

## **LIVELIHOOD SUSTAINABILITY OF HANDLOOM WEAVERS IN BOHOROM, CHAPAINAWABGONJ: THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES**

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### Abstract

The heritage of Bangladesh, which has a thousand-years history, is represented by handloom textiles. In the international market, the nation is well known for its handloom items, particularly its handloom sarees. Famous sarees like Jamdani, Benarasi, Katan, Muslin Silk, Tant, etc. primarily represent the cultural history of various regions of Bangladesh. The industry gives a lot of people a home environment workplace. With the essence of ancient tradition, the industry can give employment to the increasing number of population and also can contribute to the country's GDP. But because of some factor, the livelihood of the handloom weavers is under threat. In this paper, the prospects and challenges of sustainable livelihood that face by the handloom weavers of Bohorom, Chapainawabgonj has been studied. The study is a qualitative study. Data were collected from 15 respondents through convenient sampling. The study has used the Sustainable Livelihood Framework for the data collection. The questionnaires were open-ended an in-depth interview was taken. From those 15 respondents, 1 person was KII and FGD was conducted with 4 participants. And it has been shown that the weavers are living a vulnerable life and their livelihood isn't sustainable because of the lack of various assets and structure and policies.

***Keywords: Sustainable livelihood, challenges, prospects, handloom weavers, handicraft, BRAC, vulnerability, Bohorom, Chapainawabgonj.***

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## 1. Introduction

The handloom sector is Bangladesh's largest cottage industry and has historically dominated the rural economy of our nation. In light of the rising unemployment rate in our nation, it has a significant role to play. The industry has considerable relevance in the rural development. The handloom industry uses conventional technologies, as like agriculture. However, it provides roughly 45% of the primary fabric consumed in the nation. A contemporary textile mill is unable to manufacture some goods of higher quality that fit people's tastes and styles like those made by the handloom. For instance, handloom industry who produce high-quality sarees, lungis, gamcha, and chaddar benefit from a ready market because most customers purchase these items. There are a lot of vibrant entrepreneurs in this industry that possess the core traits of hard work, company leadership, and maybe thrift (Hossain & Islam, 2012).

The history of handloom weaving dates back to the 17th century, a time when this industry was productive and played a significant part in the economic activities of the Indian subcontinent. Because of the distinct beauty and high caliber diversity, one of the products of this business, known as "Muslins," were widely praised around the world. The elite, including kings, queens, and emperors, loved to wear Dacca muslin. Henry Patllo stated in 1972 that "Bengal's textile makers could never lessen their demand since no other country on earth could either equal or compete their quality (Mitra, 1978). However, Bengal cotton exports started to fall off in 1793. The industry declined as a result of the steady decrease in demand for products made from Bengal cotton. There were a few causes for it. This was mostly a result of British commercial policies and the Industrial Revolution in England. Bengali exports to England between 1799 and 1824 were subject to a tariff ranging from 44% to 85% in 1833. The Industrial Revolution in England was the primary factor in the downfall of the handloom businesses. Bengali handicrafts were unable to compete with foreign goods, which were backed by powerful machinery, extensive manufacturing, sophisticated labor division, etc. Thus, the effects of the Industrial Revolution presented the biggest obstacle. And at present the industry is on the way of extinction which further lead to the suffering of the people who are engaged with handloom weaving.

The handloom industry in Bangladesh, however, had a bright past, an uncertain present, and an unclear future as a result of several internal and external variables that operate in the background. More than 0.183 million handloom units, 0.505 million handlooms, and around 1 million handloom weavers, of whom about half are women, make up Bangladesh's handloom industry. Due to several issues and obstacles surrounding this business, Bangladesh's oldest and most significant cottage industry is currently in danger of being extinct (Rabiul Islam Liton, 2016). As a result, the workers are becoming uninterested in this area. Many of them left weaving and those who are still working, had to deal with challenges regarding livelihood sustainability. So, the aim of this study is to find out the livelihood challenges of the handloom weavers living in Bohorom, Chapainawabgonj, Rajshahi. The study will also seek to understand the prospect of the handloom weavers, the present scenario of the weavers of Bohorom and their vulnerability. The weavers in Bohorom work under a NGO's clothing industry. With a very little wage, they had to struggle to fulfill their basic needs which is throwing their livelihood and the future of handloom weaving in threat.

## 2. Objectives

Broad objective:

- To study the prospects and problems of livelihood sustainability of handloom weavers.

Specific objectives:

- Exploring the socio-economic condition of the handloom weavers.
- Identifying the difficulties faced by the weavers because of low wage.
- Understanding the present scenario of the livelihood of the handloom weavers.
- Exploring the impact of price hike on their livelihood.

## 3. Literature review

Islam et.al (2012) analyzed the present scenario of handloom weaving in Bangladesh. The secondary data were employed in this investigation. According to the Bangladesh Handloom Census-2003, the research has identified issues with the handloom sector that are to blame for the

lack of activity in the handloom weaving business. These issues, which include a shortage of yarn and dye supplies, high raw material costs, a lack of institutional financing, a difficulty with the marketing system, unfair competition, a lack of product variety, and organizational issues, are preventing the business from operating. The study also discussed the causes of handlooms that are not in use. There are four basic causes: a lack of money, a yarn shortage, a problem with sales, and a labor issue.

Rahman et.al (2013) have conducted a study on prospects of handloom industry in Pabna, Bangladesh. The study has found some major barriers in handloom industry of Pabna. Those are high cost of raw materials, insufficient electricity, high interest rates on loans, difficulty obtaining bank loans, lack of capital, traditional production methods, lack of automation in production, high labor costs, workers' unwillingness, lack of a union, restrictions on the purchase of raw materials, lack of government support, ineffective management, lack of a trade policy, design restrictions, and inadequate and ineffective existing distribution channel of handloom products, inadequate promotion technique.

Das et.al (2015) has carried out a study on socio-economic profile of handloom weaving community in Bargarh district, Odisha. The study found that in the district, all the weavers' primary source of livelihood is weaving. They are doing it from generation to generation. How many looms a person has and what kind of looms they have in comparison to other weavers are used to determine their economic position in this region. The majority of weavers produce saris (72%) as well as dhotis (10%), leggings (6%) and dress materials (12percent). In terms of the number of working days each month, the majority (54 percent) of weavers are supported at work by their family members for 26 to 30 days. Debt among weavers is a significant issue. Some of the causes of this debt include poor income, poverty, a lack of education, and spending on social conventions. The majority of weavers borrow money from their employers, friends, family, institutions, and banks. However, getting married, paying off previous debt, buying assets, etc. are the primary reasons people take out loans. The typical weavers spend 43.96 percent of their income on food, 21.98 percent on clothes, 10.99 percent on education, medication, and other non-essential expenses, and 1.09 percent on telephone use. The family's financial situation is also impacted by the assets they hold, such as land, a certain style of home, how many looms they have, and other items. According to the research, the majority of weavers do not purchase any kind of irrigated or

unirrigated land as a supplementary source of income. Only 4% of weavers operate individually, while 96% work under a master weaver.

Akter et.al (2017) studied a case study on livelihood sustainability of jamdani weavers. The study carried out FGD where a respondent said that he in doing weaving from the age of 15. He didn't read a book but weaving for a long time. He gets paid 15000 monthly which was good but now because of the price hike, it is quite hard for him to pay the expense for 5 members family. His niece another respondent gets 10000 monthly and have two school going children. After sending them school, she does the household chores and go to work which continue till night. She hardly gets any rest. She said those who work don't get the reward of hard work but those who sell, get it all. A respondent said that if India stops coping the product, then the price of the product in Bangladesh will increase. He said that if customer came to them and buy products from them, then they will get the authentic products with the right price. He gets paid 12000 monthly working from morning to night and have to struggle to run his family with his little wage. Respondents said that they don't want their children to come in this profession. A respondent said that he isn't happy in this work. The price of everything is raises but not the value of this work is raising. However, another respondent said that he is happy doing this work. And the respondents think that the industry needs to be sustained because it is an old tradition in our country. They said if the import of jamdani from India can be stopped and fake jamdani can be stopped selling, the industry will be developed. They also said that beside government, if any private companies come into invest or give them short term loan, it'll be helpful for them. The study also has found that they aren't aware of geographical identification of jamdani.

Divya et.al (2020) has carried out a study on financial problem faced by the handloom weavers in Chendamangalam cooperative society. The results of this study show that the majority of weavers who were engaged in weaving were women between the ages of 40 and 50 who had more than four years of experience, they are paid weekly and most of them have incomes below 5000, which is insufficient for them to support their families and meet their needs, they are paid in cash, most of them have monthly expenses between Rs. 3000 and 4,000, and most of them are paying loans, there is no society or association that provides assistance and support to weavers. Weavers don't have problems with training because they are experienced, and they don't have issues with modern technology because they use traditional one. Most weavers are approaching banks to raise money.

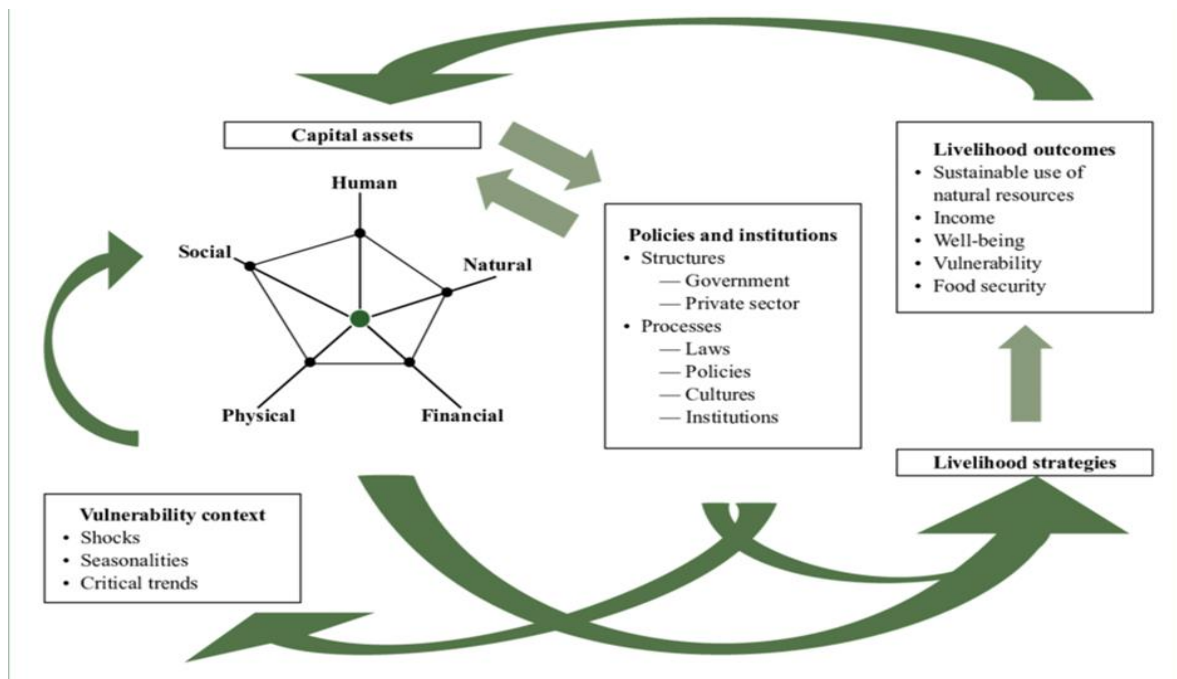
All weavers work more than 21 days per month. The majority of weavers are financially dissatisfied. They agreed that everyone receives benefits from the government's welfare programs, but they are dissatisfied with the ones that are currently in place. For example, weavers receive benefits from old age pensions after turning 60 only if they worked for four years prior to that age, and they receive no benefits from family pension plans. They also have health insurance.

## 4. Conceptual framework

Robert Chambers created a framework known as Sustainable Livelihood Approaches in 1980. (SLA). He realized that the development plan would not be able to solve the poverty issue. Robert Chambers therefore proposed this strategy in order to make the development sustainable. Under the auspices of the British Department for International Development, a framework was created (DFID). This strategy may be used as a tool or checklist to help you understand the problem with your way of in addition, the livelihood approach will aid in understanding how people make a living and in the eradication of poverty. In this sense, the method should be viewed as a set of tools and a checklist, as well as the perspectives of the poor on poverty.

### 4.2 The sustainable livelihood framework

However, the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) is the center of a sustainable livelihood approach. It examines the components of poor people's livelihood and explores its underlying causes. Additionally, this model is quite simplistic and may be understood through a qualitative method rather than representing the complexity and diversity.



Source: Department for International Development of the United Kingdom.

The fundamental concepts represented by the SLF are described and defined in the following in the manner that is appropriate for this situation.

#### 4.2.1 Vulnerability context

The Vulnerability Context forms the external environment in which people exist and gain importance through direct impacts upon people's asset status (Devereux, 2001). In this context, it includes trends, such as those in demographics, resource use, and governance; shocks, such as those affecting the health of people, animals, or crops; natural disasters like floods or earthquakes; economic shocks; conflicts in the form of national or international wars; and, finally, seasonality, such as that affecting prices, goods, or employment opportunities.

#### 4.2.2 Livelihood assets

Main concern of livelihood approach is people. Therefore, it's essential to have a clear grasp of people's capabilities (referred to as "assets" or "capital" here) in order to examine how they try to turn those assets into successful living outcomes (Bebbington, 1999). A single ideal capital gain

is insufficient to generate the intended results on its own since people require a variety of assets to reach their self-described goals. The asset pentagon gives a method to visualize these settings and to highlight dynamical changes over time through the continually changing forms of the pentagon since the relevance of the single categories fluctuates in relation to the local situation. So, below 5 livelihood assets have been discussed:

### **Human capital**

Various definitions of human capital are frequently used in the development sector. Human capital is described as “the skills, knowledge, capacity to work, and good health that combined enable people to pursue multiple livelihood strategies and fulfill their livelihood objectives” in the context of SLF (DFID, 2000). It varies at the level of the household depending on factors like household size, skill levels, leadership potential, health status, stock of knowledge, communication skill, education, technical skill, experience, creativity, problem-solving skill, mental health, personal resilience, motivation, and active labor, among others, and it appears to be a deciding factor, in addition to being intrinsically valuable, in order to use any other type of asset.

### **Social capital**

The definition of “social capital” and the components that make it up are highly contested terms. The term “social resources” in the context of the SLA is understood to refer to the networks and connections that boost people’s trust and capacity for cooperation, as well as participation in more formalized groups with their established systems of rules, norms, and consequences.

Birth, age, gender, or caste are frequently used to define access to and the amount of social capital, and these factors may even vary within a household.

### **Natural capital**

Natural resource stocks, from which resource flows and services such as land, water, forests, air quality, erosion protection, biodiversity degree and rate of change, etc. necessary for subsistence are obtained, referred as natural capital. Since high air and water quality provides a foundation for good health and other aspects of a livelihood, it is especially important for individuals who’s entire or a portion of their income comes from resource-based activities, as is frequently the case for the



impoverished stakeholders. Natural processes that destroy natural capital, such as fires, floods, and earthquakes, can cause severe shocks to livelihoods. This link between natural capital and vulnerability context is particularly strong within the framework.

### **Physical capital**

Physical capital is the foundational infrastructure and producer products required to sustain livelihoods, including reasonably priced transportation, safe housing and buildings, enough water supply and sanitization, reasonably priced electricity, livestock, equipment, and access to information. As a deficient infrastructure can prevent access to education, health care, and income creation, it is ideal to describe its impact on the sustainability of a livelihood system using the concept of opportunity costs or "trade-offs." For instance, without irrigation infrastructure, a lot of time is wasted on ineffective tasks like collecting water, which requires additional labor that might be used elsewhere (or would be a time resource to go to school).

### **Financial capital**

The term "financial capital" refers to the resource's individuals employ to attain their financial goals, and it includes the crucial availability of cash or its equivalent, which enables people to choose from a variety of lifestyle options. There are basically two places where financial capital comes from:

Cash, bank deposits, or liquid assets like jewelry are examples of available stocks.

Regular financial inflows include labor income, pensions, insurance payments, or other transfers from the government, as well as remittances, which are mostly dependent on other people and must be trustworthy.

#### 4.2.3 Transforming structure and Processes

The institutions, groups, laws, and processes that shape livelihoods are represented by Transforming Structures and Processes. They play a crucial role in determining access, the

conditions of trade for various forms of capital, and the profitability of any particular livelihood plan since they act at all levels (Shankland, 2000; Keeley, 2001). The entities (both private and governmental organizations) "that establish and implement policy and laws, supply services, buy, sell, and perform a variety of other activities that influence livelihoods" may be referred to as structures (DFID, 2000).

In addition to structures, processes make up the "software" that controls how persons and structures behave and interact. Similar to software, there are many different types of complicated, overlapping, and contradictory processes at work at many levels. For example, regulations, laws, and institutions, as well as culture and power dynamics, are crucial processes for livelihoods.

Transforming structures and processes occupy a central position in the framework and directly feed back to the vulnerability context, while influencing and determining ecological or economic trends through political structures, while mitigating or enforcing effects of shocks or keeping seasonality under control through functioning market structures; or they can limit people's choice of livelihood strategies (e.g. caste system) and may thus have a direct impact on livelihood.

#### 4.2.4 Livelihood strategies

The decisions and actions people take to accomplish their livelihood goals are referred to as livelihood strategies. They must be viewed as a dynamic process where individuals mix activities to address their varied demands at various points in time, on various geographic or economic scales, and they may even vary within a family. Their place within the framework makes obvious their direct dependency on asset status and evolving structures and processes. Depending on the institutional structures and rules in place, a changing asset status may help or impede other tactics.

#### 4.2.5 Livelihood outcome

Livelihood outcomes are the achievements of livelihood strategies, such as increased income (in the form of cash), improved well-being (in the form of intangibles like self-worth, health status, access to services, and a sense of inclusion), decreased vulnerability (as evidenced by better resilience due to an increase in asset status), increased food security (as evidenced by an increase

in financial capital to purchase food), and a more sustainable use of natural resources (e.g. appropriate property rights).

The Sustainable Livelihood Framework has been used in this study to understand the challenges of the livelihood sustainability of the handloom weavers in Bohorom, Chapainawabgonj. The framework has given some concepts as like vulnerability context, livelihood assets (Human capital, physical capital, social capital, financial capital, natural capital), transforming structure and processes, livelihood strategies and livelihood outcome which gave light to the study to explore the challenges of sustainable livelihood of the handloom weavers.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Research design

The study has used a qualitative approach to understand the prospects and challenges of Sustainable Livelihood of the handloom weavers of Bohorom, Chapainawabgonj. The data were collected based on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework developed by the UK Department for International Development from both primary and secondary sources.

### 5.2 Data sources

Primary data has been collected from the field which are designed from the Sustainable livelihood framework. And the secondary data has been collected from journal, article, Bangladesh bureau of statistics, wikipedia, newspaper etc.

### 5.3 Population

The study identified the handloom weavers of Bohorom, Chapainawabgonj as the population. The weavers from the tanti para are the population. Around 120 people are engaging with the handloom weaving according to the local people as there wasn't available data about the population number of the tanti para.

## 5.4 Sample

The non-probability sampling has been used to draw the sample size. Convenient sampling technique was chosen to collect data. Total 15 people were selected as a sample for the study.

## 5.5 Data collection procedure

There were two procedures used in this study. Firstly, structured questions were asked for the socio-demographic part and secondly open-ended questions were asked to know the Sustainability of the livelihood. For this part, an in-depth interview was taken from 10 people, 1 respondent was the KII and other 4 respondents were chosen for FGD. All of the respondents were asked same questions based on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1 Demographic description of the handloom weavers in Bohorm, Chapainawabgonj

There was a total of 15 respondents. From those respondents, one respondent was mahajon and other 14 respondents work under several mahajon. There is a variation in the age of the weavers. Starting from 18 to 75, they are engaging with the weaving.

Table 1- Age distribution of respondents

Respondents	Age
3	18-30
2	31-40
4	41-50

3	51-60
2	61-70
1	71-80

However, the gender distribution of the weavers in from the 15 respondents, there are 6 female and 9 males. The female mainly engaged with the process that done before the weaving like the work in chorka, dyeing the yarn, bobbin the yarn etc. they also involve in the weaving process.

Table 2- Gender of respondents

Respondents	Gender
6	Female
9	Male

Most of the weavers had passed primary school but later they didn't carry on with their study. Almost all the respondents studied up to class 7-8-9.

Table 3- Educational level of respondents

Respondents	Educational level
7	Class 8 or below
6	Secondary (class 9-10)

2	Higher secondary (class 11-12)
0	Graduate

The weavers' religion is Hindu. All of them are Hindu and they also call their area as Hindu para.

## 6.2 Challenges for sustainable livelihood of the handloom weavers

There are various factors that are affecting the livelihood of the handloom weavers. Still the weavers doing their best to stay in this sector because they have a connection with handloom and this is their root. The findings here have been drawn from the sustainable livelihood framework. From the framework, their problem regarding the livelihood sustainability has been seen.

### 6.2.1 Vulnerability context (Inflation, Pandemic, Seasonality)

The sudden outbreak of corona virus has been made the life of every sphere of people miserable. The weavers are no different from this scenery. Because of Covid-19, they had to face economic crisis and their wheel of livelihood almost stopped because they weren't getting any work, so some of them switched their livelihood and some of them who didn't get other job, depended on fully loan and debt. They got no help either from government or NGO. And then with this miserable situation, they had to fight with the inflation. The price of daily needs products has been increased but their wages are still same as before. And because of this, they even struggle to manage the basic needs. One of the respondents said that:

*“Our economy fell gradually during corona. We had 5 handloom machines before Covid-19. But when our work stopped, we become hopeless and didn't know what to do. So, we sold our two machines and by getting some loan, I've converted one of the handloom rooms as my cloth shop but it doesn't run well because if it were in city then people may buy something. In this remote area, nobody buys from here. We were so helpless at the time of Covid-19. No work was there. No help came from anyone. We ate with only one vegetable dish for whole day. And sometime even we starve for one daytime.”*

The key informant said,

*“Two years ago, our wage was 65 taka per yard (goj). And now after protesting from two year, it increased to 80 taka per yard. Only 15 Taka increased but in these two years, the price of every product which we need increased about 40-50 taka. So, it’s really hard to keep up with this situation.”*

## 6.2.2 Livelihood assets

### **Human capital**

Physical well-being plays a crucial role to sustain the livelihood. But the weavers face some kinds of health consequences. One of the respondents said that he faced consequences because of the long hour of work like his eyes and back pain increasing day by day. From morning 6 to afternoon 1 and then again from afternoon 3 to evening 7 they had to weave seating. As a result, they feel ache to their body. Sometime they had to work in front of stove for a long time and the heat make it worst. And in the response of the question if they take any kind of medicine for these problems, they said if they can carry the expense than they take medicine otherwise they have to suffer.

A respondent said in FGD said that,

*“During the weaving time, we have to keep working our eye, leg and hand. We’ve to give pressure to our eye as for a long time we look at the cloth and we’ve to be concerned to make if perfect. If we do any mistake then the machine had to be stopped and start again from where the mistake started. And as we continuously keep working our leg and hand, sometime we feel pain.”*

The weavers said they didn’t get any kind of formal training as it is their hereditary occupation, they learned it from their childhood by holding the hand of parents and grandparents. And they also stated that they don’t have any other skill beside than weaving. And this lack of skill is threat for them to make their livelihood sustainable even if they want to switch their job.

One of the respondents said that,

*“We don’t have other skill beside weaving. And also, we are suffering with the low wages, we had to work for a long hour but there is no wage according to the working hour. Many of the weavers are leaving the country because they can’t find job in Bangladesh with no skill.”*

Undoubtably education is one of the best human capitals. A number of scholars stated that education is a pre-condition to reduce poverty. However, the weaving doesn’t seek much education. And it can also be seen that most of the respondent studied only from class 8-9. If they had a higher study in formal education, they may try for other job so there can be seen a lack in the human capital of the weavers of Bohorom. However, the remaining generation of Tanti para are really uninterested in handloom weaving and they are now more focused on either getting formal education or going to abroad.

A respondent said that,

*“For educating our child, the problem isn’t only the expense of school fee. There are other expenses also that become burden for us. As in this area, there is no good school. So, they had to go about 5 kilometer in Chapainawabgonj. The transport fare was 20-taka one year ago. But now it become 30 taka. So, they need 100-taka pocket money where 60 takas gone in the transport and other 40 taka is for their food. And the cost of notebook, book is also had to bear. Whereas we only get 9000 taka in a month. Then how can we think to educate them from a good school? Without loan, it is really tough for us”*

### **Social capital (Social relationship, trust, connectedness)**

This emphasis on the relationship of the people, the connectedness, trust, reciprocity etc. the weavers said that sometime when they fell sick, their neighbor come and help them with the work if there was a bit of pressure. They also stated that NGO like Grameen Bank help them to get loan for weaving. They give a good number of loans to the handloom weavers. Though the respondent said that they don’t get loan easily if they don’t hit the wall with their back. Also, in the matter of raw material, the mahajon said, they want to have the raw material from a trusted and known seller rather than unknown one.



But the scenery isn't always positive, as the respondent said during Covid-19 when their work has been stopped, no help they got from the NGO though they came and took the information. They also don't trust their mahajon. Because there is a problem with transparency of the information. So, there is a lack of trust and transparency.

### **Natural capital (Land, natural resources, water supply)**

Natural capital has a big contribution especially in rural livelihood system. The weavers have their own land on which they made a house. And those lands are their ancestral land. But they don't have other land then this as a result, they can't cultivate crops and vegetables from home and they also don't own trees. The water supply system is both in the form of tube-well and in the pipe line. They use one tube well from 4 households.

The respondent said that,

*“Water of pipe line is okay. But water from tube well is full of arsenic.”*

About two kilometers away, there's a river called Pagla and in that river the abundance of fish can be seen. So, the respondents were asked if they go for fishing and if that river provide them their meal or not. They said that they don't have the time to catch fish from the river. Whole day they had to work which sometime go on for 8pm. After that they go for sleep as in the next morning, they had to wake up early 6am in the morning. For the same reason, they can't cultivate anything even if they want to.

### **Physical capital (Livestock, house, electricity)**

The physical capital is another crucial element for livelihood. It includes the housing, electricity, sanitation, water supply, livestock, vehicles and transportation etc. the respondents were asked if they had any livestock like goat, cow, chickens or duck. They said that,

*“Even if we want to have livestock, we can't because we are busy doing the handloom work the*

*whole day. So, we can't take care of them. We can't even take a good care of ourselves with this work. And it'll be really tough to monitor them all the time. How can we monitor them when we all the day seat in the handloom room busy with other works to prepare the thread also."*

All of the respondents had their own house and those houses were pacca house. And they said that the house was either of their parents or grandparents. And the sanitation was also good of those houses. Water supply vary from house to house as like some house dependent on tube well, some of them use motor, and the respondent who was Mahajon, he uses his own motor for water supply. In every respondent's house, electricity can be seen.

### **Financial capital (Income, savings, pension)**

This capital is the most crucial to determine one's livelihood. And the handloom weavers are most vulnerable in this capital. This capital includes income, savings, insurance, pension etc. So the weavers in Bohorom mainly get the payment per yard (goj). The weavers who are dependent that means who are working under mahajon get 80 taka per yard. In a day, average weaver can make 4 yard of cloth and those who are strong enough and fast can make 5 yards of cloth. So, they earn 300 taka per day and 9000 taka per month which is really low. However, the yarn preparing process as like dyeing, bobbin these ends about 2 days and for these works, they don't get any wage. All the wage includes in those 80-taka par yard.

The key informant said,

*"We can't buy cloth during puja if we don't take loan. During puja, we try to eat better food. Various kinds of pitha, sweet, card and naru made from good quality of local product which cost are expensive and we can't buy those with our income we had to take loan. We can't even hold any marriage without the help of loan."*

Respondents said that,

*"We don't have any savings. If we save money from this little wage, we'll be starving."*

Another respondent said that,

*“We don’t want our son to be a handloom weaver and face the misery as we’re facing. So, we’re giving him education so that we can see the end of this suffering. And our son is now studying at RUET. though the tuition fee is less but still we can’t carry the fee. We had to take loan for his study and also, he does a tuition at Rajshahi.”*

The weavers can’t even meet their basic need with the income they are earning. They had to take loan to buy nice cloth, they had to take loan for food during puja and weddings, they had to take loan for the education of their child and from here the sustainability of livelihood started to fall. Once they enter into the loop of the loan, they can’t get out from it. And they also don’t get any kinds of benefit like pension or insurance.



### 6.2.3 Transforming structures and policies

There’s some policies and structures that actually hindering the sustainability of the livelihood of handloom weavers. According to the key informant, 1 yard cloth should be exactly 50gm in weight. Otherwise, their wage may be cut.

The respondents said that, between the clothing industry and them, there’s a mediator who is mahajon. Mahajon tell them that 30% of the profit given to the worker and rest 70% stay in the company but they don’t believe it. They think mahajon enjoys a good amount of money. However, a producer is there who monitor the work of workers and mahajon. From the FGD, participants said that,

*“To be a producer, they need to have a handloom machine, factory and a good environment that is work friendly. But the producer has none of these. They became producer because they have money and connection with the company. we went to the company so that they make one of us a*

*producer, but they won't do it. And all of these processes became like rules. Because we don't have money and connection with the clothing company, they won't make us producer."*

The key informant said that,

*"NGO actually oppress us. They show that they are giving people a workplace but majority of the profit are enjoyed by them and we don't get a drop of that."*

The existing structures and policies are vulnerable for the workers. There's no direct connection of the company with them. As a result, their voice always stays unheard. Even if their voice reach to them, still the situation isn't getting any better. They also said that the government should monitor and set some rule that'll be helpful for them.

#### 6.2.4 Livelihood strategy

The ability to cope up with the problem they face and what decision and choices they undertake to achieve the livelihood goal is important factor to gain sustainability. In this part, the weavers are vulnerable once again.

The respondents said that,

*"We had to take loan if we face any danger. If any of member fall in chronic sickness, we had to take loan, and if we can't bear it than we can't do anything."*

During the covid-19 pandemic, they faced the harsh reality where they with no income and help, had to switch their existing work. They didn't even have any savings as a result many of them took loan who couldn't find job and still repaying. As they don't have other skill and work experience, they have less choice to make decision and move from this occupation.

#### 6.2.5 Livelihood outcome

The handloom weavers are working for a long hour. They need about 4 days to make 4 yards of cloth from which they get only 300 taka. And the income isn't satisfactory for all of the

respondents. Still, they are happy and it can be seen that their self-esteem isn't lower. They said that the area is so poor. By losing interest in handloom weaving, they are started to get educated. And many of them do day labor work now because by doing it, they get their money for each day. But in the handloom weaving, they aren't getting money for each day as for preparing the thread they need at least 3 days, but there's no wage of that.

Their overall status hasn't improved. They had to struggle with buying the food which they want to eat. They had to buy the cheap vegetable from the market. They had to get loan for any occasion or education. So, it can be said that, the livelihood outcome is really poor which forcing the weaver to leave their occupation even if they like to do weaving.

## 7. Prospects

According to the respondents, the art of handloom is so beautiful but there is less role of government to keep this sector alive. If they monitor the foreign market regarding the policy to intervene in the Bangladeshi market, then our weavers may see a good side of their life. Instead of giving loan, the government should give them donation. In the FGD session, one participant said if another competitor of the clothing industry they are working under comes into the market, then because of competition, they will give proper wage to the workers. He also said if the ministry of textile and jute can export these products in foreign country or they arrange a buyer for these products from abroad, then the handloom sector may bloom a little. And all of the weavers expect increased wage so that at least they don't have to take loan. They said that if the sector keeps going like present day, one day you won't see the area called "Tanti Para". There will be no weavers or no handloom on this land in the near future.

A respondent said that,

*"We know get 300 taka per day. But if they make it to 500 taka per day, we will be easily coping up with the current situation and we had to take less loan. Though we can't save money even if it is 500 taka. But it'll make our living a little comfortable."*

Various macro and micro factors are integrated with the process of livelihood sustainability. This may not be eradicated fully but can be reduced a little. It will help the weaver to stay in their

hereditary work with a good wage without facing struggle and pain. The rules, policies governance should be modified so that the weavers can get help from it without worrying about the near future.

## 8. Discussions

The weavers are doing their job which they get from their previous generation. They after facing all of the harsh consequences still hold on to it. They get low wage; they are the minority of that area as they are Hindu and with the low wage it is really impossible to have some savings for uncertain incidence. They had to depend on loans. They work from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. where it can be seen that they are giving their whole time to the work. They can't take care of their child properly. They can't keep any domestic animal which may give them extra money like selling the cattle or the milk and egg etc. they can't go for fishing. They can't do anything because of the handloom weaving and in the exchange of this, they get very low wage with some kinds of physical problem like eye sight problem, leg, hand, back pain etc. which further cost money and they had to again take loan for the treatment. During the covid-19, they had no income source. They said that NGO came and took the information but didn't give anything later. Finding no way, they did odd jobs like construction site labor, day labor etc. and this is the profession that they don't have surety with this job. They don't have any savings as a result during the financial crisis., they can't cope up with that. They even don't get any kind of money after leave the work even if they do it for 30/40 years which make the situation worst for the family of the weavers. Still, they are happy with it. During puja, they worship their workplace and handloom with a happy environment. But they don't want this tradition to fade away. They want their wage to increase. If this isn't going to happen than the remaining generation is started to leave and job and the future generation may never know what a handloom machine looks like. The capitalist world and bureaucracy system has a contribution on the harsh condition of the labors today. Though in ancient era, they were weaving to fulfill their own needs, but now they are fulfilling the society's need by giving them cloth working under one of the biggest NGO with an unnoticeable wage. But they can't even bear the cost of those cloth. They had to again go to another NGO for seeking loan so that they can at least fulfill their minimal needs. They think the mediator are sometime problematic like the mahajon and the producer. They are the nearest people of the NGO and they are busy gaining their own profit. And all the suffering are tolerating by the weavers. And their livelihood is on serious threat also the handloom weaving.

It can also be seen that, all of the respondents had similar wage and their education level is also low, except some of them. And it already made their socio-economic status weak. And then the low wage and a long-time working hour where it can also be said that by doing 4 days of work, they get 80 taka par yard. The study was aimed to explore the challenges for sustainable livelihood of the handloom weavers of Bohorom, Chapainawabgonj and it can clearly be seen that they are facing a struggle to keep up with this profession. They also hope that the factors that are affecting their livelihood may diminish. The remaining weavers don't want this art to be lost. However, the existing literature focused more on the problem in the handloom industry and there was no study to explore the challenges of livelihood sustainability of the handloom weavers specially in Bangladesh. This study conducted the problems related with not the macro level of the industry but also in the micro level where the weaver's vulnerability has been shown. And it has been found that, the weavers are facing challenges regarding their sustainable livelihood, where they have no strong income, no savings, no natural and physical capital, the structure where they are working isn't in favor of them most of the time, and finally they are having a poor livelihood outcome. They had no option but to take loan. Sudden inflation and pandemic make them to live in starve as they don't have any other skill and they do the odd job. And all of these are contributing to the challenges of livelihood sustainability of the weavers.

## 9. Conclusions

The weavers face a harsh life but they have nothing to do because they have no other skill or assets. Still a good number of weavers are switching their job. They don't have enough formal education and also suffering with the low wage. Their little wage can't support a whole family which make them drowning into the river of the loan. During the Covid-19, they almost starved when the work stopped. After this, they are facing the inflation and they only able to increase their wage 5 taka after covid-19 but this little wage can't support the huge inflation of the country whereas every product's price increase about 40-50 taka. They are unable to bear the expense of even basic needs like food, cloth, education etc. during pooja, they had to take loan, to give education to their child, they had to take loan which is making the situation of the weavers worse. Because of the huge working time, they even can't involve in an alternative occupation beside weaving. They had to pass the month with the salary 9000 taka. And no new generation is coming in this work rather those who were involve in the occupation are leaving and going to either city or abroad. The

remaining workers are living in misery hoping one day their increasing wage can support their need. They don't get support or help from neither the government nor from the NGO they are working under. But the scenario shouldn't be like this. They should be given priority and proper wage that they deserve. It can be seen that, the Sustainable livelihood framework of the weavers are vulnerable. And other study didn't use the framework to understand the challenges faced by the weavers regarding sustainable livelihood however this study has found several factors affecting the sustainable livelihood of the worker. It also has been showed that the weavers are vulnerable as they can't overcome the sudden pandemic and the inflation easily, they don't have enough livelihood assets which keep them in the threatening position, they are suffering in the existing structure, their livelihood strategies are weak and finally the livelihood outcome is poor and it makes their livelihood sustainability fragile. In the future, a study on the solution of the challenges regarding sustainable livelihood of the handloom weavers may be conducted.





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