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How patron-client relations influence fisheries co-management: A case study of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Patron-client relations have long played a significant role in influencing the management of fisheries and shaping fisherfolk livelihoods. Despite a vast literature on patron-client relations in fisheries, little literature explicitly examines how these relations influence fisheries co-management. This paper responds to this gap by reporting on research into how patron-client relations interact with fisheries co-management, with consequences for how fisheries co-management operates and performs. Taking Bangladesh as a case study, two examples of co-management supported by different donor-funded projects were investigated using a framework to analyse the nature and implications of patron-client relations on co-management. The research drew on the concepts of hidden and invisible power by Gaventa (2006) and the defining characteristics of patron-client relations and co-management to identify three key analytical themes: power relations; obligation and trust; and, cultural norms. The study found that the powerful non-fisherfolk senior males in the Panchayat (village-organization), the patrons in the studied areas, manipulated co-management structures and processes, used patron-client relations in the form of male community leaders (Panchayat)-fisherfolk links and developed informal rules to control access of the fisherfolk to fisheries and credit, to maintain their power and status. Patrons used existing systems of social status that set fishers at the bottom of social ranking and women largely away from public spaces, preventing the co-management systems from being inclusive and empowering. The research confirmed that patron-client relations within a fishing community can significantly shape externally-introduced co-management by influencing who is involved in fisheries co-management and how it functions.

1. Introduction

Patron-client relationships are fundamental to the livelihoods of fisherfolk. Low and sporadic income and limited access to formal credit marginalize fisherfolk and encourage dependence on patrons, including moneylenders, boat owners, fish traders, influential elite and politicians (Ferrol-Schulte et al., 2014). Patrons provide 'clients' with several forms of support such as financial, social, market access and fishing equipment and, through these, fisherfolk are better able to secure their livelihoods (Ruddle, 2011; Nurdin and Grydehoj, 2014; Miñarro et al., 2016). In exchange for this support, fisherfolk provide labour, financial (interest on credit) and political services (votes and campaigning) to their patrons, building a clientelist system (Kaufman, 1974; Crona et al., 2010; Nunan et al., 2018). This continuing pattern of reciprocity, though characterised by unequal power, is backed by community values, customs, social norms, beliefs and rituals that create trust, affection and moral obligation within clients to their patrons and binds them to these relations (Scott, 1972; Onyango and Jentoft, 2007; Miñarro et al., 2016).

Patron-client relations are part of the institutional arrangements in many fishing communities into which co-management has been introduced. Over the last few decades, co-management has been adopted globally, envisaged as a way to improve the management of natural resources and contribute to human well-being (Nielsen et al., 2004; Evans et al., 2011; Whitehouse and Fowler, 2018; d'Armengol et al., 2018). Central to much implementation of co-management is the formation of new structures, involving resource users and other stakeholders in decision-making and implementation through varying degrees of devolution of rights and power (Carlsson and Berkes, 2005; Jentoft, 2005; Nunan et al., 2015).

The design and implementation of co-management in countries of the Global South is very often top-down in nature, supported by donor-funding (Chuenpagdee and Jentoft, 2007; Ho et al., 2016). A critical

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issue for this approach is that the new structures are not introduced into a cultural, social and institutional vacuum (Nunan et al., 2015). However, the design and implementation of new structures and systems for co-management rarely consider pre-existing institutions, community norms, beliefs, traditions, daily practices and the broader social-economic-political field that envelops local arenas and implicitly governs the resources (Nunan et al., 2015; Nunan, 2020). Therefore, the rearranging of power and responsibility can challenge pre-existing institutions and so such institutions may interact with these processes, reorient them or they may capture the new institutions, hence challenging the aims and outcomes of co-management (Hall et al., 2014; Nunan et al., 2015).

Despite the longstanding existence of patron-client relations in small-scale fisheries, and an associated vast literature, little evidence is available on how patron-client relations interact with fisheries co-management and identifies what the consequences are of these interactions for how fisheries co-management operates and performs. This article responds to this gap and addresses the research question: how do patron-client relations influence fisheries co-management structures, functioning and practices? Taking Bangladesh as a case study, two donor-funded fisheries co-management projects were investigated. Bangladesh was selected because within the fishing communities patron-client relations are well-established, forcing fisherfolk to be dependent on powerful non-fisherfolk and to work for them under uneven conditions (Rahman et al., 2002; Ahmed et al., 2008; Rab, 2009). A co-management approach was introduced in some waterbodies in Bangladesh, but evidence is mixed regarding its effectiveness. Earlier evidence highlighted positive impacts on fish production, harvesting, household income and expenditure, and participation (Rahman and Begum, 2010, Ferdousi, 2011; Dev, 2011; Khan et al., 2012). However, recent studies have pointed to detrimental social and ecological outcomes such as risk of elite capture, dominance by individuals over committees, complexities in credit distribution, social exclusion, and absence of women empowerment, (Al Mamun et al., 2016; Choudhury et al., 2016; Khan and Ahmed, 2017; Brakel et al., 2018; Islam et al., 2020; Cohen et al., 2021). Existing evidence on co-managed fisheries in Bangladesh supports the case for deeper investigation into patron-client relations within fishing communities and how they influence co-management and capture village-level co-management structures.

The article begins with a review of literature on patron-client relations and co-management, and introduces Gaventa's (2006) concepts of invisible and hidden power. These concepts are used to identify and analyse the strategies used by patrons in fishing communities of Bangladesh to capture fisheries management and co-management and ensure their interests and status are maintained. An introduction to fisheries management in Bangladesh is then provided and a section on methodology describes data collection methods and ethics. This is followed by findings on characteristics of patron-client relations and co-management and how patron-client relations influence fisheries co-management. The discussion section places the findings within existing literature, concluding that patron-client relations are not always financial, but socially- and culturally-embedded. These patron-client relations shape externally-introduced co-management by influencing who is involved in fisheries co-management and how it functions, with implications for inclusivity and ecological outcomes. The findings provide further evidence of the need to understand and consider the institutional environment, history and power relations when seeking to facilitate co-management implementation. In addition, the research confirms the continuing relevance of patron-client relations in small-scale fishing communities and identifies how and why patron-client relations carry over into co-management to affect decision-making processes and structures, and, in turn, social and ecological outcomes.

2. Patron-client relations and co-management

In addressing the question of how patron-client relations influence fisheries co-management structures, functioning and practices, a review of literature enables the development of an analytical framework, informed by literature on patron-client relations in fisheries management, co-management and the concepts of hidden and invisible power.

Patron-client relations have long played a significant role in influencing the management of fisheries and shaping fisherfolk livelihoods. Inequality is common in this dyad, dependent on patron's relative power, wealth and status, reciprocity of goods and services, and moral and social obligations to the client (Scott, 1972; Adhuri et al., 2016; Miñarro et al., 2016). Factors that encourage the development of reciprocal agreements between patrons and clients include uncertainty about access rights; limited dissemination of market information; fluctuations in market prices resulting from unstable supply; risk of assets lost; absence or shortage of formal insurance and complexities in accessing the credit market (Crona et al., 2010; Miñarro et al., 2016). Benefits that fisherfolk gain in these relationships include resource and market access, loan availability and easier credit access, payment flexibility, unintimidating application procedures and minimum interest. Credit buffers income disparities of fisherfolk resulting from seasonal fluctuations in fish catch and provides economic incentives to invest in maintenance and purchasing of gear and to diversify livelihoods, crucial for the everyday survival of fishing households (Crona et al., 2010; Ferrol-Schulte et al., 2014). Patrons also provide their clients with social support through advice, financial assistance during illness or to cover expenses resulting from the loss of a family member and provide food during times of low-catch or when fisherfolk cannot work (Crona et al., 2010; Ruddle, 2011; Ferrol-Schulte et al., 2014; Nunan et al., 2018). According to Ruddle (2011), maintaining a business relationship with patrons is regarded as a family tradition for some fishing families.

These longstanding relational ties between patrons and clients are not only economic, driven by credit arrangements or for gaining informal social and financial assistance. They are also deeply embedded in and regulated by informal institutions, caste and class, religious beliefs, socio-cultural norms, kinship and neighbourhoods (Onyango and Jentoft, 2007). Values and norms are important for fishing communities as they define and shape identities, beliefs and the behaviour of fisherfolk, and guide local power structures for governing resources (Onyango and Jentoft, 2007). These relations are mutually reinforcing and contribute to developing trust between patrons and clients, generating feelings of "moral duty" among the fisherfolk towards their patrons (Adhuri et al., 2016, p.202; Miñarro et al., 2016). Through these relationships patrons influence fishers regarding where and how they should fish, where fish should be sold, which gears should be used, whether any interest is charged on loans and what the repayment period is. Patrons respond to market fluctuations by recruiting skilled fisherfolk, providing them with essential specialist equipment for targeting high-valued species, purchasing the most marketable species and linking them to the highly valued fish trade, thereby reducing the time and effort required by the fisherfolk community to market their catch (Crona et al., 2010; Ferrol-Schulte et al., 2014; Miñarro et al., 2016). To respond to market demand, in some cases patrons have been found to encourage the use of illegal fishing methods whilst protecting their fisherfolk-clients from legal prosecution through their connections to government officials (Miñarro et al., 2016). In Spermonde fishery in Indonesia, Nurdin and Grydehoj (2014) and Miñarro et al. (2016) identify several direct actors (owners of fishing businesses, infrastructure, equipment and fishers) and indirect actors (investors, buyers, suppliers, police officers and public officials) involved in a patron–client dynamic, forming an informal governance system based on power, credit and access to market.

It is into this context of patron-client relations in many fisheries of the Global South that co-management has been introduced. Co-management is a governance system that involves power-sharing and participation – with power-sharing between government and resource users (and sometimes other stakeholders), often involving representation within an elected structure (Jentoft et al., 1998; Carlsson and

Berkes, 2005). Co-management is generally introduced in fisheries to address fisheries management problems, such as overexploitation, habitat destruction and declining stocks, for which centralised top-down management has not necessarily provided an effective response (Nielsen et al., 2004; Marín and Berkes, 2010). Another major justification for co-management is empowerment at individual and community levels (Jentoft, 2005). At the individual level, empowerment involves strengthening self-confidence and increasing awareness about environmental, social and political factors that influence an individual's life, ability to influence the political process and play an assertive role in managing resources and shaping the ideology of the community (Zimmerman and Rappaport, 1988; Jentoft, 2005). At the community level, empowerment suggests a raised level of psychological well-being among the members and increasing the political power of a group or community to handle their affairs and influence their futures and ability to cope with competing uses of resources (Nielsen et al., 2004). Co-management, therefore, encourages the creation of a countervailing power in the community to government and, through that, the community may become more effective in resource management decision-making (Nielsen et al., 2004; Jentoft, 2005). For both psychological empowerment at individual level and community empowerment to work, social cohesion is considered to be essential (Speer et al., 2001). Chan et al. (2006, p. 290) define social cohesion as "…interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help". Social cohesion is a key attribute for the successful co-management of fisheries (Gutiérrez et al., 2011; Alexander et al., 2015; O'Leary et al., 2020) and considered to be essential for sustaining norms and values (Pretty, 2003; Crona and Bodin, 2011). Regular communication between individuals encourages the development of trust and contributes to the establishment of shared understanding of the conditions of natural resources (Alexander et al., 2015).

In the context of co-management, community empowerment has been seen as a way of gaining support among users because a community serves as a source of identity and attachment, provides interactive learning, enhances self-confidence, and helps people find meaning, strength and power by connecting to others (Jentoft, 2005). However, this may not always be the case. A community should not be understood as a static concept, that is, a "small spatial unit…homogenous social structure… [with] shared norms" and common interests (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999, p.629) — rather, it should more appropriately be considered as a "multidimensional, cross-scale, social-political unit[s] or network[s] changing through time" (Berkes, 2004, p.23). In managing resources, it is crucial to recognise that there are often conflicting interests and diversity regarding power and influence within a community. Jentoft et al. (1998) also observed that some users receive or capture disproportionate privileges in this context. However, it has also been found that fisheries actors do not always dominate co-management, such as in Malawi where traditional authorities have been dominant actors in some co-management initiatives (Hara, 2008; Njaya et al., 2012).

The literature review above shows that power relations characterise both patron-client relations and co-management. Several conceptual framings are available to understand how power operates and is exercised in public and private spaces and how broader power relations shape institutions and management. Gaventa's (2006) conceptualisation of hidden and invisible power is useful for understanding how these forms of power operate, and enable or constrain actions within a given space (Pantazidou, 2012). Invisible power centres on socially- and culturally-embedded norms and practices, and operates by influencing individuals' thinking about their world; it shapes self-esteem and acceptance of the status quo, even feelings or perceptions of superiority and inferiority (Gaventa, 2006). Hidden power involves powerful groups of actors sustaining their influence by controlling who is included in a decision-making arena and what reaches the agenda (Gaventa, 2006). Invisible and hidden ways of exercising power are less obvious than visible power, and are culturally laden forms of dominance, employing conscious and unconscious interactions, norms and practices to dominate and exercise control (Ramcilovic-Suominen and Kotilainen, 2020).

The concepts of hidden and invisible power are particularly relevant to how power is manifested within and resulting from patron-client relations, enabling analysis of how such power relations impact the processes and structures of co-management. Fig. 1 presents the key characteristics of, and interconnections between, the power relations of patron-client relations and co-management, and serves as a guide to inform the data collection and analysis for this research.

3. Fisheries management in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is endowed with a vast network of diverse and complex wetland ecosystems (Khan, 2011). About 50 % of the total land surface of the country, approximately 7 to 8 million hectares, is made up of inland open waterbodies, closed waterbodies and marine water exclusive economic zones (Craig et al., 2004; Byomkesh et al., 2009; Brakel et al., 2021). More than 17 million people, including 1.4 million women, are directly, indirectly and partially engaged in and dependent on fishing (Shamsuzzaman et al., 2017).

Within fishing communities in Bangladesh, patron-client relations are not new. Such relations were developed centuries ago for several reasons, largely due to the caste system and religion. The long-enduring existence and practice of patron-client relations have contributed to the social and economic marginalisation of the fisherfolk community (Rahman et al., 2002; Ahmed et al., 2008; Rab, 2009). To manage the wetlands and to ensure the fishing rights of genuine fishers, following independence (1971), the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) adopted licensing system and leasing policies in different wetlands regimes (Khan and Haque, 2010). However, state management was not capable of controlling resource exploitation and achieving equitable distribution, to ensure fisherfolk rights over the waterbodies (Rab, 2009; Khan, 2011). Concentration on collecting substantial revenue from the leased-waterbodies and poor governance contributed to the emergence of a rent-seeking powerful non-fisherfolk class and created scope for political influence over leasing processes (Rab, 2009; Khan, 2011). In effect, poor fishers were forced to work for those leaseholders under uneven conditions, facilitating the development of patron-client relations (Rab, 2009).

To improve governance, and with financial support from several donors, the GoB has implemented co-management since 1988 (Hossain et al., 2006; Khan, 2011; Kabir et al., 2013; Islam et al., 2020). In 2001, 429 inland public waterbodies were granted co-management under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Ministry of Land (MoL) with the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (MoFL) and the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) on various terms and conditions (Brakel et al., 2021). Each project followed an approach based on the type of waterbody: floodplain Haor,[1] Beel,[2] rivers and canals. The nature of the waterbody is essential for adopting co-management because each waterbody is unique in terms of environmental and social characteristics (Sultana and Thompson, 2004).

The research presented here investigated two examples of project interventions that sought to support the implementation of fisheries co-management in Bangladesh. These projects were backed by donors and the GoB. Project-1 was implemented by national NGOs linked with MoFL and Department of Fisheries (DoF). Under this project, the roles and responsibilities were divided between CBOs and Federations of Credit Groups (FCGs). Project-2 was introduced to manage ecologically critical areas of Bangladesh, implemented by the Department of Environment (DoE), and national and local-level NGOs. All CBOs under these

[1] *Floodplain Haor-saucer-shaped naturally depressed waterbody.*

[2] *Beel-perennial waterbodies.*

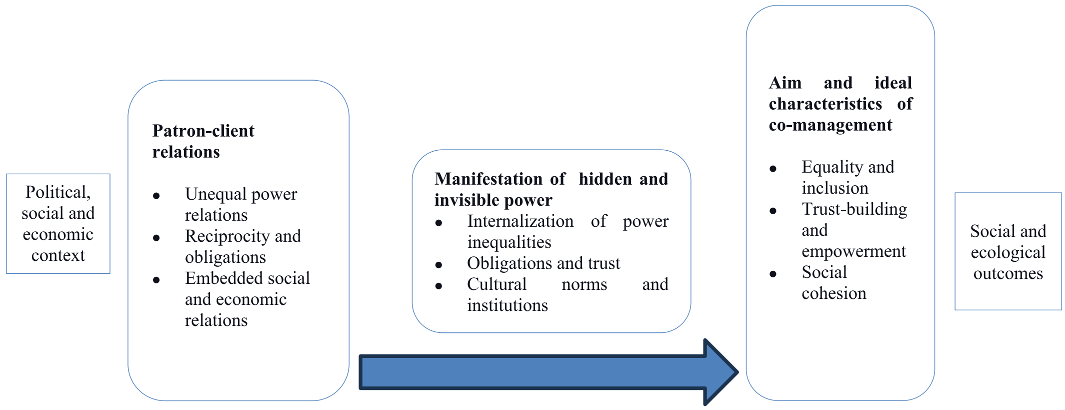

Fig. 1. Influence of patron-client relations on co-management through hidden and invisible power. .
Source: Authors compilation

two projects had formal links with the Upazilla-level (sub-district) but no link with the district-level. Partner NGOs worked to support village and Upazilla-level activities in a collaborative and coordinated way. The key feature of these projects was their focus on the entire resource-user community, including fisherfolk, farmers, labourers, landless and women, and the recognition that local elites and local government are also part of the resource-user community.

In wetland management, community involvement was assumed by the GoB and donors as crucial for facilitating resource users' contribution to management decision-making and maintaining well-functioning resources with greater compliance (Khan, 2011). Yet, no national approach has been adopted to implement co-management in Bangladesh's wetlands. It is mentioned in the National Wetland Management Act-2009 that organizations under co-management should be formed by involving fisherfolk. Although co-management has been implemented in Bangladesh for more than three decades, according to recent studies, the actors benefitting most from co-management are not the fisherfolk and women (Al Mamun et al., 2016; Choudhury et al., 2016; Khan and Ahmed, 2017; Cohen et al., 2021). Local powerful actors with family reputation, religious or political authority, wealth and financial capital are reported to have captured co-management using several channels, for example by lobbying government and NGO officials (Deb, 2009).

4. Methodology

The article draws on data collected between November 2019 and end March 2020 in the inland waterbodies of the northeast of Bangladesh. Projects were chosen that involved the local community and a wide range of stakeholders in managing fisheries, and only completed projects.

In the case-study site-1, Project-1 established 8 CBOs to manage 21 Beels. The study purposively selected 2 CBOs, who managed 5 Beels. Out of these 8 CBOs, CBO-1 had actively managed the waterbodies and the other 7 CBOs claimed lease-extension from the government, which means waterbodies were given to those CBOs under co-management, but these leases were not renewed by the government when Project-1 ended. These 7 CBOs subsequently filed a lawsuit to secure the waterbodies, which was found ongoing during fieldwork. Out of these 7 CBOs, CBO-2 was chosen. In the case-study site-1 and 2, 4 villages and 3 villages were selected respectively out of 14 villages. The reason for selecting these villages is that these fall under the geographical boundaries of the CBOs and Project-1 and Project-2 selected those villages located just next to the waterbodies sanctioned for co-management by the government. In case-study area-2, Project-2 established 28 CBOs; however, not all CBOs were given authority to manage the waterbody, and some were found to be dysfunctional during the fieldwork. Since the study aimed to research how these CBOs had been formed, managed waterbodies and how patron-client relations influence co-management structures and practices, the study selected 3 active CBOs out of 9 with authority to manage waterbodies. In total, 5 CBOs were chosen out of 36 CBOs, considering the capacity of a single researcher, since qualitative data were collected entirely by the first author.

At each study site, participants were selected through non-probability sampling techniques: purposive, convenience and stratified sampling. A total of 55 interviews were conducted (Table 1). For key informant interviews, participants from the CBOs were selected purposively based on their position (president, secretary, treasurer, general members). Other participants were local government officials (Upazilla Nirbahi Officer/Upazilla Fisheries Officer), and NGO professionals related to fisheries co-management projects. Informants from the local elite category – Panchayat members (senior non-fisherfolk in village-organisation), Mohajon (moneylenders), leaseholders, Union Parishad Chairman and informants from local fisherfolk were selected based on who was available during the data collection. In the first case-study area, informants from the credit groups (CG) were selected through stratified sampling. These CGs consisted of men and women from poor households, and fisherfolk. Therefore, participants from CGs were selected based on the respondents' gender to ensure that both women and men were included. These CGs were associated with two federations of credit groups (FCGs); FCG-1 and FCG-2. Eight CGs (6 male and 2 female) associated with FCG-1, consisting 120 males and 45 females — hence, using stratified sampling, 4 males and 1 female were selected. 5 separate CGs (4 males and 1 female) were associated with FCG-2, consisted of 150 members (120 males and 30 females) — so, in this case, 4 males and 1 female were selected through stratified sampling. The number of participants depended on several factors — the research purpose, richness of the information, practical constraints and data saturation.

All interviews were conducted at a time convenient for the participants, in a place familiar to them and where they would feel

Table 1
Selection of participants.

Participants	Case study 1 (Project-1, total CBOs = 2	Case Study-2 (Project-2, total CBOs = 3)
Local government officer	1	1
NGO staff	1	1
CBOs (Executive Committee, General Members	14	17
Federation of Credit Groups (FCGs)	10	No credit groups
Local elites	4	2
Local fishermen	2	2
Total	**32**	**23**

comfortable. Each interview lasted approximately 1 h and was non-directive. Informants shared their experiences, perceptions and interactions with others, in the context of co-management and subsequently follow-up questions were asked. Most interviews were recorded and notes were taken where recording was not possible due to restrictions from informants. Soon after the completion of an interview, field-notes and recordings were transcribed into a Word document. Before interviews started, the interviewee was informed about the purpose and nature of the research and a clear account of measures to be taken to maintain confidentiality of the data was provided. Once understanding was fully secured, consent (verbal or written) was sought. Permission was also sought regarding recording of the interview prior to starting. No identifying information about anyone interviewed was recorded. Confidentiality and anonymity of data were ensured by assigning codes to notes and transcripts. Confidentiality is also maintained by not naming the studied projects, CBOs, other respondents, Upazilla and waterbodies. Thematic data analysis (Smith and Osborn, 2004) was undertaken to analyse the data.

5. Findings

To answer the research question – how do patron-client relations influence fisheries co-management structures, functioning and practices – the findings and analysis are presented according to the three overarching themes from the literature review of: i) Power relations ii) Obligation and trust iii) Cultural norms and institutions. These are discussed as follows.

5.1. Power relations

Two key findings emerged in relation to the nature and relevance of power relations for fisheries co-management; firstly, power relations between patron and clients were found to be unequal, maintained over time through invisible power. Secondly, unequal relations were maintained in fisheries co-management by the Panchayat Murubbis (senior and most respected citizens) of the studied areas, who influenced who is involved in the committee and who could access credit and the waterbody.

Unequal power relations.

Three types of unequal power relations – social, financial and waterbody access-related – were identified between patrons and clients. Here Panchayat[3] (village-organisation) and Panchayat Murubbis operate as patrons. They possess multiple authoritative resources — customary authority, social position, gender (being male), occupation, religion, knowledge, wealth and reputation — and have multiple roles in the village-governance system. They perform the adjudicative function as a Shalishkar,[4] maintain social stability and moral order, and reduce tensions and conflict. Panchayat and Murubbis play a significant role as resource allocators, distributing food and money from Zakat[5] according to the needs of different groups of people. In Hindu and Muslim marriages of less-powerful families, they act as guardians and as Ukil-Baap.[6] Fisherfolk cannot be a part of the Panchayat because of their traditional occupation, which is considered impure and socially lower. In waterbody leasing they have the role of financier. This way, the Panchayat and Panchayat Murubbis influence every aspect of life in the villages, with the fisheries management bound up within this.

Clients are fisherfolk, farmers and the landless. One of the critical reasons clients depend on the Murubbis is the lack of alternative options for social protection in times of need. Due to lower social status and existing social norms and cultural practices (norms of purity and caste/class-based mobility restrictions) fisherfolk cannot be involved in the village Panchayat. Therefore, to obtain social support — for example, arranging marriages (deciding the amount of Mohrana,[7] fixing the amount of dowry, settling the size of the bridal party, securing positive recommendations about daughter/son), conflict resolution (outcome of a judgment in favour), and spiritual services — fisherfolk inevitably depend on Murubbis. Fisherfolk depend on Murubbis for loan support in the lean-season period – when government imposes restrictions on fishing. Unavailability of fish, food insecurity, financial hardship, and carrying on fishing-related business instigate financial relations between fisherfolk and Murubbis. Loans are given by the patrons under the conditions of interest payment, selling the entire catch to the patron and completion of lending period before moving to another patron. Fisherfolk also depend on Murubbis to access the waterbody. In the government leasing system, access to a lease is restricted to Fisherman Co-operative Organisations (FCOs), made up of fisherfolk. According to the fisherfolk respondents, high lease value, no provision of formal credit for securing lease, financial incapability, and lack of political contacts restrict fisherfolk from forming FCOs and securing a lease. In this case, Murubbis bear the cost of forming a FCO, managing waterbodies through political connections and giving fisherfolk flexible entry to FCOs and waterbodies. Women are particularly dependent on the rules, attitudes, decisions and actions of Murubbis because of mobility restrictions and have no representative in the Panchayat.

This patron-client relation is not forced. Instead circumstances dictate that fisherfolk have little choice but to depend on patrons, for their social and economic support. Patrons understand the marginalised's dependence on them, which gives patrons the power to set conditions according to their desires and considerations. These conditions do not necessarily provide fisherfolk and women maximum benefits compared to the benefits patrons receive but for everyday food, income and livelihood security, fisherfolk depend on their patron.

How do power relations enable patron-client relations to influence co-management?

Power relations were found to be maintained through co-management due to hidden and invisible forms of power. The study investigated the extent of equality and inclusion of co-management in three arenas – access to the co-management committee, access to fisheries and access to credit – and found that equality and inclusion could not be delivered due to hidden and invisible forms of power. In the respondents' responses, invisible power was evident in the internalization of power inequality by powerful and less-powerful actors. Hidden power involved situations where patrons used patron-client relationships to develop informal rules and practices to enable access to fisheries and credit, facilitating them to maintain their status and keep the less-powerful at the bottom of social and economic ranking. Different mechanisms were identified to be consciously applied by the Panchayat Murubbis to maintain their status in the three arenas of co-management, discussed below.

- Co-management committees

In the constitutions of the CBOs there are clear guidelines on the composition of co-management committees — who should participate, in what percentage, and their functions in co-management. In study

[3] Panchayat is an informal social organisation. The Panchayat system though was abolished in Bangladesh before liberation in 1971, it still exists informally (Mahboob, 2003). However, the system is not widespread in Bangladesh and that many factors — absence of influential lineage, wealth, education, the influence of national politics, etc. — have contributed to this. Respondents could not accurately pinpoint the time of its formation in the studied areas. Someone mentioned that it is a century old. and fisherfolk respondents noted that this system has prevailed since their ancestors migrated here, probably at the time of partition, 1947.

[4] *Shalishkar-adjudicator/arbitrator.*

[5] *Zakat-Islamic tax.*

[6] *Ukil-Baap (witness of the marriage).*

[7] *Mohrana-money or possessions paid by the groom.*

area-1, according to the constitution of the CBO (2005), 60 % of membership should be composed of FCG members, 30 % should be from the different professions (farmers, business people, teachers, doctors, etc.) and 10 % most respected persons in the society. In study area-2, CBOs should comprise 38 % fisherfolk, 24 % farmers, 14 % landless/sharecroppers, 14 % daily labours and 10 % other professions (elite) (Constitution, 2010). Women were involved in the committee at both sites. There was no explicit instruction about the percentage of women involved. NGO respondents confirmed in case study-1 and-2 women's representation was 30 % and 25 % respectively of all CBO members.

Though the guidelines emphasised inclusiveness in member selection in the CBO, the reality was different. Panchayat Murubbis had hidden interests and chose members in three ways. Firstly, they selected suitable members. For example, in study area-2 Panchayat Murubbis considered Bongsho (lineage) as a criterion for member selection. One respondent (EC-1, CBO-3) said "we took members to the committee from every Bongsho. In some cases, more members have been taken from the dominant Bongsho". The respondent clarified the dominant Bongsho as those who bear a high-status patronymic title such as Chowdhury or Talukdar, have lived there for generations, possess ancestral property and have more sons compared to other Bongsho and further confirmed that this approach to member selection reflected long-held social practices. Secondly, Murubbis selected those people who would listen to them and do what they said. Respondents (CG, GC, fisherfolk) reported that these people worked in their controlled FCOs and identified them 'Nijer bisshosto' (dependable) and 'Nijer lok' (own people) of the Murubbis. Thirdly, they selected those whom they thought were capable. One EC respondent, (EC-1, CBO-1), said, "We (Panchayat Murubbis) decided who are able and who will work on the project…they should speak in a decent language, have minimum education and must be trustworthy".

NGOs and government initiated women's involvement in the committee, but female members were chosen in a way Panchayat members could control. Family ties, kinship, higher class, and social networks were maintained during selection. One respondent (EC-2, CBO-4) mentioned that "every member of this EC involved their relatives. I included my sister. I told her to bring another woman known to her, listen to her……. Don't bring someone not from our side and will not listen to us". In study area-2, there was a position on the EC named "Shommanito Sodoshoo" (respected member), where a woman from a respected family, particularly a President or Secretary's wife, was always selected. Lower-class fisherfolk women were excluded from the committee. For example, one female fisherfolk respondent (CG-5) said, "no, how could I go there? Will they take us? We are 'Choto jaat.[8] CBO leader will take members from their own 'Jaati'[9] (group)".

- Equality and inclusion in access to fishery

Under co-management some waterbodies were given by the MoL to the CBOs for two purposes; first, to build sanctuaries (temporary/permanent) for conserving fisheries resources and second, for floating-lease[10] purposes to ensure financial benefits for resource-users through a rotation basis (6 months/1year). To manage sanctuaries and distributing waterbodies under the floating-lease system, Murubbis introduced informal rules, which were a hidden way of maintaining control over waterbodies and reaping financial benefit.

One such rule is area-closure rule – restricting access of general members and general public from the sanctuary area. In maintenance-related work in the sanctuary, such as brush pile-setting, guarding and patrolling, Murubbis appointed only trusted members. The reason for introducing area-closure rules, EC respondents reported, was conservation and protection from looting, but behind these, Murubbis continued illegal fishing at night with the help of trusted members and generated a considerable income from this.

Another example of hidden power is the distribution of floating-lease by the Murubbis (office-bearers) through an open-tender process. Open tender process is highly unequal but was taken from the National Wetland Management Act-2005 and 2009, so no one can raise questions. There were three ways through which fisherfolk were excluded from the floating-lease opportunity. First, the open-tender process follows the willingness-to-pay principle. In theory, this is open to all and under this process the lease price can go higher than fisherfolk groups can manage, enabling wealthier CBO leaders to secure the lease and control access. The second point GC respondents mentioned was the one-off payment system where a large sum of lease-money should be deposited within 7 to 15 days of the floating-lease decision taken. The third way of excluding fisherfolk, reported by fisherfolk, is failure to include fisherfolk in the group that sanctions the floating lease as CBO leaders maintained "affective ties" (Scott, 1972, P. 99) in group formation. As one respondent said "our leaders involved in their group only their people, relatives, and party people whom they included in committee" (GC-3, CBO-1).

- Equality and inclusion in access to credit

Credit support under the projects focused on reducing pressure on fisheries resources by substituting the livelihood activities of fisherfolk and women with alternative livelihoods activities, increasing their financial capital and strengthening their skills in decision-making especially on financial matters. However, access to credit was controlled by Murubbis and they captured maximum credit for themselves. Murubbis introduced informal practices and rules in credit distribution, impeding the opportunities of the less-powerful to access credit. Interviews with GC and EC members confirmed that credit approval depended on financial solvency, personal endowments and marital status. Credit approval based on financial solvency adversely affected fisherfolk and women. Fisherfolk in the studied areas are historically disadvantaged. Due to restricted mobility women also have less or no access to financial resources, hence economic power belongs to men. Hindu widows are deprived of access to credit as they are financially insolvent and do not get any share of their father's property. Besides financial assets, one crucial asset for women was having at least one son. One female EC respondent said that the more sons a woman has the more she is valued in society because these sons work for the Murubbis and are available to fight for them when lease-related conflicts arise or they can provide political services (rallies, election campaigns).

The second informal rule was approving loans based on the training received at the outset of the projects. According to the NGO professional and EC respondents, fisherfolk and women members were given training in alternative livelihood activities and credit was sanctioned for specific activities such as livestock rearing, poultry, handicrafts, shop building, tailoring, or nursery. However, high competition due to identical livelihood activities and minimal chances of gaining profit impeded fisherfolk from securing significant credit for further economic activities.

The third practice in credit distribution was approving credit based on previous loan repayment records. Most EC respondents mentioned poor loan repayment by fisherfolk, which led to them being denied further loans. However, some CG and GC members had different opinions, pointing to two issues: deliberate manipulation in documentation of interest deposits and irregularities in credit distribution. They reported that a group of influential people and Murubbis already captured a significant portion of the loan fund, creating obstacles for the fisherfolk to secure loans in good time and subsequent failure to repay in time.

[8] *Choto jaat (lower-class).*

[9] *Jaati-group.*

[10] *Floating-lease- sanctioning lease under the condition of fishing only floating fish, keeping the water level 3 feet and no use of any harmful gears.*

5.2. Obligation and trust

This section presents two key findings. Firstly, patron-client relationships are not always financial but social and creates moral obligation within fisherfolk to their patron. Second, fisherfolk's moral obligations and trust in their patron influences empowerment potential of co-management in a hidden way.

Reciprocity and moral obligations within patron-client relations.

Unequal power relations between the fisherfolk and patrons are not only maintained by informal rules and practices. The patron's power can be hidden within how patrons treat their clients and how the fisherfolk value their relations from the viewpoint of trust. There are informal rules related to accessing the waterbodies — namely, the existence of an informal toll, which can be high depending on the position of the Beel within the Haor; gears used for fishing; the season for fishing; and area for fishing. Unwritten rules were also found in accessing the fish market — for instance, rules for determining fish price and money distribution earned from selling catches and the practice of giving the best fish to 'Mohajon' as a gift. These conditions that the patron sets result in proportionally greater benefits to them rather than fisherfolk and women.

Power can work in a hidden way by creating moral obligations among the less-powerful. There is availability of formal credit market, but fisherfolk and women depend on their Murubbis because Murubbis can respond to the needs of the fisherfolk that NGO- or Government-led microcredit organizations fail to address. These needs include greater flexibility in loan provision (such as quick response during extreme financial needs of the marginalised and collateral-free credit services), no risk of discrimination in accessing loans, no social exclusion, or public shaming due to missing a 'Kisti'[11] and so no feeling of dishonour. Patrons also play games while fixing the price of catches in the fish market for example instead of giving the actual value of their (fisherfolk) catch they offer fishers a small amount of fish, a little money for breakfast, or waive one loan installment. Regarding waterbody access, leaseholders also provide benefits to the fisherfolk – such as flexibility in entering FCO, no membership charge, and flexibility in informal toll payment. Though in comparison the benefits fisherfolk get are very meagre and fisherfolk also understand the unequal treatment, according to them, their patron shows generosity towards them. If a patron wishes, they could impose restrictions in getting access to the Beel like other leaseholders do in their inherited properties. One respondent said "this is his kindness and willingness that he gives me permission in his waterbody. Now whatever amount of toll he wants, and the rules he fixes for fishing we have to follow those" (Fisherfolk-1).

Another factor in accepting the unequal situation is that the social assistance fisherfolk receive from patrons creates respect, gratefulness and a feeling of personal obligation. According to the GC, they feel safe and secure with their patron. Fisherfolk and women believe that during crises and extreme needs their patron will assist them, they will not dishonour and avoid them in front of others due to their lower caste status — instead, patrons will assist them by treating them as "people from our village, own people". They think it is their responsibility to obey, show respect and comply with rules and conditions set by their patron.

Trust-building and empowerment in co-management.

In the studied areas, co-management projects aimed to involve the resource users in decision-making, increase their self-confidence, enhance their awareness about environmental, social and political factors, enable them to influence decisions, and play an assertive role in managing fisheries resources. But what an individual considers about choosing office-bearers and how they behave in the context of co-management does not always follow the process that NGOs/donors had in mind but are instead responsive to the reciprocity norm, fulfilment of obligations, and trust among the actors, which can, in a hidden way, influence individual behaviour in the context of co-management.

A feeling of obligation that emerges from the economic and social protection they get from the Murubbis shaped the thinking of the GC respondents about what is morally right and who is appropriate for the office-bearer position. According to the respondents, office-bearers were selected in two ways: selection and election. The selection process was under Murubbi's control. Regarding factors considered in choosing office-bearers during CBO election respondents focused on fulfilling obligation. One respondent (GC-1, CBO-3) said "our Secretary controls large waterbodies…He and his brother control the fish market near Haor. We must go to them if we want to buy or sell fish. Sometimes he lowers the price, being from the same neighbourhood". Another respondent (GC-3, CBO-1) recalled their memory of migration and dependency issues and said, "we are bound to our chief in various ways. During liberation war, his family sheltered us. Our fisherfolk community of this Para[12] still now gets access to the beels because of him".

Respondents (GC) also pointed to the social mobility that their Murubbis have and their trust in their Murubbis. They believe Murubbis have the intelligence to bargain with the government for more waterbodies, and can secure waterbodies in the name of CBOs, which will ultimately improve their life. As one respondent said "they get the opportunity of education, have a good connection with influential people in society and government officials…know the laws and can explain those laws in various ways. They resolve any conflicts in a way that is impossible in any other way…….They always secure Beels from government under lease. So, we thought they could bring more beels for the organisation, which will benefit us" (GC-2, CBO-4).

5.3. Cultural norms and institutions

Two aspects of cultural norms and institutions associated with patron-client relations were found to influence fisheries co-management. Firstly, these cultural norms and institutions are socially- and culturally-embedded and secondly, cultural norms, rules, ideas and social practices within fisherfolk communities hindered social cohesion and influence the performance of fisheries co-management.

Embedded relations within fisherfolk community.

Patron-client relations in fisheries management are strongly socially- and culturally-embedded. Internalization of values, norms, rules and patrons' expectations by the fisherfolk and women have contributed to the continuation of these longstanding relationships.

In the study areas, the social support that Murubbis provided to their clients through the Panchayat motivated villagers and created a submissive attitude. Villagers know it is their social responsibility to obey, show respect, and comply with the Panchayat and its decisions if they are to live in the village peacefully and safely. One respondent (GC-2, CBO-5) said, "If you want to stay in this village, you must obey Panchayat." Respondents mentioned that if they do not maintain this relation, Murubbis may ban them from accessing any further economic and social support or they may delay in providing services. Another respondent (GC-1, CBO-1) said "We are bound to obey Murubbis… It is not written anywhere. We have been maintaining it year after year. Avoiding them means showing disrespect. They will not take this easily, but will not say anything in front of you. Later, they will apply many tactics, such as disrespecting you in front of your community". Respondents in the studied areas desired secure and peaceful co-existence. Respondents also confirmed that avoiding Murubbis can result in losing support from neighbours. These examples show how Murubbis' social support influence Murubbis' perceived value to the fisherfolk and women. This is internalization, where the marginalised commit energy to maintain the norms. Through internalization of values and norms, the marginalised in this case live up to a moral standard and maintain this relation for a long time.

[11] *Kisti-repayment of loan.*

[12] *Para-A small human settlement.*

Social cohesion and co-management.

In the context of committee formation under co-management, Panchayat Murubbis used several social practices, ideas and rules, which in a hidden and invisible way excluded fisherfolk from the leadership position, women from the public space, and shaped their psychological boundary of participation, hence impeded their opportunities through which they can change their lives. These hidden and invisible ways of functioning power are discussed below.

Hidden Power.

One deeply ingrained social practice that CBO leaders in the study area-2 adhered to was 'Bongsho.' This system follows the patrilineage line where an individual's descent is traced exclusively through their father's line, titles are passed down through male descendants and the custom of patrilocal marriage. In patrilocal marriage, a woman resides with or near the husband's parents, which geographically distances her from her natal family, significantly reducing her daily interactions and involvement in family affairs. In most cases, women started to use her husband's title instead of her father's title. Hence this patrilocal marriage system significantly attenuates a woman's ties with her Bongsho.

Another form of hidden power is using Panchayat's meeting procedures to select office-bearers. Several GC respondents reported that Murubbis controlled this process, where one Muruubi proposed a name for the office-bearer position, another Murubbi supported it, and then the present members raised their hands in support. When Murubbis spoke in a meeting and gave or proposed a decision, others refrained from speaking and verbally accepted that decision, as it is deemed morally acceptable in this society, which created opportunities for Murubbis to be selected.

CBO leaders unified different ideas regarding the participation of women in elections, which favoured Murubbis in maintaining their status quo. These ideas include protecting Ijjat and prioritising caring responsibilities. Ijjat is a key social value that governs floodplain women's actions and shapes their status and societal role. One EC respondent (EC-1, CBO-1), said, "When women lose their Ijjat, society also loses its Ijjat. People then point towards its Murubbis, criticising them for not controlling their women properly." Hence, to secure the Ijjat of the female members and to protect the Murubbis from criticism, Murubbis held a critical idea that women are subject to time-restrictions. One respondent said, "If a woman wishes for a post, we will give a decision. But can they fulfill their responsibility? We usually do our meeting in the afternoon as we all have work in the morning. But our women cannot stay outside after Maghrib (Evening prayer)" (EC-1, CBO-1). Another respondent (EC-2, CBO-1) mentioned "… staying outside after evening prayer will lose not only her 'Ijjat' but also her husband's Ijjat." The reason behind the time-restriction was that if a woman is harassed sexually or something supernatural happens to her, she will lose her chastity and purity. People and her family may exclude her socially and accuse her by calling her 'Noshta',[13] damaging the reputation of the woman's whole family and the Para where she lives.

Murubbis also emphasised women's domestic responsibilities. They hold on to the idea of a woman from the angle of what a good mother does. According to them, women should not deny their domestic and caring responsibilities and should not deprive and dishonour their husbands by engaging in public activities. One respondent (EC-2, CBO-4) said "If they fail in their main duty, there is no point if they show excellence in other activities". Another respondent (EC-1, CBO-2) said, "If they get time after these duties, we do not have any problem." The reason for this view is that if women ignore domestic responsibilities due to involvement in public activities, then many problems might occur in the household space, such as domestic violence, chaos, and confusion, which will ultimately need to be solved by them.

Though Murubbis used ideas of femaleness to maintain household stability and security, these ideas were ultimately aimed at controlling women's participation. A recurring issue was the inability of female respondents to take on organisational responsibilities due to domestic commitments. The lack of fixed time frames for household activities restricted them from accessing the public domain.

Adding to the cultural practices, Murubbis introduced a new rule of imposing a fee for the nomination form during the CBO election. While the rule was justified to increase the CBO's fund, and cover office-related costs, it's had a hidden consequence. The high price of nomination forms covertly discouraged the poor fisherfolk and women from participating in the election.

Invisible power.

In the studied areas, the fisherfolk and women internalized the idea that the office-bearer position is not for them but rather for the Murubbis. They accepted their socially lowered position, and unequal situation "as natural" (Lukes, 2005, p. 28). Their self-perception, deeply influenced by cultural practices, had led to a sense of resignation and belief that any development initiatives will perpetuate the unequal situation, as evidenced in the following interview extract.

> We are fisherfolk. They do not want to see us in office-bearer positions. A fisherfolk will run an organisation, preside over a meeting as a President, and Murubbis will respect us, give us 'Salam', sit at the same table, and use the same wooden chair; it cannot happen. If they do it, then they will be socially-lowered. They want us to respect them and give them 'Salam,' but they will never take it well to show us respect (GC-2, CBO-2).

Regarding involvement in office-bearer positions, female respondents also responded from an internalised perspective. Dominant views about females' capacity and gender norms of Ijjat are internalised within them, influencing their decision to stay away from office-bearer positions. As one female respondent said:

> If I take responsibility, I must go to the Upazilla office and talk with a male officer. I never spoke in front of our Murubbi, so how can I deliver a speech in front of them…Taking responsibility means I must go to the Haor at night to patrol, and if any emergency arises, I have to move along with the police. In our 'Samaj' (society), women can't go to the Haor or Bazar. It will never happen" (EC-4, CBO-1).

Female members secure and maintain their position within the EC by behaving within acceptable social norms. Though some of them were fairly well educated, it was observed that they did not feel any need to get leadership roles. Both women and fisherfolk members think their current unequal situation in the context of co-management is better than when they were not allowed in a public place. Some fisherfolk members said that they never thought that, with minimum institutional capital, they could join such a formal committee. One respondent (GC-1, CBO-1) said, "It was beyond our dream." Here the problem of not being able to use power is insignificant to the fisherfolk compared to their previous state, where they were denied power.

6. Discussion

From the above findings it is apparent that patron-client relations influence fisheries co-management. Three themes – power relations, obligation and trust and cultural norms – refer to how hidden and invisible power manifest within patron-client relation and in fisheries co-management and influence several aspects – equality and inclusion, empowerment and social cohesion of co-management.

Invisible power was at work as internalization of power inequalities. There is evidence that power is not only held by a patron but, rather, clients can also possess some power (Nunan et al., 2020). Other fisheries' literature (Ruddle, 2011; Nurdin and Grydehoj, 2014; Miñarro et al., 2016) reported unequal power relations between patron and client. Evidence from this study revealed that internalization of power inequalities both by the powerful and less-powerful contributes to maintaining these power inequalities and even cause challenges and

[13] *'Noshta'- one who loses chastity.*

pressure for co-management. Prior to the introduction of co-management, Murubbis set rules, conditions for giving access to waterbodies and credit. Though the rules and conditions produce inadequate benefits for fisherfolk and women, they agreed to those rules and conditions as they have very little choice, showing a steady determination not to change their behaviour. Here less-powerful groups believe they have no choice but to accept power inequalities because in their times of extreme needs only Murubbis respond quickly, as other NGOs and government organizations fail to help. These power inequalities over time became a part of their (Murubbis, fisherfolk and women) behavioral system. An introjected feeling of superiority, therefore, works among the Murubbis in the context of co-management, where they believe that their thinking, knowledge and experiences about the society are far above others. They know very well how the social order can be maintained and the social, cultural values of their society can be preserved, who should be involved in managing fisheries and how the fisheries and credit system will run. Panchayat Murubbis selected suitable members (Bongsho), set criteria (language, education, trustworthy) for member inclusion, re-established waterbody access rule (open-tender), introduced area-closure rules for managing the sanctuary, and established rules and practices for credit distribution (financial solvency, having son, training received, a satisfactory previous loan record). These rules, ideas and practices affected the potential for equality and inclusion in co-management a hidden way. These hidden mechanisms excluded many fisherfolk (who do not work in the FCOs controlled by Murubbis), and women (particularly low-caste fisherfolk women, and widows) from the committee, from contributing to the decisions regarding management of fisheries and credit, and from getting financial benefits, setting them at the bottom of the social ranking.

Power can be hidden within the moral obligation and trust that the fisherfolk have in their patron. Literature (Crona et al., 2010; Miñarro et al., 2016) has reported that, in fisheries, reasons for the reciprocal relationship between patrons and fisherfolk are uncertainty in access rights, price risk, risk of loss of assets, and lack of formal insurance and credit-market. Reciprocity is a social norm, where the less-powerful feel compelled to reciprocate favours their patrons provide. Evidence from this research revealed two things; firstly, this relationship can persist even when there is availability of formal credit market and government support for leasing and, secondly, this relationship is not always financial rather social. The social assistance fisherfolk receive from patrons creates respect, gratefulness, and a feeling of personal obligation.

In such circumstances when certain marginalized groups have been given access to power it does not indicate that empowerment has happened, and they can take responsibility and act effectively to change their lives. For less-powerful groups to be able to claim a position on the committees and to reduce inequality, they must first learn to fill their new roles, understand the forces impacting them, analyse social and political context critically and become aware that the circumstances are unjust, which may then enable them to raise their voice about the unjust situation (Gaventa, 1982; Jentoft, 2005; Chisholm et al., 2020). This aligns with Jentoft's (2005, p.3) reference to 'learned hopefulness'. But this is not happening here, rather moral obligations are hidden within the thinking of less-powerful and shape their behaviour and action in the context of co-management. The less-powerful groups choose Murubbis as leader of the CBO for three reasons: first, they think it is their moral responsibility; second, they think they do not have necessary skills such as formal education, knowledge about rules and regulations, and motivational capacity to influence political system; and, third, they have no choice because non-conforming may result in withdrawal of all kinds of financial, social and waterbody acceess-related services. It is not the case that less-powerful groups do not understand the social forces that shape their environment and how they face asymmetric distribution of monetary benefits. However, moral obligation and trust influence their self-confidence, the feeling of being able to control their domain through own action and their internal efficacy – lack of belief that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to influence political process (Zimmerman and Rapport, 1988).

One of the important findings from the cases is that social cohesion, involving inclusion, participation, recognition, and sense of belonging, and a key driving force for successful co-management fisheries (Jenson, 2010; Gutierrez et al., 2011; Fonseca et al., 2019), does not exist in the studied communities. Murubbis were not willing to collaborate, so due to differences according to caste/class and gender, not all members could participate in co-management. Murubbis utilized existing cultural norms, rules such as Bongsho, Panchayat's meeting procedure, and Ijjat to form the co-management committee. These norms, ideas and practices are socially-and –culturally legitimated, and Muriubbis used these as taken for granted and used them strategically, as no one could raise any questions. These universally accepted ideas and norms within the communities, which Bourdieu (1998 in McDougall and Ojha, 2022) referred to as 'Doxa', play a powerful role in excluding less-powerful actors from decision-making in a hidden way. Murubbis did not create obstacles directly. Factors within these social practices such as patrilineage lines and meeting norms inhibited participation of the less-powerful. Murubbis accumulated ideas of femaleness – what a woman in their society performs and what they should maintain even holding a leadership position such as prioritising caring responsibilities, and following time-restrictions. Gerson and Peiss (1985) argued that insisting on women's participation on the one hand, and advocating retention of women's femaleness on the other is contradictory, suggesting that women will remain outsiders.

To form the committee, the social practices and ideas Murubbis used shaped the ideological boundary of participation of the less-powerful – accepting powerlessness as natural. Fisherfolk and women think that no development initiatives can alter their unequal situation, there should always be a difference in society. This accepting powerlessness as normal gives legitimacy to those social norms and reinforces the status quo. They consciously withdrew from showing open defiance against norms, rules, and practices because they thought this would make them uncomfortable afterwards, causing loss of historical fishing access or withdrawal from social assistance. Therefore, they developed a culture of silence (Gaventa, 1982), making them more secure in the committee. This practice of withdrawing from open defiance has two results. Firstly, it provides the "dominant narratives an air of legitimacy" (Gaventa, 1982, p.18) and enables social legitimation to be developed around the dominant. Secondly, this impedes the alternative perspectives in fisheries management because this kind of engagement cannot create a sense of belonging among the less-powerful through which they can fully contribute to the resource management decision-making. For transition to co-management of a small-scale fishery, establishing and adopting new norms, rules and behaviours is essential (Alexander et al., 2015). But this cannot always be possible since communities are not homogenous, instead complex patterns of relational ties between groups of actors – with differing values, diverse interests, agendas, perceptions, resource uses and influences (Carlsson and Berkes, 2005; Alexander et al., 2015). In the studied cases, this reality significantly challenges social cohesion and successful co-management outcomes.

7. Conclusion

This paper developed and applied a framework (Fig. 1) to analyse how patron-client relations influence the structure, functioning and performance of co-management. Several contributions are made to literature on patron-client relations and co-management from the research: that patron-client relations can be deeply embedded in social, economic and political systems, with highly asymmetric power relations; patrons use various strategies to dominate and shape co-management to align with their interests; and, analysis of hidden and invisible power shows how clients go along with patron strategies. The research reinforces Nunan's (2020) call for greater consideration of the political economy of co-management in implementation and in developing expectations of co-management performance and outcomes. The research also supports concerned observation that initiatives labelled as co-management may be far from being participatory and inclusive, with the concept 'stretched', as suggested by Pearson and Dare (2019).

The first contribution to literature on patron-client relations is confirmation that such relations are highly asymmetrical and are more associated with being strongly socially- and culturally-embedded rather than providing credit and access to fisheries. This observation differs from literature that finds that relationships between patrons and fisherfolk are asymmetric and arise due to uncertainty in access rights, lack of formal insurance and credit, and lack of alternative employment (Crona et al., 2010; Nurdin and Grydehøj, 2014; Ferror-Schulte et al., 2014; Miñarro et al., 2016; Adhuri et al., 2016). Findings from this study indicate that this relationship can persist even when there is government support for leasing. A patron-client relation is a stubborn relationship, in which the clients show a constant determination to prevent change in behaviour. Patrons utilise hidden and invisible power to maintain these relationships over time, despite external efforts to improve fisherfolk livelihoods and improve fisheries or water-body management. Invisible power works through internalization of power inequalities both by the patron and client, and hidden power works through social and cultural rules, norms and practices used by patrons for controlling access to the waterbodies and markets, and providing social services. The findings support Nunan et al.'s (2018) advice that relations between patrons and fisherfolk should be taken into consideration in both development interventions and designing collaborative fisheries governance approaches.

The second contribution is identification of the types of strategies patrons use to maintain control of co-management structures and activities. Patron-client relations are all-pervasive in the studied communities, influencing all aspects of life and, therefore, fundamentally influence village responses to co-management. Strategies used included forming and controlling fisherfolk organisations, selecting members of the co-management committees and maintaining their status so that fisherfolk trusted in the ability and connections of patrons to deliver benefits for them. The status of patrons and cultural norms prevented fisherfolk and women from speaking in meetings, putting themselves forward for high positions in the committees and challenging decisions. Patrons developed a façade of inclusiveness and kept to composition requirements of co-management committees but maintained control through utilizing social rules, ideas and practices. Literature on elite capture (Platteau and Gaspart, 2003; Wilshusen, 2009; Wong, 2010; Saito-Jensen et al., 2010; Ramcilovic-Suominen and Kotilainen, 2020) report that elites capture committees through their traditional authority and caste identity, and capture funds through manipulation of the microcredit system, financial misappropriation, and employing general malpractices. Evidence from this study adds to these observations by identifying how power is hidden within informal rules and practices of committee formation, allocation of funds and distribution of waterbodies, making it hard to challenge elite capture and ascertain the rationale for decisions and co-management performance. The hidden and invisible power concepts brought analytical depth to understanding inclusion and exclusion within fisheries governance.

Finally, analysis of invisible and hidden power showed how power can shape co-management structures, performance and outcomes, confirming observations that the introduction of co-management does not happen in a vacuum, but instead will interact with, and be shaped by, existing institutions (Nunan et al., 2015). Invisible power was identified as internalization of values, social rules and practices as natural, with hidden power found within wider social practices, cultural norms, rules and values of the community and within the thinking of clients, within their moral obligation and trust towards their patrons.

The analytical framework developed and applied in this paper provides a tool to facilitate analysis of embedded power asymmetries, uncovering how hidden and invisible strategies enable patrons to maintain control over every aspect of society and maintain their material benefits and status. The framework enables analysis of how these strategies affect the potential for equality and inclusion, trust-building and empowerment, and social cohesion, deemed within literature as necessary for effective co-management. The framework further enables analysis of the nature and mechanisms of power differentials within a community, building on long recognition that communities are not homogeneous, but members differ in their interests, assets and power (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999).

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Rehnuma Ferdous: Writing – original draft, Visualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Fiona Nunan:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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