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INSTITUTION-BUILDING CONSIDERATIONS IN RURAL EMPLOYMENT
PROGRAMMES IN BANGLADESH

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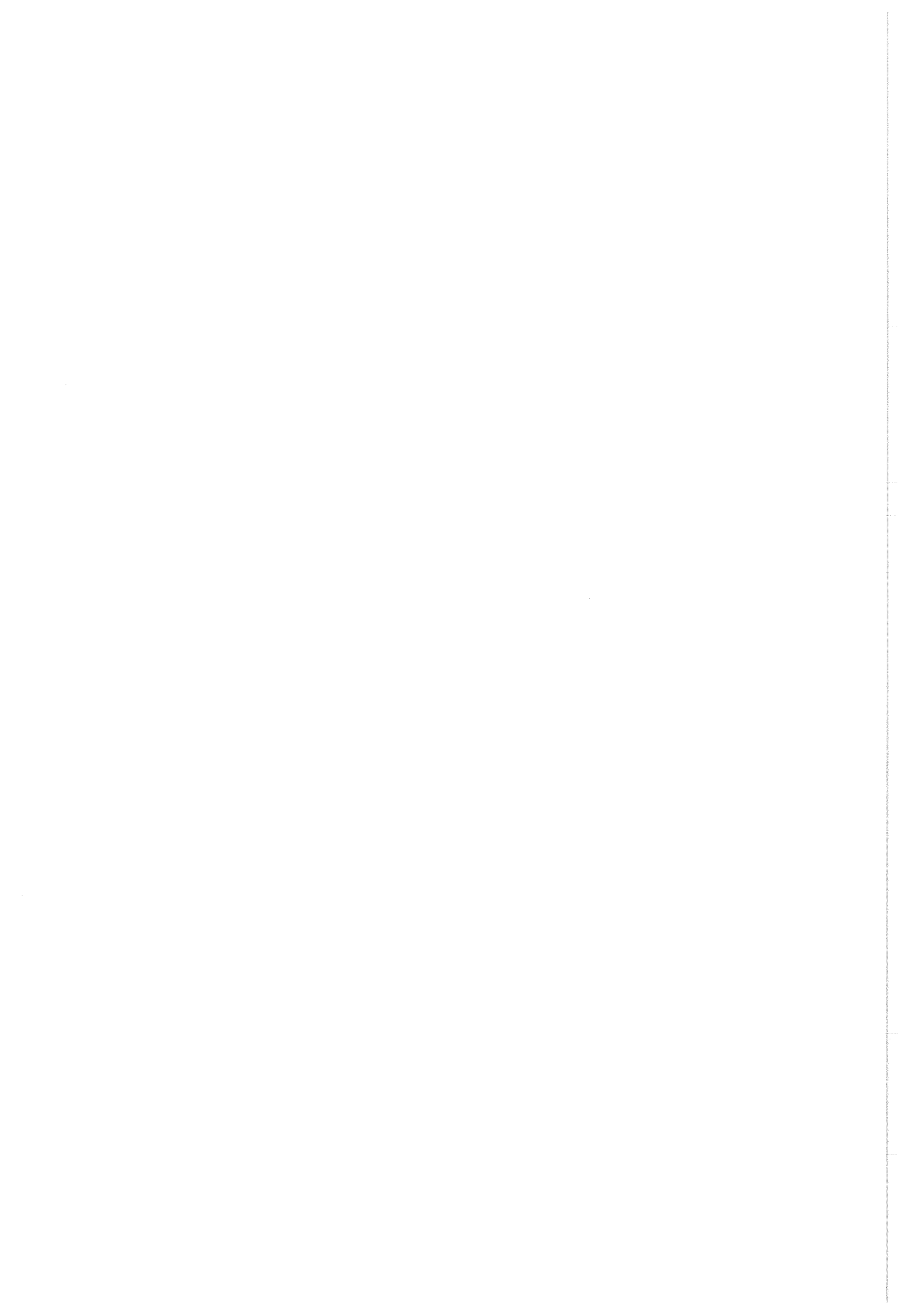
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Chapter One

1. Introduction and Background to the Problem

The economy of Bangladesh is predominantly rural-based whereby the population constitutes 91 per cent of the total (Wood:1994:292), the agricultural labour force accounts for 90.16 per cent of the total (Huq:1978:167) and approximately 80 per cent are considered directly dependent on agriculture. But high concentration of land resulting in landlessness has increased the proportion of rural labour force. Especially the rural wage labourers grew by 42 per cent as compared to 27 per cent for the total labour force between 1961 and 1974 (Khan:1986:67).

The growth of the rural labour force again has been accelerated by rapid population growth which exceeds the growth of agriculture. While the rate of growth in agriculture dipped from 3 per cent to 2 per cent during 80s, the growth of rural labour force kept on increasing by 3.2 per cent per year, approximately 1 million men and women; and the rate will soar up to 3.5 per cent per year by the end of this century (Wood:1994:238,292). A further projection of the future labour force indicates that by 2000 the rural labour force will increase from 8 million to 12 million (Faaland and Parkinson:1976:).

The declining growth of the agricultural sector, on the one hand, has resulted in the diminishing labour-absorptive capacity of this sector, resulted in its declining trend of share in employment. During 1974-86, agriculture's share of employment declined from 79 per cent to 57 per cent (Hossain and Akash:1993:9). On the other hand, the rapid growth of the rural labour force implies a growing pressure on existing employment opportunities in the rural areas. This is true that a substantial proportion of the rural labour has been absorbed as a result of the introduction of HYV and irrigation technology, and that open unemployment¹ is very low in Bangladesh. The growth of the rural labour force, however, has an impact on the employment situation, which can be referred to as a decline in labour days per worker. The labour demand, when comparing pre and post adoption of green technology, was 17 higher in 1977/78

1

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, open unemployment is defined by taking a one-week reference period and classifying as unemployed only those persons whose were actively seeking work but did not find work at all during the reference week.

than in 1953-54. But still labour days per worker declined by 21 per cent due to an increase of the work force by 38 per cent (Khan:1986:73). Besides, agricultural activities in Bangladesh are highly characterized by seasonality² which constrains the absorption of labour throughout the year. Although non-crop agricultural activities and non-agricultural activities during slack seasons help to smooth fluctuations in overall rural employment, the slack in the September-November period still remains pronounced (Hossain and Akash:1993:13). As a result, underemployment has become a regular phenomena in rural Bangladesh. In various micro-studies at village level it is indicated that along with other factors, seasonal variations account for about 33 per cent of underemployment of the rural labour force (Wood:1994:237).

The situation of underemployment as such has drawn the attention of the government which focuses on tackling it. Thus, apart from other programmes geared to the agricultural sector, a series of targeted schemes have been devised to curb rural un- and underemployment. Among these, Rural Works Programme (RWP) and Food for Works Programme (FWP) play a significant role.

2. Statement of the Problem

Given the un- and underemployment in the agricultural sector, the Rural Works Programme (RWP) and Food for Works Programme (FWP) are meant to provide short-term and long-term employment to the rural poor. Besides, these two programmes are distinct from most other rural employment programmes in the sense that they are envisaged to directly benefit the targeted poor i.e. landless labourers and marginal farmers. With a view to ensuring the participation of the poor, these programmes are implemented primarily through local government bodies and finally the Project Committee (PC) which is supposedly representative of the poor themselves.

However, in reality, neither the poor can participate, nor do the benefits channelled through these programmes accrue to them. Indeed, their participation becomes a farce as the rich landowning people predominate in the local government bodies and their power is reproduced further in the PC,

2

Due to high degree of requirement of rainfed condition, principal agricultural activities such as transplanting and weeding depends on timing of the rains which are seasonally concentrated. BIDS/IFPRI employment survey found that February-April and September-November were slack periods for agricultural employment, while December, January and May were peak months.

formed by the same people for the implementation of rural works schemes.

Thus, the landowners exist as intermediaries between the programmes and the rural poor. Moreover, the poor people, due to their dependency on this class are controlled economically, socially and politically. This control creates a traditional labour relations in the RWP and FWP implementation so that the participation of poor people involves merely their physical labour.

On the contrary, the whole management of the programmes ranging from scheme selection to execution is controlled by these intermediaries. Thus, non-participation of the poor, on the one hand, and the control of the rural intermediaries over the programmes, on the other including over the labour process enables the latter to exploit the former ones and thus to benefit from the programmes. They do so in connivance with other allies such as government officials and various power-blocs in the rural and urban areas. A study report of the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) estimates that 15-40 per cent of all works funds 'disappear on their way through the system, appropriated by officials, partly by locally elected bodies' (Vylder and Asplund in Hartmann and Boyce:1983:202).

The RWP and IRWP, (its recent label) deliberately tried to move rural works interventions towards the poor through their participation and mobilization, deemed necessarily to bring about the development, possession and control over assets by the rural poor. However, the programmes were simply injected into the structure of social relations of production in which the deprivation and exploitation of the poor are rooted. With this partial intervention, what is lacking is the capacity of the poor to claim their rights concerning the works programmes. The somewhat romantic and unrealistic assumption was made that being landless will induce the poor people towards collective action. Thus, the need to organise the poor and empowering them both economically and politically so that they can claim the services through challenging the existing structural setting and establishing themselves as a counterforce to that has remained largely latent. As a result, the poor shackled to an exploitative structure have been merely the (partial) recipient of the services provided by RWP and FWP.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To critically analyze rural employment programmes and policies
2. To analyze who controls these programmes and what is the situation and participation of rural labourers in these programmes.
3. To delineate the pattern of rural labour relations playing a role in these programmes.
4. To explore the potential of mobilizing rural labourers and their organized efforts towards changes in the existing labour relations.

4. Research Questions

1. Why is the participation of the rural poor in the implementation of rural employment programmes constrained?
2. What are the contributing factors which maintain existing exploitative labour relations?
3. Can modification in the programme implementation design ensure more participation of the poor ?
4. What is the potential of institution-building for changing existing labour relations?

5. Justification of the Study

There have been several efforts to ensure the employment of the rural poor through institutional design. Nevertheless, most of these initiatives lack the emphasis on the direct participation of the poor. Rural Works Programmes with its renewed vision attempted to ensure participation of the poor in the implementation of works schemes. However, this effort could not finally bring about effective change in the employment situation of the rural landless poor. Similarly, Food for Works Programme, although in principle and organisational design geared to deliver the benefits of the programme to the poor failed to achieve its objective.

There are plentiful studies on the evaluation of employment programmes indicating the short-term and long-term benefits of the programme. The studies of BIDS (Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies) and ILO-ARTEP can be referred here. But most of these studies touch upon either employment potential in relation to the agricultural sector or the overall management of these programmes while the issue of participation and non-participation hardly

get into sharp focus. This study will thus help us understand the crux of the institutional practice in these programmes and based on that the paper will explore a more viable strategy for institution-building with a view to guaranteeing more equitable rural employment programmes.

Related to ensuring the increasing participation of the rural landless poor in the implementation of employment programmes, the issue of labour relations has not yet been taken into account. However, the issue of labour relations rooted in the social relations of production remains a crucial issue. The study will dig out the internal dynamics of rural labour relations and based on that, search for strategies to develop more effective and guaranteed employment policies.

A body of literature is available on agrarian labour relations in general, but there is hardly any study exclusively focused on the interface of agrarian relations with rural employment programmes like the Rural Works Programmes (RWP) and the Food for Works Programmes (FWP). Besides, the studies which are available, do not help to identify possibilities for a breakthrough in existing labour relations. Rather, it mostly conveys pessimism in this regard. This study will explore possibilities of changing labour relations, and look for avenues to increase the effective employment in the rural employment programmes, which can be replicated in other areas/sectors.

6. Methodology of the Study and Sources of Data

The study is built upon some analytical tools. A historical approach has been followed at the outset to understand the trend and growth of rural labourers by focusing on two major variables, the mode of production and the demographic situation. Within the broader frame of rural employment programmes, Rural Employment Programme (RWP) and Food for Works Programme (FWP) has been taken as a point of reference with a view to understand the pattern of labour relations which is more visible in these two programmes than others. With regard to delineate the effect of these programmes on the rural poor people's lives, the study compares the objectives of these programmes embedded in the philosophy with the extent these have been put into practice.

To this end, a critical contextual analysis has been made by referring to

roles of different actors involved in these programmes along with making the interconnections between existing rural institutions, especially the local government, the local administration and the labouring poor. This contextual analysis is meant for the understanding of mode of labour relations within the RWP and FWP framework.

In order to characterize the viability of institution-building, a comparative labour relations scenario has been depicted highlighting the difference between organised and unorganised labourers especially in terms of wage and labour management. This comparative approach has been followed to understand the possibilities of change in labour relations. Apart from this, a critical analysis on the viability of institution-building efforts has been made in this study with reference to special different catalytic agents considering their origin, evolution, formation and differential approaches towards institution-building.

Last but not least, a search for a viable institutional initiatives has been made to this end. With regard to this, case study method has been used in this study to delineate innovative management models, developed from and practised through the organised effort of the poor which has resulted in intervention in rural labour relations, especially in the context of the RWP and the FWP. Other experiences of labour market intervention in the region especially the case of Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) in India has been referred to authenticate the alternative labour relations developed so far in Bangladesh in the context of the RWP and the FWP.

In analysing the abovementioned issues, secondary data have been extracted from various articles of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), ILO-ARTEP reports and other international journals, seminar reports and books available in the ISS library. Besides, statistical data has been extracted from various BBS (Bangladesh Bureau Of Statistics) produced reports such as Labour Force Survey, Impact of Food For Works Programme etc. Soft data for the case studies has been extracted from the action research report on scheme implementation of IRWP (Intensive Rural Works Programme) in Bangladesh and other related workshop reports.

7. Scope and Limitations of the Study

In fact, rural employment programmes are characterized by a wide range of activities covering all these sectors i.e. farm-sector, non-farm sector and off-farm sector, while the study is focused merely on the Rural Works Programme (RWP) and the Food for Works Programme (FWP), a segment of whole non-farm sector. Unlike these two programmes, there are a good number of employment generation programmes under public sector institutions like the Department of Fisheries, the Department of Forestry, the Department of Land and Revenue etc. wherein the labour relations calls for attention. However, due to time constraints and lack of relevant data, the study limits itself to the said two programmes. There has been a good number of Government Organisations (GOs) involved in the planning and implementation of the RWP and the FWP scheme. But due to the same reasons, the study concerns the works schemes of the two big organisations e.g. Local Government and Rural Development (LGED) and Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) which bears the representativeness of the others left here. In respect of comparative labour relations, the study was primarily designed being subject to the supply of primary information on different variables of both control group and experimental group. Due to lack of supply of these expected data, the study has resorted to secondary data for this purpose.

8. Organisation of the Study

The core of the paper begins with the chapter three which is attempted to delineate the growth of rural labourers in Bangladesh and its consequence on the worsening situation of un(der)employment. Chapter four deals with the response of various GOs (Government Organisations) in tackling the problem of this un(der)employment). Chapter five is built upon the critical assessment of employment strategy under the Rural Works Programme (RWP) and the Food for Works Programme (FWP) highlighting the role of Local Government Institutions (LGIs) and the private contractors. Chapter six is devoted to the pattern of labour relations under the RWP and the FWP scheme operations paying attention to the issues of wage and wage payment, working hours and labour control and exploitation mechanisms. Chapter seven is organised around an alternative to the existing labour relations focusing on the viability of institution-building and empowerment of the rural poor. Chapter eight attempts to make conclusion and recommendations based on the analyses of the whole paper especially in the light of the objectives of this research.

Chapter Two

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are three areas in the study which demand theoretical reflection: the power structure in rural areas including over the implementation of public policies, the dynamics of rural labour markets and relationships therein, and the basis for alternative strategies. This will be discussed in three sections below.

2.1 state, Class and Rural Power Structure

The conception of state had been neglected for decades due to the fact that the state was previously reduced to a narrow boundary. Especially in Anglo-Saxon world, the contractarian assumptions led to limit the state boundary to the government, administration and political organisation. Thus, the issues such as relationship between the private and public spheres and state authority and society was separated from state domain (Caporaso:1989:174). However, especially, the resurgence of liberal new classical economics in the 1980s, when state activities started to become trimmed, has made inroad into reconceptualisation of state giving rise to the various discourses in the political as well as social science theory.

Bringing the state issue back to the theoretical world with a multidimensional perspective has produced conceptions of state which are varied in nature. It ranges from institutional aspects to abstract normative conceptualisation of the structure of social relations. While the former conceives the state from the viewpoint of institutional relationships, the latter views it as a normative relationships between the authority and civil society. Nevertheless, both the views converge in the functioning of the state. Because there is an interaction between the institutions and the idea, characteristic of normative aspects, which shapes the functioning of the state. Considering this, Rockman (1989) developed three concepts of state from the viewpoint of its various roles: (i) the state as an authoritative policy-making system, (ii) the state as a provider of collective and distributional goods, and (iii) the state as a repository, creator and mediator of societal interests.

In the Marxist tradition, class has been central to the conceptualisation of the nature and role of the state. It implies that the existence of state and

the state formation has to be understood from its relationship with different classes and class interests. In this paradigm, the definition of class has a particular connotation which is distinct from the social class existent in the static social structure. Referring to Poulantzas, Wright (1978) mentions three qualifying propositions for class. **First**, class emerges out of the class contradiction and the class struggle. **Second**, class is designated in the objective position in the social division of labour. **Third**, classes are structurally determined not only at the economic level but also at the political and ideological level. Taking into account this class perspective, Lenin (1970), quoting Marx, states that,

"The state is a product and manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms. The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonisms objectively can not be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that class antagonisms are irreconcilable. The state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another.....The state is a special organisation of force: it is an organisation for the violence for the suppression of some class" (pp. 290, 291).

This view, in fact does not provide coherent theory and systematic analysis about the state as it is derived from the perspective of class struggle. In this view, there is a danger of being bogged down with mechanistic analysis and thus end up with one-sided formulation of the role of state. Indeed, the state, apart from its oppression, also plays a role of cohesion to reproduce its mode of production. Therefore to give a more concrete view, Poulantzas, along with the 'class-theoretical' approach, developed by Marx, Engels and latter on elaborated by Lenin, gives a 'functionalist' cast of it. Thus taking into account these approaches, he mentions that while the political functions of the state as stemming from the 'class-theory' has been characteristic of class domination or oppression, it is not the only object of this function. Rather, through its political practice, the state maintains unity by condensing and reflecting contradictions in all class-divided formation, inside which state power is the power of the definite class to whose interests it corresponds. But it does not mean that the state is merely the instrument of the dominant class. Thus, Poulantzas argues that to conserve the existence of the state and reproduce the dominant mode of production, the state maintains existing social relations through managing class contradictions and thereby securing cohesion (Poulantzas:1968:137). Nevertheless, all these theories were developed in the context of capitalist state rather than in that

of the third world where state formation is characterized by the colonial heritage.

Therefore, the role played by the state in this case is characterized by different features. Hamza Alavi (1973), a principle advocate of the postcolonial status of the state, points that the previous status of the colonial states indicates the specificities of the state in the postcolonial situation. He mentions that the ex-colonial countries inherited an "overdeveloped" state as because the metropolitan bourgeois revolution has not only replicated in the colony the superstructure which it has established in the metropolitan country; rather it has created a state apparatus also to exercise domination over indigenous bourgeoisie.

Thus, in the face of the formation of colonial state equipped with powerful bureaucratic apparatus and the governmental mechanism, the indigenous bourgeoisie was not able to subordinate this highly developed colonial state apparatus (Alavi:1973:147). Although metropolitan bourgeoisie joined by other neocolonial bourgeoisie are present after the independence, their relationship with the state is not similar to what it was during colonial time.

As a result, the state is not entirely subordinate to indigenous bourgeoisie, nor an instrument of any of the two classes i.e. metropolitan bourgeoisie and indigenous bourgeoisie. Again, neither the indigenous nor the neocolonial bourgeoisie have an exclusive influence, and their interests compete. Following this argument he concludes that the state in the post-colonial societies enjoys a relatively autonomous status and 'mediates the interests of the three competing propertied classes—the metropolitan bourgeoisie, the indigenous bourgeoisie, and the landed classes while at the same time acting on behalf of all of them in order to preserve the social order in which their interests are embedded, namely, the institution of private property and the capitalist mode as the dominant mode of production.

Although this thesis applies to all postcolonial South Asian countries, despite being applicable to some extent, the situation of the state is slightly different in the case of Bangladesh. As Rahman (1986) argues, the merchantile bourgeoisie, industrial bourgeoisie and rich landlords are not in competition with each other, because the merchantile bourgeoisie is making a

transition to an industrial bourgeoisie; and the rich landlords has not yet emerged as a powerful class, being a junior partner to the other ruling classes. So, the role of the state as a mediator between three classes is not that significant.

Only the military bureaucracy considered as the fraction of ruling class is playing an important role. This bureaucratic military apparatus has developed a close relationship both with the ruling classes and with international capital, facilitating the penetration of metropolitan capital in the form of foreign aid and consequently creating an aid regime in Bangladesh. As a result, the rich landlords, despite being junior partner of the ruling classes, has become the beneficiary of the state intervention, even though the introduction and perpetuation of the aid regime is, meant to a great extent, for the purposes of rural development and rural poverty alleviation. This happened because rich landlords emerged as a constituent part of power-blocs during intermediate regime of Awami League.

It is fact that the landlord-bias state policy as such has been contradicted by the pressure from other fractions, and more importantly, the direct influence of the rich landlords has diminished during the military leadership. However the influence of the landlords remained considerable not only through their power exercise in the rural area, but also because of state's dependence on its political support at the national level (Westergaard:1985:155).

The flow of state resources into the rural area has promoted inequality among the peasantry. The rich landlords, enjoying a pre-dominant access to the various rural institutions through which development resources are channelled, posses the power to appropriate these resources, in connivance with the bureaucrats and other elites. In fact, the ruling elites depend on the rich landlords because due to their economic domination in the rural area, the latter have the power to mobilize the small and poor farmers for the political ends of the ruling party; either by using dependency-relations with the poor or, where needed, by exercising coercive measures. In return for the loyalty to the ruling party, the rich landlords access the state for state-channelled modernisation inputs so they can make their holdings more productive. Besides, they also seeks to act as intermediaries in the flow of agricultural inputs to the smaller farmers, so as to extract surplus from this class (Sobhan and

Ahmad:1980:9)

The labouring poor peasants, in contrast, develop an extended dependency relationship with the rich landlords or overlords, intermediation with the government. The dominance of the rich landlords thus allows them to extend their power further in the formal rural power structures like the Union Council, the first tier of local government. And their power turns into a network in the rural area, as their leadership in one organisation/institution enhances their bid for membership in other organisations; this does not only broaden their status domain, but also helps them to gain economically (Rahman:1986:210). The power of the rich landlords is again reinforced by the public development policies such as land reform programmes, rural development programmes, educational programmes, public works programmes etc. which they use to create patronage in rural areas.

The reason behind the creation of patronage in the rural area, indeed, relates to the convergence of class interests. The rural patrons or rich landlords are able to ensure their benefit from any legislation, to the extent that they serve the interest of the ruling party through of mobilization of the small and poor farmers for this political end. Urban politicians and bureaucrats, often related to the large landowners get support provided that the interests of the rich are not attacked. Besides, urban elites and the bureaucrats, often being large landowner, preserves the interests of the rich as their fellow class members, rather than taking "suicidal" initiative (Hossain and Jones in Rahman:1986:217).

Thus the class alliance between the political elites, bureaucrats, and other ruling fractions helps develop a power-bloc which gives the landed rich people the leverage to control rural resource including the labour. This power network is again reproduced by the state through its ideological apparatus which has a bearings on class practices. Referring to this issue, Jahangir (1982) mentions how ideological reproduction reinforces class domination. He states,

"The ideological apparatuses influence ideologic-political relations of ideologic-political domination. Thus in the rural context a murubbi³ or atabbar becomes a rich person emphasizing the community structure, These forms of thought, of the articulation of these forms of ideology with other levels of social reality are this way transformed" (pp. 107).

Thus, the ideological apparatuses legitimise the leadership of the rich landowning class which facilitates their domination over every aspect of the lives of the rural poor. On the contrary, the capability of the poor denounced in terms of their decision-making about village affairs. This is reflected in the implementation mechanism of rural development and even in schemes targeted on the poor where the decision-making process and participation is not shared by the poor but concentrated in a chosen few who come from a high landowning background.

2.2 Rural Labour Markets

Predominantly, theorisation on labour market is characteristic of an orthodox economic model of transactions. Nevertheless, to fully grasp the dynamics of labour a market, especially rural labour market, it is crucial to understand that it is subject to the social setting in which it functions. In fact, understanding of the arrangements of one market requires understanding of those of another (Binswanger and Rosenzweig:1984:3) which is very much obvious in agrarian relations.

In the capitalist agriculture, labour market functions, presumably are premised on the mutual needs of the employer and the labourer where the labourer is free to sell his labour. But the quality of the labour input, the prime concern of the capitalist, is not determined only by screening for skill, muscle, age, sex and intelligence; rather some other factors are of considerable importance, too, like thought, feeling, wiliness, volition, rebelliousness and sense of alienation and discontent. All of these are needed to ensure the profit-making objective of the capitalist (Bardhan:1989:25). To manipulate the latter characteristics of the labourers and thus achieve the profit objective, a variety of mechanisms are used in the rural labour markets to tie the labourers to the landowner.

3

Murubbi, particularly in the rural area, is an address of respect to the elder person. The respect is shown to the elder person because he is supposed to have more knowledge and experiences than the younger ones because of his seniority in terms of age. However, in relational term, it is ascribed to the well-off or educated person irrespective of age.

The basis underlying this labour-tying practice is the high degree of land-polarisation. Land-polarisation accompanied by the rise of wage labourers results in labour linkage based on credit and loan transaction which ties the labourers to the landlord or rich peasants, in terms of labour service delivery. This tied labour market gives the employer monopsonic power in bargaining as the labourers are both socially and politically controlled by the supply of credit and sometimes shelter. This monopsony becomes apparent when the labourers have to repay their consumption loan, by providing labour services at a discount below the market wage. In fact, whatever the degree of discount may be, in the situation of credit-ridden labour services, the employers have the power to realise the interest rate against credit by exploiting labour. Thus, in case, the labourers get smaller discount, exploitation goes on with the lengthening of working hours. Conversely, the exploitation is followed by large discount rate when the labourers have to work for few hours (Bardhan:1984:87).

The site of this labour exchange may be intra-village or inter-village. Considering the demand-supply function and taking the village as the 'site', Rao (1988) mentions two factors which cause a sluggish functioning of the labour market. He argues that employers are not interested to recruit labourers from outside their village; because it involves higher recruitment costs for getting labour market information. Besides, they do not want to take the risk by employing non-villagers whose skill and behavioural characteristics are not familiar to them. These considerations from employers side causes a decline in demand for outsiders.

Similarly, from the labourers perspective, associated costs for searching jobs elsewhere compel the village labourers to discount the prospect of employment outside their own village. Thus he concludes that these dynamics establish a basis for the predominance of intra-village transactions which take the form of patron-client relations along the line of credit and other securities provided by the employers. Nevertheless, alongside the predominance of intra-village transactions, at least a low profile of inter-village transactions also take place. And thus, the rural labour market is fragmented into labour-exporting, labour-importing and village autarchy as Rao argues.

Contrary to this, the territorial segmentation thesis states that labour circulation takes place beyond village boundaries. Empirical evidence suggests that breakdown of survival strategies from the labourers' perspective forces them to resort to migration through networks. From the perspective of the employers, due to defiant behaviour of labourers from the village or to shortage of labour supply in agriculture-growth areas the employers are compelled to recruit labourers from outside which is not only cheaper but also amenable to supervision and control (Kannan:1989:17).

The thesis thus implies that cost aspects of the labour market, which validates Rao's framework of supra-village labour market, is subject to the validity of information regarding associated costs both from the employer's side as well as the labourers' side. And thus the cost consideration is not an objective factor in the formation of the rural labour market.

In view of this, Bardhan and Rudra (1986), advocates of the territorial segmentation thesis, state that the phenomenon of territorial segmentation is "not necessarily economically irrational and may even be regarded as a rational response to imperfect information on worker characteristics, costs of enforcement of contracts with unfamiliar people and general absence of credit and insurance markets" (pp. 114).

Whatever the formation, either characterized by territorial segmentation or village autarchy, the common thread of the rural labour market has been that it mostly functions through interlinked transactions of credit and labour which has implications on the labour relations. The study will explain as to how interlinkage, beginning with the credit and labour, is gradually extended to socio-political life of the rural labourers and thus used as a mechanism of labour control. Within this framework, specific issues on labour relations such as wage rate, working hours and labour exploitation mechanisms will also be highlighted in this study.

2.3 Institution-Building

The concept of institution-building has been basically derived from different theories on organisation. Amongst them, there are two theoretical underpinnings: Marxists and pluralists. From the pluralists front, again, theorisation on institutions is inspired with both optimism and pessimism.

While some view organisation by "associating together" as a platform to establish democracy and thus as a vehicle for political competition and political outcome, others are pessimistic in relation to the end result of organisational dynamics. The pessimism is pronounced particularly in the proposition on the 'iron law of oligarchy' of Michels which states that despite an ideological commitment to democracy, there is more likely a possible trend towards an inexorable oligarchy: leadership above membership which would become dominant and self-perpetuating (Esman and Uphoff:1984:53).

Apart from other areas, literature on organisation theory has shown a central interest in the issue of institution-building with a particular orientation towards the perspective of rural society in contemporary times. Esman and Uphoff (1984) distinguish differential characteristics classified into four mainstream theories on institution-building.

According to Marxists and other associate intellectuals, the state, in an alliance with the rich landowning class has been an instrument in the exploitation of the rural poor. Given this exploitative nature of state and rural society, organisations or institutions of the poor would either be co-opted or suppressed by the state apparatus and other ruling allies. Therefore, institution-building of the rural poor should be designed as a revolutionary force oriented towards a political struggle. Indeed, in the Marxist tradition, organisation or institution-building is exclusively meant for the working class people who would be organised for class struggle against the bourgeoisie and finally seize the state power through its vanguard political party backed by trade unions (Lenin:1970:304).

The crux of the Marxist idea about institution-building is absolutely premised on the political reform of society where the problem of economic reform is assumed to be automatically solved by the achievement of the political reform.

The "liberationist" paradigm, unlike the Marxist, views the incompatibility of the state in relation to organisation-building of the rural poor. What makes a difference is that here institutional formation is not oriented towards a revolutionary ideology. Instead, this school of thought suggests a series of processes through which the rural poor should start with the self-awareness that leads them towards collective strength, and finally provides

them with sufficient conditions for confrontation and thus self-emancipation (Freire in Esman and Uphoff:1984:55). In this process of emancipation, this theory suggests the importance of the catalytic role of an outside agent; the poor are viewed as the driving force in institution-building and devising a strategy and tactics by themselves.

Characterizing the poor as "oppressed" Freire (1982) argues for the strategic significance of catalytic role for the emancipation oppressed by saying that 'while no one liberates himself by his own efforts alone neither is he liberated by others' (pp. 53). It implies that the involvement of others, at certain level is of crucial importance for the liberation of the poor. To this end, Freire emphasises the need for "dialogical action" characterized by cooperation between the catalytic agent (Which he calls the 'leader'). However, in this "dialogical action", poor should not be steered towards their salvation by way of sloganization, manipulation and domestication; rather they should be helped out to the extent that they can actualise their position in the face of challenging reality and transform it by themselves as he cautioned (pp.167-168).

The "technocratic approach" towards institution-building suggests that instead of bringing about any change in the structure, technological advancement can provide the ground around which small farmers can build up organisation so as to pool development resources. In fact, the issue of institution-building is kept at a very low profile in the technocratic model. To the extent that the state is responsive in getting prices right and removing market distortions, precisely the factor markets, institution-building is not seen as useful as it is in other theories (Esman and Uphoff:1984:55).

A "structural-reformist" approach towards institution-building neither avoids the state nor is it absolutely dependent on the state, like the technocratic approach. The need for institution-building is emphasized by the advocates of this approach let alone the nature of state and its exploitative nature. The basic premise of this theory on institution-building is that instead of overthrowing the existing structure, institution-building should applied from an incrementalist perspective so as to bring about gradual modifications in the existing socio-economic and political structure; this modifications will cumulatively shift the balance of the social structures and eventually

influence the actions of the state and the private sector (Ibid).

2.4 Concluding Observations

The study will rely on concepts and insights developed above in the various chapters that follow. There is no single underlying framework. Instead, existing partial theories are utilised in the application to different parts of the analysis. The labour market analysis will help clarify the formation of largely waged rural labour force, its segmentation and its relationship with employers. The class analysis will help understand how the landowning class has managed to control the rural labour force and also the implementation process of the two main public programmes meant for the rural poor. Finally, institutional analysis will be used to understand how the rural poor and NGOs are looking for alternatives and better institutional arrangements.

Chapter Three

3. RURAL LABOURERS AND RURAL EMPLOYMENT SITUATION IN BANGLADESH: THE PROBLEM

3.0 Introduction

Unemployment has become a great problem in rural Bangladesh. Among other factors, the causes of this problem is more of structural which is deeply rooted in the agrarian relations developed over a period of time. Thus, the dynamics of agrarian relations manifesting a particular mode of production has contributed to the rise of rural labourers with the passage of time.

Taking into account, this chapter attempts to understand the rural employment situation and its problematics in the light of history giving rise to the rural labourers. Therefore, at the outset, the rise of rural labourers will be discussed in a historical perspective. Thereafter, the issue regarding the implications of the rise in rural labourers along with other factors will be delineated. Alongside, the growth of rural labourers as a resultant fact will be analyzed. Finally, to understand the employment and unemployment scenario, the degree/magnitude of labour absorption capacity in the agricultural sector will be described in the light of the growth of rural labourers.

3.1 The Rise of Rural Labourers: A Historical Perspective

In fact, the emergence and growth of rural labourers is shaped by different modes of production. Therefore, to understand the rise and growth of rural labourers, it is imperative to look back at the colonial period. Needless to say, the colonial regime was characterised both by increased production and the appropriation or surplus. The main mechanism used for surplus extraction was extra-economic by nature: it involved land taxation or land revenue (Schendel and Faraize:1984:28). To ensure an increased rate of production and thus primitive accumulation of capital, the initial colonial policy was to give the *Zaminders*⁴ taxation and property rights, through which they were expected to exploit the full potential of the two main resources e.g. land and

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Superior Landlord/revenue collector. Although Zaminder came into existence during pre-colonial period, but they have been incorporated as a revenue collector with a territorial claim to an "estate" under British administration. Thus, they were used as a linchpin of colonial surplus extraction through land taxation and at the same time they could develop into territorial potentates. However, another group of zaminders of different political and economic importance evolved depending of the size of their states.

labour. However, the peasant mode was kept uninterrupted through restrictions on the dispossession of land by these *Zaminders*. Thus, initial colonial Bengal was marked by a stabilized rural society, in which the emergence of rural labourers was not yet significantly pronounced.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, a shift in emphasis took place in the mode of colonial surplus-extraction, from the extra-economic to economic means. This shift was made because of articulation of Bengal with world capitalism characterized by the expansion of trade and the commercialisation of agriculture. Both processes replaced the *Zamindari* system by the emergence of *jotedars*⁵, limiting rent collection as a means of appropriation, while emphasizing economic modes of appropriation. This happened by facilitating *Jotedars'* access to expanding credit and commodity markets (land, labour and agricultural products). Although colonial rule protected the rights of individual property of land, as a consequence of the international division of labour, the state policy was directed towards emphasizing the role of Bengal as exporter of raw materials; this in effect strengthened the grip of the *Jotedars*. And despite the legal protection of individual land entitlement, the rise of *Jotedars* initiated a new form of depeasantization. Depeasantization of this kind started to take place as a result of the "debt-ridden share-cropping strategy" adopted by *Jotedars*: a chain relation of three processes e.g. indebtedness, extension of share-cropping and eventually an escalating trend of land transfers among the producers. Nevertheless, the *jotedar* strategy only reinforced a process which had deeper structural causes. Indebtedness and consequently dispossession of producers from the land was induced by "a diminishing land-man ratio, the movement of the terms of trade against the cultivators, rising food prices and in some areas a decline in the productivity of the land due to erosion, silting-up of rivers (Ibid:31).

Although the depeasantization process eventually stopped halfway, the process boosted, to certain extent, the wealthy *jotedars*, on the one hand and on the other gave rise to wage labourers, by the late nineteenth century. Referring to the Dufferin Report, Schendel and Faraizi (1984) mention that in 1888, about 26 per cent of all rural households were dependent on wage labour while

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Petty Landlord.

another 13 per cent relied on their labour as a secondary source of livelihood. Another reference can be made; two subsequent studies on the Faridpur district, one surveyed by J.C.Jack and the other one published by Royal Commission of Agriculture in India, registered that respectively 28 per cent, 21 per cent, of all village households were dependent on agricultural labour. In a subsequent stage until 1939, the proportion of rural labourers was reported as having been 22.5 per cent: the proportion of labourers during this period seems to have been stabilized compared to the situation in 1888. Nevertheless, in relation to absolute numbers, there had been a spectacular increase between years from the 1880s and 1940s which is indicative of previous conservative estimates: it reveals that some 7 million Bengalis had joined the ranks of those dependent on wage-labour (Ibid:40).

Another cause of the rise in the number of rural labourers was the virtual stagnation of agricultural output, especially the decline in jute production in the 1950s. This caused impoverishment and in effect resulted in a trend of a land-polarisation in rural Bengal society, "with land being transferred out of the hands of small, mainly subsistence and rice cultivating peasants" (Wood:1994:118). This polarisation again led to the growth of rural labourers. Despite regional variations as well as variations between particular time periods, the historical trend since the colonial period shows that the proportion of rural labourers rose from 18 per cent in 1939 to 21 per cent in the early 1960s; and to between 25 and 38 per cent in the late 70s (Schendel and Faraizi:1984:43).

3.2 Landlessness and the Growth of Rural Labour Force

The development of agrarian relations which has taken place so far in Bangladesh, has been characterised by the colonial legacy. The share-cropping arrangement indicative of colonial tenancy relations, has been and still is dominant in agrarian Bangladesh. This oppressive agrarian arrangement had been further reinforced by the Jotedar-oriented policy during the post-liberalization period which basically perpetuated the process of immiseration among the rural poor. Despite the attempt made by land reform, there has not been any change with a significant impact on rural society, in terms of equity.

Furthermore, the modernisation of agriculture has facilitated the process of differentiation in agrarian society. Landed rural elites having unregulated access to the various markets have reaped the benefits of HYV inputs. By contrast, due to lack of access to inputs and credit markets, the poor peasants have been tied up with the interlinked transactions of land, credit and labour. This in turn has resulted in a polarisation process. Indeed, the HYV technology characterizing dynamic capitalist sector within agriculture has stimulated polarisation through the alienation of the small and marginal farmers from the land (Hossain and Nations:1974).

The polarisation process can be attributed to the changes in the proportion of the farms under different tenurial categories. One study of BIDS (Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies) indicates that the percentage of owner farms increased from 61 to 67 per cent between 1960 and 1974 while during the same period the percentage of owner-cum-tenant farmers declined from 37 per cent to 27 per cent and the tenant farm on the increase from 2 to 6 per cent (Alamgir:1975:269). It implies that owner-cum-tenant farmers have been relegated to the tenant status losing their land through land transfer over the period of time which has resulted in land concentration in the owner category. In other words, the archetypal agrarian structure has accelerated the process of land transfer causing landlessness among the rural poor.

The process of land transfer results from the land transactions between the rich and small landowning as well as the landless classes through mortgaging. Indeed, the poor peasants are involved both dimension of mortgaging e.g. mortgaging in and mortgaging out the land. In case of mortgaging out, the small or near-landless peasants have to pay an exorbitant rate of interest to the rich landowning class against the loan given for mortgaging. This high rate of interest eventually makes it impossible to reclaim the land. Consequently, the poor peasants are driven off the land. Wood's (1976) study in Bondokgram village in Comilla reveal that the acquisition of land due to mortgage from the cash-hungry peasants accompanied by the high rate of interest accelerated landlessness on the one hand and the consolidation of land ownership on the other, resulting in permanent transfer of the poor peasants' plot within a few years. Besides, the multiple inheritance system of the rural society causing land fragmentation specially among the small or near-landless households gradually leads towards landlessness.

Apart from the land dispossession and land transfer as structural factors contributing to the landlessness as mentioned above, famine has been another factor which has caused the loss of land through selling by the rural poor and thus kept the rate of landlessness on the increase. The data on the pre and post famine situation registers the quite substantial increasing trend in the rate of land selling among the small landowners, amounting to 39 per cent, 29 per cent and 54 per cent in the years of 1972, 1973 and 1974 respectively (Muqtada:1981:27). In fact, the crisis situation as such aggravates the structural factors referred to earlier; it weakens the entitlement of the poor people further and in effect forces them to join the rank of the landless category by land-selling.

Thus the structural factors coupled with the natural disaster contribute to the growing landlessness in Bangladesh. More importantly, the trend of increase in different landless categories has been quite substantial. This is confirmed by the result of a study showing that the percentage of households having no land dramatically increased from 11 to 15 per cent and the households owning 0.5 acres of land increased from 48 per cent to 50 per cent within the duration of eighteen months (Hossain:1986 in Shahabuddin:1988:3). What is more serious is that the growth of landlessness has outstripped the rate of rural population growth. Comparing the population census data of 1961 and agricultural data of 1977, Ahmed and Hossain (1984) have shown that during this time period, the annual rate of growth in case of near-landless and landless rural households increased by 3.20 per cent while the rural population increased at the rate of 2.42 per cent (Ibid).

Considering the historical trend, it can be argued that the rate of landlessness has been on the continuous increase. Between the period of 1951 and 1977 landlessness increased from 14.3 per cent to 36.8 per cent (Muqtada and Alam:1983:20). Afterwards, it continued in an upward fashion. Information available from two recent subsequent studies, one by BBS in 1983-84 and another by BIDS in 1987, registers that the percentage of landless and near-landless households has been 46.3 per cent and 48 per cent respectively in two study years.

The rapid growth of landlessness in rural society has consequently increased the size of rural labour force. The spiralling growth of rural labour force

in a historical perspective is revealed from Labour force Survey (LFS) data which shows that between the period of 1961 and 1974, the annual average growth rate of labour force was 1.7 per cent which kept on increasing by 2.3 per cent and 2.4 per cent during the period from 1974 to 1984-85 and 1985-86 respectively. Considering the broad time-period between the 1974 and 1989, the rural labour force registered an annual average growth rate of 12.6 per cent. If the wage labourers alone are taken into account, their growth exhibits a faster rate than that of the total labour force. During the period of 1951-61 and 1961-74, the rate of wage labourers increased by 85 per cent and 42 per cent respectively, while the rate of total labour force was 21 and 27 per cent within the same period (Khan:1985:67).

The rapid growth of landlessness leading to the substantial growth of rural labour force has implications on the magnitude of labour absorption in the rural sector. How far the faster growth of rural labour force has been compatible to the absorbing capacity of the rural economy will be discussed here.

3.3 Labour Absorption and the Employment-Unemployment Scenario

In the face of growing labour force, the absorption of rural labourers has become a critical issue. Why it is critical will be explained below. The agricultural sector has been the predominant absorber of rural labour. Therefore, the rapid growth of the labour force, especially of wage labourers, as compared to the absorptive capacity of the rural sector particularly the crop sector- has serious implications for the question of labour absorption. It is argued that the introduction of HYV contributed to an increase in labour-demand in the crop agriculture sector. Similarly, acreage expansion and the adoption of labour-intensive crops generated demand for labour. Data suggest that between 1977-78 and 1981-82, the increase in labour demand by 129.1 million mandays resulted from acreage expansion and the adoption of more labour intensive crops; the introduction of HYVs resulted in an increase of 104.6 million mandays (Khan:1985:74). From this view point, it can be generalized that the crop sector has the potential to absorb rural labour force. In fact, the notion of rural labour absorption in contemporary Asian countries following upon 'Green Revolution' , as contended in most empirical literature, was derived from the historical experiences of East Asia, especially Taiwan and Japan. The essence of the East Asian approach to

agricultural development, using labour and saving capital can be attributed to the growth of employment opportunities both in agriculture and in the farm sector (Ruttan and Binswanager,1978 in Alauddin and Tisdell:1991:174).

However, the process of East Asian approach can not be substantiated in the context of Bangladesh. The shifting from labour-using to labour-saving approach could not be achieved in this country, due to the disarticulation between agriculture and industry, which the East Asian countries went through successfully. Besides, instead of labour-saving, the Green Revolution technology was in the production process of Bangladesh agriculture; in effect, this led to a slow increase in overall labour absorption.

More importantly, the seasonal dimension, too has the consequences for the amount of labour absorption. Due to seasonality, there are fluctuations in the absorption ratio at different times of the year. The trend of total labour requirements shows that despite the green revolution, the demand for labour has fallen short in the *kharif*⁶ season as compared to the *Rabi*⁷ seasons. However, it is found that overall shortage of demand for labour has been compensated by the intensity of cropping during *Rabi* season.

Thus, inter-seasonal labour absorption has been found to be reduced to a great extent. Considering both relative and absolute inter-seasonality, Alauddin and Tedsil (1991) mention in their study that the absolute difference in labour demand between the two seasons has declined from 1.3 billion mandays in the initial years to 0.9 billion man-days in the subsequent years; and the relative difference has gradually declined from 75 per cent in the earlier years to less than 60 per cent in the later years.

But on the question of intensity, i.e. the per hectare absorption of labour, we note a reverse picture. The authors, making a trend analysis between 1960-70 to 1984-85, indicate that during *Rabi* season in the earlier years, labour intensity amounted to 260 man-days, which declined to 250 man-days in subsequent years (Alauddin and Tedsil:1991:181). Therefore, although green revolution technology followed by irrigation, HYV and cropping intensity

6 Summer crops.

7 Winter crops.

appears to have reduced seasonal differences in labour demand, in practical term, however, the output gains due to all these factors have not been accompanied by a considerable absorption of rural labour.

On top of this, the population growth accompanying the increasing rural labour force, especially the growth of wage labourers, has lowered the capacity of the crop sector in terms of labour absorption. This can be exemplified by the comparative projection of employment growth and population growth in the years 1960-70. During these years, employment in crop production rose by less than 4 per cent while in the same period the population of Bangladesh increased by 41 per cent, giving rise to 45 per cent in the working-age group. Thus the growth of population superseded employment growth and, "consequently, the increase in labour absorption in the crop sector failed significantly to keep pace with rising population and potential labour supply" (Ibid:178). All these tendencies raise doubts about the prospect for continued increases in labour absorption in the agricultural sector.

The situation of labour absorption sector discussed above relates to the issue of employment and unemployment in the agricultural sector. The data from the Labour Force Survey of 1989 reveal that employment has quite substantially increased from 58.8 in 1983-84 to 73.8 per cent in 1989 in the agricultural sector. In contrast, non-agriculture sector employment has sharply declined from 41.2 to 26 per cent. But regarding employment growth in agricultural sector, there remains a question in terms of intensity of work. However, employment in terms of the number of persons/workers involved, reflects more apparent rather than real features of employment. The situation of employment and unemployment has to be understood in terms of the amount of involvement of the labourers/workers in a particular job over a particular period of time. The important variant here, as already has been discussed, is seasonality which causes fluctuations in the availability of jobs.

Besides, a developing country like Bangladesh where the formal labour market is small in size, self-employment occupies a significant share of employment other than wage work. Taking these two issues into account from the perspective of a labour-time criterion, the Manpower and the Labour force surveys of 1979, 1980 and 1983 set less than 20 hours per week as an indicator of severe 'underemployment'.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Various Types of Rural Workers by the Numbers of Hours of Work Done During the Reference Week, 1980

Number of Hours of Work During the reference Period	Type of Rural Workers					
	Agricultural self-employment		Agricultural Labourers		Non-agricultural Labourers	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Less than 20	3.9	42.9	4.3	7.8	2.6	10.0
20-39	19.2	40.5	17.4	88.9	18.7	50.0
40 and more	79.9	16.7	78.3	58.2	78.7	40.0

Source: Rizwanul Islam, Rural Unemployment and Underemployment: A Review, 1986, pp.14, BBS, Manpower Situation in Contemporary Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1982, Tables 17,19 and 20.

The Survey results are evident from the above table which show that a quite significant number of agricultural labourers under self-employed category, agricultural wage labourers and non-agricultural labourers had hours of work more than 40 days except female labourers.

In case of self-employed category, the hours of work done by the male labourers imply that unemployment does not exist here as the labourers' involvement in the work is above the underemployment criterion. But the self-employment is not indicative of an individual's free choice, rather it relates to a forced one. In fact, due to lack of accessibility of the landless and the land-poor, who constitute the bulk of wage labourers, they have to resort to self-employment which is rudimentary in nature and self-exploitative too as they have to work long hours against low return. So, although unemployment among the labourers belonging to this category is not high in the sense of idle hours and days, "the extent their employment has very low productivity there is perhaps a great deal of wastage of labour among these groups" (Islam:1986:15) .

Similarly, the gross figure on agricultural wage labourers shows that unemployment or underemployment are not significant. However, the seasonality consideration unveils the real magnitude of employment and unemployment. Quoting manpower survey of 1980, Islam (1986) mentions that during the slack period, the underemployment becomes more acute: 28 per cent of the male agricultural workers appear to have been severely underemployed and 39 per

cent remains at the level of underemployment. The situation of female employment exhibits a very dismal picture. Apart from the slack period, female underemployment exists even during the peak period, be it at a low rate. The data suggest that nearly 6 per cent of male agricultural workers remains underemployed during the peak period. When both sexes are taken into account, the underemployment situation is reflected in the same way; this is confirmed by BBS (1992) data showing that the average weekly hours of work done by rural labourers has been 38 hours.

The issues discussed so far relates to the extent of un(der)employment in rural areas. Indeed, coupled with the seasonality and other structural constraints, the spiralling growth of the rural population has weakened the capacity of the rural sectors to absorb the rural labour. The continuing incapacity and its consequences have been rightly pointed out by the World Bank estimate which indicates that 'during the first half of the 1980s approximately 2.3 million new entrants to the rural labour force will not be able to find gainful employment' (Wood:1994:292).

3.4 Summing Up

The issues discussed so far in this chapter delineates the situation of rural labourers which is characterized by the dynamics of Bangladesh agrarian society as rooted in colonial time. The agrarian structural arrangement has made rural labourers vulnerable to un(der)employment, aggravated by the spiral growth of population. As has been seen, attempts to curb unemployment of rural labourers through agricultural technology have failed due to structural factors leading to growing landlessness, coupled with the worsening land-man ratio caused by the rapid growth of population has thwarted them. Given the lack of absorptive capacity of the agrarian structure itself, it has been imperative to improve the situation of rural labourers through creating or facilitating special employment activities outside agriculture. There have been already some attempts towards this end. The next chapter will outline the responses made by government organisations so far.

Chapter Four

4. RURAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES: THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

4.0 Introduction

Given the massive rural un(der)employment, a series of programmes have been undertaken and are being implemented by Government Organisations (GO) so as to generate employment for the rural poor. As has been shown in analysis in the previous chapter, the introduction of modern technology has not contributed to the full absorption of labourers in this sector. Thus, considering the lack of absorptive capacity of the agricultural sector, GO, alongside focusing on agriculture sector, have undertaken non-farm related employment programmes to curb un(der)employment.

GO involvement in these two sectors generally provides the poor with two kinds of employment. The GO exclusively, involved in the development of agricultural sector create wage employment by providing agricultural inputs while the other ones mainly involved in non-farm sector or non-agricultural sector are geared to creation of self-employment through providing credit and training to the rural poor. Within the non-farm sector arrangement, again, a certain categories of employment are generated under direct public supervision such as Rural Works Programme (RWP) and Food for Works Programme (FWP). This chapter will shed light on GO responses in all these categories of employment.

4.1 Wage Employment

4.1.1 Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC)

After the adoption of Green Revolution technology in the agriculture sector, the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) emerged as institutional set-up of the government activities. The main objective of BADC is to make the country self-sufficient through producing more food while it was also deemed to that setting up of this institution would create employment for the labouring rural poor. To meet these objectives, the BADC got involved in 1961 in the distribution and installation of Low Lift Pumps (LLP) and Deep Tube Well (DTW). A Shallow Tube Well (STW) programme was undertaken by the institution in 1970-71.

4.1.2 Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE)

While BADC is responsible for the distribution and installation of LLPs, DTWs and STWs, the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) as another government organisation plays a complementary role in achieving the broader objective of agricultural growth, by motivating the farmers regarding use of fertilizer, modern seeds and irrigation technology. With a view to improving the effectiveness of field extension services, DAE introduced Training and Visit (T&V) programme in the North-West part of the country, and subsequently spread all over the country in late 1982. In fact, the underlying objectives of production and growth-oriented extension services of the organisation involved was to promote the intensity of self-employment of the landless and near-landless farmers, and to facilitate a viable source of income.

But despite greater contribution of BADC and DAE to agricultural growth, this objective was not achieved as, due to leakage, few benefits of these services only accrued to about 46 per cent of the landless only. Although activities of these organisation has resulted in an increase in demand for wage labourers, this happened in some 'trickle down' fashion (Chowdhury:1994:24). Considering this, a shift in the goal of extension services has been made during Fourth Plan, from more affluent farmers to 'resource poor' farmers. In view of this shift, the Fourth Five-Year plan (FYP) envisages the restructuring of extension services of DAE, outlining the necessity of linking the poor small farmers with a 'target group' approach, so as to benefit them including vulnerable group like youth and women (FYP:1990:V.A-34).

4.2 Self-employment

4.2.1 Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB)

The genesis of Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) is rooted in the Integrated Rural Development (IRDP) evolving at the academy rural development; it came to be known as the 'Comilla model'. The integrative approach of BRDB, inherited from IRDP philosophy and its replication throughout the country, is envisaged as related to the objectives of achieving increased production, creating employment, ensuring income re-distribution and developing physical infrastructures in the rural areas. To this end, all the activities are carried out through a two-tier cooperative system e.g. Agricultural Cooperative Societies (KSS) and the Thana Central Cooperative Association (TCCA). Having been concerned, among others, about curbing rural unemployment

and creating employment, BRDB started some area-based integrated rural development projects, previously known as IRDP involving the participation of various government Departments since the mid-Seventies (Hye:1989:77). The area based development projects involved the RDP-I (Rural Development project), NIRDP (Noakhali Rural Development Project), RDP-II, NIRDP-II and the SWRDP (South-West Rural Development Project). The geographical coverage of these projects was spread over 7 Thanas, 3 Thanas, 313 Thanas, 15 Thanas and 44 Thanas in the respective districts respectively (Ibid).

Considering the situation of growing poverty, BRDB brought about a new dimension in the co-operative system. New programme components include BSS (Co-operative of the assetless), MBSS (Co-operative of the assetless women), technology, training and credit, etc. (Chowdhury:1994:26). Apart from these, it has undertaken some extended projects to facilitate rural employment for the rural poor population, during the Third and Fourth Five-Year Plan periods. Of these, the Integrated Development of Rural Women and Children through co-operatives is in operation from 1986, covering 30 Thanas of greater Dhaka and Comilla districts. Others include RDP-5, RDP-9, RDP-12, RPCP (Rural Poor Co-operative Project) and RPAP (Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme) covering 32 Thanas of greater Faridpur and Kurigram districts, 26 Thanas of old Rangpur districts, 139 Thanas of greater districts of Dinajpur, Bogra, Khulna, Barisal, Mymensingh and Jamalpur and 145 Thanas respectively (Ibid).

4.2.2 Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSIC)

The Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) was created in 1957, under the act of parliament as a pioneering organisation for small and cottage industries development in the country. It has been implementing some programmes for generating rural employment under the guidance of the industrial policy of 1986. The programmes undertaken by BSCIC involve:

- (i) development of rural industries;
- (ii) a women entrepreneurship development programme;
- (iii) the development of cottage and rural industries in Chittagong hill tracts region and
- (iv) self-employment for rural women through cottage industries.

For the smooth running of the programmes, BSCIC works through a set of growth

centres. Thus, the organisation has set up 64 industrial service centres, 85 small industrial estates, 16 centres for the women entrepreneurship development programme, 101 centres for rural industries at the Thana level, 33 centres in the hill tracts, 11 centres for salt development, 3 centres for bee keeping and 8 centres for women's self-employment throughout the country (Rahman:1989:204). With a view to creating new employment and improving the productivity of the existing one, BSCIC provides assistance regarding consultancy, project appraisal, credit arrangement, improvement of skills and product quality, marketing and supply of technology information (Ibid).

4.2.3 Directorate of Women Affairs (DWA)

This organisation has been established under the Ministry of Social Welfare. The objective of the organisation has been to design self-employment programmes for women through the expansion of credit programmes and to implement these in coordination with other organisations dealing with women's issues. Recently, the organisation has undertaken some specific projects such as Agriculture-based rural development programmes for women, and NGDO Community-based services for poor women and children. Other than these, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has launched some other new projects.

4.3 The Rural Works Programme (RWP) and the Food for Works Programme (FWP)

The emergence of the Rural Works programme traces back to the colonial period. The present institutional shape of the RWP surfaced with the formulation of development approaches in Bangladesh during 60s. During this time, development strategy was characterized by two institutional set-ups; one, of which includes the cooperative system e.g. the Thana Central Cooperative Association (TCCA) which originated from Comilla Academy, while the other was that of the Basic Democracies instituted by Ayub Khan in 1960 (Khan:1989:92).

In fact, the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) as a replication of the Comilla Model, among others, encapsulated a RWP component within its integrative framework. Simultaneously, there was a need for a mechanism to directly channel resources to the peasant producers and develop benefits for the targeted population, given the lack of administrative machinery. This situation led to the introduction of basic democracies, envisaged to ensure diffusion of HYV package through the two-tier cooperative system, while at the same time, benefits of the development resources were deemed to accrue to the rural labouring poor through its RWP component.

In view of this, a local administrative body was formed under the basic democracies ordinance, which was basically premised on the Union council system introduced by the British. The local administrative body consisted of a five-tiered system e.g. Thana, Union Council, Ward, Village and Para. In general, the formation of these tiers was based on a system of adult franchise for the election of members, rather than on the selection at the union level and the members and the chairmen at the village level.

This local administrative body established under the Basic Democracies ordinance were used as a channel for the smooth implementation of RWP. Thus RWP created in 1962, was designed to involve a much larger segment of the rural population in its programmatic effort (Abdullah:1981:33). The RWP was meant primarily for the development of rural infrastructure through the construction of roads, embankments, irrigation and drainage channels, with a view to generating more employment for the rural people. Gradually, it increased the components of its programme adding others such as coastal embankment, school construction, LLP/DTW, small irrigation scheme and water supply. The broad objectives of RWP have been (i) to encourage farmers to invest more in agriculture and (ii) to create large-scale employment during the slack seasons when a few employment opportunities exist (Chowdhury:1994:35).

Although RWP started with credibility by generating employment for 0.6 to 1.0 million persons per year during the 60s, later on, however, the size of its operation has declined steeply (Ahmad and Hossain:1985:76). Following this, there have been recent changes in the RWP approach especially as a result of the renewed interest of the donors in the question of participation; this has given a distinctive character to the programme renaming it the "Intensive Rural Works Programme" (IRWP). The distinctiveness of IRWP is embedded in its 'target group' approach to the implementation of the programme which was absent in RWP operations. The distinctive character of IRWP has accordingly brought about substantial changes in its objectives. Thus the objectives as defined in the IRWP Plan of operation have been:

- (i) To increase direct and indirect employment and other income opportunities in the short and long run for the landless labourers, marginal farmers and women from such households (i.e

'target group').

- (ii) To improve the infrastructure in 100 flood prone thanas⁸ by implementation of rural works thereby promoting agricultural production.
- (iii) To review, assess to strengthen and improve the organisation and administration of the Rural Works Programme in the local bodies and to work out solutions and make recommendations for a rationally framework within which to achieve (i) and (ii) above (Wood:1994:262).

It is to be noted here that IRWP has recently been renamed "Rural Employment Sector Programme" (RESP) which involves two major components of the Rural Works Programme: the Infrastructure Development Programme (IDP) and the Production and Employment Programme (PEP).

Food for Works Programme (FWP) is similar to RWP in terms of concept and objectives. In fact, the RWP started its activities paying cash for work, while wheat has been the major form of payment in FWP. FWP came into existence during the famine in 1974, when food aid of PL-480 was used as a resource for investment in the rural works programmes, especially related to the development of agricultural infrastructure. The programme encompassing labour intensive earthwork has a higher volume of projects as compared to RWP. However, it is conceived in narrow terms as it provides short-term employment opportunities during the agricultural slack seasons. Thus, the objectives of FWP have been:

- (i) Budgetary support from the GOB (Government of Bangladesh) for the development of rural infrastructure in the field of land and water development in order to increase agricultural production and to reduce damages induced by natural calamities in the agricultural sector;
- (ii) Income transfer to rural workers through the payment of wages;
- (iii) Providing employment to the rural population during the lean agricultural season; and
- (iv) Stabilizing foodgrain prices and ensuring maintenance of security

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Administrative unit consists of a number of unions ranging from 5 to 13 or so.

stock levels in the Public Foodgrain Distribution System (Quddus:1993:180).

Despite its reformist approach, the FWP as a whole is seen as an attractive means for attacking interrelated problems like unemployment, income-distribution and economic growth (Asaduzzaman et al:1984, in Nabi:1990:31). Among others, the Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED) and the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) are involved in the implementation of projects of FWP and RWP.

Thus, the projects implemented by LGED involve major projects with all RWP components such as Normal Works Programme⁹, Infrastructure Development Programme (IDP), Rangpur Development Project (RDP-8) etc. Besides, BWDB activities include some small and big projects related to water management like Flood Control and Drainage Improvement (FCDI), as well as some other projects e.g the Early Implementation Projects (EIP) System Rehabilitation Projects (SRP) and the Compartmentalization Pilot Project (CPP) etc. (Chowdhury:1994:36). In fact, BWDB plays a significant role in FWP. The organisation absorbs a major share of FWP for the purpose of maintenance of its completed projects as well as for the construction of the earthwork component of approved projects (FFYP:1990:V.B-11).

4.4 Summing Up

In this chapter it has been observed that the GO responses are directly or indirectly envisaged as tackling rural unemployment in Bangladesh. The employment generated through programme activities of BADC and DAE are more of indirect in the sense that they are mainly designed to increase agricultural production through the use of modern technologies which is deemed to create employment for the rural labouring poor. Although the activities of BRDB, among other programmes includes agriculture sector development, however, they are different from BADC and DAE in that employment created by BRDB is self-initiated in nature while the latter ones generate wage employment. Alongside self-employment characteristics, the activities of BSIC and DWA again can be distinguished from all three GOs mentioned from the view point of sector and

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Specific kind of works generated with private initiative such as development of agricultural land, re-excavation of ponds and development of homestead land under private ownership and other maintenance works required by those of private-holders.

gender. While BSIC is involved in non-agricultural activities, DWA concerns exclusively women in its employment creation programmes.

Amongst all the activities of GOs discussed so far, RWP and FWP differs from all of them in the sense that development resources in these two programmes are delivered under public supervision where the beneficiaries precisely the labourers and their employment activities are directly connected with the government machineries and functionaries.

On the contrary, employment generated by other ones do not have direct public supervision. All these imply different strategies in employment creation by different GOs. As the focal point of the paper has been the RWP and FWP, how the employment strategies are envisaged as a distinct ones within the framework of these two programmes remains to be discussed. The following chapter is designed to this end.

Chapter Five

5. EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE RURAL WORKS PROGRAMME AND THE FOOD FOR WORKS PROGRAMME: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

5.0 Introduction

As mentioned elsewhere in the previous chapter, among various rural employment programmes, the RWP and FWP envisage a distinctive approach towards the employment of the rural poor. The distinctiveness of these two programmes is inherent in its 'target group' orientation which does not conceive employment generation merely as an adhoc arrangement, e.g. the provision of temporary employment during the slack season of the agricultural cycle. Rather it ensures participation of the rural poor which is deemed to make them claimants of short-term projects and help them as well to undertake long-term project resulting in their progress in the possession of assets by landless rural labourers and marginal farmers. Thus, RWP and FWP follow particular employment strategies so as to benefit the targeted population. To this end, the most prevalent employment-strategy for the rural poor is characterized by the involvement of the local government body, deemed to be a good representative mechanism for reaching the poor. Regarding cash for work, a 'contract system' is followed where the works are given out to 'contractors'.

This chapter, at the outset, will delineate the role of the local government institution and the related procedural arrangements made by this body in RWP and FWP activities. Thereafter, a critical assessment will be made with a view to understanding the crux of the dynamics of local government with special reference to the degree of its representativeness from the perspective of the target population. This affects the range of benefits accruing to them through the employment programmes concerned. Alongside, the role of 'contractors' will be analyzed with a similar view.

5.1 Local Government as the Implementing Agency

To make employment people-centered, the RWP and FWP activities are channelled through local government bodies ranging from the Union down to the village. As an implementing agency of the employment programmes concerned, local government bodies function with some procedural arrangements discussed here.

5.1.1 Formation of the Project Committee (PC)

As the body of local government, the Union Parishad (UP) is responsible for forming project committees at different levels for the implementation of work schemes under RWP. Thus, according to the existing rules, UP is supposed to form Ward Project Committees (WPCs) and Union Project Committees (UPCs) as permanent bodies whose term of office is co-terminus with that of the UP, while the Project Committee (PC) would be reorganised every year. Apart from this, UP has the authority to form scheme-based PCs to implement specific schemes, such as re-excavation of *khas*¹⁰ derelict tanks, construction of *pucca*¹¹ irrigation channels and development of *hats*¹² and *bazars*¹³.

Although there are variations in circular, the composition of the PC is more or less the same. Circular No. 5 made by the Ministry of Local Government and the Engineering Department (LGED) works programme, proclaims that the Ward PC should consist of 9 to 11 members including UP members from the ward, *Gram Pradhan*¹⁴ or *Swanirvar Gram Sarker*¹⁵, the Head teacher of primary school, a representative of model farmer/manager of KSS (Agricultural Cooperative Association), of the landless, VDP (Village Development Project) members and a women representative.

Circular 7 states that the Ward PC should be comprised of UP members of the respective ward, the Head teacher of the local primary or high school, representative of model farmer/manager of KSS, one social worker and one representative from the landless or disadvantaged and one representative of the VDP. Indeed the underlying intent of constituting the PCs as such is to ensure the participation of different sections of people in the village, and thus to guarantee employment for the poor. In doing so, PCs are supposed to perform some tasks which are set below.

-
- | | |
|----|--|
| 10 | Government-owned land. |
| 11 | Permanent, solid construction, cemented (of building). |
| 12 | Afternoon village market held twice a week. |
| 13 | Market place. |
| 14 | Village headman. |
| 15 | Village government. |

5.1.2 Functions of the Project Committee (PC)

According to the manual of RWP the functions of PC are broad in nature. Because the manual considers the PC as a permanent body under UP whereby it is supposed to perform various tasks including RWP. However, the circular of Ministry of Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED) limits the PCs' functions to the works scheme's execution. The major function of PC as stated in the circular No. 5 has been to mobilize the labourers according to the list of destitutes prepared and maintained by the UP in their assessment list of tax-payers and to gang them up. Besides, the PC has to carry out some labour and work-related specific functions throughout the scheme-implementation cycle. These include:

- (i) Ensuring fair wages to the labourers and making payment on the basis of output as stipulated by UP.
- (ii) Ensuring implementation of the project within the stipulated time period.
- (iii) Maintaining project accounts regularly, keeping all the concerned people informed about the account balance and the progress relating to works, hearing grievances of the labourers in weekly meeting at the project site, and taking advances from the UP and adjusting them with proper accounts.
- (iv) Giving local publicity by putting up a signboard providing detailed information on the projects, particularly the size of the funds allocated for them.
- (v) Maintenance of the project after completion, under the guidance and supervision of UP.
- (vi) Maintaining liaison with the technical staff of the Thana Council and ensuring scheme implementation under their technical guidance as per work measurement, design, estimate and alignment.
- (vii) Settling land disputes concerning project implementation.

5.1.3 Project Planning Process

The planning process starts at the ward level. The Ward Project Committee (WPC) calls a meeting which is attended by the constituents of the respective villages under a particular ward. Here, the respective constituents attending the meeting are supposed to be consulted with regard to the pressing issues requiring attention under RWP; and finally, the project proposals are prepared by the WPC based on the priorities identified in the meeting.

The next stage of the planning meeting takes place at the Union Council/Parishad (UP) level with the participation of the Ward members, under the chairmanship of UP Chairperson. Here, proposals coming from different Ward Project Committees (WPC) are finalized. Indeed, the WPC has to prepare a list of proposals both for the Thana Council as well as for the Union Council/Parishad (UP). Eventually, these lists are integrated into Union and Thana council proposals for schemes. (a flow diagram on project planning process is provided in Appendix-A).

During the planning process, the selection of schemes is subject to some major criteria. These criteria could be catalogued into two broad issues. First, as per article 5 under the MLGRD circular No. 5, while identifying the schemes the view of local constituents should be given priority to all other considerations. Second, as stated in a more or less similar tone in the article 4 (i) under circular No. 5 and article 3(h) under circular No. 7, the schemes which offer greater employment opportunities for the landless and disadvantaged unemployed labourers, small peasants, share-croppers, and which also provide both short and long-term employment for them, are given priority.

5.2 Contractor as Implementing Agent

Alongside the involvement of Local Government bodies, a 'contracting system' is followed in the implementation of work schemes. Although the contracting out scheme is especially meant for "cash for work programmes", however, the practice is not exclusive. Sometimes work schemes are implemented through the contracting system, while other times both the contractors as well as the local government body are incorporated in the implementation process.

Anyway, through the contracting system, the contractor has to go through the tendering process. Prior to the process, the contractor has to be enlisted with the agencies offering work schemes like the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and the Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED). After that, he is qualified to participate in the normal tendering process, fulfilling the requirements of those agencies.

After the bidding process has been completed, the work order is given out to the successful contractor(s), explaining the technical and management aspects

related to the operation, along with the stipulated time-schedule for the completion of the scheme.

The planning and implementation process envisaged by the Local Government bodies, and in case of contracting system, the procedural arrangements maintained by the agencies dealing with the rural works, appear to be substantive in terms of the physical completion of the works programme, at least the development of physical infrastructure. Evidence of programme performance is measured in terms of figures of person-days generated, and the volume of work done. For example, in 1976/77, RWP and FWP contributed to rural employment by generating 100 million person-days work (Institute of Nutrition:1977a). Nevertheless, these indicators merely provide the quantitative aspects of the programme of RWP rather than its qualitative dimension which requires a thorough understanding of the dynamics inherent in the two strategies followed in RWP implementation.

5.3 What is Wrong then? Issues Relating to Local Government and Beyond

From the viewpoint of target achievement it seems that everything goes well with the employment strategies perused in the RWP and FWP as mentioned above. Nevertheless, the question might be posed as to how far the prime objective of RWP i.e. participation of the targeted poor as well as the magnitude of benefits envisioned, have been reflected in programme operations. In other words, the question remains to be answered- how many people from which class are provided with employment?

Ideally, nothing goes wrong in this regard as the characterisation of Local Government implies its representativeness with regard to the various sections of its particular constituency.

However, the scenario is more apparent than real when class aspects of the employment generated are considered. The survey findings of the Institute of Nutrition reveal that among the RWP workers in Comilla, 25 per cent owned 2 acres of land and in FWP, which is exclusively meant for the destitute, 45 per cent workers had alternative means of support (Institute of Nutrition:1977b).

This dimension of class bias in RWP and FWP has to be understood in relation to the nature of class representation of the Local Government and other

intermediaries, influencing the programmes and the targeted people as delineated below.

5.3.1 Nature of Class Representation of the Local Government Body

The genesis of local government is inherent in the introduction of Basic Democracies (BD) during the period of what was then Pakistan. Theoretically, the BD is a pioneering step to develop a platform for grass-roots level democracy and thus create local level institutions like Local Government bodies. The latter are deemed to bridge the century-long gap between local communities and the centre and high authorities, in terms of political feelings as well the options of development activities in those communities. From this perspective, institutional design of BD made an inroad into the creation of flow of democratic process at the local level.

Nevertheless, the undercurrent of RWP encapsulated within the Basic Democratic framework was more a purposeful intervention of the government and its machineries, than that it created a representative platform for the establishment and practice of democracy by the local people. Indeed, in the face of different political types of opposition, the government founded Basic Democracies under the basic democratic system using them as an ideal arrangement to channel RWP, so that the government would be seen as a welfare agent responding to the economic need of the villages. Other than this, transferring RWP-related resources (precisely cash) was thought to be an effective means to bind the BDs¹⁶ (Basic Democrats) with the regime through more than just favours (Sobhan:1968:257). While the former one was an open, the latter one was a covert objective of the regime. Yet, the latter one becomes obvious when the hasty operation of RWP is considered. While there was a budget for just over a quarter million during the pilot operation of RWP, a dramatic rise in next year of the pilot phase took place in the budget amounting to 100 million taka spreading out over all of what then East Pakistan, without considering the maturation of Local Government as a popularly elected unit through which RWP was designed to be implemented (Blair:1974:88).

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Members elected under Basic Democracies ordinance.

In fact, the hasty expansion of RWP was driven by the idea of creating a basis for the Presidential poll of 1965, when the Basic Democracies were used as "electoral colleges" in favour of the Ayub government. Indeed, the BD system heavily turned into a patronage mechanism, for funnelling public works monies down to the village (Blair:1985:1235), which in effect created vested interest-groups in the countryside.

As a matter of fact, the history of participatory government can be traced back to the late colonial period. Nevertheless, the franchise for the election related to local government institutions was restricted to property holders and graduates, while it was open to all during Ayub's regime. Although the legacy of local government institution began with the experiment by Ayub Khan, the praxis and practice of using local government institutions with a view to mobilizing and representing the broad masses came into being after independence (Ibid:1234).

However, all successive regimes fell into the same trap when was already established using this institution. Indeed, all subsequent regimes tended to develop a link between state and macro-level elites, on the one hand and the micro-level, rural elites, on the other, so as to retain their power base.

Thus, instead of bringing about structural reform conducive to the enactment of viable and representative local government, all successive governments tried to use Local Government Organisation (LGO) as a vehicle of traditional patronage, involving the distribution of RWP and FWP resources. The income disparities and skewed land distribution characterising the typical rural power structure, have affected all institutional arrangements through which public development resources were channelled (Khan:1989:35-36). As a matter of fact, the members of the local government in the successive periods, returned to office, appeared to be of the very same kind of large and influential farmers who had been "Basic Democrats" in the old local government structure of the Ayub Khan period (Blair: 1978:70).

Blair (1985) referring to Rashiduzzaman confirms this dominance of local elites in the early period of BD. This is also confirmed by Alam(1982) and Khuda(1981) in their study of Union Panchayat system and *Gram Sarkar* respectively. Ultimately, the effects of patronage within institutional

framework have reinforced the continued dominance of the rural rich, and it was- and still is perceived by them as a source to strengthen the exercise of power further. This can be illustrated from the following table.

Table 2: Landownership Matrix of UP Leaders

Group Number	Landowning Group	No. of UP Leaders	% of Total	Position of UP Leaders at the Time of Becoming Heads of Households (in acres)				
				1	2	3	4	5
				00	01-2.50	2.50-7.50	7.51-12.50	12.51+
1	00	4	3.03	3	1	0	0	0
2	0.1-2.50	10	7.58	0	6	3	1	0
3	2.51-7.50	39	29.55	1	6	24	6	2
4	7.51-12.50	35	26.52	2	0	17	14	2
5	12.51+	44	33.33	1	1	2	7	33

Source: Atiur Rahman, *Rural Power Structure*, 1981, pp. 55, Atiur Rahman, *The State and the Peasantry*, *The Journal of Social Studies*, No. 35, 1987, Table No. 8 pp. 83.

The table shows that quite a few UP leaders own a significant proportions of land. But, they did not possess this much land before. According to the matrix, at least 30 per cent of them owned less than 7.50 acres of land when they became head of the households. After this election, about 60 per cent of the elected UP leaders gained more than 7.50 acres of land. What is important is that among those who gained more land during the UP tenure 49.20 per cent were elected for the next or for even more terms (Rahman:1987:83). This scenario implies that given the existing rural power structure of economic and political, characterized by elite access to and control over LGO as well as over land and labour, popular representation and participation in local government has been frustrated.

Similarly, the formation of the PC as described earlier has been affected by this dominant structure. It is supposed to be formed under the chair of the UP chairperson who does not represent the poor people. Thus, normally the PC is constituted predominantly by the rich landowning class, as is reflected in the table below which represents the class-composition of 14 PCs of various Rural Works Programmes in the Madaripur District in Bangladesh.

Table 3: Landholding Pattern of the PC Members, Chairperson and Secretaries

Landholding (in acre)	All the PC Members, Secretaries and Chairperson taken together	% of total	PC Members	% of total	PC Secretaries	PC Chairperson
From 0 to below 1	11	8.80	10	10.31	1	0
1 to 2.50	27	21.60	25	25.77	2	0
2.50-5.00	41	32.80	28	28.86	7	6
5.01 to 10.00	24	19.20	17	17.53	2	5
Above 10.00	22	17.20	17	17.53	2	3
Total :	125	100	97	100	14	14

Source: Mohammad Shahabuddin and A.B.M. Yunus Khan, *Report on the Study on Target Group Participation in Implementation and Operation of Rural Works*, Table III, pp. 41.

The above table evidences that the persons belonging to landless and marginal category represent only 8.80 per cent of the total PC body, while 21.60 per cent of the PC members own 1 to 2.50 acres of land. Significantly, the PC is comprised for 78 per cent of persons who belong to the high landowning class, whose assets range from 2.51 to 10 acres of land and more. The lack of representation of the landless and marginal class of people, who are supposed to be majority in the structure of PC, is again reflected when the different positions in the PC are considered. Thus, among the PC members, people from landless and marginal category accounts for only 10.31 per cent while the small landowning class of people and high landowning group of people constitute 25.77 per cent and 67 per cent. A similar scenario can be observed in case of important position like secretaries. Most importantly, the influential position of the PC—that of chairperson—is exclusively dominated by the (high) landowning group.

The above discussion substantiates that in implementing the RWP and FWP strategy, local government has not been representative of the target people, as appeared from the structural formation of the strategic PC. As a result, despite the effort to apply a 'target group' approach of RWP and FWP, it has been frustrated by the perversion of local governance. The consequence has been, as commented by Wood (1994), the target of the programmes has been achieved, but that the 'group' whom the programmes are designed for is absent

in the RWP and FWP operations.

The internal dynamics of local government discussed so far does not unveil the crux of the problems inhibiting popular representation. There are other forces beyond local government which interact with each other and which constitute power-blocs against this representation. These are discussed next.

5.3.2 Role of Private Contractors and other Allies

Apparently, the strategy of implementing RWP and FWP through private contractors looks different from that of local government. But the role played by these private contractors does not make any difference from the viewpoint of the representation of poor people.

In fact, the private contracting system itself has been an exclusionary arrangement, as it does not leave room for the poor to be represented: they do not qualify as they do not fulfil the institutional procedures as explained earlier. These procedural arrangements in effect, facilitate the rural influential through the private contracting system in another way. This is so because those who qualify for this system come from a rich class background and are already in control of local government.

Although this class bias can be removed theoretically by bringing about changes in procedural arrangements in favour of the poor, it is difficult in practical term to strengthen and confirm their representation. Usually, landownership is predominantly considered as the indicator of class categories. But based on this indicator, the categorisation of landless class and thus targeting of the poor is camouflaged by the "property inheritance system" in which the members of the landed households are not entitled to the ownership until the land is divided among the members of those households. Thus, despite being educated and coming from a rich class background, sons of those households can be "landless" yet they will later inherit land after its division; this illustrates of the weakness of "landless" label (Wood:1985:466).

As a matter of fact, irrespective of a class position in local government bodies, due to their class position, such family members either have connections already or they develop them with local leaders as well as with government officials, in order to get contracts under the RWP and FWP schemes.

Indeed, the role of private contractor is facilitated by these allies as they share interests with each other. The nexus among these allies is sometimes perceived as an unavoidable reality and taken for granted. Thus, the idea of this 'nexusism' is deconstructed to bypass the crux of the matter which is explained in the following terms:

"...the officials administering development programmes require the cooperation of local elites (if they are to get successful results). No wonder, then, that the evaluation studies invariably conclude that these programmes have helped mainly those in the rural population who were already relatively well off" (Myrdal in Blair:1978:73).

The scenario illustrated in this paragraph holds true in the context of rural societal arrangements in Asia in general and in Bangladesh in particular. And there has been ample evidences that those who work against these forces have been ousted and in some cases assaulted or abused by the rural power holders.

However, these stories are more apparent than real in the sense that 'the prevailing social climate is used in this way to excuse the ineffectiveness of government control' (Bremner:1985:1048). Thus, it is more a symptomatic rather than the real cause. Because this situation of dominance by the rural elites is inherent in the very structure of patronage which is maintained by the different parties such as institutions; be they government or private, and by different rural forces.

The moot point here is that the patronage mechanism facilitates strengthening the alliances between government officials and rural elites controlling local government bodies, and the private contractor having connection with the both parties. In other words, the ascribed or achieved class position does not allow them to relate closely to poor people coming from the same locality or region. This is visible in case of 'the civil servants who happen to be of more modest class origins [and] soon pick up the urban elites habits, and when they visit the villages as extension agents or senior development officers the people they relate to most easily are, of course, the influential, educated few' (Vylder:1982:69).

Apart from the high level officials, mid- or lower-level officials similarly bear the same class character: as those who are educated and qualify to get a

job in the government institutions concerned obviously come to belong to the dominant rural class. So, it would be a suicidal step for them to favour poor people rather than accumulating resources through making alliances with different power allies. These alliances are rooted in their mutual interests which are expressed in terms of material benefits, as can be exemplified by a case illustration; it comes from the confessions of a Circle Officer (CO) coordinating of at least 20 different departments including RWP and FWP.

"Normally, I get maximum money from the Rural Works Programme and Food for Works Programme. The plan submitted by the chairman of UP has to be forwarded by me. And once a project has been bypassed by the relevant ministry, it has to be implemented under my supervision. So I am the key man. The Chairman gets the budget alright, but always leaves a certain percentage for me and the SDO (my superior officer). The very nature of the works programme is such that I can always raise an objection. So the Chairman always keeps me happy. We don't give cash to the Chairman. We always give in kind- wheat. The godown man always gives the chairman 5% less than what we allot. He has to give a share to the thana project implementation officer, the project supervisor, my office clerk. Then he has to keep mouth of the influential shut. At the end of the day, I reckon not even 30 per cent of the total budget reaches the village" (Rahman:1987:96-97).

The political economy of the local government, its configuration, the role of contractors in the implementation of RWP and FWP and finally the sources and nexus among the allies as discussed above— all of these confirms that the employment strategy envisioned as promoting the participation and mobilization of the poor, has been far from achieved in practice.

In fact, all these institutional arrangements coupled with built-in motives of vested interests has turned the poor people into passive recipients of service-delivery and thus divested them from their access to and active participation in the management of the RWP and FWP. How and why this access and participation has been constrained is subject discussed below.

5.3.3 Access and Participation of the Poor in the Implementation of Rural Works Programme and the Food for Work Programme

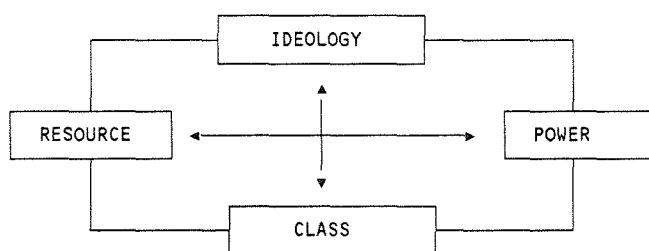
The developmentalist paradigm of Bangladesh is characterized by the dominant state ideology which is infiltrated into different groups and legitimises the existence of the state. Thus, policy framing, development strategy, and participatory decision-making through incorporation of the people and their view, have been curtailed by the trend of making them the exclusive concern of an inner circle of power (Jahangir:1982:116). The whole gamut of rural

employment programmes like RWP and FWP is maintained within this broader framework of the development strategy as such.

The existing style of development and developmental arrangements are in fact premised on the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy; this results in a 'closed shop' environment insofar as popular participation is concerned. These elements again provide excuses for non-participation manifested by the ideology of the power allies. For example, the nature of RWP and FWP since its inception has been being dominated by an engineering criterion which legitimises exclusive decision-making of the engineers as it involves 'hard' expertise.

Alongside, the generalists-bureaucrats have the preconceived idea that the poor are 'passive, fatalistic, uninterested in initiating anything of their own, incapable of undertaking initiatives to change their lives and therefore, need constant prodding, supervision, and spoon-feeding' (Vylder:1982:67). In fact, such a criterion set in a programmatic arrangement is, may be, unavoidable in the sense that it has also social consequences in positive terms, in that technicalities may indeed contribute to the enhancement of productivity of the land, changing pattern of labour demand etc. Nevertheless, these views and mechanisms are just a means to maintain politico-economic alliances between local level officials and rural rich/patrons (Jahangir:1989:73). Indeed, there has been a convergence of interests of various allies, which leads towards the construction of an ideology regarding the participation of the poor, as can be explained from the figure below.

Figure 1: A framework of social dynamics determining the participation of the poor



The resource endowment of the rural rich/patrons gives them leverage to exercise power both in the formal sense and in the informal sense. It has already been shown in the case of UP members that the more they gain resources, the more they confirm their position in the formal power structure. This exercise of power is reinforced by their allies such as various macro

level elites and local officials dealing with the implementation of development programmes. The local level officials develop links with the rural elites because they come from or aspire to, the same class background. Therefore, resource-endowment allows the elites and intermediaries to exercise power on the one hand and, on the other develop their class relations further among local elites, officials and bureaucrats and along the line of shared vested interests.

With regard to continuing the exercise of power and strengthening the class position, the class relations among these allies helps produce a dominant class ideology about the participation of the poor. These ideologies are also manifested in professional activities. The case of RWP can be referred to this. The idea of revitalizing RWP in the form of IRWP was based on the assumption that the existing structure, characterized by tied national and political networks, could be changed through establishing external networks which would favour the poor (Wood:1994:331). However, to harness the programme, an external network was formed by a small cadre of expatriate field staff who were supposed to monitor the programme activities. Here the question lies as to why it was not of poor people rather than a revival of the 'expatriates' that had to rectify the programme? The answer lies primarily in the mode of traditional bureaucratic arrangement and professionalism which Chambers (1993) calls 'normal bureaucracy' and 'normal professionalism' respectively, which among other biases, favours the rich over the poor. The important characteristic of 'normal professionalism' is area of specialization in development activities, which is in fact a defense for mystifying the ignorance of the 'developmentalist professionals' about the reality of the local problem in general, and the problem of the poor in particular. Despite this limitation, the state continues to maintain this development paradigm dominated by these professional elites, in order to keep their interests and thus sustain itself.

Consequently, the convergence of interests of the bureaucrats, local elites and other professional elites creates a dominant ideology patronized by the state which constrains the access and participation of the poor in RWP and FWP operations. Although they have class representation in the PC as delineated elsewhere in this chapter, the insignificant proportion of this group does not give it much weight at the various levels of decision-making process. In

practical term, the "participation" of labour remains confined to merely their physical labour.

5.4 Summing Up

Different procedural arrangements along with the implementation mechanisms discussed so far, shed lights on the elusiveness of especially institutional initiatives endeavoured within the RWP and FWP framework. This elusiveness becomes evident in the existence of dominance of rural rich patrons in local government bodies. This dominant position again is facilitated by power alliances of various levels, and on top of that, by the state which excludes the rural poor from participation in decision-making process on the employment programmes concerned. The exclusion of the poor is legitimised by the dominant class ideology maintained by the state and its apparatuses. Analysis of the functioning of local government and the private contractors brought out the nature of participation of the poor. Yet a detailed analysis of in what way and to what extent their exclusion from participation affects their life and livelihood as well as their work under the GO work programmes requires more room for discussion. This examination which will take place in the next chapter on labour relations in RWP and FWP.

Chapter Six

6. LABOUR RELATIONS IN THE RURAL WORKS PROGRAMME (RWP) AND THE FOOD FOR WORKS PROGRAMME (FWP)

6.0 Introduction

For delineating the nature and feature of labour relations in the RWP and FWP, it is imperative to look into the dynamics of agrarian labour market because be it non-farm sector or non-agricultural sector, the labourers originates from the agrarian roots. As it is discussed in the earlier chapter that the nature of poor people's participation in the implementation of the RWP and FWP is restricted to physical labour. This exclusion of the labourers from the decision making in the implementation of the concerned programmes might imply that it has been the manifestation of their disengagement from the means of production like land. And from this pretext, a simple conclusion might be drawn that the agrarian labourers are proleterianised which is reflected into these programmes.

Nevertheless, disengagement of the labourers from the means of production is more apparent than real. The tenancy relations in Bangladesh inherited from the colonial mode of production has not contributed to the emergence of two clear broad agrarian classes. Although this has been supported by some D/P (Differentiation/Polarisation) thesis, however, Rahman in his study notes that rural proletarianization is yet to emerge.

"The emerging proletariates which were observed....are, infact, not fully proletarianized. The dependent relationship arising out of the unequal land tenure structure, lack of sufficient alternative employment opportunities, age-old community ideologies....were still very active in keeping them as yet 'proto' or 'partial' proletariat".
(Rahman:1986:190).

In fact, the logic of the rural rich of continuing patron-client relationship rather than following the routes of capitalist development has resulted in a traditional labour relations in the rural sector. Therefore, labour relations in the RWP and FWP are shaped accordingly, and not participatory.

In view of this, this chapter is an attempt to understand first the agrarian labour market configuration. Thereafter, the chapter will outline the implications of the dynamics of agrarian labour market on the labour relations

in RWP and FWP. The labour relations in RWP and FWP will shed light on some issues such as labour recruitment procedure, mode of wage and the wage rate, the territorial composition of the labour force and labour control mechanisms, labour rights and vulnerability of the labourers in the programmes.

6.1 Labourers and Labour market Configuration

In most of the studies on agrarian relations, there has been a common trend in straightforward categorisation of rural labourers on the basis of ownership of means of production. From this view point, the wage labourers are considered as the rural labourers. But in practical life situation, rural labourers are not constituted on the basis of this single parameter.

In fact, the mode of development of agrarian relations taken place so far in South Asia in general and Bangladesh in particular has not contributed to the full proletarianization of the rural labourers. This is due to the fact that the agrarian production arrangement is not characteristic of a full-fledged capitalist development where surplus extraction is based on the relationship of employer and wage labourers. Wood (1976) analysing the nature of agrarian relations in Bangladesh notes: 'the relationships between rich and poor within the village are not primarily those of employer-employee, centred around the direct extraction of surplus value from labour.....the nature of dependency or exploitation of the poor does not occur by and large through the activity of labour'. It implies that the relationship in the agrarian sector is not single-stranded and exploitation has not been necessarily the result of the dispossession of means of production, precisely land. Instead, given the land tenure structure and the organisation of production, there have been various forms of relationships in agrarian society resulting in varied relations of exploitation (Datta:1991:22). For example, tenants do not appear to be falling in category of labourers, in the sense that presumably due to ownership of the means of production as well as control over decisions regarding production-organisation, their position is much different in character from that of an owner-cum cultivator, except for security and tenancy. But all tenants are not homogeneous; rather they are heterogeneous from the view point of nature of production-relations.

Within the higherarchy of the tenants category, there are some poor tenants known as "share-croppers" who despite apparent control over the means of

production via a tenancy contract, virtually loose their control over the labour process and production-decisions as the respective directives are given by the landlord. In view of this, the share-croppers at the level of economic operation, are little different in character from wage labourers, indeed, in practical terms, share-cropping is a kind of labour contract (Ibid:21). Indeed, share-cropping has been a convenient form of capitalist exploitation of dispossessed rural labour (Alavi, 1978,21-2 quoted in Westergard:1985). Thus, share-croppers are also part of rural labourer and hence constitute a segment of the rural labour market other than wage labourers.

It is important to note here, specially in the case of wage labourers, that there are difficulties in terms of the characterization of rural labour markets, because the labourers of this category do not have an uniform character. For example, a labourer may not be simply a wage labourer for being hired, as he might have a piece of land and may be 'self-employed', both himself and his family members (Muqtada and Alam:1983:56). The reverse may also exist. Datta (1991), shows that the percentage of the landless households hiring-in labour is 70 in one village and 39 in another village of Bangladesh. This confirms that the rural labour market is not the only function of landowning category.

Considering this, Muqtada and Alam (1983) have categorised three broad important categories of labour on the basis of estimation of labour utilization i.e. by the number of person days used by various farm-holdings. These involve family labour, hired casual and hired permanent labour. Besides, they also mention two other categories of labourers: exchange and contact labourers. However, the latter two categories are not significant in the rural labour market.

In fact, the hired casual and hired permanent category known to be "attached labourers" constitute the dominant form of rural labour in Bangladesh. Within this category, again, there are multiple facets characterized by the nature of attachment of the attached labourers with employer, based, among others things- on the duration of contract and mode and frequency of payment¹⁷.

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The nature of labour attachment involves complicated characteristics. With a view to delineating a clear view of labour attachment within the broader frame of labour relations, Bardhan and Rudra have devised a scheme of classification of attached labourers and categorised them emphasizing different variants involved. These are: (i) totally unattached

The fragmented nature of the rural labour market as such is not characterized by the normal functioning of the market i.e. interaction between demand and supply of labour. The formation of the rural labour market indeed has been the outcome of the introduction of the green revolution. The green revolution technology based on HYVs has resulted in an increase in demand for labour. It is to be noted here that the cost of maintaining HYV in production is high. Therefore, to economise on the cost of production, on the one hand, and to ensure the supply of labour especially during peak season on the other, the medium and large landowners have tied up the landless and very small landholding peasants supplying labour, with interlinked transactions of land, labour and credit.

In case of the landless wage labourers, this interlinkage is predominantly based on credit. For cash hungry labourers, there is only option to live on credit from the rich landowners. Other than this, they are in desperate need of employment security, land and housing. Islam and Rahman (1985) indicate how interlinked transactions work in the rural labour market. In their study, data on the responses of permanent labourers for being attached to their present employers reveals an interplay of different factors which include conditions for leasing-in land, for a free house-site, condition for loan and security of employment etc. Among them, one third of the labourers gave responses associated with a condition of loans, while security of employment, condition for leasing-in land and a free house site were also mentioned by them. These interlinked transactions give the rich landowners leverage to attach the labourers with them on various conditions.

Like wage labourers, share-croppers of the lower landowning category are also linked with these transactions. What is more along with the factors mentioned, share-croppers are linked through additional factors of transactions i.e. cattle. Poor resource endowment of these share-croppers force them to enter into these relationships with the landowner which make them vulnerable to exploitation and gradually dependant on them.

labourers (ii) totally attached labourers (iii) semi-attached labourers type I (iv) semi-attached labourers type II and (v) semi-attached labourers type III. See for details, Pranab Bardhan and Asok Rudra 'Types of Labour Attachment in Agriculture: Results of Survey in West Bengal, 1979, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. xv, No. 35, August, 30.

The dependency syndrome in the rural labour market characterized by interlinked transactions seems to be economic in nature. However, labour market dynamics are also extended by the rural landowning class into extra-economic relationships. These relationships allow the landed class to extend their control over the labour in other segments of the rural labour markets. As will be seen in the next section, they replicate the traditional labour market dynamics in development projects i.e. non-agricultural programmes like RWP and FWP.

6.2 Implications of Labour Relations in the Rural Works Programme (RWP) and the Food for Works Programme (FWP)

Although the rural labour market dynamics as mentioned above seem to be maintained for economic ends, in practical term, economic coercion, implicit in interlinked transactions for this, is not end in itself. Rather, it is a means to develop extra-economic labour relations through which rich landowning people- who in turn exert socio-political influence in the countryside- turn the labouring class into loyal clients. Datta's (1991) study indicates that 68 per cent of all the labourers developed extra-labour relations with the employers; a significant proportion i.e. 74 per cent of these labourers are socio-politically linked with their employers.

The labourers are inclined to this socio-political attachment because they are provided with legal protection by the employers during crisis and conflict in the village which involves police intervention against them. From the perspective of the rich landowning employers, this attachment strengthens the existing power which allows them to exert influence in decision-making regarding development activities. Like other interventions in the rural area, this influence is manifested in RWP and FWP.

Thus, despite its distinctiveness in that the Programmes are outside agricultural activities, access to the resources related to these two programmes is regulated by the rural rich-peasant relations. In doing so, they have consolidated their position through a network of selective patronage. As a matter of fact, access to employment does not only depend on being poor, but upon having a favoured client status within the patronage network through which work in RWP, FWP and other rural employment programmes is allocated (Kramsjo and Wood:1992:10).

This situation compels rural labourers to establish extra-labour relations with the rural power-holders with a view to entering to the patronage network. Thus, while socio-political attachment is characteristic of extra-labour relations, among others, the form of this relationship is also based on employment opportunities in government projects provided by the rural rich patrons.

Consequently, although small farmers and landless labourers are supposed to escape through RWP and FWP from bondage due to interlinked transactions, the unregulated exercise of power in these programmes in real terms, 'merely forges new shackles in the hands of their oppressors' (Sobhan:1968:244). Thus, predominant type of labour relations existent in the agrarian sector have simply been extended to the RWP and FWP: issues to be discussed next.

6.2.1 Labour Process

The labour process in the RWP and FWP is entailed in the official circulation concerned which proclaims that labourers will be ganged up by the PC, in the case of execution of schemes by the local government body i.e. UP. Although there is no clear mention in this respect in the case of a private contractor's involvement, it can be assumed from the programme's objective that a common emphasis in both implementation mechanism has been put on the socio-economic background of the labourers. It means that whoever executes programmes, the poor, who are in dire need of employment should be given priority when mobilizing labourers according to the list maintained by UP.

Anyway, sharing the same class background and thus a nexus to each other, both the contractor and the PC people practise the same process in terms of labour mobilization for the implementation of the RWP and FWP. Practically, the labourers are ganged up by *sardars*¹⁸ who are recruited by the PC/contractor. The *sardars* are in fact intermediaries between the PC/contractor and the labourers.

Thus, there is only a slight difference in working relationship; while the labourers are mostly in direct contact with the landlord or rural patrons in

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Sardars are the head of the households, coming from a strong lineage and large landholding background who have economic influence as well as reputation for making decisions which maintain and reinforce social order in a particular area of the village.

agricultural activities, they are mediated through these intermediaries in development programmes like RWP and FWP. The *sardars* having the authority to recruit labourers preferably gang up those who are functionally dependent on them. Apart from this, there are some poor villagers who are scattered across the village without previous connection or intimacy among themselves and whose association to each other is likely to be temporary for the season. These dispersed as well as unorganised people are preferred as members of a gang/group (Wood:1994:267).

Although the latter ones are not necessarily dependent on the sardars, all labourers enter into a new form of dependency relation with the landlord class or people situated at the UP, via these sardars. By definition, RWP and FWP programmes are operated during the slack season when due to low income flow, the labouring poor's economic condition becomes vulnerable. This leads labourers to borrow money as an advance prior to the commencement of scheme-works. The advance is paid on a daily basis by the PC people through *sardars*. Thus the sardars or the labour sardars place themselves as money-lenders in different guise in the schemes, which gives them leverage to control the labour process.

How economic dependency resulting in this labour process affects labour relations will be figured out by different pertinent aspects in the following sub-sections.

6.2.2 Wage and Wage Payment

As a procedure, either *sardars* or PC members are supposed to pay the wages to the labourers. There are different frequencies practised in payment. In some projects, payment is made daily while in others and even in the same project it is made once or twice a week. In fact, the frequency of payment depends on the availability of wheat in case of FWP. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the labourers are paid an advance as consumption loan so that they can meet immediate consumption requirements until the payment is made.

This system of interim payment affects the rate of wages to be paid by the sardars or gang leaders. Because the consumption loan given to them finally reduces the value of their wages, in that a substantial amount of interest against that loan has to be paid to obtain wheat. Other than this, malpractice

of the prescribed procedure results in reduction in the wages received by the labourers. This is reflected in the respective volumes of wheat paid to labourers to sardars and to supervisors, as is confirmed by Asaduzzaman and Huddleston (1983) in a study on the evaluation of FWP of two large implementing agencies e.g. Water Development Board (WDB) and Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation (MRR). The study reveals that taking into account the variation between the two agencies, the average wage rate received by the labourers has been 43.7 seers of wheat per 1000 cft. of earthwork whereas they are supposed to receive 42.84 seers of wheat in case of WDB projects and 50 seers for men and 70 seers for women in MRR projects.

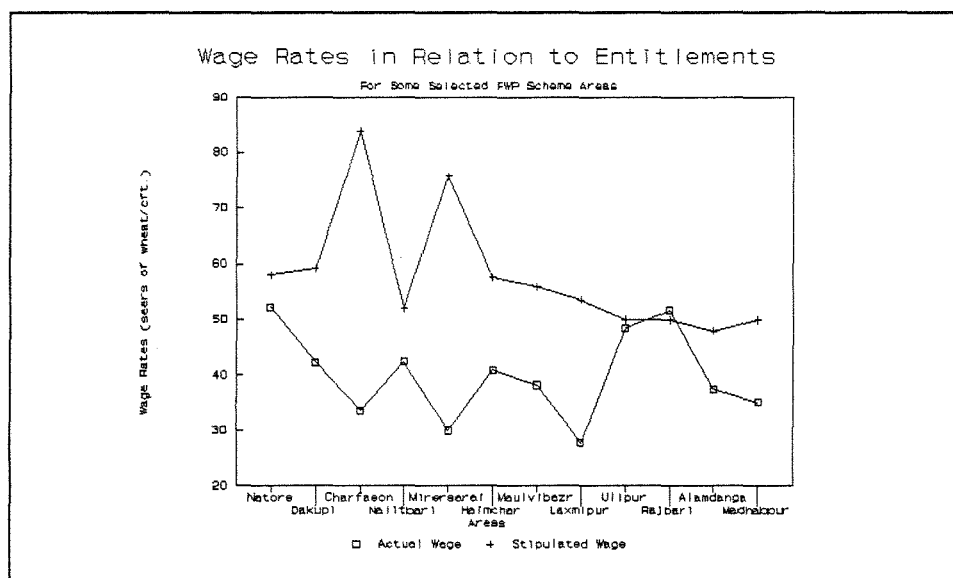
On the contrary, the prescribed rate for the sardars and supervisors have been 2.5 seers and 0.5 seers of wheat for each 1000 cft. of earthwork done under their jurisdiction. But except for sardars in MRR projects, sardars and supervisors reported to have received on average 3.1 seers and 2.5 seers per 1000 cft. respectively in WDB projects. In MRR project, supervisors received 1.3 seers of wheat per cft.

Regarding underpayment of wages, it is argued in some studies that due to illiteracy the labourers are not aware about the stipulated wage rate. However, the reason is more apparent than real. In fact, labourers involved in the schemes are somehow conscious about the wage rate. Data produced by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (1991) reveal that 70.01 per cent of the labourers in FWP are aware about the wage rate. Thus, the argument about the low wage payment which is attributed to illiteracy of the labourers is nullified by this data. The findings of the same study again indicate that a substantial number of the labourers i.e. 69.78 per cent, are dissatisfied with the amount of wages given to them.

While the former data reveal that labourers are conscious about the wage rate, the latter on dissatisfaction about the amount of wages implies that the labourers are underpaid. It raises a question: being aware about the wage rate, why the labourers are subject to underpayment? The answer lies in the interlinked transactions of credit and labour described earlier. Once being interlinked with the credit, the labourers cannot claim a fair wage from the sardars, labour contractors or the authorities concerned, despite their awareness about the stipulated wage rate.

Although there has been little evidences of labourers bargaining for a fair payment of wages, the data show that less than 50 per cent of the labourers get the wages they bargained for (Chowdhury:1983:123). The point to mention here is that the number of labourers who are paid, be it significant or not, as a consequence of bargaining does not necessarily imply that they are not functionally dependent on their patrons involved in the schemes works. Indeed, a causal link in this respect lies in the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy of the labour arrangement where one segment is deprived while the other one is privileged amongst the labourers. This will be discussed in the next section on labour control mechanisms. Whatever the reason, it is true that the labourers are generally underpaid. An estimate on the WDB projects and MRR projects indicates that rate of underpayment ranged from 24 to 27 per cent for the former, while for the latter it was 17-20 per cent (Hossain and Akash:1993:38).

From the view point of macro situation, data suggest that underpayment of wages ranges from 10 per cent to 60 per cent (Chowdhury:1983:128). A graphical representation of 12 selected FWP areas¹⁹ including 8 WDB projects and 4 MRR projects exhibits the discrepancy between the actual wage paid to the labourers and the stipulated rate (For details, please see Appendix-B).



Source: Adapted from Omar Haider Chowdhury, 1989, Profile of Workers in Food-for-Work Programme in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Development Studies, Vol. xi No. 182 (special issue), pp. 128, Table V-4.

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A sample of 12 areas is selected on the basis of regional variation.

From the above figure it is found that except Rajbari in all the FWP areas, there has been underpayment with marked rate in some areas like Haimchar, Maulavibazar, Mireasarai, Dakupi and Alamdanga where the gap between stipulated and actual wage rate is more than 10 per cent. However, the case of Rajbari cannot be attributed to the mass mobilization effort of the labourers. In fact, at Rajbari payments were made in paddy and wheat and as such our procedure of converting paddy into its wheat equivalent by using local market price for rice resulted in slight overestimate of actual payments. In 9 WDB project areas, the rate of underpayment registers 37.21 per cent which means the labourers received less than the stipulated rate. The rate of underpayment in WDB areas varies from a high of 60.34 per cent (at Mirersarai) to a low around 30 per cent (at Natore).

Similarly, in the remaining 3 MRR areas, the average wage received by the labourers is about 10 per cent less than they are entitled to; and the rate of underpayment varies from a high of 29.84 to a low of 2.86. In all 12 areas the rate of underpayment on average is 28.04 per cent.

The above discussion about the wage rate concerns those projects which are implemented under the supervision of PC. With regard to the projects under the supervision of private contractors there is a dearth of information about the wage rate. However, micro level information available so far reveals that average daily wage earned by the labourers fluctuates between Tk. 20 to 25 with the private contractor (Ahmed: 1993:46) which is below the minimum wage rate i.e. Tk. 45. Another study on Special Public Works Programme, one of the several types of RWP mentions the volume of sectoral expenditure related to the construction of pucca irrigation channel under contractor's supervision which gives a clue to the wage volume given to the labourers. The data reveal that only about 11 per cent of the targeted amount during the operational phase goes to the labourers (Hossain and Asaduzzaman:1983:206).

The issues relating to wages discussed so far substantiates the underpayment of the labourers involved in RWP and FWP. But matters do not the end here. What is more serious is that their vulnerability to the wage situation gets worse when the issue of hours of work spent by the labourers in the work scheme is added. So, to understand the whole gamut of labour relations the next sub-section is dedicated to this issue.

6.2.3 Hours of Work

The underpayment of labourers as described above might entail the idea that they are not skilled enough for earthwork involved in FWP and RWP work schemes. Nevertheless, this idea is a myth rather than reality because the productive capacity is confirmed by one survey indicating that the labourers on average are able to move 117 cft. per day (Chowdhury:1983:131).

According to the procedure, the volume of payment is calculated on the basis of quantity of earthwork moved. So, as per the labour productivity data presented before, the labourers are supposed to receive a handsome amount. In reality, higher productivity is camouflaged by the fictitious record-keeping while the practice of work intensity goes on through recruitment of a small number of labourers. This work intensity is manifested by the hours of work done by the labourers. Osmani and Chowdhury (1983) making a comparison of working hours indicate that in spite of similar volume of employment in relation to days, household employment in terms of hours is about 10 per cent higher for the group participating in FWP schemes as compared to the group not participating in this scheme.

Regarding concrete figures about working hours, data suggests that in five projects out of six, all labourers worked more than nine hours a day. More precisely, the majority of labourers (59.7 per cent) worked more than eight hours a day and a significant proportion (9.4 per cent) of workers worked more than 11 hours a day (Chowdhury:1983:124).

The previous discussion regarding wage rate provided evidence that the labourers are underpaid, while the present discussion provide the fact that their working hours are longer than normal. This implies that labourers are exploited by both PC people and private contractor. Now, the mechanisms of how these labourers are exploited remains to be discussed.

6.2.4 Mechanisms of Exploitation

The mechanism of exploitation is built-up through the process of advance payment to the labourers. This advance payment makes the labourers functionally dependent on the contractors and the sardars; the latter ones are also bestowed with the authority in terms of financial management and administrative aspects of the work scheme. Eventually, the authority

concentrated in so few, on the one hand, and the marginalisation of the labourers through credit-linked arrangement, on the other, results in a power imbalance which paves the way for exploitation in various ways.

The very source of exploitation lies in the mode of payment. The practice of payment in RWP and FWP resembles the payment pattern in the agriculture with the combination of daily and an end of season pay-off. While in agriculture the payment is made according to the individual quantity harvested, in the work scheme the pay-off is the balance accruing from the final measurement of the earthwork moved by the labourers. So, for the pay-off individual labourers have to wait until the completion of the work. But the contractor and the sardars intentionally lengthen the number of working days with a view to delaying final measurements. This lengthening of the working days results in despair among the labourers and finally compels them to leave this work and disappear into another one. The 'exit' of the labourers as such is forced in a sense that there is neither certainty in terms of measurement nor do they get daily or half-weekly payment as advance to meet family requirements during these days. Faced with this trap, they do not have any option except looking for other work with a view to eking out daily existence. As a result of the labour turnover, the practice so far is that balances owed are rarely paid to the labourers when the final measurement of the earthwork shifted in is done. In a 1984-85 programme monitoring exercise, no payment was made after measurement in 78 per cent of the schemes visited (Wood:1994:314). This is how the labourers' are deprived of the wages owed to them are finally appropriated by the contractors and the *sardars*.

Another issue regarding exploitation involves earthwork measurement. During earthwork measurement, the local officials and site workers, who are responsible for maintaining technical standards, cheat labourers through their puzzling techniques. Although the labourers are imparted technical training previously and aware about the cheating, they cannot raise their voice against this cheating and claim accurate measurement; this is due to their functional dependency emanated from the advance payment by the contractors and sardars, and to some extent to the threat from officials to deny authorization of the bill to be paid to the labourers against their work. Thus the cheating which occurs in connivance with the Contractors, *sardars* and the local officials deprive the labourers of their fair wages and thus imply exploitation.

The exploitative process as discussed above implies that it goes on as a result of the dominance of the power-bloc, and that it goes unchallenged. However, it does not mean that there has been no resistance from the labourers' side. In fact, there has been a series of events regarding the confrontation of the labourers with these power blocs especially on the issue of wage payment. However, all these attempts were nipped in the bud either before the implementation of the work or during the work process, through the control mechanism indicated and adopted by the contractors and the *sardars* in particular and various power blocs in general. Hence, how the labourers are controlled in RWP and FWP operation leaves room for discussion.

6.3 Labour Control Mechanism and Vulnerability

Elsewhere in the paper, the credit transactions are discussed which enhance the power of the *sardars* and contractor to control the labour process. Fact is that given the credit dependency, the labourer cannot claim justice or speak out against exploitation, in terms of measurement of earthwork, accompanied by cheating and underpayment as discussed before. Nevertheless, there is a potential threat to the contractors and *sardars* from the labourers, if the latter ones despite their dependency, come from the same territorial unit. Because, the labourers once brought together around an earthworks scheme, are more likely to be unionised in defence of their perceived common interests (Wood:1994:307); this in effect might jeopardise the opportunities of the vested interested groups or at least interrupt the process of exploitation. In fact, the success of the RWP's programme objective was premised and thus envisaged on this assumption.

Therefore, to avoid this potential threat, alongside recruiting labourers around the scheme, contractors and *sardars* recruit migrant and semi-migrant labourers from different territorial units. The room for manoeuvring in this respect is provided by the circular No. 5 para 16 which instructs that the implementation of project has to be ensured according to time-schedule (Wood:1994:268). On the plea of this, the contractors and *sardars* recruit migrant labourers by manipulating the situation of local labour force in various ways. There is paucity of hard data on the use of semi-migrant labourers in RWP and FWP. However, the existence of the semi-migrant labour is well pronounced in various studies. Regarding migrant labourers, one survey of 31 project sites indicates that 14.7 per cent of the FWP labourers are migrant while in particular sites rate of migrancy is significant which

amounts to 70 per cent.

Nevertheless, whatever the proportion of migrant labourers may be, the moot point is that these migrant labourers are recruited to control potential labourers' agitation. The labourers coming from different areas have different patronage backgrounds which do not provide a common ground for uniting together in protecting their interests as a class. On the other hand, 'it is easier to resist any feasible demands.....if these [labourers] do not face up to management as an indivisible mass but are split along regional....lines can be manipulated on the basis of the contrasts' (Breman:1990:559). Having migrated, the labourers are provided with security regarding shelter by the sardars and contractors, which makes them loyal to them rather prone to raise their voice against odds related to the scheme work.

Apart from this, the composition of the labour force as such creates antagonism between the native labourers and the migrant or semi-migrant labourers. Alongside this kind of fragmentation of labourers, they are also segmented especially along the line of gender, which is deliberately created and further reinforced by the contractors and the *sardars* through an inclusion-exclusion mechanism. This principle is applied by paying comparatively more wages and other facilities to one group of labourers while the other groups are underpaid. Any threat to this policy is controlled by exclusionary arrangements where those who complain become victims of the situation. This control mechanism can be buttressed by evidence from a case illustration of one project site in Jessore.

"....most of the FFW workers were drawn from two adjacent villages, while the committee was dominated by the influential member of only one village. At one stage, all the labourers from other village were expelled en masse for a long period when they made allegations about discriminately higher wage-rates being paid by the committee members to the workers from their own village" (Osmani and Chowdhury:1983:153).

The exclusionary policy of controlling labour does not always apply to the semi-migrant labourers. In fact, whichever segment of the labourers may challenge the exploitative process of the RWP and FWP operation, the control mechanism is the same the other way around. Normally, for the labourers coming from around the scheme area, a combined 'carrot and stick' policy is used to control labour agitation. 'Carrot' tactics are used for buying the loyalty of precisely the favoured clients of the village where the scheme is located, by

providing extra-benefits of the scheme. In cases where 'carrots' tactics fail, 'stick' policy is applied to them in terms of social sanctions which take the form of sacking the agitators and at the extreme point using police violence.

Labour control mechanisms applied in the RWP and FWP consequently put the labourers in a vulnerable situation. Heterogeneity accompanied by the combination of local and semi-migrant, migrant labourers results in fragmentation and thus make specially the local labourers vulnerable to employment. This vulnerability is more acute in the sense that the labourers involved in the RWP and FWP being situated in the agrarian setting are already divided among themselves along the line of different village faction-leaders.

Thus the scope of getting employment is subject to the socio-economic position and influence of the individual labourer's patron or faction-leader whom (s)he is attached to. Because 'the faction-leaders or members who need wage labourers would approach or be approached by those in their faction seeking employment' (Jansen:1986:189). So, those not belonging to the faction-leader or patron who have a strong influence in the PC become vulnerable to employment in RWP and FWP.

Apart from getting employment, vulnerability of labourers is manifested in different stroke in terms of wage rate. The migrant labourers are usually recruited at a cheaper rate and having a migrancy status, they cannot resist underpayment due to their fear of rejection from the side of the employment authorities concerned; this has already been evidenced in the case of semi-migrants who, coming from an adjacent village, were expelled from employment for a long time. Thus, labourers are made economically vulnerable, resulting in various successive segments within the 'labour pool' during the whole operational process of RWP and FWP.

6.4 Summing Up

The issues regarding labour relations, labour control and vulnerability of labourers discussed so far in this chapter indicate that although RWP and FWP fall under the non-farm sector, the labour market dynamics in these programmes resemble that of the agrarian labour market. From the analysis it is found that the labour market dynamics functioning in RWP and FWP are characteristic of the dependency of labourers which results from interlinked transactions

forming the labour process in those programmes.

Thus, credit-ridden programmes adversely affects various aspects of the labour relations such as the mode of wage payment, the wage rate and working hours. Besides, programme configurations of this kind provide a suitable ground for the *sardars* and the private contractors to exploit labourers in various ways related to operational management of the concerned programmes. Moreover, the exploitative process goes unchallenged because of the control mechanisms applied by the authorities concerned, along the line of dependency stemming from typical agrarian labour arrangements. Given the dependency syndrome redeveloped in RWP and FWP programmes, the *sardars* and contractors apply combined 'carrot and stick' tactics to the labourers with a view to maintain an uninterrupted process of exploitation. The embryo of the control mechanism lies in the 'inclusion-exclusion' policy which results in the segmentation and fragmentation of the labourers. Consequently, the labourers are put in a vulnerable situation which shatters their option to raise their 'voice', leaving them merely with either the 'exit' or 'loyalty' option (Hirschman:1970).

Given this labour regime, it is difficult for the labourers to engage in claim-making to their rights, responsibilities and freedom, and thus change the existing labour relations in RWP and FWP. Unless , of course, an alternative effort could be made. This leaves room for discussion in the next chapter which will be searching for alternatives to present labour relations, in the light of institution-building efforts of the labouring poor.

Chapter Seven

7. CHALLENGING LABOUR RELATIONS: SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVES

7.0 Introduction

In previous chapters evidence was presented on the dominance of the rural elites in the rural power structure, which has marginalised the active participation of the rural labourers in RWP and FWP operations. And the resultant fact of this dominance has been delinking the rural labouring poor from the operational process of these programmes. This in turn has resulted in a dominant mode of labour relations making the labourers vulnerable to non-employment and other related issues. The whole scenario of vulnerability of labourers within this dominant labour regime is reflected in the following paragraph:

".....the recruitment and management of labour through sardar and patronage networks; the credit needs and related dependency of labour upon the patrons who gain access to management of these schemes and control employment;..... sporadic participation in site-work undermining workers' potential unity; fragmented, competitive labour, leaving workers divided and vulnerable; family survival strategies (necessarily cautious, risk avoiding) within such networks undermining any prospect of militancy by workers in claiming rights" (Wood:1994:315).

As a matter of fact, a 'target group' approach especially in the case of RWP/IRWP has been erode by this regime: it has resulted in the prominence of delivery concept to organised group of landless labourers or into a stereotyped income-generation scheme, rather than that it has ensured the full participation and mobilization of rural labourers as envisaged in the programme objectives. Nevertheless, this paradox provides room for potential concerted action of the landless labourers which could turn them into subject of the programmes.

Given this understanding, this chapter is mainly based on the issues of an institution-building effort as an alternative to existing labour relations in the RWP and FWP. Thus, considerations viability along with a different characterisation of "institution-building" will be discussed at the outset. Thereafter, the role of NGOs will be highlighted with special reference to a viable strategy for changing the dominant paradigm of labour relations. In order to substantiate the viability of an alternative paradigm of labour relations, the discussion will compare existing labour relations and an

alternative scenario.

7.1 Institution-building Considerations

The previous discussions revealed that given the patronage-led labour relations developed in RWP and FWP, the labourers can not ensure their participation and thus become better claimants in terms of their rights and freedom in the scheme work. Although there has been some resistances against the exploitation of the labourers as practised through various mechanisms discussed before, these remained sporadic events. As a result, these attempts produced no good results for the labourers. One of the significant limitations, among others to these efforts was the seasonality nature of scheme work which does not provide a favourable ground for getting organised and undertake concerted action on the part of the labourers.

These experiences lead to the conclusion: the labourers have to be organised through an institutional frame which can provide them with a platform to critically understand their position in a broader perspective of societal dynamics rather than limiting it to the scheme work only and thus to claim their rights through collective action against the odds of the society. The question then arises who will mobilize and build up such an institution of the labouring poor?

There are two major sources of organising the poor: (i) by external agent and (i) by the labouring poor themselves. The former again involves mainly two sources i.e. government and the political parties. However, any initiative coming from the government or close to government e.g. government-led political parties is more likely to cause demise or danger of the institution as such, inasmuch as the initiatives are more purposive and self-interested from the side of government or the political parties (Esman and Uphoff:1984:188), rather than premised on concern for the poor. The history of co-operatives and other institution-building efforts in Bangladesh such as *Swanirvar Bangladesh*²⁰ can be referred here. It is a proven fact from previous institution-building experiences of this kind, that once taken care of by the government, the local institutions, despite their autonomy at an initial stage, finally loose their self-control and consequently experience

demobilization and departicipation (Kasfir, 1977 in Esman and Uphoff: 1984:188).

Apart from these two external agent or outside sources, another one i.e. NGOs, often called 'third sector' can be taken into consideration. Although NGOs are becoming an object arena of criticism on the question of legitimacy, their approach towards development activities in general and the practice and praxis of institution-building characterized by learning process approach²¹ in particular, endows them with the legitimacy of their constituency constituted by organised poor. On the contrary, despite legitimacy in establishing an institution, the government and the political parties, due to lack of orientation towards learning approach, can not suffice with regard to developing institution in view of its viability and sustainability.

Another wave of criticism contends that no external agent can be good enough for developing institution for the poor. Rather the poor should build up their own institution by themselves. This view, indeed, implies that there has been fertile ground for the poor people to establish an institution by their own initiative. However, the rural social arrangement and its dynamics are not that simple; the relationship is not as harmonious as encapsulated in this idea. Indeed, the poor are situated in the network of power ranging from village level (micro) to society (macro). Given their position in this network, it is endangering for them even to think of building their own institution. Because, they will experience, due to the patronage tie, social sanctions from the existing power blocs which will eventually make their life even more vulnerable.

Thus, taking into account the dynamics of rural society, the assistance of an external agent is a necessity. Because an external agent without ties to the local structure or involvement in feuds and village factions, can independently facilitate institution-building efforts of the rural poor

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Learning process approach as a paradigm in social development differs from the conventional development approach which calls for experts to design programme blue prints to be passed to line agencies for implementation. This approach, thus is characterized by a bottom-up process which produces a three-way fit between beneficiaries, programme and the assisting organisation. First fit between the beneficiaries and the programme helps understand the beneficiary needs and accordingly devise programmes and make services available. Second fit between the assisting organisation and the beneficiaries facilitates the later to articulate their own needs and the process by which the former can take decision. Third fit relates to a critical link between the programme's task and the organisation's distinctive competence. As Korten (1983) mentions, the learning process approach proceeds with these three critical fits through three corresponding stages: (i) learn to be effective (ii) learn to be efficient and (iii) learn to expand.

(Devitt,1977 in Esmann and Uphoff:1984:255). In other words, as we learned from the analysis of the local government, to establish a viable institution characteristic of a genuine participatory process rather than as a mechanism of patronage-distribution, the external agent playing the role of catalyst is of primordial need. Because,

"A truly participatory development process can not be generated spontaneously, given the existing power relations at all level and the deep-rooted dependency relationships. It requires a catalyst. The catalyst or change agent who can break this vicious circle is a new type of activist who will work with the poor, who identifies with the interests of the poor and who has faith in the people" (Wignaraja,1984 in Burkey:1993:75).

Having rationalised the necessity of an external agent, the question arises which external agent is viable for institution-building of the labouring poor? In the light of the above discussions, it can be argued that the government paradigm in institution-building is not sustainable as it is patronage-led. On the contrary, NGOs having a people-centred view can play a vital role in this regard.

It has been recognised in the development arena that NGOs have the tradition of organising and facilitating the poor in achieving their sustained growth and development. In view of the particular emphasis of this paper on the dynamics of labour relations in RWP and FWP, it requires interfacing of these programmes with the institution-building approaches of NGOs. Pertinently, there is evidence that existing labour relations cannot be changed until the labouring poor are empowered, to the extent that they can act as a countervailing force against oppressive and exploitative labour relations. Therefore an issue of concern here is to what extent NGO approaches to institution-building contribute to empowerment of the labouring poor; this will be discussed in the next section.

7.2 NGO Approaches Towards Institution-Building: Empowerment Perspective

It is well-known that NGOs emerged with a "welfarist" approach characterized by relief and rehabilitation character. However, within a few years of its independence, NGOs in Bangladesh have made a dramatic shift towards a development-oriented philosophy resulting in the practice of community development approaches. During the journey of development activities, NGOs have further sharpened their ideology with the understanding and necessity of people-centredness. From the second half of the 1970s

onwards, NGOs started to bring about a distinction in their policy: a thematic move from 'community' to 'target group' approach to development (Streefland et al.:1989:3).

Thus, the 'target group' approach of the NGO development-paradigm has further facilitated building up viable institution of the poor. But despite convergence of approaches towards targeting the poor, there have been also divergences among the NGOs in terms of vision towards institution-building. Thus, institution-building efforts of NGOs are geared to two-pronged goals: (i) to reach the rural poor effectively with material support and (ii) to strengthen the weaker section of the population by conscientizing them and increasing their unity so as to achieve the broader goal of changing their condition through concerted action. With the passage of time these two-fold goals have eventually generated two contending approaches towards institution-building:

- a. Combined approach of conscientization and Employment and Income-Generation (EIG) activities by providing material support.
- b. Single-stranded approach of conscientization without any material support.

While the former envisages organisation or institution-building as a means, the latter one conceives as a goal in itself (Shahabuddin:1988:63). However, despite this difference in approach, a common thread which is more pronounced has been that irrespective of these differences, NGOs are analysing the structural dynamics of the poverty situation and the positioning of the poor in the structure of exploitation, as well as envisioning a way out in a similar fashion. In doing away with the exploitative structure and thus changing the condition of the poor, NGOs commonly envision empowerment of the poor as the vehicle to this end. And to reach this end, they share the common trend of establishing two-tier institutions i.e. primary organisations and broad-based apex organisation or federations.

Thus, all the institution-building exercises of NGOs are geared to the empowerment of the poor, either only in the social/political or in a combination of economic and social/political dimensions. But again the question arises, what kind of empowerment is realistic for the sustained growth of institutions, through which changes in the lives of the poor can be

brought about.

With respect to socio-political empowerment characterized by a mobilization²² or confrontational model, the organisation of the poor has to build up alliances with progressive political institutions. However, this strategy, instead of resulting in political empowerment, is more likely to use these institutions for narrow objectives of particular political factions and thus divide the poor in various segments. Consequently, efforts of political empowerment will become unsustainable; here reference can be made to the failure of Nijera Kori, one of the national NGOs in Bangladesh, which could not succeed with a purely confrontational model (Ibid:81).

Besides, given the rural structural setting, it is suicidal to go ahead with only social/political empowerment. Empowerment through mobilization will simply irritate the existing power structure comprised of rural patrons, local officials and macro level bureaucrats and elites, resulting in the demise of all institutional efforts, as has been outlined by Benjamin White as follows.

"Efforts at mobilization, therefore, are conflict ridden, prone to obstruction and sabotage from powerful elements in society whose interest lies in the status quo; when they show signs of success or growth for example, when an isolated pilot project threatens to evolve into a large scale movement they are often vigorously opposed by government bureaucracies" (White:1987:67-68).

What is more serious is that the poor get frustrated with the spirit of institution-building, when faced with a dangerous situation caused by the local rich allied with other power groups who react against the mobilization efforts.

Considering this, it appears more realistic to give equal emphasis to both economic aspects and social aspects of empowerment. Economic empowerment resulting from economic interventions i.e. income-generating activities would bring about a breakdown of their economic dependency, and in turn help change

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The concept "mobilization" has different connotations. It is conceptualised from the political ground as well as simple development perspective or both. As a phenomena, it is conceived as an instrument to bring about change in the participant's objective condition of living whereby social education is considered as an entry point in its process. Mobilization, in broad sense is used for demonstration in support of resistance against certain development policy bringing about a change in the subjective level. Shahabuddin (1988) referring to Hassan (1983) catalogues three types of mobilization: (i) Bourgeois mobilization (ii) Revolutionary mobilization and (iii) NGO or development-oriented mobilization.

their position in society and hence result in social empowerment. It is a mutually reinforcing process in the sense that social empowerment caused by economic intervention further enhances the economic empowerment of the poor.

Specifying four basic elements²³ for empowerment, Lankshear (1994) states that economic activities initially provides the poor people power in terms of their employment, determination of tasks, control over distribution of benefits; it also allows to go through the broader economic power, its relational and structural characteristics which can be understood from this simple capital accumulation process initiated by themselves. He also mentions that this process simultaneously helps the poor to understand some other social dynamics in which the economic power is embedded.

This in effect, provide them with the scope to undertake plan of action which leads towards empowerment ranging 'over improved standard of living, enhanced experience of control, a stronger sense of economic security, higher level of personal fulfilment and so on (pp. 166, 179-182).

Although economic intervention is criticised in the sense that it may isolate the poor, but this combined strategy of empowerment does not consider economic activities as an end in itself but rather as a means to reach the broader end objective of political empowerment. McKee (1989) quoting Tendler and Stears outlines the viability of this strategy by referring to the example of SEWA in the context of India and BRAC in the context of Bangladesh. SEWA started its activities with a credit programme and gradually in this process branched out to related sectoral and social issues and strengthened the primary institutions/cooperatives and federations in different trades, in keeping with ongoing Employment and Income-Generating (EIG) activities (Rose:1992:..).

The empowerment perspective in NGDO approaches to institution-building discussed so far, suggests that given the rural structural arrangement, a combined strategy of EIG and conscientization allows the poor to create the space for gradually making them economically more self-reliant; this in turn provides them with institutional strength and the room for manoeuvring on

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In elucidating statement of empowerment, Lankshear specifies values for A-D against four variables in a schematic form. The schema is like following: A (subject) is empowered in respect of B (some aspect of the discursive structuring of power) by/through C (a process or quality) such that D (a valued end or outcome) ensues.

various social issues. To what extent this strategy contributes to changes in the lives of the labourers involved in RWP and FWP, will be discussed next.

7.3 Empowerment Implications for Changes in the Labour Relations in the Rural Works Programme and the Food for Works Programme

A combined empowerment strategy of EIG and conscientization as described above, has implications for RWP and FWP operations. It has become evident from the fourth chapter that unlike other sectors, the rural labourers in the field of RWP and FWP are exposed to a tied labour market which does not permit them the 'voice' option except 'exit' and 'loyalty'. It is also an imperative conclusion that existing labour relations cannot be changed until and unless the labourers acquire a 'voice' and hence are turned into claimants in terms of their rights. In doing so, there should be a parallel platform of the labourers which would act as an alternative to the existing system, and gradually help them to gain access to the institutions delivering development resources.

But this is subject to a breakthrough in the dependency relationship which has been developed through interlinked transactions between the labourers and the concerned authorities implementing RWP and FWP. The combined strategy of EIG and conscientization has a potential in this regard. The formation of groups centering around EIG activities would primarily make the labouring poor independent of the interlinked transactions with the contractors and the *sardars* who play the role of money-lenders in RWP and FWP operations. In this process of EIG activities, on the one hand, they, will go through group dynamics which creates room for discussing non-economic issues affecting their economic lives, and thus helps them to critically analyze such issues from a wider social perspective. On the other hand, being exposed to wider society through economic activities, they will gain confidence about their skills and capabilities. Besides, collective efforts ventured by the groups will create a safety net for the poor themselves and thus help remove their vulnerability to employment which they have to experience being exposed to dependency relationships.

Moreover, once the labouring poor are able to achieve greater financial self-reliance caused by economic intervention, they will have a better footing to claim their rights and ensure their participation through gaining access to the institutions delivering rural employment programmes. Eventually, the

process would lead them to establish a change characterized by parallel mechanism in implementing RWP and FWP operations so as to counter existing labour relations. How the institution-building efforts have brought about this change in the labour relations in RWP and FWP is illustrated in two cases discussed below. Of the two, one includes experience of India which is representative of South Asian region; the other one illustrates the case of a Bangladeshi NGDO.

7.4 Change in Labour Relations

7.4.1 The Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) in India

The Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) evolved out of relief programme as a response to severe drought during 1971-72 to 1973-74 which rendered a large number of jobless in the rural areas. Initially, a number of adhoc schemes in rural Maharashtra were drawn up for providing the draught affected poor with 'crash employment' on 'food for work' basis so as to meet their immediate requirements (Acharya:1990-91:5).

In the mid-seventies, the Government of India launched an experiment called Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Programme (PIREP) in 15 states, with the aim to facilitate poor in creating durable assets and to train them in low skills jobs for this purpose. Successfulness of this experiment created an avenue to establish a process of guaranteed employment for the poor in rural Maharashtra. Consequently, Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (MEGS) came into being through an act of state assembly passed in 1978, which was considered as statutory programme of the state government for providing work on demand. The act explicitly recognised the right to work for every adult aged 18 and above in the rural areas of the state. However, for the households which have no person of that age group were also entitled to employment. Thus, under the guaranteed provision of MEGS, persons of the abovementioned category requiring job are expected to register himself/herself with the Revenue departments' outlets at the local level. The act promulgates that the employment has to be provided to the job-seeker within 15 days of his/her registration. In case of failure to provide job, the job-seeker, under the act should be compensated by unemployment allowance of Rs. 2 per day.

The MEGS includes twin objectives: the guarantee of employment and improvement of rural infrastructure. To ascertain these objectives, the issue of employment guarantee is dealt by revenue department while technical departments are responsible in respect of infrastructural development. Thus, having responsibilities divided into two wings, MEGS is implemented through a three-tier administrative system: at the state level, at the district level and at the tehsil (block) level (Hirway and Terhal:1994:107).

The employment project starts with the requirement of a reasonable number (at least 50 persons) of job-seekers who have already registered themselves at the local revenue office. Based on the application of these job-seekers, the *tehsilder* prepares a list of project proposals and sends it to technical department for release of funds for those projects.

To make this employment arrangement more participatory, representative and result-oriented, there has been a statutory committee at three levels: at the state level, at the District level and at the tehsil level. At the state level, the committee known as 'State Council', appointed by the Government, is comprised of elected representatives from the state assembly, other local bodies and some eminent public figures. In this body, at least two members come from backward castes.

Government also appoints District Employment Guarantee Committee at the district level and Panchayat Samiti Employment Guarantee Committee in every tehsil level. Representation of these two committees are exclusively meant for the backward castes and workers/union of workers and women. These two committees are expected to supervise and review the implementation of the schemes and suggest measures to the State Council and the Government for suitable action to be taken up for the improvement of EGS.

Despite the representation of the poor people in the committees and guaranteed nature, initially, employment under EGS arrangement was not gainful to the poor workers due to low wages. In the beginning the EGS rate was kept lower than the agricultural rate with the notion that the sector will fall short of supply. In fact, the lower rate had been the resultant fact of the rich landlord's lobby which was intended to keep the workers under their control.

Nevertheless, within the EGS framework, the poor workers gradually established their own platform with a view to addressing their issues as well as realising them. There had been a large number of independent organisations operating within EGS arrangement. However, the involvement in the EGS activities made the workers realise that the situation of the labourers can not be changed until and unless they are organised with a broader unity.

This realisation eventually led to the formation of a broad based group of EGS workers. In 1981, a state level apex organisation called 'Maharashtra Rajya Shetmazdoor and Employment Guarantee Scheme Workers Samanvay Samiti',²⁴ was formed under the initiative of two major agricultural workers' organisations namely, 'Shetkari Shetmazdoor Panchayat'. This umbrella organisation empowered the workers in relation to voice out their concerns and make them effective by various social actions such as strikes, agitation, conference, meeting, 'fill in the jails' movement etc. These social action measures resulted in change in the condition of EGS workers.

In 1983 four major agitations involving strikes and demonstrations compelled the Government to raise the minimum level to Rs. 6 from Rs. 3 which was previously fixed for the interest of the rich landlords. Latter on in 1987, minimum wage was raised further to 12 Rs. linking it to the cost of living. Besides, public demonstrations and meetings organised by the apex body of the workers has brought about positive policy changes in favour of the female workers in terms of maternity benefit (Acharya:1990:75-76).

Apart from the issues internal to the EGS framework, the organised effort of the EGS workers made successful intervention in terms of widening the scope of EGS in others sectors. For example, as a result of strikes and workers movements, EGS was extended to the unskilled components of major irrigation projects. Besides, paddy binding works were brought under EGS.

The case of EGS illustrated above evidences that organisation-building of the poor is of crucial importance for changes in the lives of the poor. The lessons learned from the case so far imply the fact that organised effort of the poor can result in intervention in the traditional labour market. The

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In literal sense it means, Maharashtra State Agricultural Labourers' and EGS Workers' Coordination Committee.

specificity of the case has been that the organised workers made this intervention by creating their access to the GOs providing employment.

There has been another case of intervention whereby the poor, instead of creating their access to local Government body, has established a parallel institution for taking over the responsibilities of the employment projects by themselves. The case of intervention as such is illustrated below.

7.4.2 The Case of Labour Contracting Society (LCS) in Bangladesh

7.4.2a Background

The praxis of the Labour Contracting Society (LCS), an institutional innovation, came into existence as a result of the participatory rural development process endeavoured by PROSHIKA, a national NGDO in Bangladesh. And to be more clear, LCS did not emerge as a separate event, but rather as a consequence of overall understanding of development practices characterized by combined income generation and conscientization process. In other words, it has been developed from the experience of ongoing development activities targeted on the poor. It is to be noted here that the idea of LCS was initially borrowed from the experience of EGS. Latter on, EGS experiences had been blended with PROSHIKA development strategy.

Since late 70s, PROSHIKA has been endeavouring to contribute to the development of the rural poor and recently of the urban poor. The very understanding of PROSHIKA has been that the socio-economic upliftment of the poor is very much subject to their own critical understanding of social reality and taking organised action in reshaping that reality (PROSHIKA, Annual Report, 1981 in Shahabuddin:1988:72). In doing so, PROSHIKA finds a strong linkage between material independence, to a certain degree, and local unity, in the sense that this combination will assist the poor in counteracting the structures responsible for their poverty such as wage rates, tenant shares, interest rates, concentrated access to land, water, other means of production, production skills, education and health (Kramsjo and Wood:1992:30).

The development strategy of PROSHIKA thus encapsulates a mutual reinforcement of both income-generation activities and organisation-building which comprises three interrelated components in an organic whole: (i) Organisation-building

of the rural poor (ii) Employment and income-generation (EIG) and (iii) Development education. During the process of group maturation both in terms of economic venture and social action programmes, PROSHIKA emphasises the growing encompassing organisations of the poor ranging from village level to Thana level which are linked to one another.

These broader or greater organisations are deemed necessary to consolidate the institutions of the poor at primary level which will provide leverage to pursue greater demands and achieve them. In pursuit of all these understandings, participatory action research programmes, as a tool for analysing developmental problem and finding out the solution, has been very much in practice. This action research process of the poor has resulted in some institutional innovations. Among others, LCS has been one of the important innovation.

7.4.2b History

Besides, other income-generating activities ventured by themselves with the help of PROSHIKA, the organised groups had been involved in the implementation of Rural Works Programmes. During their involvement in such programmes they experienced the exploitation of PCs in the programme implementation which led them to analyze causal relations and think about alternatives. Thus, being disappointed with the PC activities, organised groups, who had been working as labourers, became critical about the management of PCs and the subordinated position of labourers resulting from the influence of PC members and hence the exclusion of the participation of the organised groups.

This criticism raised the fundamental question of the participation of the poor at the policy level as emphasised in the IRWP plan of operation. In other words, the operational arrangements were questioned in relation to the whole concept of PC as an effective instrument for community participation and scheme implementation (Shahabuddin and Khan:1983:100).

Moreover, with a view to eliminating intermediaries and ensuring the participative management of labourers themselves in the scheme operation, the organised group members had been demanding a direct contract of IRWP scheme work with themselves. In response to this, two alternative mechanisms have been developed within IRWP's operational framework. Of the two, one way attempts to ensure labour rights through an "improved wage system", while the

other consisted of the formation of a Shadow Project Committee (SPC).

The "Improved wage system" was characterized by the modification of the contracting system: contractors are expected to ensure payment of the stipulated wage rates to the labourers. This approach was tried out in the Delta Development Project (DDP) during 1982-84 under BWDB (Chowdhury:1994:40).

However, this approach was premised on the narrow objective of ensuring the wage rate, rather than on the participation of the labourers in the management of operations. And thus it experienced a haltage in the way work schemes were carried out. The SPC (for details on SPC, please see appendix-C) comprised of labour representatives, was designed to protect the interests of the workers and was expected to play the role of watchdog on the activities of the PC during scheme implementation. The underlying objective of the experimentation of this approach was to explore and establish a viable mediating institution capable of providing legal protection to the labourers.

To achieve this, an action research was conducted by PROSHIKA involving its organised groups. During the action research process, evidence came out that the convergence of common interests between government officials, local bodies and power-elites is reflected in the misappropriation of funds through cheating and trickery and that this had become characteristic of the scheme's operations. The most crucial problem was that this action research reinforced the socio-cultural cohesion on the part of the vested interest groups, and on the other hand the experimentation was hampered by the various powerful allies involved (Shahabuddin and Khan:1986:35).

The lessons learned from the action research provided the organised groups with the idea that neither incorporation nor an intermediate set up between the labourers and the PC suffices to protect the interests of the labourers. Once this became clear from the study findings, it created a room for the organised group members to negotiate at the policy level and ensure their participation as the IRWP is meant for. Thus, with the help of PROSHIKA, organised group members proposed the direct access of organised labouring groups through the establishment of separate implementing body parallel to the PC, which would comprise full-fledged labourers, so that the operation of schemes would be completely managed by themselves without any intermediaries.

The alternative proposed as constituted by only labouring poor, was identified as the "Labour Contracting Society" (LCS). Initially, the proposed LCS was confronted by the UP leaders on the ground that the poor people are inefficient and incapable of managing scheme works by themselves. However, the LCS proposed for an experimental stage to prove its comparative worthiness in terms of scheme implementation. The spectacular success of LCS during this experimental stage has received attention at the policy level. As a result of policy development in Rural Works Programme, the LCS model is gradually being replicated on a significant scale.

By now, eight NGOs of different categories, apart from their general activities of institution-building, are involved in forming LCS with the particular orientation towards the implementation of work schemes. They include Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), PROSHIKA, Friends in Village Development (FIVDB), Association for Social Advancement (ASA), Association for Village Advancement (AVA), Jagorani Chakra (JC), Gono Kalyan Kendra (GKK) and Bittaheen Vaggya Unnayan Sangstha (BIVAUS). The LCS activities of these organisations are organised in the light of policy changes in the operational framework which remains to be discussed here.

7.4.2c Organisation of LCS Activities

The core of work scheme can be catalogued into four major areas such as contract procedure, mode of payment, training, supervision and monitoring. The changes of emphasis made in favour of LCS and smooth running of their activities are organised around these four areas.

Regarding scheme work, a contract is signed between the institution delivering the programme and the LCS. As per policy, LCSs are enlisted as "D" class contractors; they will be allotted work at current work schedule rates, without any participation in open tender procedures. Besides, they do not have to pay pre-work guarantee money like traditional contractors. With respect to entitlement, LCSs receive 25 to 50 per cent of the total amount of earthwork (Chowdhury:1994:50). Work entitlements of LCSs in BWDB scheme operation is up to a worth of Tk. 3 lac.

However, in case of LGED, the volume of contract of earthwork allotted to LCS does not exceed the worth of Tk. 1 lac. LCS activities are concentrated in two

largest field i.e. construction and maintenance where the contract amount is paid to them in three instalments.

The first instalment is meant for starting work which is paid in the form of "mobilization advance" which covers 25 per cent value of the work. The payment of second instalment is subject to the completion of 50 per cent work while third instalment is paid upon the completion of 100 per cent work. It is to be noted here that LCSs organised by the BINGOs (Big NGOs) do not require mobilization advance as these LCS groups are usually more advanced and capable of financing themselves from their group fund already mobilized at least until second instalment.

Another aspect within the whole LCS operation involves training. The training is imparted by the concerned institutions responsible for implementation of Works Programme like LGED and BWDB. The training covers social awareness and management of work with particular emphasis on technical aspects of the work. The technical part of the training is supported by the engineering staff while the social awareness and management aspect is dealt by socio-economic staff of the institutions mentioned.

Monitoring of activities has been another area of LCS operation. Like training, monitoring activities of two kind i.e. technical and socio-economic, are performed by the engineering staff and socio-economic staff respectively. Apart from this, the NGDOs, whom LCSs are affiliated with, monitor and facilitate the activities within the purview of their regular activities of group monitoring and group visits.

Besides, group size and group management is an important part of LCS work process. Usually, the size of LCS group ranges from 30 to 100 members. With a view to operating the management of works smoothly, the members of the group elect one group leader and three to ten sub-group leaders. The group leader is responsible for the work of the whole group, including contractual obligations with the institutions contracting-out the work scheme to the LCS; the sub-group leader is responsible for the work under his or her supervision of ten to twelve members.

It is important to note here that the concept and practice of leadership is distinctive from the way it is traditionally perceived and practised. Thus,

irrespective of leadership status in the group, all the LCS members participate in the earthwork with few exceptions where in spite of willingness, locational peculiarities hardly allow leaders to participate in the earthwork after having performed monitoring and supervision role.

The abovementioned descriptions of LCS as an innovation in the field of RWP operation indicates that the institutional effort of the labourers have established a parallel system to the traditional PC, bypassing the intermediaries and hence exploitative mechanism retained by them. The question arises as to what extent this institutional innovation makes a difference in terms of labour relations works programme. In this effort, a comparative labour relations scenario will be described in the next section.

7.5 Comparative Labour Relations

It has been evidenced in the previous chapter that the dominant labour relations maintained by the convergence of interests of various power allies is characteristic of dependency relations where the labourers are shackled at every stages of RWP and FWP scheme operations; from labour mobilization to wage payment. The institutional innovation of LCS in the field of RWP has made a shift in this dominant paradigm resulting in changes in the mode of labour relations.

In practical life situation, the issue of labour relations is itself of a varied nature and it is thus difficult to present a clear-cut and comprehensive picture of it. However, the key features as analyzed in the previous chapter provide the base upon which a comparative analysis can be tried out putting the new paradigm i.e. LCS into the context.

Regarding the wage, it has been already noted and also illustrated in the figure that under dominant labour relations maintained by the PC, the labourers are underpaid with a significant proportion. On the contrary, wage rate under the operational management of LCS is distinctively higher than that of PC. This comparative scenario can be substantiated from the table (see next page) on differential wage information of work schemes under LGED and BWDB.

Table 4: Comparative Scenario of Wage Rates Received by LCS and Non-LCS Labourers in 1992-93.

Name of Implementing Agency and the Categories of Labourers	Average Daily Wage (Tk.)		
	LCS Labourers	Non-LCS Labourers	LCS Increment over Non-LCS Local Wages
LGED			
Male	52	30-40	30%
Female			
BWDB			
Male	70	30-40	75%
Female	38	15-20	90%

Source: A.K.M. Alamgir Chowdhury, Countering Landlessness and Poverty in Rural Bangladesh: Experiments with Landless Contracting Societies, 1994, LGED, 1994 and own estimate for BWDB, 1994.

The above table shows that irrespective of gender, the wage rate received by the LCS labourers is substantially higher than Non-LCS labourers. The rate of increment in the wage is again characteristic of differential in terms of implementing agency. The percentage of LCS increment of wage over the Non-LCS ranges between 30 to 35 per cent in case of LGED programme while it is between 75 and 90 per cent in BWDB programme areas.

From this significant difference in wages between LCS and Non-LCS labourers, it can be argued that the differentials have been the result of concerted intervention made by the establishment of LCS in the field of work scheme.

More importantly, the existence of LCS in the scheme operation has spill-over effects on other labourers working under contractors regarding social awareness, precisely of the wage rate. These labourers, due lack of unity and awareness about the stipulated wage rate, usually fall victim to cheating by the traditional contractors. LCS-led operations in the same locality or neighbouring areas keep these labourers informed about the wage rate and inspire them to get organised and at least create a platform for bargaining with the contractors. This can be illustrated from the following example of a wage labourer who worked under traditional contractor.

Example: 1

Kolimuddin, village Jain Kati under the district Patuakhali is a wage labourer and mainly works as agricultural labourer and earth cutting work in the nearby villages. He observed that the LCS receive the work from BWDB @ Tk. 500 per cft. of earth-work. He motivated his fellow workers not to work with the contractor unless the contractor offers a reasonable rate. He expressed his view "...we are the local labourers. LCS labourers are working @ Tk. 500; contractor must offer us a reasonable rate; he can not cheat us, otherwise we shall see who works for contractor.....".

Source: A.K.M. Chowdhury, Countering Landlessness and Poverty in Rural Bangladesh: Experiments with Landless Contracting Societies, 1994, pp. 58

Regarding composition of labour force, it has already been noted that in case of FWP labourers on average 14.7 per cent constitute migrants while in some specific areas this proportion is quite high which amounts to 70 per cent. On the contrary, labour force does not constitute migrant labourers, because the very formation of LCS is based on occupation and geographical proximity. As a result, while the local labourers under contractor lose their bargaining power due to oversupply of labourers caused by the recruitment of migrant labourers, the LCS labourers are faced with this labour market segmentation.

It has been noted elsewhere in the chapter that under the dominant labour relations maintained by the PC, labourers enter to a chain of dependency through interlinked transactions through credit and labour which in effect perpetuate their continued economic vulnerability. Under the LCS operation, labourers are able to break the chains of dependency on the PC members, sardars and contractors.

Although there is dearth of hard data on this, their breakthrough especially in credit dependency can be substantiated indirectly by the investment capacity of the labourers which resulted from income through LCS involvement; this would have not been possible under the control of contractor or *sardars*. This can be illustrated from the example below:

Example: 2

A total number of 168 labourers from two organised LCS took part in a project (polder No. 43/2E) at Patuakhali during 1988-89 financial year. After the successful completion of the project, each labourers got Tk. 70 as a daily wage which was in fact above of the wage rate fixed by the government. So, whatever was saved, they invested the amount for buying cattle and in small business.

Source: Agar Ali Sabra and Shibu Kanti Das, A Report on the Workshop Entitled "The Sharing of Experience of Landless Contracting Society", 1990, pp. 6.

Sometimes, dependency is created by interlinkage of both land and credit through mortgaging system. Another case of a female member illustrated below indicates how she was able to redeem mortgaged land from a rich landlord creditor as a consequence of LCS intervention.

Example: 3

Hazera Begum, village Shakpaldia under the district of Faridpur is an widow with two daughters and one son. She had a small 'jhupri' (temporary shelter made of leaves/straw and waste plastic sheets) on her neighbour's land. Last year, she joined an LCS and received the final payment of Tk. 2100 and released the mortgaged land with that money. This year, she is expecting to receive a similar amount and is planning to build her new shelter on that land. She expressed herself " last year I released my land, this year I shall build our own home there".

Source: A.K.M. Chowdhury, Countering the Landlessness and poverty in Rural Bangladesh: Experiments with Landless Contracting Societies, 1994, pp. 56.

7.6 Summing up

Empirical evidence shows that NGOs deserve the credibility in facilitating institution-building among the poor. Despite the fact that irrespective of the scale of activities, institution-building activities of NGOs are converged into a common vision i.e. the empowerment of the poor, however, mission activities differs according to the ideological underpinnings of particular NGOs. Nevertheless, having been traversed a long way in development activities, NGOs in general has experienced the reality that in way of

achieving empowerment, institution-building should be directed towards a pragmatic way rather than revolutionary fashion. The case of LCS has been indicative of the pragmatic effort in translating institution-building efforts into the action towards empowerment which has introduced a breakthrough in the existing labour relations in RWP and FWP works schemes.

Alternative model as such, again, is not the end of the institution-building process. While LCS as an alternative to the PC has been recognised in the macro policy-decision and thus given the room for taking responsibility of work schemes by themselves, it has not yet significantly replaced the 'traditional system'. Therefore, in the face of bureaucratic forces and their allies in the rural areas, LCS has to be streamlined being well-networked in a wider perspective on the question of its sustainability and growth. The sustainability considerations will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion throughout the chapters reveals the fact that RWP and FWP within the mainstream rural employment programmes, despite serious attempts to channel resources to the poor and thus create a gainful employment for them, have not been able to realise their envisioned objectives. No doubt, the 'target group' approach as a strategy can to a great extent ensure the benefits of the poor people.

However, when it is translated into action, the approach has to be articulated with the context in which the poor people are situated. Given the patron-client relationship in the rural Bangladesh characterized by interlinked transactions of land, credit and labour, the poor people are socially, economically and politically dependent on the rich landlords. This relationship on the one hand allows the landlords to extend their control over other resources and thus exercise the power through their dominance in various rural institutions, precisely the local government. On the other hand, the dependency syndrome does not allow the poor people to directly participate and take control over any venture by themselves.

As a result, targeting the poor and encouraging their participation within this structural setting has simply made a shift of clientalism of the poor to the employment programmes like RWP and FWP. And this has accordingly reproduced traditional labour relations where the rich people being in the rural power structure control labour process and enjoy the leverage to exploit them in connivance with various power-blocs. In other words, instead of participation, rural poor have been turned into recipients and thus RWP and FWP arrangements, precisely the operations of these two programmes through local government bodies and other agents have resulted in merely a service delivery mechanism.

What lacks in the design of RWP and FWP is the empowering mechanism which would develop the capacity of the poor to establish themselves a countervailing force to the traditional rural power structure dominated by landowning class. Indeed, convergence of bureaucratic interests with the rural power allies does not provide them with this ideological orientation. This is

reflected in the chapter five as to how the convergence of interests of rural patrons, urban elites and bureaucratic professionals marginalises the participation of the rural poor and in effect disempowers them.

Given this situation, the poor people have to be organised by themselves if any breakthrough in the existing labour relations in RWP and FWP is to take place. This has been evidenced from the case study of LCS where the rural poor have turned themselves from mere labourers into claimants.

There is no denying the fact that the role of LCS in the field of RWP and FWP is not very much significant in changing the condition of life and livelihood of the rural poor. Because, these two programmes being seasonal in nature can not suffice to the guaranteed provision of employment for the periods when the works schemes are not in operation. But the concept of LCS, although rooted in the involvement of the rural poor within RWP framework, is essentially geared towards empowerment of the poor in a wider perspective. Indeed, the theorisation of LCS is embedded in the holistic understanding of the society which implies that given the structure of exploitation, whatever the nature of employment may be, the poor people are subject to exploitation and repression unless they are empowered to the extent they can counteract to that structure.

From the view point of this theoretical underpinning, LCS model is also being tried out recently in other sectors of rural employment with the notion that replication of this model would help the poor people to guarantee employment in all possible sectors. For example, the Department of Forest is planning to implement some of its projects through private initiative. Usually, project implementation as such is supposed to be dealt by well-off people while the poor people are thought to be unqualified, inefficient and incapable of handling the technicalities of the projects.

However, the achievement of LCS in RWP has already drawn the attention of the government and demythologized these prejudices about the capability of the poor. Thus, as a result of its spectacular success in organising the poor in RWP, Proshika has been recently commissioned by the government to formulate a design for the replication of LCS model in social forestry programmes.

Despite the success in terms of capacity-building of the poor, quality of infrastructure, development of leadership and management skills, there are some crucial issues which demand serious concern for the sustainability of LCS. Amongst them, some issues are practical while others are strategic in nature.

Regarding practical issues, some documents on the experiences of LCS activities outline the problems encountered by the LCS members which are related to the implementation of scheme works. These involve mainly three issues: allotment of reaches for the LCS which are not economically and technically viable, delayed work order for the works schemes and delay in final payment of bill to the LCS (Sabri and Das:1990).

One of the important strategic issues relates to the lack of absorptive capacity of works schemes available from the perspective of LCS. In the last workshop on LCS, 1993 held in Comilla, it was clearly expounded by BWDB officials that compared to the huge volume of works programme the supply response of LCS is inadequate to realise even 25 per cent of the total earth work which is reserved for LCS (EIP:1993). However, it does not imply that the significant number of LCS is not existent so far to meet the demand of BWDB. In fact, there are some procedural complications which are responsible for this.

The process of scheme implementation is followed by a tripartite relations which involve LCS/NGDO, Government Organisation (Bangladesh Water Development Board/LGRD) and the donor agency. While LCS/NGDOs correspondence goes on with the donors in terms of submission of project proposal, the government organisation (GO) approves the project proposal and gives allotment of work. This segmentation of project planning and decision between the GO and donor results in lengthy processes. As a result, often, GO circular regarding the approval of the project allows very little time which incapacitates LCSs to go through contractual procedures.

Given the constraints, both of practical and strategic nature, some attempts should be made for the sustainability of LCS in particular and thus exploring and expanding the horizon of rural employment in general. With regard to take measures, the key area of intervention has been strategic issues which would

accordingly solve practical problems.

First, instead of tripartite relations as mentioned above there should be direct contract between the GO and LCS/NGDOs so as to accelerate the implementation process. This will help remove procedural complications and allow LCSs sufficient time to go through procedural arrangements and thus adequately respond to the need of works schemes.

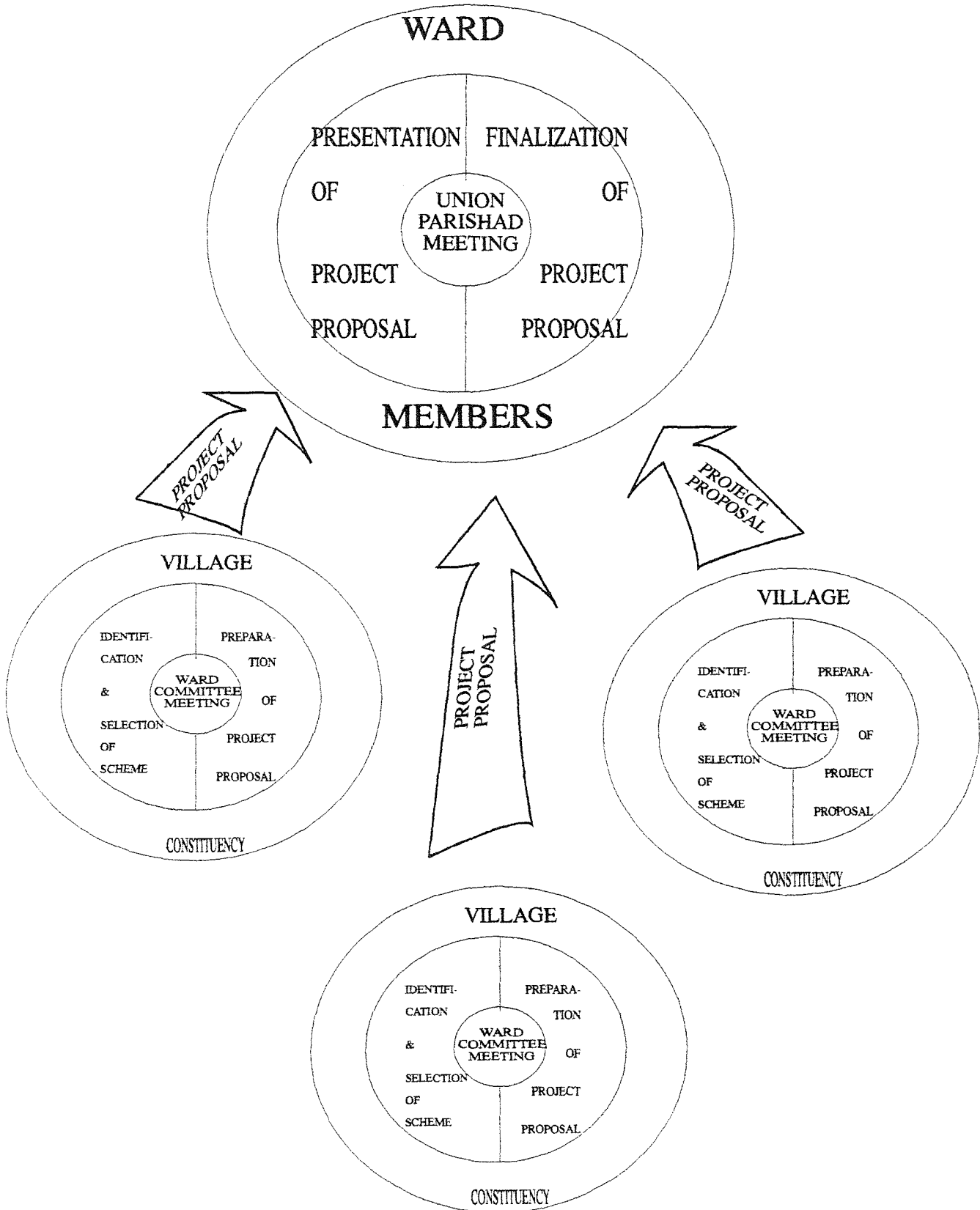
Second, related to the practical issues including procedural arrangement, there should be a system of co-ordination between GO and LCS/NGDOs. To be precise, there should be a regular forum or working group consisting of NGDOs, LCS representative and the GO representative based on the work season so that project planning and implementation process can be enhanced. Apart from this, the forum would help to discuss ongoing problems related to LCS activities.

Third, while the abovementioned micro level forum is meant for the solution of practical and immediate problems, there should be a coalition of NGDOs at the macro level. This coalition should be used as a platform to lobby with GO for changes in the policy-decisions which would favour the rural poor in general and LCS in particular. While the major emphasis of the coalition should be macro level policy influence, it should simultaneously address the practical problems concerning the issues like delayed work order, allotment of inconvenient reaches for LCS, delay in payment of final bills etc.

Fourth, there should be a direct agreement between the GO and LCS/NGDOs instead of with the donors. This will facilitate scheme implementation process and help avoid complications regarding the modalities of work schemes.

Last but not least, LCS has been in operation under RWP and FWP framework for about a decade. Since then there has been no comprehensive study about the impact of LCS concerning the socio-economic implications, institutional aspects and its significance in terms of exploring the potentials in other sectors of rural employment. The paper therefore, underlies the scope and the need for a policy study focusing on the LCS model which could help streamline the existing rural employment programme and formulate a viable policy to this end.

A FLOW DIAGRAM ON PROJECT PLANNING
 PROCESS IN THE RURAL WORKS PROGRAMME
 AND THE FOOD FOR WORK PROGRAM



APPENDIX-B

TABLE V.4

WAGE RATES IN RELATION TO ENTITLEMENTS

THANA	AGENCY	WAGE RATE PER 1000	STIPULATED *WAGE RATE	RATE OF* UNDERPAYMENT (per cent) [4-3/4x100]	STIPULATED WAGE RATE OF WFP	RATE OF** UNDERPAYMENT [6-3/6x100]
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Natore	WDB	52.3	57.94	-9.73	34.7	+151.0
Jaldhaka	WDB	22.08	na.	—	—	—
Sujanagar	WDB	42.16	na.	—	—	—
Joypurhat	WDB	41.22	47.75	-13.68	47.7	-14.0
Dakupi	WDB	42.33	59.17	-28.46	—	—
Asasuni	WDB	41.88	50.15	-16.49	48.0	-15.0
Charfasson	WDB	33.6	83.88	-59.94	71.9	-53.0
Hizla	WDB	45.0	62.33	-27.80	58.6	-23.0
Mirpur	WDB	42.0	66.19	-36.55	57.6	-27.0
Alamdanga	WDB	37.5	48.0	-21.88	38.1	+2.0
Barguna	WDB	42.5	70.3	-39.55	63.4	-33.0
Jhikergacha	WDB	na.	—	—	—	—
Gaffargaon	WDB	51.8	na.	—	—	—
Boalmari	WDB	40.8	54.73	-25.45	43.4	-6.0
Nalitabari	WDB	42.5	52.06	-18.36	44.0	-3.0
Mirersarai	WDB	30.0	75.65	-60.34	60.2	-50.0
Haimchar	WDB	40.98	57.49	-28.72	46.95	-13.0
Burichang	WDB	46.1	66.0	-30.15	61.60	-25.0
Chunarghat	WDB	41.64	74.33	-43.98	56.76	-27.0
Maulvibazar	WDB	38.28	55.86	-31.47	51.87	-26.0
Laxmipur	WDB	27.7	53.50	-48.22	50.68	-45.0
Parsuram	WDB	42.95	na.	—	—	—
Ulipur	MRR	48.57	50	-2.86	—	—
Thakurgaon	MRR	40.34	50	-19.32	—	—
Sreepur	MRR	44.71	50	-10.58	—	—
Bander	MRR	50.0	50	-0.00	—	—
Nawabganj	MRR	55.0	55	-0.00	—	—
Rajbari	MRR	51.7	50	+3.4	—	—
Raojan	MRR	48.7	55	-11.69	—	—
Madhabpur	MRR	35.08	50	-29.84	—	—
Begumganj	MRR	45.35	55	-17.55	—	—

Note: * Estimated by BIDS from the project proforma for WDB projects.

** Estimated by WFP from col. (4) after adjusting for the percentage of wheat utilized and the percentage of work performed at each WDB executed project site

(Omar Haider Chowdhury, Profile of Workers in the Food-for-Work Programme in Bangladesh, Bangladesh Development Studies, Vol. xi No. 1&2 (special issue).

Shadow Project Committee— Search for an Effective Instrument to Project the Labour Interest

The need an organ like Shadow Project Committee consisting of the Labour representatives only which will act as the protector of labour interest and play the role of watchdog on the activities of the PC during scheme implementation has felt out of the observation and experiences of the implementation process of two major labour intensive schemes (Re-excavation of President canal and Re-excavation of Kumar River).

In both the PCs of the above said two schemes the representation of landless and labouring people was totally refused and the entire work of implementation was dominated by the chairman and the secretary of the respective PC (in both the PCs Up Chairman hold the position of PC Chairman) and some touts unduly engaged by them to supervise handle the labourers.

Both the PC are autocratically formed by the UP Chairman and C.O. (Dev.) without any discussion with anybody in the locality or even with the nominated PC Members themselves. Most of the members of the PC do not even know that they are the members of PC and none of them were involved in implementation process.

Throughout the implementation process labourer's participation and interest were hampered by mishandling and trickery of the PC Chairman, Secretary and the touts engaged by them.

The labourers were effused to have regular payment and due wage. They were not given the daily part payment regularly for their subsistence. Measurement of the earth-cut do not understand the technique and in proper way. As the most of the labourers do not understand the technique and complicity of measurement under-payment through falsification of measurement was the most common technique of exploitation by the PC. In this way labourers had been cheated through different trickery of the PC Chairman and Secretary. Many of the labour sardars collaborated them in this respect and for this the sardars used to get extra money from the PC Chairman.

Due to the ignorance of the labourers about the govt. regulations on RWP, lack of necessary information on the scheme, wage rate etc. lack of self confidence and moreover some of the labourers tried to bargain on wage or demanded timely measurement and due payment, they had been either threatened or pushed out of the work. In kumar River where more than half of the labourers were from organized proshika groups, they tried to mobilize the labourers against the atrocities done by the PC Chairman (they were offered TK. 165/-) per 1000 cft. instead of TK. 200/-, daily part payment were irregular and measurement of the earth cutting were not taken) and to take a collective stand in support of their just demand, they were threaten and had to face the red eye of the touts engaged by the PC Chairman. many of them pushed out of the job and some of them had to face threat of false police case. The Pc Chairman engaged some pet labourers from this own village on daily basis who were loyal to him and were opposed to any organised move of the labourers.

In such situation labour do not even get any support or protection from the government people. It is clear from the experience and observation of the implementation process of the said two schemes that to protect their own interest the labourers have to build their own strength and need to establish their legitimate claim through developing their own organisation.

To counter the misdeeds of PC during implementation they need an organ of their own which will function in parallel to the PC and will stand to ensure their claim through proper implementation of the scheme.

So the concepts of SPC as an integral part of the implementation process of rural work schemes should be recognised. This is also necessary for achieving the target group objective of IRWP.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS ON SPC

Formation Process:

- a. For each scheme there will be one Shadow Project Committee formed with the representatives of the target group people (Landless, marginal farmers, labourers) only.
- b. SPC will consist of 7 members who will be selected by the target group

people-both organized and unorganized of locality.

- c. Members of the training team from IRWP (who will provide training to the labour leaders in locality before the scheme implementation starts) will arrange gathering of the target group people in the locality and through discussion with them will identify the potential labour leaders and at the same time will assist the target group to select their representative in SPC from amongst them. In this selection process, members of the organized groups who are vocal and have the capability of convincing the people of this class will be given priority. In such gathering of target groups people 4 representatives will be selected for SPC.
- d. The remaining 3 members will be selected just after the implementation work starts from within the working labourers sitting in a meeting in the work site will select these 3 representatives in SPC from the potential leaders.
- e. SPC in a meeting can co-opt a local worker, who they trust, as member if they feel it necessary.
- f. SPC will select a chairman from amongst its members.
- g. For the entire working season every one of the SPC member will get compensatory wage on daily basis in accordance with the prevailing labour wage in locality. 50% of these compensatory wage will be given by the working labour groups and the remaining 50% will be provided by IRWP.
- h. After the formation of the SPC its members will be provided with necessary training to equipped then with required skill to perform their role.
- i. On reasonable ground, in special gathering of the labourers in the work site, any member of the SPC can be removed from this position and another person will be included in his place.

Role/Function of SPC:

- a. The SPC is to work for the protection of the interest of the labourers during the scheme implementation.
- b. To play a role of watch dog on the activities of the PC so that the labourers interest and proper implementation of the scheme is ensured.
- c. To look after that the due wage is being paid in time to the labourers by the PC.

- d. To ensure that the earth cutting measurement is properly taken by the PC and receded in register.
- e. In case of any difference or conflict between working labourers and PC registering wage rate, payment, measurement etc. SPC will act as the spokesman of the labourers and will stand for the just claim of the labourers.
- f. To maintain liaison with the local level govt. people, Thana parishad and TDC on behalf of labourers.
- g. To collect necessary information regarding the scheme and provide it to the labourers.
- h. SPC will maintain the following counter-registers.
 - Measurement register
 - Payment register
 - Attendance register of labourers.
- i. To attend the work site weekly meeting of the PC to raise the problems and grievances of the labourers, to obtain information on fund so far received and expenses made, to discuss the problem and progress of the work and to negotiate with PC for probable solution of those.
- j. In cooperation with the PC, SPC will provide work site training on earth cutting measurement to the labourers.
- k. SPC will do necessary motivational work among the labourers and encourage them to get organized into long term functional groups.

(Report on the study on Target Group Participation in Implementation and Operation of Rural Works, Proshika December 1983, P-97.)

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