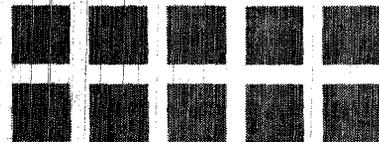


# CHAPTER VII



### LEVEL OF LIVING OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN WEST BENGAL WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO UTTAR DINAJPUR DISTRICT

#### 7.1 Introduction

The agricultural labourers have been leading a very poor economic life. They have small incomes, even not sufficient to meet their basic civic amenities. In virtual sense, their incomes are so meager that they can provide for only a part of minimum subsistence living. They do not have even the minimum clothing, education and medical facilities. Basic needs (BN) include two elements (ILO, 1976). First, they include certain minimum requirements of a household for private consumption: adequate food, shelter and clothing, as well as household equipment and furniture. Second, they include essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, health and education facilities. Our study indicated that the agricultural labourers far below the poverty line in extreme poverty were incapable of buying or producing the minimum food requirements of the basket because of two reasons: low employment availability and low wages, far below the minimum wages prescribed by the government.

Our objective is to study the sources, composition and pattern of income and consumption of agricultural labourers across surveyed villages of Uttar Dinajpur district in West Bengal. In addition, an attempt has been made to study the housing conditions and possession of consumer durables by the agricultural labour households.

#### 7.2 Pattern of Income

The total income of agricultural labour households is a function of the wage rate and number of days of employment. In the prevailing situation of wide spread unemployment and underemployment, the total incomes of agricultural labourers is bound to be low. The Table 7.1 shows that an average agricultural labour household earns annually about Rs. 14235.77 in Uttar Dinajpur district. However, there are considerable variations in the income levels of agricultural labour households across surveyed villages of the district. For example, at *Dharampur* and *Jagatagaon* – villages under least developed blocks, agricultural labourers have recorded highest

annual average income of about Rs. 15520.37 and Rs. 15520.37 from different sources of livelihood. The average annual income of agricultural labourers at *Delwalpur* and *Malon* – villages under highly developed blocks are only Rs. 14667.83 and Rs. 12 773.68. Similarly, the average annual income of agricultural labourers at *Tilna* and *Nakol* – villages under moderately developed blocks are Rs 13581.99 and 13355.42 from different sources of livelihood. The per capita income of an agricultural labourer is worked out to be Rs. 3324.69 at *Jagatagaon* and Rs 3189.12 at *Dharampur* – villages under least developed blocks, Rs. 3235.55 at *Delwalpur* and Rs. 2756.90 at *Malon* – villages under highly developed blocks and Rs. 13581.99 at *Tilna* and Rs.2725.59 at *Nakol* – villages under moderately developed blocks. The average annual income and per capita income is found to be higher in least developed blocks as compared to highly developed blocks and moderately developed blocks. There are some reasons for such variations. At *Dharampur*, about 50 percent of agricultural labourers reported that they migrated to outside state mainly Punjab, Haryana, and Delhi for hiring out their labour in various industries. They stayed there for 5-6 months and earned some money. After 5-6 months, they returned home and again engaged in agriculture. Some labourers reported that they migrated to nearby towns of Dalkhola and Siliguri to work as rickshaw puller and as day labourer in towns and various factories for 5-6 months. The wage rate in non-agricultural activities is higher than the agricultural activities. This has helped to increase the annual income of agricultural labourers in this village. At *Jagatagaon*, 50 percent of the agricultural labourers are engaged in tea garden works for 5-6 months. The wage rate of a tea garden worker is little higher than the wage rate of crop cultivation labourer and did not vary with the seasonal change. The tea garden work also ensures regularity of employment of agricultural labourers for 5-6 months in this village. Some workers also reported that they went outside the state to get the work in various manufacturing industries for 5-6 months. These have helped to increase the average annual income of agricultural labourers of these villages.

The relative shares of individual components of income are given in Table 7.1. It is clear from the Table that the main source of income in the case of an average agricultural labour household is hiring out labour in agricultural sector. As already observed, an average agricultural labour household earns 65.10 percent of the total income from this source in this district. The second important source of income is hiring out labour in non-agricultural sector. About 14.31 percent of the total income is

earned from hiring out labour from non-agricultural sector in this district. The third important source is cultivation (12.75 percent) followed by business and household enterprises (4.36 percent). However, there are some differences in the relative shares of income across surveyed villages of Uttar Dinajpur district. For example, an average agricultural labour household at *Jagatagaon* earns more than 73 percent of total income from hiring out labour in agriculture, more than 16 percent from hiring out labour from non-agriculture sector and only 2.78 percent from self-cultivation. At *Dharampur*, the share of wage income from hiring out labour in agriculture in total income is 51.84 percent, which is lower than all other villages but the share of wage income from hiring out labour from non-agriculture sector in total income is 23.70 percent, which is higher than all other villages of Uttar Dinajpur district. This is due to the fact that 50 percent of agricultural labourers of this village went outside the state for work and engaged in different non-agricultural activities, which ensures higher wage rates. And this village is also located near the Kishanganj town of Bihar state and location of the village increases the scopes of non-agricultural activities, which increases the share of non-agricultural wage income in total income. The share of income from business and household enterprises is recorded highest i. e. 6.31 percent and 6.85 percent at *Delwalpur* and *Nakol*. At these villages, agricultural labourers are engaged in various business activities like the business of rice husking. They purchase paddy from the market and convert it into rice, sale these in the market and earn some profit. At the same time, women labourers supplement their income by producing village hand made goods such as basket or jhuri and Dhokra or mat etc. The share of income from cultivation in total income is the highest (16.58 percent) at *Tilna* followed by *Delwalpur* (16.25 percent), *Dharampur* (15.22 percent) and *Malon* (14.25 percent). This is due to the fact that the share of landed labour households at *Tilna* (60 percent) is higher than other villages of Uttar Dinajpur district. It is clear from the Table that the share of income from self-cultivation is second important source of income at highly developed villages (*Delwalpur* and *Malon*) and moderately villages (*Tilna* and *Nakol*). Though most of the agricultural labourers are landless (table 7.9) in the sample villages of the District, they are now leasing-in land for one crop season from the landlords or employers under fixed rate tenancy system. This enhances the share of income from cultivation in total income of labourers. The system of cultivation under fixed rate tenancy rather than share cropping system is widely prevalent in different villages of Uttar Dinajpur district. Under the share

cropping system, there is risk of recording the name of sharecroppers moreover and the risk of production is borne both by the landowner and sharecroppers. Under such a situation, the landowners are interested to keep their land lying vacant instead of leasing out their land to landless labourers and marginal farmers. But under fixed rate tenancy system, both landowner and agricultural labourers reported that they have benefited under the system. Their income increases, which improves their standard of living. Under this system, the risk of recording the name of agricultural labourers as sharecroppers is less because the landowner lease out their land only for one crop and risk of production is not borne by landowner. This system is more prevalent for *boro* paddy cultivation. The agricultural labourers increase their income by leasing-in land from their employers or from other landowners.

**Table-7.1**  
**Average Annual Household Income Received From Different Sources in Rupees**  
**Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District**

Sources	Delwalpur	Malon	Tilna	Nakol	Dharampur	Jagatagan	All Villages / District
1. From Hiring Out Labour in Agriculture	9132 (62.26)	811.50 (68.98)	8981 (66.12)	9185.50 (68.78)	8045.67 (51.84)	11446.50 (73.78)	9267.03 (65.10)
2 From Self-Cultivation	2383.33 (16.25)	1820.67 (14.25)	2251.33 (16.58)	1640 (12.28)	2362.67 (15.22)	431.67 (2.78)	1814.95 (12.75)
3. From Hiring Out Labour in Non-Agriculture	1748.84 (11.92)	1448.67 (11.34)	1774 (13.06)	1042.83 (7.81)	3678.33 (23.70)	2528 (16.29)	2036.78 (14.31)
4 Business and Household Enterprises	925.33 (6.31)	383.67 (3.00)	250.66 (1.85)	914.96 (6.85)	820.20 (5.28)	429.14 (2.77)	620.66 (4.36)
5. Others	478.33 (3.26)	309.17 (2.42)	325 (2.39)	572.13 (4.28)	613.50 (3.95)	680 (4.38)	496.36 (3.49)
Total	14667.83 (100.00)	12773.68 (100.00)	13581.99 (100.00)	13355.42 (100.00)	15520.37 (100.00)	15515.31 (100.00)	14235.77 (100.00)
Per Capita Income	3235.55	2756.90	2877.35	2725.59	3189.12	3324.69	3018.20

**Data Source:** Own Field Survey

### 7.3 Poverty among Agricultural Labourers

The term poverty may be defined as inability of an individual to meet certain minimum desirable level of living. All those people who live below this minimum desirable level of living are said to living below the poverty line. The poverty line worked out by Dandekar and Rath was Rs. 180 per capita per annum at 1960-61 prices for the rural areas (Dandekar and Rath, 1971). The planning Commission estimated Rs. 327.56 per capita per month as the basic minimum needs for the year 1999-00 for the rural poor. On the basis of estimation, the minimum level of income for an average household with five members at the state level is worked out to Rs.

19653.6 per annum for the year 1999-00 for the rural areas. Households below this floor level of income are treated as families living Below Poverty Line (BPL). Households above this income level are called as Above Poverty Line (APL) households. It is observed from the Table 7.2 that 77.78 percent of the sample agricultural labourers households of this district are seen in BPL category. However, there are considerable variations in the percentage of households living below poverty line across the selected villages of Uttar Dinajpur district. It is found that a higher percentage of sample households in villages under moderately developed blocks are BPL as compared to that in villages under highly developed and least developed blocks. In percentage terms, it comes to 83.33 and 90 at *Tilna* and *Nakol* – villages under moderately developed blocks. At villages under highly developed blocks mainly *Delwalpur* and *Malon*, the figures are 73.33 percent and 76.67 percent where as villages mainly at *Jagatagaon* and *Dharampur* under least developed blocks, it becomes 73.33 percent and 70 percent. So labourers lived in villages under least developed blocks are better off than the moderately developed blocks and highly developed blocks.

**Table 7.2**

**Proportion of Agricultural Labour Households Living Below Poverty Line Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District**

	Delwalpur	Malon	Tilna	Nakol	Dharampur	Jagatagaon	All Villages
Proportion of Labour Households Living Below Poverty Line	22 (73.33)	23 (76.67)	25 (83.33)	27 (90.00)	21 (70.00)	22 (73.33)	140 (77.78)
Proportion of Labour Households Living Above Poverty Line	8 (26.67)	7 (23.33)	5 (16.67)	3 (10.00)	9 (30.00)	8 (26.67)	40 (22.22)
Total	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	180 (100.00)

**Data Source:** Own Field Survey

#### 7.4 Food Consumption

The per capita availability of food determines the working capacity and efficiency of agricultural labourers. It is an established fact that deficiency in food availability retards the physical, social and economic growth of people. Per capita availability of food among sample labour households varied on seasonal and even day-to-day basis due to uncertainty in income and employment of labourers. But in our study areas, most of the sample households maintain a uniformly good diet from day to day. The food intake of agricultural labour households was measured in two ways. Firstly, the number of times a particular food item consumed by a household

during the month prior to interview. This is shown in Table 7.3. From this Table, it is clear that an average agricultural labourer did not get two square meals in a day throughout the year. In some months, some agricultural labourers take one principal meal and labourers in an average have taken pulses 9.69 times in a month. The average number of times of pulse consumption was highest at *Dharampur* (15.9 times per month) because this village is located near Bihar. There is some tendency among Biharees to consume more amounts of pulses. The average number of times of pulse consumption was the lowest at *Malon* (6.9 times per month) – a village under highly developed blocks due to low level of incomes. The average number of times of consumption of meat was also highest at *Dharampur* (1.62 times per month) because of high average income level and may be because of the fact that this village is Muslim dominated village. The price of beef meat is less than half of the goat meat. As a result, they are able to eat meat every month of a year. In other villages, labourers are not able to purchase meat in every month. They eat goat meat two or three times in a year because of high prices of goat meat. The average number of times of fish consumption is 4.53 times in a month in all villages of Utar Dinajpur district. Here labourers consume fish by both buying and catching fish. The average number of times of fish consumption is highest at *Nakol* (5.03 times) in a month because this village is having comparatively larger amount of marshy land as compared to other villages. As a result, the labourers consume fish mostly by catching instead of buying.

**Table 7.3**  
**Average Number of Times a Particular Item Consumed Per Capita Per Month Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District**

Items	<i>Delwalpur</i>	<i>Malon</i>	<i>Tilna</i>	<i>Nakol</i>	<i>Dharampur</i>	<i>Jagatagaon</i>	All Villages
Cereals	59.25	55.83	58.30	57.75	59.30	58.85	58.22
Pulses	10.13	6.9	8.6	7.02	15.9	9.6	9.69
Edible Oil	59.25	55.83	58.33	57.75	59.30	58.85	58.22
Vegetables	57.30	50.54	56.40	54.45	58.75	57.10	55.76
Milk	1.48	.78	.8	1.27	.79	.77	.98
Meat	.58	.27	.44	.38	1.62	.36	.61
Sugar	7.83	3.63	7.76	5.68	9.6	8.4	8.82
Fish	4.75	4.5	3.9	5.03	5	3.5	4.45

**Data Source:** Own Field Survey

Secondly, in order to get an idea about availability of food to agricultural labourers, we examined the per capita per day food availability to agricultural labourers. The daily diet of the majority of the population is mainly based on cereals, pulses, vegetables, milk, sugar, fats and oils and flesh food. The main cereals in the

study areas are rice and wheat but they reported that they consumed wheat occasionally mainly during harvesting periods of wheat. Most of the agricultural labourer reported that they consume sugar and jagary during festivals / occasions. Only few labourers reported that they use sugar in tea, in milk for feeding children. In Table 7.4, the others item include spices, fruits and eggs. The commonly used spices were red and green chilies, cumin, turmeric, coriander seeds, mustard seeds, garlic and ginger and black pepper. The commonly consumed fruits were mango, jackfruits, banana, litchi, dates, guava, orange etc.

The per capita per day cereals intake is 462.50 grams in all villages of Uttar Dinajpur district, which is slightly higher than the intake of 460 grams per capita per day recommended by ICMR (1989). Increasing areas under boro production (HYV seeds) in the study areas increases the per capita per day availability of cereals intake of agricultural labourers. But this figure varies across the villages of the district. The per capita per day cereals intake was highest at *Dharampur* (483.70 grams) – a village under least developed blocks followed by *Delwalpur* (480.47 grams) and *Jagatagaon* (470.14 grams). In the case of villages under least developed blocks mainly *Tilna* and *Nakol*, the per capita per day cereals intake is less than the figure recommended by ICMR (1989). Pulses are important sources of proteins. Bengal gram (chana), green gram (moong), lentil (masoor) and red gram (arhar) are the main pulses available to the people of this district. But high prices of pulses are beyond the purchasing power of agricultural labourers. The result has been a sharp decline in quality and quantity of the protein diet of the labourers. The per capita per day availability of pulses to the agricultural labourers in this district is very low; therefore, pulses have little share in the daily available food. Pulses (6.39 grams) have contributed only 1.01 percent of the total food availability. The per capita per day availability of pulses is higher at *Dharampur* (8.82 grams) and *Jagatagaon* (8.20 grams) – villages under least developed blocks and *Delwalpur* (8.27 grams) – village under highly developed blocks as compared to other villages of this districts. The per capita per day consumption of pulses (6.39 grams) in this district is only 15.98 percent of the recommended minimum requirement (40 grams). The common vegetables found in the study villages found were leafy vegetables, brinjal, ladies finger, tomato, cauliflower, potato, carrot, pumpkin, papaya, jackfruits etc. Per capita per day availability of vegetables (127.79 grams) have contributed 20.12 percent of the total daily food availability. The diet is highly deficient in milk (96.17 percent), meat

(91.67 percent), pulses (84.03 percent), edible oil (80.28 percent), sugar (80.07 percent) and fish (72.60 percent). A moderate deficiency is found in vegetables (20.13 percent). However Table 7.4 shows that the per capita availability of cereals is surplus (.54 percent) in Uttar Dinajpur district.

The intakes of two principal nutrients, viz, calories and protein have been examined across the villages of the district. The per capita per day intake of calories and protein are presented in Table 7.5. The average calories intake of agricultural labourers is far short of the requirement judged by any norms. The minimum calorie requirement per capita per day depends upon a number of variables like age, sex, body weight, occupations etc. To determine calorie requirement, different individual economists, committee and commissions provides different figures. Dandekar and Rath had taken 2,250 calories per capita per day as the minimum requirement. The Planning Commission has now defined a 'poverty line' based on recommended nutritional requirements of 2400 calories per capita per day for rural areas and 2,100 calories per capita per day in urban areas.

As against this minimum requirement, the actual intake is 1,798.83 calories per capita per day; the deficiency works out to be more than 25 percent in the district. This calorie deficiency varies across the villages. The average daily intake of calories among agricultural labourers is highest at Dharampur (1913.30 calories) followed by *Delwalpur* (1884.56 calories), *Jagatagaon* (1839.86 calories), *Malon* (1752.97 calories), *Nakol* (1697.11 calories) and *Tilna* (1677.31 calories). The deficiency in calorie requirement works out to be 20.28 percent at *Dharampur*, 21.48 percent at *Delwalpur*, 23.34 percent at *Jagatagaon*, 26.96 percent at *Malon*, 29.98 percent at *Nakol* and 30.11 percent at *Tilna*. The deficient in calorie requirement is lowest at *Dharampur* because of high per capita consumption of cereals, pulses, meat, and sugar.

Therefore, the calorie intake is very much below our modest norms in our study areas. This reflects under nutrition and the distress conditions of agricultural labourers of Uttar Dinajpur district. The level of under-nourishment should bring out sharply the abject poverty to which this group is condemned. Similarly, the intake of proteins is found to be lower than the minimum requirement recommended by FAO/WHO expert groups. The protein available per capita per day among agricultural labourers is 36.39 grams, which is 39.35 percent lower than the recommended requirement (60 grams). The main sources of protein in the study areas are cereals,

vegetables and pulses. The cereals, vegetables and pulses contributed 34.33 grams protein out of a total 36.39 grams protein per capita or a little over 94.34 percent of the total. The per capita availability of protein varies across the villages of the district. The per capita per day protein intake is highest (38.24 grams) at *Dharampur* followed by *Delwalpur* (38.08 grams), *Jagatagaon* (36.39 grams), *Malon* (34.14 grams), *Nakol* (33.03 grams) and *Tilna* (32.02 grams). In brief, the protein intake among the agricultural labourers in all villages of Uttar Dinajpur district leaves nothing to be desired. It would appear from the foregoing analysis that agricultural labourers were found to be deficient in both calories and proteins.

## **7.5 Consumption Expenditure**

Income, no doubt is one of the criteria of measuring the economic status of a household. Yet, studies have shown consumption expenditure as a better measure in this regard. Studies (Nayak and Prasad, 1984) have confirmed the view that the level and pattern of consumption expenditure is a better yardstick to measure the standard of living / economic status of a household. By correlating income with consumption expenditure, we can also know the adequacy / inadequacy of income to maintain a reasonable standard of living. Taking all these into account, data on the level and pattern of consumption expenditure of the sample agricultural labour households are analyzed in this section.

**Table: 7.4**  
**Average Amount of Food available Per Capita Per Day among Agricultural Labourers Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District**

Food Items	<i>Delwalpur</i>	<i>Malon</i>	<i>Tilna</i>	<i>Nakol</i>	<i>Dharampur</i>	<i>Jagatagaon</i>	All villages	Requirement (Grams)	Departure from Reqt. Grams Percent
Cereals	480.47 (71.14)	463.10 (74.56)	438.49 (74.48)	439.10 (73.99)	483.70 (71.83)	470.14 (71.31)	462.50 (72.81)	460	2.5 .54
Pulses	8.27 (1.22)	4.25 (.68)	3.71 (.63)	5.09 (.86)	8.82 (1.31)	8.20 (1.24)	6.39 (1.01)	40	-33.61 -84.03
Vegetables	138.66 (20.53)	122.82 (19.77)	115.53 (19.62)	112.73 (19.00)	131.60 (19.54)	145.41 (22.05)	127.79 (20.12)	160	-32.21 -20.13
Milk	4.03 (.60)	3.61 (.58)	1.84 (.31)	5.70 (.96)	5.25 (.78)	2.56 (.39)	3.83 (.60)	100	-96.17 -96.17
Edible Oil	8.69 (1.29)	6.40 (1.03)	7.50 (1.27)	7.95 (1.34)	8.78 (1.30)	8.00 (1.21)	7.89 (1.24)	40	-32.11 -80.28
Sugar	8.68 (1.29)	2.69 (.43)	4.28 (.73)	3.46 (.58)	9.41 (1.40)	7.33 (1.11)	5.98 (.94)	30	-24.02 -80.07
Fish	11.58 (1.71)	8.55 (1.38)	6.57 (1.12)	7.27 (1.23)	9.03 (1.34)	6.34 (.96)	8.22 (1.29)	30	-21.78 -72.6
Meat	2.34 (.35)	1.02 (.16)	1.53 (.26)	1.76 (.30)	5.92 (.88)	2.42 (.37)	2.50 (.39)	30	-27.5 -91.67
Others	12.67 (1.88)	8.68 (1.40)	9.26 (1.57)	10.78 (1.75)	10.92 (1.62)	8.92 (1.35)	10.14 (1.60)	-----	-----

**Data Source:** Own Field Survey

**Table 7.5**  
**Average Amount of Calories and Protein Intake Available Per Capita Per Day among**  
**Agricultural Labourers in Uttar Dinajpur District**

Items	<i>Delwalpur</i>		<i>Malon</i>		<i>Tilna</i>		<i>Nakol</i>		<i>Dharampur</i>		<i>Jagatagaon</i>	<b>All Villages</b>		
	Calories	Protein	Calories	Protein	Calories	Protein	Calories	Protein	Calories	Protein	Calories	Protein	Calories	Protein
Cereals	1662.42	28.83	1602.33	27.79	1517.18	26.31	1519.27	26.35	1673.60	29.02	1626.68	28.21	1600.25	27.75
Pulses	28.37	2.07	14.58	1.06	12.72	.93	17.46	1.27	30.25	2.21	28.13	2.05	21.92	1.60
Vegetables	54.49	3.88	48.27	3.44	45.40	3.23	44.30	3.16	51.72	3.68	57.15	4.07	50.22	3.58
Milk	2.70	.12	2.42	.11	1.23	.06	3.82	.17	3.52	.16	1.72	.08	2.57	.11
Edible Oil	78.21	0	57.6	0	67.5	0	71.55	0	79.02	0	72	0	71.01	0
Sugar	34.59	0	10.71	0	17.03	0	13.77	0	37.45	0	29.17	0	23.80	0
Fish	12.74	2.00	9.41	1.50	7.23	1.14	7.98	1.26	9.93	1.56	6.97	1.10	9.04	1.42
Meat	4.54	.42	1.98	.18	2.97	.28	3.41	.32	11.48	1.07	4.69	.44	4.85	.45
Others	18.96	.62	12.97	.05	13.85	.07	15.53	.50	16.33	.54	13.35	.44	15.17	.50
Total	1897.02	37.94	1760.27	34.13	1685.11	32.02	1697.11	33.03	1913.30	38.24	1839.86	36.39	1798.83	35.41

**Data Source:** Own Filed Survey

The average levels of household consumption expenditure, per capita consumption expenditure, distribution of consumption expenditure between food and non-food items are analyzed in this section. Table 7.5 gives the mean values of consumption expenditure of agricultural labourers across the villages of Utar Dinajpur district. On an average an agricultural labour household spends of Rs. 16379.11 annually on different items of consumption. However, there are considerable variations in the household consumption expenditure across the villages. For example, the household consumption expenditure is highest at *Dharampur* (Rs. 17282.84) – a village under least developed blocks followed by *Delwalpur* (16,860.64) – a village under highly developed blocks and *Tilna* (16,851.90) – a village under moderately developed blocks.

The estimation of per capita consumption expenditure has been necessitated to get a better picture on the level of living of agricultural labourers in the study area. The average per capita consumption expenditure of agricultural labourers is shown in Table 7.6. The per capita consumption expenditure of agricultural labourers at *Delwalpur* is Rs. 3457.04, which is higher than all other villages. But per capita expenditure on food items at *Dharampur* (Rs. 2293.29) is higher than all other villages of the district. This may be due to higher average household income and lower family size. The analysis carried out in terms of absolute values does not give a correct picture of the pattern of consumption, since average consumption levels of the six villages are different. In such a situation, the consumption pattern may better be studied by comparing the relative shares of individual items of consumption in the total consumption expenditure of agricultural labour households in the district.

The Table clearly shows that the expenditure on food items of agricultural labourers accounts for the major proportion of the total consumption expenditure, followed by clothing, health, washing and toilet articles. Agricultural labour households spend about 64.28 percent of their total consumption on food items. Out of food items, an average agricultural labour household spends about 44.27 percent on food grains. The percentage share of expenditure on food grains declines with the increase in level of income but the share of expenditure increases on pulses and meat. Agricultural labourers of *Dharampur* and *Jagatagaon* – villages under least developed blocks spend 3.09 percent and 3.65 percent of their income on meat. But at *Delwalpur* and *Malon* – villages under highly developed blocks, agricultural labourers spend about 2.13 percent and 1.10 percent on meat. However, at *Tilna* and *Nakol* –

villages under moderately developed blocks, agricultural labourers spend about 1.49 percent and 1.51 percent on meat. The average households income of agricultural labourers of villages under least developed blocks is higher than the villages under moderately and highly developed blocks. It is clear from the above that higher income group labourers spend larger percentage of their income on meat as compared to lower income group labourers. Robert Giffen has shown that in Ireland, poor people consumed more amount of potato when the prices of potato increased by curtailing the consumption of meat. Due to increase in the price of potato, they reduce the consumption of meat in order to maintain the minimum basic needs. So lower income group people spend lower percentage of their income on meat but spend higher percentage of their income on food grains. But they spend less amount of their income (in absolute sense) on food items as compared to high average income of agricultural labour households of *Dharampur*, *Jagatagaon* and *Delwalpur*. So total expenditure on food items increases with the increase in average household income because the poor household is not able meet the minimum requirement of food. Increase in income will lead to increase in consumption expenditure on food items.

Among the non-food items, clothing account for the largest proportion of expenditure. This is followed by the expenditure on health, marriage and other ceremonies. Clothing as a basic human requirement is essential for protection against the physical environment and weather and, to maintain the standarity and modesty of life. For a woman, one sari and one blouse are the minimum acceptable covering dimmed necessary for public appearance. Most of the women reported that they used only three to five *saris* and three to four *blouses* in a year due to lack of money. Many elderly women were without *blouses* or petticoats in the study area. Most of the women reported that they purchase better quality *saris* and *blouses* during Durga Puja. The per capita expenditure on clothing is Rs. 290.75 per year. An average agricultural labour household spends Rs. 9.05 on clothing. The expenditure on clothing is highest at *Delwalpur* (10.62 percent) followed by *Nakol* (9.68 percent) and *Tilna* (9.26 percent).

Agricultural labourers suffer from different diseases like fever and headache, back pain, chest pain, high blood pressure, tuberculosis, chicken pox, polio and diphtheria and tetanus. They work in muddy water, in heavy rains as well as under blazing sun. The nature of their agricultural work exposed them in particular to health hazards: rice transplanting, increases susceptibility to ailments such as intestinal

infections, arthritis, rheumatic joints, leech bites, respiratory ailments etc. (Mencher and Saradmoni, 1982). To treat illness, all our sample agricultural labour households use allopathic treatment only. Allopathic treatment cures quickly, whereas homeopathy or aurvedic treatment takes time to cure. When the agricultural labourers were sick, the majority of them went to the village private quack doctors who practiced in the villages. There are some reasons of such a state of affair. Even though state health care was free, the cost of transportation, medicines and related problems and the poor quality of treatment itself, caused poor labourers to refrain from using the available facilities. The labourers spend 5.74 percent of their total expenditure on health. The per capita expenditure on health is Rs. 184.14 in district as a whole (Table 7.8). The per capita expenditure on health is higher at *Malon* (Rs. 232.37) as compared to other villages of the district. The agricultural labourers spend large proportion of their expenditure on marriage and other social ceremonies. The dowry system in rural areas increases the expenditure on marriages. The labourers spend 4.08 percent of their income on marriage and other ceremony purposes. The per capita expenditure on marriage and other ceremony is Rs. 130.83. The per capita expenditure on marriage and other ceremony is higher at *Malon* (Rs. 137.77) as compared to other villages of Uttar Dianjpur district. But agricultural labourers spend a meager proportion of their total expenditure on the education of their children. Their children will read up to class IV to V. After that period, they employed their children in agricultural activities. So expenditure on education is very small.

Most of the agricultural labourers use firewood, crop residue and cow dung, twigs and dry leaves as a fuel. Labourers collected twigs and dry leaves from fields and distant bush areas. Generally, women or girl children collected fuel from fields and spend one or two hours of time every day for this purpose. They generally did not purchase fuels but collected from different places. For lighting purposes, they use kerosene lamp like *kupi* or *lantern*. They purchase kerosene oil weekly from ration dealer. They spend 2.67 percent of their total expenditure on fuel and lighting.

**Table: 7.6**  
Average Amount of Consumption Expenditure per Households Per Annum Across Surveyed Villages  
of Uttar Dinajpur District

Items	Delwalpur	Malon	Tilna	Nakol	Dharampur	Jagatagaon	All Villages
Cereals	6360.14 (40.58)	6264.28 (44.10)	6359.24 (42.17)	6282.64 (42.64)	6873.71 (41.53)	6406.45 (41.82)	6424.41 (42.10)
Pulses	410.33 (2.62)	215.47 (1.52)	202.07 (1.34)	273.55 (1.86)	469.80 (2.84)	419.20 (2.74)	331.74 (2.17)
Vegetables	945.33 (6.03)	622.40 (4.38)	792.80 (5.26)	747.50 (5.07)	894.13 (5.40)	928.93 (6.06)	821.85 (5.39)
Edible Oil	575.20 (3.67)	433.06 (3.05)	543.73 (3.61)	568.67 (3.86)	624 (3.77)	544.83 (3.56)	548.25 (3.59)
Fish	546.13 (3.48)	560.00 (3.94)	428.27 (2.84)	362.47 (2.46)	559.33 (3.38)	532.14 (3.47)	498.06 (3.26)
Meat	358.50 (2.29)	173.17 (1.22)	251.67 (1.67)	236.17 (1.60)	534.33 (3.23)	583.33 (3.81)	356.20 (2.33)
Tea	233.73 (1.49)	140.19 (.99)	174.27 (1.16)	115.33 (.78)	516 (3.12)	337.34 (2.20)	252.81 (1.66)
Sugar	230 (1.47)	72.67 (.91)	124 (.82)	99.10 (.67)	267.40 (1.61)	199.70 (1.30)	165.48 (1.08)
Milk	135.60 (.87)	61 (.43)	33.33 (.22)	101.87 (.69)	93.17 (.56)	43.67 (.29)	78.11 (.51)
Others	433.23 (2.76)	277.95 (1.96)	316.37 (2.10)	370.36 (2.51)	328.77 (1.99)	271.27 (1.77)	332.99 (2.18)
Sub-Total	10228.19 (65.26)	8820.19 (62.10)	9225.77 (61.10)	9157.66 (62.15)	11160.64 (67.43)	10266.86 (67.02)	9809.90 (64.28)
Clothing	1664.80 (10.62)	1223.83 (8.61)	1396.87 (9.26)	1426.00 (9.68)	1298.17 (7.84)	1279.23 (8.35)	1381.48 (9.05)
Tobacco	388.27 (2.48)	407.60 (2.87)	924.67 (6.13)	391.73 (2.66)	398.80 (2.40)	563.10 (3.68)	512.36 (93.36)
Fuel and Lighting	490.13 (3.13)	375.43 (2.64)	345.60 (2.29)	430.07 (2.92)	423.47 (2.56)	375.80 (2.45)	406.75 (2.67)
House Construction	539.33 (3.44)	461.67 (3.25)	511.67 (3.39)	618.33 (4.20)	471.67 (2.85)	390 (2.54)	498.78 (3.27)
Education	107.66 (.69)	230.67 (1.62)	130.67 (.87)	196.17 (1.33)	330 (1.99)	330 (2.15)	220.86 (1.45)
Health	871.67 (5.56)	1076.67 (7.58)	855 (5.67)	980 (6.65)	856 (5.17)	616.67 (4.03)	876.00 (5.74)
Washing	403.33 (2.57)	542.71 (3.82)	611.20 (4.05)	604.20 (4.10)	520.53 (3.14)	579.10 (3.78)	543.51 (3.56)
Marriage & Other Ceremonies	538.19 (3.43)	638.33 (4.49)	677.67 (4.49)	609.67 (4.14)	641.87 (3.88)	633.33 (4.13)	623.15 (4.08)
Others	440.27 (2.81)	428.77 (3.02)	400.17 (2.65)	320.69 (2.18)	450.67 (2.72)	285.34 (1.86)	387.65 (2.54)
Total	15671.84 (100.00)	14205.87 (100.00)	15079.29 (100.00)	14734.52 (100.00)	16551.82 (100.00)	15319.43 (100.00)	15260.44 (100.00)

Data Source: Own Field Survey

**Table 7.7**  
**Per Capita Consumption Expenditure Per Annum among Agricultural Labourers Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District**

Items	<i>Delwalpur</i>	<i>Malon</i>	<i>Tilna</i>	<i>Nakol</i>	<i>Dharampur</i>	<i>Jagatagaon</i>	All Villages
Food grains	1402.97	1352.00	1280.39	1282.17	1412.41	1372.81	1350.46
Pulses	90.51	46.50	40.69	55.83	96.53	89.83	69.98
Vegetables	208.53	134.33	159.62	152.55	183.73	199.06	172.97
Edible oil	126.88	93.47	109.48	116.06	128.22	116.75	115.14
Fish	120.47	120.86	86.23	73.97	114.93	114.03	105.08
Meat	79.08	37.37	50.67	48.20	109.79	125.00	75.02
Milk	29.91	13.17	6.71	20.79	19.14	9.36	16.51
Tea	51.56	30.26	35.09	23.54	106.03	72.29	53.13
Sugar	50.74	15.68	24.97	20.22	54.95	42.79	34.89
Others	95.57	59.99	63.70	75.58	67.56	58.13	70.09
Sub-total	2256.22	1903.63	1857.55	1868.91	2293.29	2200.05	2036.27
Clothing	367.24	264.14	281.25	291.02	266.75	274.12	290.75
Tobacco	85.65	87.97	186.18	79.94	81.95	120.66	107.06
Fuel	108.12	81.03	69.58	87.77	87.01	80.53	85.67
House Construction	118.97	101.84	103.02	126.19	96.92	83.57	105.09
Education	23.75	49.78	26.31	40.03	67.81	70.71	46.40
Health	192.28	232.37	172.15	200	175.89	132.14	184.14
Washing	88.97	117.13	123.06	123.31	106.96	124.09	113.92
Marriage and Other Ceremonies	118.72	137.77	136.44	124.42	131.89	135.71	130.83
Others	97.12	92.54	80.57	65.45	92.61	61.14	81.57
Total	3457.04	3068.20	3036.10	3007.04	3401.08	3282.72	3208.70

**Data Source:** Own Field Survey

## 7.6 Shelter

Housing is a serious problem especially for the rural poor. Houses of agricultural labourers are not much effective to them because they do not give protection completely against wind, rain and cold; they have inadequate lighting and ventilation, no separate arrangement for keeping animals and lack of basic sanitation facilities. Most of the houses are *kutcha* houses with mud walls and thatched roofs. Table 7.8 shows that 50 percent of the total houses of Uttar Dinajpur district are *Kutcha* houses with mud walls and 68.80 percent roofs of the houses are thatched roofs. The percentage of *kutcha* houses with mud walls is highest at *Delwalpur* (66.67 percent) followed by *Tilna* (63.33 percent) and *Malon* (60.00 percent). Agricultural labourers at *Delwalpur* seem to be economically better off than *Malon* and *Tilna*. At *Delwalpur*, where only 26.67 percent labourers own bamboo slips walls and 83.33 percent labourers own thatch roof. At *Jagatagaon* and *Dharampur*, 73.33 percent and 56.67 percent labourers possess bamboo slips wall houses and 80 percent and 86.67 percent roofs are thatched roofs. At these two villages, soils are sandy soils; as a result

mud walls do not last for a long time. Therefore, they form houses with bamboo slips instead of mud walls.

The labourers were further asked about the number of rooms they have at their houses. It has been revealed that a large number of labourers (55.56 percent) live in a one-room house in all villages of the district. Village wise also, a majority of labourers at *Delwalpur* (53.33 percent) have two room houses. At *Jagatagaon* and *Dharampur*, the majority of labourers (70 percent and 76.67 percent) have only one-room houses.

The respondents were further asked about the facilities like kitchen, bathroom, toilet, ventilation, electricity etc. in their houses. Only 40 percent of labourers have the facilities of separate kitchen in their houses in the district. At *Delwalpur*, 46.67 percent labourers have separate kitchen. But at *Jagatagaon*, only 43.33 percent labourers have separate kitchen. Only 5 percent of labourers of the district have toilet facilities provided by the government under Rural Sanitation Programme. But these toilets are not properly maintained and as a result these toilets have become unfit for use after some times. Most of the labourers are habituated to use open field for toilet purposes. The facility of having windows is more prevalent at *Delwalpur* (73.33 percent) as compared to other villages of the district. At *Malon*, animals and their some landless owners lived together in the same shack. Some of the huts had bamboo doors and others did not. No labour households have electricity facilities.

### **7.7 Possession of Consumers Durables**

In the study area majority of the labourers are landless. Only 38.89 percent labourers have cultivable land (Table 7.9). The percentage of landed households is highest at *Tilna* (60.00 percent) followed by *Delwalpur* (53.33 percent). It has been revealed from the study that majority of labourers (51.06 percent) possess bicycles. Villagewise, at *Jagatagaon*, 60 percent labourers have a bicycle, which is followed by *Delwalpur* (56.67 percent), *Nakol* (53.33 percent) and *Dharampur* (46.67 percent). This is followed by furniture (46.11 percent), watch (13.33 percent) and radio (12.22 percent). Televisions are owned by only four families, comprising one from *Delwalpur*, another one from *Nakol* and two from *Jagatagaon*. Possession of bicycle, radio and furniture is almost equally distributed among the labourers from different villages. Among the live stock assets, most of the labourers (32.22 percent) are rearing duck. This is followed by goats (28.33 percent), poultry birds (24.44 percent),

cows-not-in-milk (22.22 percent) and cows-in-milk (18.89 percent). Possession of live stock assets is not equally distributed among the labourers from different villages. For example, 76.67 percent labourers at *Delwalpur* are rearing ducks but at *Jagatagaon* and *Dharampur*, only 3.33 percent labourers are rearing ducks.

**Table 7.8**  
**Nature and Availability of Facilities in the Houses Owned by Agricultural Labour Households Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District**

	<i>Delwalpur</i>	<i>Malon</i>	<i>Tilna</i>	<i>Nakol</i>	<i>Dharampur</i>	<i>Jagatagaon</i>	All Villages
<b>1. Nature of Walls</b>							
a. Earth/Mud	20 (66.67)	18 (0.00)	19(63.33)	15(50.00)	12(40.00)	6(20.00)	90(50.00)
b. Bamboo Slips	8 (26.67)	11 (36.67)	10(33.33)	13 (43.33)	17 (56.67)	22(73.33)	81(45.00)
c. Concrete	2 (6.67)	1 (3.33)	1 (3.33)	2 (6.67)	1(3.39)	2(6.67)	9(5.00)
<b>2. Nature of Roofs</b>							
a. Tin	5 (16.67)	4 (13.33)	3 (10.00)	5 (16.67)	4 (26.67)	6(20.00)	27(15.00)
b. Thatch	25 (83.33)	26 (86.67)	27(90.00)	25(76.67)	26(86.67)	24(80.00)	153(85.00)
c. Concrete	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
<b>3. Number of Rooms Per Households</b>							
a. One Rooms	12 (40.00)	13 (43.33)	17(56.67)	14 (46.67)	23(76.67)	21(70.00)	100(55.55)
b. Two Rooms	13 (53.33)	12 (40.00)	12(40.00)	12 (40.00)	5 (16.67)	9(30.00)	63(35.00)
c. Three Rooms	4 (23.33)	3 (10.00)	1 (3.33)	3 (10.00)	2 (6.67)	-----	13(7.22)
d. Four Rooms	1 (3.33)	2 (6.67)	-----	1 (3.33)	-----	-----	4(2.22)
<b>3. Facilities Available Per Households</b>							
a. Separate Kitchen	14 (46.67)	12 (40.00)	10(33.33)	11 (36.67)	12 (40.00)	13(43.33)	72(40.00)
b. Bath Rooms	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
c. Toilet	2 (6.67)	1(3.33)	2 (6.67)	1 (3.33)	2(6.67)	1(3.33)	9(5.00)
d. Windows	22(73.33)	20(66.67)	18 (60.00)	17 (56.67)	14 (46.67)	16(53.33)	107(59.44)
e. Doors	20(66.67)	18(60.00)	15(50.00)	16 (53.33)	11 (36.67)	12(40.00)	92(51.11)
f. Electricity	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

**Data Source:** Own Field Survey

**Table 7.9**

**Possession of Consumer Durables Goods and Live Stock Assets by Agricultural Labour Households Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District**

A. Name of Durables	Delwalpur	Malon	Tilna	Nakol	Dharampur	Jagatagaon	All Villages
1. Land	16 (53.33)	12 (40.00)	18 (60.00)	12 (40.00)	7 (23.33)	5 (16.67)	70 (38.89)
2. Radio	5 (16.67)	3 (10.00)	6 (20.00)	3 (10.00)	3 (10.00)	2 (6.67)	22 (12.22)
3. Watch	7 (23.33)	2 (6.67)	5 (16.67)	4 (13.33)	3 (10.00)	3 (10.00)	24 (13.33)
4. T. V.	1 (3.33)	-----	-----	1 (3.33)	-----	2 (6.67)	4 (2.22)
5. Furniture	13 (43.33)	12 (40.00)	9 (30.00)	11 (36.67)	20 (66.67)	18 (60.00)	83 (46.11)
6. Bicycle	17 (56.67)	13 (13.33)	13 (43.33)	16 (53.33)	14 (46.67)	18 (60.00)	91 (51.06)
<b>B. Live Stock Assets</b>							
1. Cows in Milk	8 (26.67)	3 (10.00)	7 (23.33)	5 (16.67)	6 (20.00)	5 (16.67)	34 (18.89)
2. Cows Not in Milk	8 (26.67)	8 (26.67)	10 (33.33)	5 (16.67)	7 (23.33)	2 (6.67)	40 (22.22)
3. Goat	18 (60.00)	8 (26.67)	19 (63.33)	3 (10.00)	2 (6.67)	1 (3.33)	51 (28.33)
4. Pigs	-----	1 (3.33)	4 (13.33)	2 (6.67)	-----	-----	7 (3.89)
5. Poultry Birds	4 (23.33)	10 (33.33)	2 (6.67)	17 (56.67)	11 (36.67)	-----	44 (24.44)
6. Ducks	23 (76.67)	12 (40.00)	18 (60.00)	3 (10.00)	1 (3.33)	1 (3.33)	58 (32.22)

**Data Source:** Own Field Survey

**7.8 Overall Findings on Level of Living of Agricultural Labourers**

The living conditions of agricultural labourers are miserable because of low level of wages and income. Their main source of income is hiring out labour in agriculture. The share of income from non-agricultural activities is very marginal. They spend major part of their income on food items as compared to non-food items. Out of food items, they spend major part of their income on food grains. The share of expenditure on pulses and meat is very marginal. They did not get the minimum amount recommended by ICMR. They suffer from poverty and malnutrition. About 77.78 percent labourers live below the poverty line in this district. Most of them live in just one-room *kutchha* houses with no facility of kitchen, bathroom and latrine, drinking water and electricity.

## 7.9 Summary

This chapter focuses on the sources, composition and pattern of income and consumption of agricultural labourers across surveyed villages of Uttar Dinajpur district. The main source of income in the case of an average agricultural labour household is hiring out labour in agricultural sector. An average agricultural labour household earns 65.10 percent of the total income from this source in this district. The second important source of income is hiring out labour in non-agricultural sector. About 14.31 percent of the total income is earned from hiring out labour from non-agricultural sector in this district. The third important source is cultivation (12.75 percent) followed by business and household enterprises (4.36 percent). However, there are some differences in the relative shares of income across surveyed villages of the district. An average agricultural labour household earns annually about Rs. 14235.77 in this district. However, there are considerable variations in the income levels of agricultural labour households across surveyed villages of Uttar Dinajpur district. About 77.78 percent of the sample households of this district are seen in BPL category. However, there are considerable variations in the percentage of households living below poverty line across surveyed villages of the district.

Per capita availability of food among sample labour households varied on seasonal and even day-to-day basis due to uncertainty in income and employment of labourers. An average agricultural labourer did not get two square meals in a day through out the year. The per capita per day cereals intake is 462.50 grams in all villages of Uttar Dinajpur District, which is slightly higher than the intake of 460 grams per capita per day recommended by ICMR (1989). But this figure varies across surveyed villages of Uttar Dinajpur district. The per capita per day consumption of pulses (6.39 grams) in this district is only 15.98 percent of the recommended minimum requirement (40 grams). The intakes of two principal nutrients, viz calories and protein have been examined across the villages of the district. The average calorie intake of agricultural labourers of the district is far short of the requirement judge by any norms. As against the minimum requirement, the actual intake is 1, 798.83 calories per capita per day; the deficiency works out to be more than 25 percent. This calorie deficiency varies across the villages of the district. Similarly the intake of proteins is found to be lower than the minimum requirement recommended by FAO/WHO expert groups. The protein available per capita per day

among agricultural labourers is 36.39 grams, which is 39.35 percent lower than the recommended requirement (60 grams).

Income, no doubt is one of the criteria of measuring the economic status of a household. Yet, studies have shown consumption expenditure as a better measure in this regard. On an average, an agricultural labour household spends of Rs. 16379.11 annually on different items of consumption in Uttar Dinajpur district. The expenditure on food items (64.28 percent) accounts for the major proportion of the total consumption expenditure, followed by clothing (9.05 percent), health (5.74 percent), washing and toilet articles. They spend 2.67 percent of their total expenditure on fuel and lighting. Housing is a serious problem especially for the rural poor. Most of the houses are kutchha houses with mud walls and thatched roofs. It has been revealed that a large number of labourers (55.56 percent) live in a one-room house in all villages of the district.

In the study area majority of the labourers are landless. It has been revealed from the study that majority of labourers (51.06 percent) possess bicycles. This is followed by furniture (46.11 percent), watch (13.33 percent) and radio (12.22 percent). Among the live stock assets, most of the labourers (32.22 percent) are rearing duck. This is followed by goats (28.33 percent), Poultry birds (24.44 percent), cows-not-in-milk (22.22 percent) and cows-in-milk (18.89 percent). Possession of live stock assets is not equally distributed among the labourers from different villages.