

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

8.1 Summary:

Agriculture is the main source of income of the rural people of Uttar Dinajpur district. This district is industrially very poor and also backward in all respects - than the others districts of West Bengal. According to 2001 census about 69.24 percent of rural working force are being engaged in agriculture and allied activities. According to 2001 Census, there were 29.58 percent cultivators to total workers in this district. The contribution of agricultural sector in Net State Domestic Product of West Bengal at constant (1999-01) prices was 30.86 percent and at current prices it was 30.13 percent in 2000-01 (Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Govt. of West Bengal, 2007).

Uttar Dinajpur district is a multi language district because people of various communities are living in the district. The language which we have in this district are, Bengali, Hindi, Vojpuri, Santali and various colloquial languages. As the languages are different, life style and culture of the people are also different. Though the language is different, most of the people know Bengali language very well.

However, it has been observed by some researchers that the benefit from the awareness among the cultivators for the use of improved inputs like seeds, manure etc. have not reached to the weaker sections of the rural areas of this district.

The main objective of the present study is to analyse the socio-economic condition of agricultural labourers in rural areas of Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal. The main aim was to study the sources, composition and pattern of wage, income of agricultural labourers in the selected six villages of this district. In addition, an attempt has been made to study their assets and liabilities. In our study we have classified the agricultural labourers into two classes namely, landless agricultural labourers and marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labourers.

Shaping the economic life of vast majority of rural population and providing the means of livelihood, agriculture has been not only a way of life of

the rural people of the district, it also contributes significantly to the employment of the rural people. Though agriculture is the main stay of Uttar Dinajpur districts' economy, the agricultural sector has remained backward. The traditional psychology, peculiar village custom, individual decisions and plough cattle techniques overwhelmingly dominates its production. In Uttar Dinajpur district, the average number of mandays for male wage employment, in agricultural sector was about 7 months and in the case of female it was about 5 months. The agricultural labourers as a whole have been engaged for longer hours at a lower rate of wages than fixed under minimum wages Act, 1948. It is found that the employment of agricultural labourers in agricultural operation is arranged by personal contact and the terms and conditions of employment greatly differ between areas, individuals as well as between casual and attached labourers. Moreover, their employment depends upon the availability of works. By virtue of their being agricultural labourers, the main source of their income is agricultural wages and they boost their income by resorting to subsidiary occupations like house repairing, construction work, small trade etc.

Different categories of agricultural labourers are employed under different terms and conditions under the same employer or different employers. In our survey, area most of the agricultural labourers were employed as casual day labourers and group labourers. We also observed that the importance of casual labour and group labour increased with the improvement of economic condition of the villagers. The total number of employment days available from farm and non-farm activities to an adult male worker was 257 days in 1974-75 and it increased to 293 days in 1993-94. In the case of an adult female labour, the total number of days available from farm and non-farm activities is 195 days in 1974-75 and it increased to 226 days in 1993-94. The relative importance of wage paid employment (in percentage farms) in total employment days has declined over the years. On the other hand, the share of self-employment has increased for both male and female labour in West Bengal.

An agricultural labourer got an average annual farm employment of 169.71 days in Uttar Dinajpur district. The male worker got an average annual farm employment of 180.98 days. Among the different activities, the wage employment of crop farming provided the larger days of employment (23.51

days) of crop farming and employment in agriculture allied activities (18.32 days). We have divided the agricultural season of a year into four parts, pre-kharif, kharif, rabi and boro. Kharif season is the busiest season of the year followed by boro season. The employment rate is higher in boro season in our study area. From our field investigation, we found that high seasonal fluctuations of employment exists in the study area. It was also found that seasonal fluctuation of employment in the highly developed block is higher as compared to moderately developed and leased developed blocks.

We have worked out the trends and determinants of agricultural wages across the districts of West Bengal for male and female labourers over the period from 1980-81 to 2000-01. We have used AWI data for this purpose. There was a steady increase in money wages across the districts of West Bengal was obtained, though the magnitude of the increase differed from one district to another over the years. The constructed real wages of agricultural labourers for different districts of West Bengal was obtained from NSS data for the periods 1983-84 to 2000-01. First, we have considered the trends if real wage rate of male agricultural labourers. The real wages show a decline in the mid-1980s' but a gradual recovery in the latter part of the decade. However, these gradual increases were not sustained in subsequent years. In most of the districts of West Bengal, it is found that real wages fluctuated during the first half of the decade but increased during the 2nd half of the decade. For female agricultural labourers, we do not find any clear trends of real wages during the first half of 1980's in West Bengal but we found an increasing trend in the second half of 1980's. But it was not sustained in the latter half of 1980's.

There are various factors responsible for affecting the money wages and real wages of the agricultural labourers. Among them the supply of labour and demand for labour is very important. The scope for our agricultural employment and the prevalent level of wages for such employment also influence the level of agricultural wages. The wages of the agricultural labours are determined by collective bargaining between the employers and the labours. There are several theories regarding wage determination in the rural labour market. Among them, the subsistence or motivational wages theories, the efficiency wage models, the labour turn over model and the interlinked market theories are important.

However regional agricultural wage rate are determined by many other factors such as level of economic development, previous years wage rate, productivity of land, cropping intensity, level of irrigation used and use of modern technology. In our study areas there is no fixed working hours as well as wage rate. During peak season demand for labour was high which induces both casual and group labourers to demand higher wages from the employers. During the slack season, the demand for labour was low and wages decline marginally. After three to four years peak period wage rates settled as the market wage rates for all labours. The labour-credit interlinkage did not exist in the study area. In the case of fringe benefits, we find that various forms of fringe benefits are prevalent in the study areas. But it varies from village to village and from district to district. In our study area the agricultural labourers get rice, meal, light tiffins, *bidi*, fuel material etc .as fringe benefits. In the case of minimum wages most of the agricultural labourers are not aware about the minimum wages fixed by government for agricultural work and they did not move for getting the minimum wages. Though they some time get higher than the minimum wage in the peak season, which stays for a few days. In our study area minimum wage varies from Rs. 40 to Rs. 70 per day.

In the study area there are a few numbers of recipients of government assistance (social security) in the form of Id-aged pensions, widows and handicapped assistance etc. We find that the number of recipient of handicapped assistance are highest in the village Jagadishpur and in Solpara. In the village wise analysis of our study, the main source of income of the landless agricultural labourers is the sales of agricultural produce followed by remittances from relatives. According to the village wise analysis the income from remittance from relatives is highest, but it is not the main source of income. Among the six villages Lalbazar, the village under least developed block earns highest per capita income and lowest per capita income earned by Alianagar, the village under moderately developed block. From the analysis of per household income of the marginal farmer- cum- agricultural labourers, the major source of income is hiring out agricultural labour and own farm income. The marginal farmer-cum agricultural labourers supplement their income by adopting non-farm employment as a subsidiary occupation.

The analysis of per capita income of the marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labourer suggests that the increase in household income is accompanied by the increase in family size. In the village wise analysis, marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labour households in Alianagar has recorded the highest per capita income, the village under moderately developed blocks. Among these six villages only one village, Dolua reported the practice of apiary though the practice is limited within one or two households and in one village in Alianagar practice of sericulture is found. We can say that in case of household income of landless agricultural labourer the numbers of households belonging to first income category is highest followed by second and third income category. In the case of per capita income of the landless agricultural labourers category wise, here also the numbers of households belongs to first income category is highest followed by second and third income category. In the case of marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labourers households, the numbers of households belonging to the second income category is highest than the first and third income category.

The data presented in the Tables 5.12 and 5.13 shows the various non-agricultural activities in which the agricultural labour households were engaged and accepted those activities as a subsidiary source of income. In our study area, non-agricultural activities pursued by the agricultural labour households are seasonal in nature undertaken within the village or outside the village. The seasonal migration in the urban areas or even in the outside the state is largely the result of under employment and compulsion to supplement the meager farm income to meet both food and non-food needs. However, easily availability of unskilled jobs on a large scale in the towns and cities and also the developed transport facilities have motivated large numbers of agricultural labourers to migrate from village to town or even outside the state.

There is much similarity in the per capita income pattern across the villages. The per capita income levels are closely related to the agricultural development of the village under study. It has also been observed that the average household and average per capita income levels of the marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labours are marginally higher than those of the landless agricultural labours in the villages under study.

We found different categories of labours in the study areas. Out of the different categories of labours, we have divided agricultural labour into six categories - annual farm servant (fully attached labourers), temporary attached labourers or semi-attached labourers casual labourers; group labourers, landless agricultural labourers and marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labourers. Different categories of agricultural labourers are employed under different terms and conditions under the same employers or different employer. The existence of fully attached labour or annual farm servant is hardly found in the district. Semi-attached labourers are divided into two categories on the basis of the period of contract and the freedom of choice of the employer. The first category of semi-attached labourers have to work for other employers during the busy season of agriculture. The second category of temporary attached labourers have enjoyed more freedom to work for other employers during the contract period and they are attached with the employers for two and more days in the busy agricultural periods. The second category of semi-attached labourers enjoy more freedom to work for other employers as compared to first categories. The basis of attachment (full or partial) are the following: a) Allotment of land, b) current consumption loan and c) old debt.

By casual labourer, we mean a person who enters an agreement or contract with a particular employer for a single day at a time. He enjoys more freedom to choose the employer and works more freely as compared to semi-attached labourers and fully attached labourers. The casualization of agricultural labourers has increased over the years because the farmers prefer more casual day labourer as compared to semi-attached and fully attached labourers.

By group labourers we mean a group of labours who forms a group with equally able bodied persons to work on piece rate basis. The farmers-employers prefer the casual group labour because, through employment of group labour it is possible to maintain the timeliness for different agricultural operations and also to reduce search cost involved in contracting a number of individual workers. The practice has been spreading rapidly and it is used for major agricultural operations such as transplanting, weeding, harvesting and threshing involving larger amount of labour. There is no fixed hour of work for them. During the

survey it was observed that most of the agricultural labourers were employed as casual day labour and group labour. Thus the demand for group labours is increasing day by day.

We also analyse the assets and liabilities of landless agricultural labours as well as marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labourers, across the six villages of Uttar Dinajpur district. There are some considerable variations in per capita household value of assets across the six villages. Among the constituents of household durable assets, the value of dwelling house accounts for the major proportion for landless agricultural labour households. About 69.44 percent of landless agricultural labour household are under debt. The burden of loan for marriage and social ceremony is considerably high in all the six villages. This is likely to continue in the coming years on account of current loan. The adverse effect may turn out to be very worse because of exorbitant rate of interest charged by money lenders and predominant dependence of the landless agricultural labour on them. As the resource base of the marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labourers is small, so they have to borrow to meet their needs of consumption, health care, marriage and social ceremonies and repayment of old debt.

The burden of loan for marriage and social ceremonies is ranked 2nd position after the outstanding loan followed by loan for house construction. But at the state level, the main cause of indebtedness is the borrowing for household consumption followed by purchase of land and construction of building and productive purposes. However, as these loans are not only economically unproductive but also they do not help in the creation of additional incomes, they are bound to borrow from non- institutional as well as from institutional sources for years after years. At the state levels the main source of rural credit is friends and relatives followed by shopkeepers and money lenders. But at the village level, the share of subsidized loans provided by the government under different anti-poverty programmes in total borrowing is higher than the shares of friends and relatives and money lenders. Out of non-institutional sources, friends and relatives emerged as the main source of rural credit at the village level of the district.

It appeared to us that the poor socio-economic condition of rural wage labourers particularly agricultural labour in the district of Uttar Dinajpur has slightly changed for the better since a decade ago. These changes have been brought about through the efforts of different agencies and associations. Changes through land reforms have a significant role among the landless rural wage labourers in the district. Under the land reforms programme some paltry amount of surplus land has been distributed among the landless agricultural labourers. In recent years State Government has adopted a number of rural development programmes for improving the rural socio-economic scenario. Yet it has not been able to change the economic condition of agricultural labourers satisfactorily.

8.2 Conclusion

The income from money wages of agricultural labourers are not uniform because it varies significantly due to individual contracts, dissimilarities of rural operation, purpose of agricultural works is peak season, non availability of work is the slack season etc. The findings of the study amply demonstrate the miserable conditions of agricultural labourers in term of low availability and seasonal variation of employment, low wage rate, low income, inadequate consumption and excessive burden of debt. They are compelled to live in a miserable sub-human life. Since they do not possess skill or training, their scopes of alternative employment opportunities have limited in others sectors. It is difficult for them to bargain with the land owner's for higher wages as they are not organized like industrial labourers. They are ignorant and illiterate, depend blindly on the fate. They live in scattered villages and belong to the lowest rang of social and economic ladder.

8.3 Suggestions

To improve the socioeconomic condition of agricultural labourers the following policy agenda may be suggested :

1. Land reform and redistribution of ceiling surplus lands among the landless is the first guarantee to build up the asset structure to improve the entitlement and capability of the poor workers. Then necessary inputs should be provided in order to make the marginal farmer-cum-agricultural

labourers and the landless agricultural labourers viable against natural odds and exploitation of money lenders.

2. Improvement in agricultural sector must be brought about by a consolidation of holdings, the spread of irrigation, the use of better seeds, fertilizers and other inputs, better transport and marketing facilities, double and multiple cropping and the development of the rural tertiary sector together with a large reduction in indebtedness and an increase in productivity of landless agricultural labourers and marginal farmer-cum-agricultural labourers, that they will provide employment to them all the year round. Livestock production is another area which is free from the constraint of limited land resource and which can help most of the landless agricultural labourers to improve their socio-economic condition. Piggery is also another important activity which by augmenting income may improve the socio-economic condition of agricultural labourers among the tribal community. But to bring about the necessary improvement government supports are needed.
3. Labour absorption in agriculture and generation of rural non-farm employment may go a long way in increasing the capability of the agricultural labourers. Any strategy for reducing poverty has to concentrate both on employment intensity as well as on labour productivity. Effective measures are needed for raising agricultural labour productivity without compromising on the employment intensity of agriculture.
4. Employment in agriculture is highly seasonal and demand for labour is very high during peak season (both *amon* and *boro*). During this period labourers are fully employed but they remain unemployed or underemployed in the rest of the period. In this district labourers got employment for about 6 to 7 months in a year. To provide continuous employment to agricultural labourers it is necessary to create alternative employment opportunities in rural areas. Non- agricultural employment opportunities in the study area are highly inadequate and non-agricultural activities include mainly repairing *kutchra* house, thatching activities, some building-construction work and road construction activities along with work in brick industry. To create non-agricultural activities in the

rural areas it is necessary to build up cottage and small industries, generation of self-employment and wage employment in non- agricultural sector by providing training, skill and education.

5. The traditional welfare and employment programmes of the government such as various rural development programmes, wage employment programmes, self-employment programmes, targeted public distribution system and nutrition programme should continue. It is also necessary to properly implement the government sponsored employment programmes like National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), Swarnajayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY) and Jahar Gram Samridhi Yojyana (JGSY) etc.
6. The wage rate of agricultural labourers in this district is very low and varies across gender, operations and seasons. To remove the gender differential in wage, it is necessary to generate awareness among women labourers that they are equally efficient as men in all respects for agricultural operations and to encourage them to demand for equal wages from the employers. Women organization should raise voice against such discriminations and create pressure on employer for equal wages for equal works. Another problem is the seasonal fluctuations of wage rate which can be tackled through ensuring regular employment opportunities to agricultural labourers. For this purpose it is necessary to develop the agriculture by adopting new HYV techniques of production and other institutional reforms. Instead of using capital intensive technique of production, we should follow labour intensive technique of production in agriculture and multiple-cropping to generate adequate employment opportunities. In our study areas the wage rate of agricultural labourers is far below the minimum wage fixed by the government. The proper implementation of Minimum Wage Act is essential to ensure reasonable wage rate to the rural workers of the study area.
7. The bargaining power of agricultural labourers is very weak in the study area. They are bound to take wages as fixed by their employers. They are

unorganised, illiterate and ignorant and it is difficult for them to bargain with the employer for higher wages. Due to the non-existence of agricultural labour union in the study areas, they have no bargaining power. So formation of union among agricultural labours is essential to increase their bargaining power, to ensure higher wages and to ensure better working conditions. No political parties or organizations have shown interest to organize the agricultural labours because of seasonal variation of employment in agriculture. The people concerned may take initiatives to organise the agricultural labours in the district of our study as well as in the state of West Bengal. Educational standard, social awareness and economic status are to be developed among the agricultural labourers in order to organize them. Generating awareness among agricultural workers about health and hygiene, education, family planning etc. would definitely help them to improve their standard of living.

8. Last but not the least, the second generation reforms in India should give emphasis on agricultural and rural infrastructure from which agricultural labourers get benefit directly or indirectly. Agricultural labourer are socially depressed and economically backward and poor. However, they should not live in abject poverty forever as it has unpleasant socio-political and humanitarian implications. Governmental and non-governmental organisations should come forward sincerely to help them achieving a decent living and self-esteem. Agricultural labourers should not be left with the market forces alone. It is only through concerted efforts from all concerned that they may attain freedom from bondage and servitude.