

Challenges of Agricultural Laborers in Northern Bangladesh: From the View of Migrant, Women and Tribal Laborers

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For more than a decade, the agricultural sector has played a major role in the eradication of poverty in Bangladesh. Agriculture is the main source of the food supply in this country, and it also plays an important role in industrial development and other areas. About seventy percent of the country's population has access to this agricultural sector. The country's economy is enriched by exporting farmers' raw materials abroad. So, agriculture is the largest sector of employment in Bangladesh and agricultural laborers are the major contributors to the agriculture sector.

The agricultural laborers of Bangladesh are the most neglected section of society. They are socially handicapped; they do not assert themselves as important to realize their demands. From morning to evening they sell their labor in various types of farming. Wages earned through the sale of labor are the main economic source of their lives and livelihoods. Without the opportunity to sell labor, they have no alternative but to remain unemployed. As laborers, they have the right to receive a fair wage or remuneration but to date, no effective precise wage policy has been set for this group of laborers. More than two decades ago, a policy was formulated by the government to establish fair labor wages for agricultural laborers but there is no evidence of its implementation anywhere. Consequently, a large number of agricultural laborers in the country are deprived of their rights and dues. Regarding the compensation of agricultural laborers, it is stated that if a person appoints another person as an agricultural laborer, he will be obliged to pay the wages due to that laborer.

From these points of view, it can be understood that, despite making a significant contribution to the agriculture and entire economy of Bangladesh, agricultural laborers have various problems and challenges. Unfortunately, often they are deprived of their rights and it is becoming difficult for them to live a normal life. However, what is most worrying is that, despite having so many problems, there are very few organizations working only for the development of agricultural laborers. So over the years they have had to deal with these problems themselves while they try to make a living.

Given this background, the research for this thesis has attempted to identify the challenges and problems faced by agricultural laborers in Bangladesh, from the viewpoints of migrant, women and tribal agricultural laborers. The objectives of this study are to check the issues and problems of the migration of agricultural laborers; what kind of work-related problems affect women agricultural laborers; and any socio-economic factors that hinder the role of tribal agricultural laborers. It was decided that this study would focus on the role, degree of activity and contribution of various organizations to solving the problems of agricultural laborers in the study area in order to provide a better future for them. By a well-structured questionnaire, a

total of 700 respondents from 14 villages of 3 districts were interviewed between January 2018 and September, 2019. Graphs, charts, mean value, t-test analysis and a regression model were used to analyses whether or not the explanatory variables significantly influence the dependent variable.

The first two chapters of the present research expand on the introduction and provide an overview of the research issue and objectives.

The third chapter focuses on the first objective, which is to elucidate the issues and problems of migration of agricultural laborers. A t-test has been used to compare the effects of migration between migrant and non-migrant laborers. In addition, the problems they face during migration were also investigated. In conclusion, it can be said that, naturally, the laborers who migrate are able to earn more than before, a conclusion also obtained from the results of this study. There is a statistically significant difference in wage rates between agricultural laborers who have migrated and those who have not: higher for those who have migrated, with a significant difference between pre- and post-migrated wage rate. The difference in wages before and after the migration of the same laborer was ascertained also: the pre-migration wage rate being lower than that post migration. Migration is one way for agricultural laborers to obtain good wages but, due to lack of accurate information, lack of medical care and the problem with accommodation, they may be prevented from taking full advantage of the benefits of migration. The present study suggests that initiatives taken by the government and non-government organizations to provide all the information available to the agricultural laborers could help them to obtain their desired wages and improve their standard of living.

Chapter 4 focuses on women agricultural laborers and their problems in the three districts of the study area. Agriculture remains the largest source of employment in Bangladesh, providing employment for 63 percent of the population. Not only men but also women are a large part of this sector but, in the system of a male-dominated society, women have always been deprived through the presence of social barriers and discrimination. The objectives of the present study are to discover the work-related problems that women agricultural laborers have to face, and also to identify and discuss some factors impacting on the wage rate of women in the survey area. To test these factors, a regression model was being used. The results show that women agricultural laborers have many problems on the way to work. There is significant inequality between men and women in terms of wages. Women are deprived of their fair wage rate even though they do the same work as men. The working environment also is not in their favor. At work, they are often mistreated by their male colleagues or even by the landlords and this is considered as a barrier to their participation in the work. Since women are in an important position in agriculture, their problems should be resolved very quickly but the most important is to reduce wage inequality because it is a major obstacle to the economic empowerment of women through equal wages. If wage discrimination were reduced, women would be more interested in participating in the work. Another important need is to provide training for women

to improve their skills, which all government and non-governmental organizations should do. Women should be recognized for their work by society at large, since progress is being made in all respects. The participation of women in agriculture on the one hand is increasing the food security of the country, and on the other hand it is contributing to the rising per capita income. It is therefore important to recognize this contribution of women socially and nationally for further improvement and growth in agriculture. Through the research presented here, it is hoped that more awareness can be generated among policymakers. In the future, such awareness will give women agricultural laborers in the country a chance to work in a safe environment with equal wages.

In chapter 5, problems concerning tribal agricultural laborers are described. It can be concluded that, although there is no difference financially, the tribes are discriminated against in terms of social issues. The tribal agricultural laborers face several constraints in improving their livelihood. In the absence of adequate assistance, tribal households in the study area met their stress situation in their own way. Social perspectives concerning tribal agricultural laborers must be changed by lobbying for strong government initiatives.

In chapter 6, the role of institutions for agricultural laborers is discussed. It is noted that formal and informal support for agricultural laborers is insufficient. The overall development of life and livelihood is always a complex phenomenon and is inversely proportional to the number of agricultural laborers. It is shown that, in Bangladesh, industrial laborers are considered more important with regard to labor policies. Although a large part of the labor force is agricultural, not everyone is interested in working with them. There is no customized and consistent labor policy for agricultural laborers. The occupation of the agricultural laborer is not permanent and they also work in other jobs, .so it is not easy to organize them. The social and living standards of agricultural laborers are on a marginal level in society, so to improve their lives and livelihood, and to convey the benefit to their door, it is necessary to consider developments at the level immediately above them (i.e., at that of the landowners). More explicitly, parameters that affect the life and livelihood of agricultural laborers (such as wage, availability of work, and technological support) must be addressed. It is not possible to ensure the development of development packages for agricultural workers through their appointing body (such as landowners). Government and non-governmental organizations must come forward in this regard.

Finally, chapter seven draws some conclusions and indicates some policy recommendations.

Keywords: Agricultural laborers, northern region, migration, women agricultural laborers, tribal, institutions.