

The Problems of Landlessness in Bangladesh: The Process of Landlessness and Strategies for their Survival

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a) Researcher's Identity

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b) Objectives

Objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To find out the socio-economic characteristics of the landless people;
- ii. To study the strategies adopted by landless people for their survival; and
- iii. To identify the process and the reason for landlessness.

c) Executive summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Bangladesh is an agricultural country with 85% of her population depending directly or indirectly on agriculture. Therefore, in Bangladesh land play an important role for the livelihood of the rural people both in terms of income and employment. But Bangladesh is a land scarce country and per capita cultivable landholding is only 0.25 acre. Again by time, the problem of landlessness is taking an alarming shape. The percentage of landless families rose from 14.3% in 1950s to 56.5% in 1990s. A number of factors are responsible for rapid landlessness of the rural people. This study is an attempt to identify the reasons for landlessness and also to adopt strategies for the landless people for their survival.
- 1.2 The study was conducted in Aminpur village of Sherpur Thana under Bogra district. A total of 178 landless families were identified through a household survey. Out of 178 landless families 70 families were selected randomly for the study and only the family heads were

interviewed. The interviews were conducted through a structured questionnaire. In addition, data were collected through group discussions and observations. The study was undertaken and completed during the period of December 1990-June 1991.

2. Findings

- 2.1 Socio - economic Characteristics of the Landless People in Aminpur were more or less similar to other villages of the country. Socio - economic characteristics were judged in terms of age, education, family size, occupation, housing pattern, income and expenditure.
 - 2.1.1 More than three fourth of the landless family heads (78.58%) fell within the age group of 21 to 50 years. However, the concentration was found in age group 21 to 30 years.
 - 2.1.2 Majority of the family heads (60%) were completely illiterate and 18.57% could sign their name only. Of the rest, 11.43% and 10% had primary and secondary education respectively.
 - 2.1.3 The families were classified into nuclear and joint families. Majority of the families (81.43%) were of joint type. The average family size of the landless households was 4.99 which were lower than that of the national average 5.4.
 - 2.1.4 The landless household heads were engaged in different types of occupations such as selling of farm labor, petty businesses and selling of non-farm labour. Majority of them (87.14%) had taken selling of farm labour as their principal occupation. The female members of the families were engaged in household chores.
 - 2.1.5 Most of the houses of the sample families (82.86%) were made out of clay walls and thatched roofs. The rest was made out of mud wall and tin plate roofs.
 - 2.1.6 Both annual income and expenditure of the landless families varied from Tk. 6,000.00 to Tk. 20,000.00. However, the highest number of families (44.29%) had income in the range between Tk. 9,000.00 to Tk. 15,000.00. The expenditure of the highest number of families (57.14%) also fell in the same range.
 - 2.1.7 Majority of the landless families (77.14%) had not attended any social and cultural functions. They put forward the reason that they were not invited because they were not able to afford any gift due to their poor economic condition. The rest were invited mainly to use their services in the functions.

- 2.2 Landless families of the village adopted various strategies to earn their livelihood. In this connection, availability of work, sources of loan, savings, involvement with cooperative organisations, livestock and poultry and tree plantation have been taken into consideration.
- 2.2.1 The landless people did not get work throughout the year. Out of 70 household heads 34.24% got employment for 300 days and 47.14% for 240 days and the rest of them remained unemployed for most of the time. Most of the landless people could not fulfill their basic needs due to non-availability of work. Even, vast majority of them (80%) could not take meals thrice a day.
- 2.2.2 In case of financial need, landless families borrowed money from village money lenders, relatives, cooperative societies and others. Out of the sample families, 62.86% received loan from different sources. Money lenders were the major sources of loan for 27.14% of the landless families. As they could easily get loan from money lenders, they forgot about the rate of interest (352%) which was far higher than taking loan from other sources.
- 2.2.3 The landless families could hardly save after meeting their daily necessities. A vast majority of them (78.57%) had no savings at all. The rest of them could save, but the amount was very low.
- 2.2.4 Majority of the landless household heads (71.42%) were not affiliated with any formal cooperative organisation. Others were affiliated mainly with BRDB cooperatives.
- 2.2.5 The landless families owned 53 bovine, 80 goats and 331 poultries. The average number of bovine, goats and poultry birds per household was 0.75, 1.14 and 4.73 respectively.
- 2.2.6 The total number of fruit and timber trees owned by the landless families was found to be 536. On an average they owned 7.66 trees. Many of the landless families earned additional income by selling dairy, fruits, poultry and timber trees.
- 2.2.7 Process of landlessness; land owners had not become landless in a day. It was a lengthy and gradual process through which they had become landless.
- 2.2.8 More than 27% families were completely landless without having any homestead land. About 43% families had only homestead land and 30% had 0.5 acre land including both homestead and cultivable land. Among the landless families 25.71% had become landless in between 16 to 25 years and

2.86% of households in 5 years. Out of 70 sample landless families, 25 families were large farmers, 23 were medium farmers, 7 were small farmers and 5 were landless during their grandfather's days. During their father's time, 13 were large scale farmers, 22 were medium scale farmers, 18 were small scale farmers and 17 were landless. By now they were all landless.

2.3.1 The reasons identified for landlessness were as follows:

- i) The law of inheritance (41.43%);
- ii) Selling of land by themselves to maintain their families (28.58%);
- iii) Selling of land by their forefathers (11.43%);
- iv) Land related litigation (7.14%);
- v) Selling of land for unproductive purposes like amusement, gambling. (5.71%);
- vi) Selling of land for medical treatments (4.28%)
- vii) Selling of land to meet up dowry in daughter's marriage (1.43%)

d) Conclusions and Recommendations

Landlessness has become a major problem in Bangladesh. It is one of the root causes of poverty in Bangladesh which gives rise to various socio-economic problems like unemployment, homelessness, growth of slum in city areas, pollution of environment, malnutrition, social crime and litigations. These problems are intensifying day by day with the increase of landless people at an alarming rate.

With a view of helping for the landless people, the government has undertaken a number of land reform measures in the past. At present "Adarsha Gram" project has been taken up by the government with the same intention. Through these measures, landless families were given some khas land to earn their livelihood. But none of the programmes could provide any real solution to the landless. The government endeavours could not succeed mainly because of two reasons: (i) supports provided under the programmes were quite insignificant in relation to the dimension of the problem and need of the landless and (ii) the programmes were not implemented properly.

In order to minimize the problem of landlessness in Bangladesh the following recommendations can be made;

- i) The government programmes should be implemented properly. Implementation procedures should be simplified and made participatory in nature.
- ii) Land reform alone cannot solve the problems of landlessness. Therefore, there is a need to create non-farm employment avenues along with land reform programme.
- iii) Cooperative organizations should be strengthened for the development of socio-economic upliftment of the landless people.

It is imperative to take pragmatic policy-plan for the development of landless people. Development of Bangladesh is simply impossible without development of landless people who constitute about 60% of the total population.

