

**DEVELOPMENT AS CONSCIENTIZATION**  
*The Case of Nijera Kori in Bangladesh*

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*Foreword, by Professor Md. Anisur Rahman*

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Dedicated to  
the people  
who, against all odds,  
are fighting relentlessly  
for a better Bangladesh,  
**THE MEMBERS OF NIJERA KORI**



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## ABBREVIATIONS

BCC	Behavioral Change Through Communication
CG	Conscientization Gap
CPR	Common Property Resources
DCI	Data Collection Instrument
DCI	Direct Calorie Intake (method)
DH	District Hospital
F	Fundamentalism
FFW	Food for Work
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
HDRC	Human Development Research Centre
HH	Household
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IT	Information Technology
KII	Key Informant Interview
KR	Knowledge about Rights
LGI	Local Government Institutions
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MCWC	Maternal and Child Welfare Centre
N	Sample size
NA	Not Applicable
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NK	Nijera Kori
NK-C	Nijera Kori Control (poor in non-programme area)
NK-E	Nijera Kori Experimental (members of Nijera Kori)
NK-EC	Nijera Kori Experimental-Control (non-member of Nijera Kori in program area)
PME	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation
PBS	Palli Bidyut Samity (Rural Electricity Cooperative)
PC	Private Consumption
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SMVDP	Social Mobilization, Voice and Democracy program (2001-2007)
SPC	State Provided Commodities
THC	Thana Health Complex
TNO	Thana Nirbahi (Executive) Officer
TV	Television
UN	United Nations
VAW	Violence Against Women
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization
WV	World View

# Acknowledgement



Defining “development” is no easy task. Development is *right*. Increase in *per capita* income without distributive justice and within rising inequality is not development. True development is a process of inclusion of the excluded, but not an adverse inclusion. Development is about people, about expanding their choices to lead lives they value, about enlarging opportunities for full life which can only be guaranteed by empowering people, especially empowering the poor, distressed, deprived, destitute and marginalized people in all fronts. Therefore, the right to development to empower the excluded is the necessary precondition for sustainable development. True development is a freedom-mediated process of human development. These freedoms include *political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security*. Ensuring free play of all these five types of freedom, in a most visible way, must be viewed as a natural precondition for empowerment.

Development is right – both constitutional and justiciable. It is about both knowledge about these human rights as well as about means and ways to apply these rights or realization of these rights by the poor and marginalized people for whom, under class society, consistent denial of these rights is a rule. Our understanding of *development as conscientization* rests on two issues: *meaning of conscientization*, and *broad aspects of conscientization*. The English term “conscientization” is a translation of the Portuguese term “conscientização, which is also translated as “consciousness raising”. This term was first coined successfully by Brazilian educator, activist, and theorist Paulo Freire in his 1970 seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Conscientization refers to a type of learning which is focused on perceiving and exposing social, political and economic contradictions and injustices. Conscientization also includes taking actions against oppressive elements in one’s life as part of that learning.

Conscientization is a process by which the learner advances towards critical consciousness which is necessary for *informed actions* (social praxis) – the key goal of development education. Conscientization should not be equated with just consciousness raising because the latter may involve transmission of pre-selected knowledge (in congruence with “dominant culture”, “cultural hegemony”, “status quo” etc). Conscientization is the heart of liberatory education. Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness – in particular, awareness of oppression, being an “object” of others’ will rather than a self-determining “subject”. This process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming part of the process of changing the world. It is based on the above analysis, we argue that conscientization-mediated development will be liberatory-development, and, thereby, will form the basis for real human (e) development. And, thus, is our urge to understand the essence of conscientization through how the most poor, vulnerable, marginalized people internalizes their rights (knowledge front) and how they build informed actions (practice front), and how far they move (as compared to the others who are not involved) in such process of conscientization.

It is of-course true that level of conscientization have increased among members of Nijera Kori. It can also be said emphatically that other members of the society outside Nijera Kori have also been positively affected by Nijera Kori movement. Another important finding needs to be noted very conspicuously that Nijera Kori members who have received financial supports from other NGOs improved their living standard better than who received no such

conscientization-oriented programmatic intervention. This fact clearly admits the positive role of finance in improving life. But economic inputs without conscientization does not work well, rather might worsen the situation. It has been seen that finance and conscientization catalyze each other- one works better in presence of the other. Actually financial assistance meets short run needs and conscientization brings permanent solutions to problems of life. Availability of resources expedites the action of conscientization to bring change in life.

Has conscientization-oriented interventions of Nijera Kori succeeded or failed? If succeeded, then to what extent? If failed, then failed to what extent? This study was devoted to find an answer to these questions and what has been found is mixed. However, it was distinct that conscientization works both in terms of internalization of reality and informed actions.

The accompanying study is an outcome of about two years of extensive hard work, involving the devoted time of our field team, commitment of the respondents- the members of Nijera Kori and the representatives of the common people in Bangladesh, sleepless nights of our in-house staff members of Human Development Research Centre- the coders, editors, transcribers, data entry personnel, system analyst, computer type setters, and of-course of cooks, drivers, security guards and cleaners.

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# CHAPTER I

## DEVELOPMENT AS CONSCIENTIZATION

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### UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT: AS RIGHT

Defining “development” is no easy task. We all have intuitive notions of “development”. When we speak of a developed society, we draw a picture in our minds a society in which people are well fed and well clothed, possess access to a variety of commodities, have the luxury of some leisure and entertainment, and live in a healthy environment. In short, most of us would insist that a *minimal* requirement for a ‘developed’ nation is that the physical quality of life be high, and be so uniformly, rather than being restricted to an incongruously affluent minority (Ray 2003). The notion of good society goes further. We might stress political rights and freedoms, intellectual and cultural development, stability of the family, a low crime rate, and so on. However, economic definition of development tends to insist that a high level of *material* well-being is probably a prerequisite for most other kinds of advancement. In the last few decades, the economic yardstick of *per capita* gross domestic product (GDP) growth has come under fire from various quarters. Not many serious people now believe that *per capita* income is development. Development, in the broader sense of the term, should be viewed as an approach; it is about a *view of the world*.

Development is *right*. Increase in *per capita* income without distributive justice and within rising inequality is not development. True development is a process of inclusion of the excluded, but not an adverse inclusion. Development is about people, about expanding their choices to lead lives they value, about enlarging opportunities for full life which can only be

Box 1: Understanding Development	
Development as	
✓	Human Development.
✓	Expanding people’s choices to lead lives they value.
✓	Freedom-mediated process.
✓	Transformation from deprivation.
✓	Addressing various faces of poverty (poverty due to): lack of income, hunger, low wage, unemployment, lack of shelter, lack of access to public resources (including <i>khas</i> land), ill health, lack of education, environmental hazards, lack of political freedom, lack of transparency guarantee, lack of protective security, marginalization (e.g., religious minorities, indigenous people, elderly people, disable people, poor women, slum dwellers, <i>char</i> people, rickshaw-van pullers, etc.), and mind set.
✓	Inclusion of excluded.
✓	Empowering excluded by enlarging opportunities for full life.

guaranteed by empowering people, especially empowering the poor, distressed, deprived, destitute and marginalized people in all fronts. Realization of this approach of development requires empowerment of poor and marginalized people in the front of knowledge (about their rights and worldview) first and simultaneous actions to participate and own the process. And this itself is a never ending process of progress in spiral. In this process, the passive recipients of the benefits of development transform into active agents of development.

Therefore, the right to development to empower the excluded- the poor and deprived- is a necessary precondition for sustainable development. True development is human development, which is a freedom-mediated process. Human Development is about inclusion of the excluded in the process of development. In absence of this true development, the distressed and deprived persons can be featured as: person without a face; a subjugated identity; a lost identity; a redundancy; an appendage; a person born to eat last and least; a person born to live on left over; a person born to be uneducated; a person first to be fired and last to be hired; a person to be born and brought-up in an adverse environment; a person who



is *less than equal*. In setting the true development in motion a real attitudinal change is warranted; traditionally fixed mind set needs to be changed; whole ‘ethics’ needs to be revisited- to create an enabling environment for the inclusion of the excluded, and for the empowerment of the poor and deprived.

True development is equivalent to ensuring opportunities for a full life to people, especially to those who are excluded- the poor, women, and deprived. Human development is a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy (Sen 1999). Thus, human development inherently assumes “integration” and beyond just “wealth”; requires removal of all sources of un-freedom; necessitates pro-active participation (not tokenism) of un-empowered in the process of substantive empowerment. It is important to note at this point that the discourse on empowerment is a complex one involving many dimensions of individual and social rights. Empowerment should not be reduced to legal rights or economic bargaining power only, because it has personal and cultural dimensions.

*Human development* and *poverty* (alleviation and/or reduction) are interrelated. Poverty is a multidimensional phenomena and accordingly there are a wide variety of approaches to its definition and measurement. Economists and policy analysts are more prone to focus on money-metric measures of poverty, based on the assumption that a person’s *material standard of living* largely determines their well-being. The poor are then defined or identified as those with a material standard of living as measured by income or expenditure below a certain level – the so-called *poverty line* (Atkinson 1987, 1989; Ravallion 1992). Practical problems, largely associated with the difficulty of accurately quantifying income or expenditure, have recently led economists to the exploration of alternative, non-monetary proxies for household welfare. Most pronounced amongst these is the use of household asset indexes; i.e. an aggregate measure of the access to and ownership of a specified articles of household attributes (Filmer and Pritchett 1998, Montgomery *et al.* 2000, Sahn and Stifel 2000).

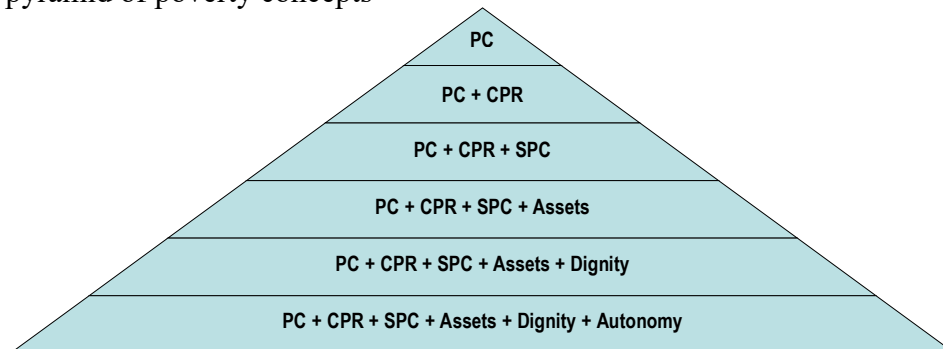
It is widely recognised that poverty measures based on household income or expenditure reflect a *static* concept, offering only a limited picture of household well-being. In case of what might be considered transitory shocks to income, households may reduce the consumption of food or household expenditure on clothing or other items in order to preserve their asset holdings, such as land, housing or durables. If, however, shocks permanently affect welfare, households may run down their holdings of assets such as durables, jewellery, livestock or land. Agarwal (1991), examining the welfare impact of famine in Bangladesh, concludes that focusing exclusively on either asset ownership or food expenditure/nutritional levels/household expenditure may give a misleading picture of well-being. *Vulnerability* and *livelihood strategy* approaches to poverty assessment are seen as offering a more *dynamic* conception of poverty (Falkingham and Namazie 2002). They focus on the households’ ability to cope with shocks to living standards by incorporating measures of investments in human capital (health and education), physical investments (housing, equipment and land), social capital and claims on other assets (such as friendships and kinship networks), stores (food, money or valuables such as jewellery), as well as labour (Moser 1998, Bond and Mukherjee 2001).

Recognition that monetary measures are not all encompassing and fail to capture other important aspects of individual well-being, such as community resources, social relations, culture, personal security and the natural environment, have resulted in the development of a set of complementary indicators which aim to capture *human capabilities* (Sen 1985 1987,

McKinley 1997, Micklewright and Stewart 2001). Capability poverty focuses on an individual's capacity to live a healthy life, free of avoidable morbidity, having adequate nourishment, being informed and knowledgeable, being capable of reproduction, enjoying personal security, and being able to participate freely and actively in society. Material resources at some level are generally necessary for some of these activities, but they are not sufficient. Measures that focus on capability poverty thus incorporate access to public services, assets and employment, as well as money-metric measures which reflect the ability to 'purchase' food, clothing and shelter. Capability poverty can be measured directly in terms of capabilities themselves; for example, the percentage of children who are underweight, or, indirectly, in terms of access to opportunities, or the means of capabilities, such as access to a trained health professional at birth and access to education and other public services. It has been argued that for any given country it should be difficult to predict or promise a significant reduction of mass poverty in the near future in a view of many factors which are not within the control of the society, no matter how mobilized its people are including internal and external resistances that should be expected to the very effort to promote people's mobilization and self-determined development (Rahman 1989a).

Baulch (1996) has usefully described the progressive broadening of what is thought to constitute poverty in terms of a '*pyramid of poverty concepts*'. Each concept represents a dimension of well-being, and each conceptualization constitutes a different combination of dimensions, with the combinations getting broader and more complex (Figure 1). The traditional 'economic' conception of poverty ideally focuses on line three of Baulch's pyramid; i.e. private consumption combined with common property resources and the consumption of state-provided commodities. However, difficulties of measuring consumption of state-provided commodities and access to common property resources often results in a focus on private consumption alone. At the other end of the spectrum, Sen (1999) sees freedom, autonomy and dignity as central and other concepts are relegated to a secondary level of importance. It should be noted that the more complex the conceptualization of poverty, the more difficult it is to operationalize. Thus, although Sen's approach is useful in understanding the attributes of welfare, it is difficult to quantify or capture.

Figure 1: A pyramid of poverty concepts



Source: Baulch, 1996

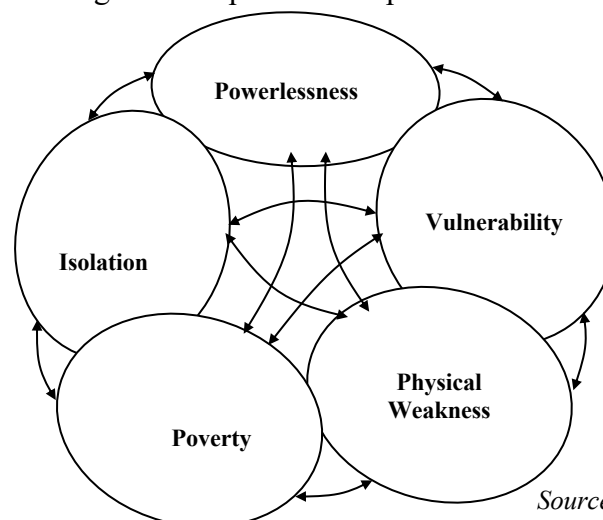
Note: PC = private consumption; CPR = common property resources; SPC = state provided commodities

Alternative conceptualization of poverty is a burgeoning array of methodological approaches towards its assessment (McGee and Brock 2001). These include ethnographic investigations using classical anthropological methods (Scott 1985, McGee 1998), participatory poverty assessments (Norton *et al.* 2001), longitudinal village studies (Jayaraman and Lanjouw 1998), and conventional household surveys (Grosh and Munoz 1996, Grosh and Glewwe 2000). The relative merits of alternative conceptions and methodological approaches largely depend upon the purpose of the analysis of poverty and exclusion.

In understanding the relationships between development and poverty it would be appropriate to mention that the economic idea about *poverty* is mostly narrowly defined one indicating income poverty or food poverty (measured in terms of direct calorie intake or cost of basic needs). Poverty, however, should be viewed in a broader sense as a complex interrelated domain of the following: income poverty, poverty due to hunger, poverty due to low wage, poverty due to constrained bargaining power, poverty due to unemployment, poverty due to lack of shelter, poverty due to lack of access to public resources including rights to *khas* land and *khas* waterbodies, poverty due to lack of education, poverty due to ill health, poverty mediated through environmental hazards, political poverty (due to lack of political freedom), poverty due to lack of transparency guarantee, poverty due to lack of protective security, poverty mediated through various forms of marginalization (e.g., among religious minorities, indigenous peoples, elderly people, disable people, poor women, slum dwellers, char people, rickshaw-van pullers etc.), poverty due to lack of knowledge about rights, poverty due to non-conducive environment in asserting rights, poverty due to lack of access to participate in public discussion and scrutiny, and poverty of mind set (for details see Barkat 2006a). This set of interrelated domains of poverty imply that poverty eradication is not just an economic issue, it is economic and much beyond.

The issue of poverty needs to be viewed in relation to *deprivation*: Poor people are caught into the deprivation trap (depicted in Figure 2), and true human development requires breaking that trap by empowering the excluded- poor and deprived. Focusing on human freedom contrasts with narrower views of development, such as identifying development with the growth of gross national product, or with the rise in personal incomes, or with industrialization, or with technological advancement, or with modernization. Growth of GNP or of individual incomes can be important as *means* to expanding the freedoms enjoyed by the members of the society. But freedoms depend also on other determinants, such as social and economic arrangements as well as political and civil rights. The examples are facilities for education and health care, the liberty to participate in public discussion and scrutiny. Similarly, industrialization or technological progress or social modernization can substantially contribute to expanding human freedom, but freedom depends on other influences as well. If freedom is what development advances, then there is a major argument for concentrating on that overarching objective, rather than on some particular means, or some specially chosen list of instruments. Viewing development in terms of expanding substantive freedoms directs attention to the ends that make development important, rather than merely to some of the means that, *inter alia*, play a prominent part in the process (Sen 1999).

Figure 2: Deprivation trap



Source: Barkat 2003b

As stated earlier, human development is about people, about expanding their choices to lead lives they value. Economic growth, increased international trade and investment, technological advance- all are very important. But they are means, not ends. Whether they contribute to human development will depend on whether they expand people's choices, whether they help create an environment for people to develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives. Therefore, the fundamental to enlarging human choices is building human capabilities: the range of things that people can do or be. The most basic capabilities for human development are leading a long and healthy life, being educated and knowledgeable about their rights and about the means and ways to establish those rights, having access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and being able to participate in the life of one's community. Assuring people's dignity also requires that they be free- and able- to participate in the formation and stewardship of the rules and institutions that govern them. *A poor person who cannot afford to send his/her children to school, but must send them to work in the fields or engage in household work, is lacking in human development.*

Thus, true human development is freedom-mediated, which requires the removal of major sources of un-freedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states. Despite unprecedented increases in overall opulence, the contemporary world *denies* elementary rights to freedom to vast number- perhaps even the majority of people. Sometimes the lack of substantive freedoms relates directly to economic poverty, which robs people of the freedom to satisfy hunger, or to achieve sufficient nutrition, or to obtain remedies for treatable illness, or the opportunity to be adequately clothed or sheltered, or to enjoy clean water or sanitary facilities. In other cases, the un-freedom links closely to the lack of public facilities and social care, such as the absence of epidemiological programs, or of organized arrangements for health care or educational facilities, or of effective institutions for the maintenance of local peace and order.

Actually, what people can positively achieve is influenced by many factors including economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and nourishment of initiatives. The institutional arrangements for these opportunities are also influenced by the exercise of people's freedoms, through the liberty to participate in social choice and in the making of public decisions that accelerate the progress of these opportunities. Realization of these interconnections is important to put 'people'- the excluded distressed and deprived- in the centre of development.

Basically, there are five distinct types of freedom. These include *political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security*. Each of these distinct types of rights and opportunities helps to advance the general capability of a person. They may also serve to complement each other and produce synergy. All these five types of freedom are linked with one another, and in-integrity produces synergy. *Political freedoms-* in the form of free speech and elections- help to promote economic security. *Social opportunities-* in the form of education and health facilities- facilitate economic participation. *Economic facilities-* in the form of opportunities for participation in trade and production, and access to public resources (e.g, *khas* land)- can help to generate personal abundance as well as public resources for social facilities. Ensuring free play of all these five types of freedom, in a most visible way, must be viewed as a natural precondition for empowerment.

From the justiciable rights-based empowerment perspective, the challenge of true human development includes both the elimination of persistence and endemic deprivation and the prevention of severe destitution, which emanate from lack of substantive freedom. Here, as stated above, freedom implies all five broad types of instrumental freedoms. *Political freedoms* refer to the opportunities for the people to determine governing bodies and principles of governance, to criticize authorities, to have the right to penalize for undemocratic governance, to have freedom of expression and an uncensored press. The intensity of economic needs adds to - rather than subtracts from - the urgency of political freedom (Sen 1999). The second forms of freedom-economic facilities refer to the opportunities that individuals enjoy to utilize economic resources for the purpose of production, or exchange, or consumption. The economic entitlements that a person has will depend on the ownership of and access to resources (land and other assets) as well as on the conditions of exchange. The third forms of freedom- social opportunities are the arrangements that society makes for education, health and so on, which accelerate the capability of individual's substantive freedom to live better. Political and economic oppressions substantially reduce the positive effect of social opportunities on individuals or on certain groups of people who are oppressed. The fourth form of freedom- *transparency guarantees* are related to the openness, i.e., the freedom to deal with one another under guarantees of disclosure and lucidity. Transparency guarantees are based on trust, violation of which adversely affects people's lives. Unfounded enactments, rules and regulations, contradictory official memos, keeping people uninformed about their rights, among others, are some of the good examples of lack of transparency guarantees which pave the way for oppressing people, promoting corruption, underhand dealings, mis-governance, and perpetuation of endemic deprivation. The fifth form of freedom- *protective securities* are extremely important because there are people who are vulnerable, fragile and deprived as a result of material changes that adversely affect their lives. The need for protective security can emerge as a consequence of economic structure itself and/or as a consequence of alienation from political and other freedoms. Ensuring protective securities implies the need for strong institutional arrangements. All these freedoms reflect distinct types of rights and opportunities which help to advance the general capability of a person, or a community characterized by some common identity- class, gender, culture, ethnicity, geographic location etc. Denial of these freedoms produces and reproduces serious imbalances in terms of social, economic, cultural, demographic, political and psychological life in our society. And making these freedoms work for the poor and marginalized necessitates understanding development as a process mediated through conscientization.

**Box 2: Human development - the concept is larger than the index**

Ironically, the human development approach to development has fallen victim to the success of its human development index (HDI). The HDI has reinforced the narrow, oversimplified interpretation of the human development concept as being only about expanding education, health and decent living standards. This has obscured the broader, more complex concept of human development as the expansion of capabilities that widen people's choices to lead lives that they value.

Despite careful efforts to explain that the concept is broader than the measure, human development continues to be identified with the HDI—while political freedoms, participating in the life of one's community and physical security are often overlooked. But such capabilities are as universal and fundamental as being able to read or to enjoy good health. They are not included in the HDI because they are difficult to measure appropriately, not because they are any less important to human development.

Source: Fukuda - Parr 2002

## UNDERSTANDING CONSCIENTIZATION: AS ROUTES TO DEVELOPMENT

Development is right- both Constitutional and justiciable. It is about both knowledge about these human rights as well as about means and ways to apply these rights or realization of these rights by the poor and marginalized people for whom, under class society, consistent denial of these rights is a rule. The central argument we want to forward in this study is that *people's conscientization is the key to sustained development of the poor and marginalized*. This argument implies that true conscientization process has the all-encompassing potential to set an empowerment process in motion through which it is possible to transform human deprivation into human development; through which poor and marginalized people's agency role in development realizes; and through which they can become pro-active demander of rights rather than passive recipients of right-based services. To set this process of conscientization in active motion, imparting and sharing knowledge about rights (human rights, knowledge about fundamentalism, worldview etc) is a necessary precondition, and struggle towards attainment of rights is a sufficient pre-condition. This necessary pre-condition forms the basis for *internalization* and the sufficient pre-condition forms the basis for *informed action (praxis)*. It is argued that implementation of these two pre-conditions is necessary to realize the conscientization-mediated development which enlarges opportunities for a full life to people, expands real freedoms that people enjoy, expands choices to lead lives people value, and establishes dignified human life. In other words, this conscientization-mediated development should be seen as a route to crystallize the process of *development with dignity*.

### Box 3: Development as human right

Rights in Bangladesh CONSTITUTION (1972)

1. "All power in the Republic belong to the people" (Article 7.1).
2. *Guarantee of human rights, freedoms, respect for dignity and work of human person* (Article 11).
3. *Provisioning of basic necessities of life- food, clothing, shelter, education, medical care* (Article 15a).
4. *Right to work, guaranteed employment at reasonable wage* (Article 15b).
5. *Right to social security* (Article 15d).
6. *Right to ensure women's participation in all spheres of national life* (Article 10).
7. *Emancipation of toiling masses* (Article 14).
8. *Removal of rural-urban disparity; access to electricity* (Article 16).
9. *Right to free compulsory education* (Article 17).
10. *Equality of opportunity of all citizens; removal of social and economic inequality* (Article 19).
11. *Equality before law* (Article 17).
12. *Right no to be discriminated on grounds of religion, race etc.* (Article 28.1).
13. *Protection of right to life and personal liberty* (Article 32).

In our understanding of *development as conscientization* it is worth, at this point, to explain two issues: (a) meaning of conscientization, and (b) broad aspects of conscientization.

The English term "conscientization" is a translation of the Portugese term "conscientização, which is also translated as "consciousness raising". This term was first coined successfully by Brazillian educator, activist, and theorist Paulo Freire (1921-1997) in his 1970 seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire was teaching the poor and illiterate members of Brazillian society to read at a time when literacy was a requirement for suffrage and dictators ruled many South American Countries.

Conscientization refers to a type of learning which is focused on perceiving and exposing social, political and economic contradictions and injustices. Conscientization also includes taking actions against oppressive elements in one's life as part of that learning. This meaning of conscientization can be traced back to Italian left intellectuals of early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in their "*philosophy of praxis*" i.e, *informed action*. These intellectuals include Antonio Labriola, Rodolfo Mondolfo, Giovanni Gentile, Benedetto Croce, and (of course) Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937).

According to Gramsci, capitalism (capitalist state rule through *force plus consent*) maintains control not just through violence and political and economic coercion, but also ideologically, through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the bourgeoisie became the “common sense” values of all. Thus a consensus culture develops in which the working class identifies their own good with the good of the bourgeoisies. Therefore, Gramsci suggests that the working class needs to develop a culture of its own. In Gramsci’s view, any class that wishes to dominate in modern conditions has to move beyond its narrow “economic-corporate” interests, to exert intellectual and moral leadership, and to make alliances and compromises with a variety of forces. Gramsci terms this union of social forces as “historic bloc”. This bloc forms the basis of consent to a certain social order, which produces and reproduces the hegemony of the dominant class through a nexus of institutions, social relations and ideas. Gramsci stated that all men are intellectuals, in that all have intellectual and rational faculties, but not all men have the social function of intellectuals. However, he distinguished between a ‘traditional’ intelligentsia which sees itself (wrongly) as a class apart from society, and the *thinking groups* which every class produces from its own ranks ‘organically’. Such ‘organic’ intellectuals do not simply describe social life in accordance with scientific rules, but rather articulate, through the *language of culture*, the feelings and experiences which the masses could not express for themselves. Therefore, according to Gramsci, it is needed to create a working-class culture through education, which will develop working-class intellectuals. This intellectual will (according to Gramsci) renovate and be critical of the *status quo*. Gramsci’s ideas about an education system for this purpose correspond with the notion of critical pedagogy and popular education as theorized and practiced in later decades by Paulo Freire in Brazil.

Conscientization proceed through the identification of ‘generative themes’, which Paulo Freire identifies as “Iconic representations that have a powerful emotional impact in the daily lives to learners”. In this way, individual consciousness helps breaking the “culture of silence” in which the socially dispossessed (deprived, destitute, distressed) people *internalize* the negative images of themselves created and propagated by the oppressor in situations of extreme poverty and marginalization. Liberating learners from this mimicry of the powerful, and the fratricidal violence that results therefore is a major goal of conscientization.

Paulo Freire, based on the premise- “*people are not machines or objects that can be worked on like motor cars. They have to be worked with*”- asserted that education can conquer oppression and is a means for liberation and social change. The most useful concepts Freire emphasized in his “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” are as follows:

- i) **Dialogue:** Instead of teacher depositing (“against bank approaches”) information to the student, discussion based around the principle of respect would take place, wherein the teacher would often become the student and the students teachers.
- ii) **Praxis:** Dialogue would lead to informed action and making a difference in ones world. Students are given the tools that lead to informed action – learning about letter writing, learning how to get involved in the community etc.
- iii) **Culture of silence:** Dominated individuals lose the means by which to critically respond to the culture that is forced on them by a dominant culture. This is what happens if conscientization is not happening.

- iv) **Language:** Through the gathering of a list of terms used in daily life in the community, the teacher can learn to understand the reality of the people and speak in a language that all understand. Making words relevant to the lives of the people helps to build a conscientization among students.
- v) **Community and cultural circle:** All members of the classroom, regardless of class need to work together in order to achieve goals. The formation of a community in the classroom is called a “cultural circle”.
- vi) **Cultural synthesis:** The recognition and respect afforded to different cultures. An extension of the mutual respect among learners in a discussion based classroom.

Finally, conscientization is a process by which the learner advances towards critical consciousness which is necessary for informed actions (social praxis) – the key goal of development education (according to Freire). This concept of conscientization is the foundation of

community cultural development. Conscientization should not be equated with just consciousness raising because the latter may involve transmission of pre-selected knowledge (in congruence with “dominant culture”, “cultural hegemony”, “status quo” etc). Conscientization is the heart of liberatory education. Conscientization means breaking through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness – in particular, awareness of oppression, being an “object” of others’ will rather than a self-determining “subject”. This process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming part of the process of changing the world. It is based on the above analysis, we argue that conscientization-mediated development will be liberatory-development, and, thereby, will form the basis for real human(e) development. And, thus, is our urge to understand the essence of conscientization through how the most poor, vulnerable, marginalized people internalizes their rights (*knowledge front*) and how they build informed actions (*practice front*), and how far they move (as compared to the others who are not involved) in such process of conscientization.

#### Box 4: Conscientization: As Routes to Development

- ✓ A process of liberatory education and social change.
- ✓ A process of breaking *culture of silence*.
- ✓ A process to critically respond to dominant culture.
- ✓ Poor and marginalized people’s agency role.
- ✓ This necessary pre-condition forms the basis for *internalization*, and the sufficient pre-condition forms the basis for *informed action (praxis)*.
- ✓ Struggle towards attainment of rights is a sufficient pre-condition.

#### To Recapitulate

Defining “development” is no easy task. Development is *right*. Increase in *per capita* income without distributive justice and within rising inequality is not development. True development is a process of inclusion of the excluded, but not an adverse inclusion. Development is about people, about expanding their choices to lead lives they value, about enlarging opportunities for full life which can only be guaranteed by empowering the poor, distressed, deprived, destitute and marginalized people in all fronts. True development is freedom-mediated process of human development. These include *political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security*. Ensuring free play of all these five types of freedom, in a most visible way, must be viewed as a natural precondition for empowerment. In understanding the relationships between development and poverty it would be appropriate to mention that the economic idea about *poverty* is mostly narrowly defined one indicating income poverty or food poverty (measured in terms of direct calorie intake or cost of basic needs). Poverty, however, should be viewed in a broader sense as a complex interrelated domain of the following: income poverty, poverty due to hunger, poverty due to low wage, poverty due to constrained bargaining power, poverty due to unemployment, poverty due to lack of shelter, poverty due to lack of access to public resources including rights to *khas* land and *khas* waterbodies, poverty due to lack of education, poverty due to ill health, poverty mediated through environmental hazards, political poverty (due to lack of political freedom), poverty due to lack of transparency guarantee, poverty due to lack of protective security, poverty



mediated through various forms of marginalization (e.g., among religious minorities, indigenous peoples, elderly people, disable people, poor women, slum dwellers, char people, rickshaw-van pullers etc.), poverty due to lack of knowledge about rights, poverty due to non-conducive environment in asserting rights, poverty due to lack of access to participate in public discussion and scrutiny, and poverty of mind set.

Development is right – both constitutional and justiciable. It is about both knowledge about these human rights as well as about means and ways to apply these rights or realization of these rights by the poor and marginalized people for whom, under class society, consistent denial of these rights is rule. The central argument we want to forward in this study is that *people's conscientization is the key to sustained development of the poor and marginalized*. This argument implies that true conscientization process has the all-encompassing potential to set an empowerment process in motion through which it is possible to transform human deprivation into human development; through which poor and marginalized people's agency role in development realizes; and through which they can become pro-active demander of rights rather than passive recipients of right-based services. To set this process of conscientization in active motion, imparting and sharing knowledge about rights (human rights, knowledge about fundamentalism, worldview etc) is a necessary precondition, and struggle towards attainment of rights is a sufficient precondition. This necessary pre-condition forms the basis for *internalization* and the sufficient pre-condition forms the basis for *informed action (praxis)*. It is argued that implementation of these two pre-conditions is necessary to realize the conscientization-mediated development which enlarges opportunities for a full life to people, expands real freedoms that people enjoy, expands choices to lead lives people value, and establishes dignified human life. In other words, this conscientization-mediated development should be seen as a route to crystallize the process of *development with dignity*.

The English term “conscientization” is a translation of the Portuguese term “conscientização, which is also translated as “consciousness raising”. This term was first coined successfully by Brazillian educator, activist, and theorist Paulo Freire (1921-1997) in his 1970 seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire was teaching the poor and illiterate members of Brazillian society to read at a time when literacy was a requirement for suffrage and dictators ruled many South American Countries. Conscientization refers to a type of learning which is focused on perceiving and exposing social, political and economic contradictions and injustices. Conscientization also includes taking actions against oppressive elements in one's life as part of that learning. This meaning of conscientization can be traced back to Italian left intellectuals of early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in their “*philosophy of praxis*” i.e, *informed action*. These intellectuals include Antonio Labriola, Rodolfo Mondolfo, Giovanni Gentile, Benedetto Croce, and (of course) Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). Conscientization proceed through the identification of ‘generative themes’, which Paulo Freire identifies as “Iconic representations that have a powerful emotional impact in the daily lives to learners”. In this way, individual consciousness helps breaking the “culture of silence” in which the socially dispossessed (deprived, destitute, distressed) people *internalize* the negative images of themselves created and propagated by the oppressor in situations of extreme poverty and marginalization. Liberating learners from this mimicry of the powerful, and the fratricidal violence that results therefore is a major goal of conscientization. The most useful concepts Freire emphasized in his “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” are: i) Dialogue: Instead of teacher depositing (“against bank approaches”) information to the student, discussion based around the principle of respect would take place, wherein the teacher would often become the student and the students teachers. ii) Praxis: Dialogue would lead to informed action and making a difference in ones world. Students are given the tools that lead to informed action – learning about letter writing, learning how to get involved in the community etc. iii) Culture of silence: Dominated individuals lose the means by which to critically respond to the culture that is forced on them by a dominant culture. This is what happens if conscientization is not happening, iv) Language: Through the gathering of a list of terms used in daily life in the community, the teacher can learn to understand the reality of the people and speak in a language that all understand. Making words relevant to the lives of the people helps to build a conscientization among students, v) Community and cultural circle: All members of the classroom, regardless of class need to work together in order to achieve goals. The formation of a community in the classroom is called a “cultural circle”, vi) Cultural synthesis: The recognition and respect afforded to different cultures. An extension of the mutual respect among learners in a discussion based classroom.

Conscientization is a process by which the learner advances towards critical consciousness which is necessary for informed actions (social praxis) – the key goal of development education (according to Freire). This concept of conscientization is the foundation of community cultural development. Conscientization should not be equated with just consciousness raising because the latter may involve transmission of pre-selected knowledge (in congruence with “dominant culture”, “cultural hegemony”, “status quo” etc). Conscientization is the heart of liberatory education. Conscientization means breaking

through prevailing mythologies to reach new levels of awareness – in particular, awareness of oppression, being an “object” of others’ will rather than a self-determining “subject”. This process of conscientization involves identifying contradictions in experience through dialogue and becoming part of the process of changing the world. It is based on the above analysis, we argue that conscientization-mediated development will be liberatory-development, and, thereby, will form the basis for real human(e) development. And, thus, is our urge to understand the essence of conscientization through how the most poor, vulnerable, marginalized people internalizes their rights (*knowledge front*) and how they build informed actions (*practice front*), and how far they move (as compared to the others who are not involved) in such process of conscientization.

## CHAPTER II

# NIJERA KORI AS LABORATORY TO UNDERSTAND PROCESS OF CONSCIENTIZATION<sup>1</sup>

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### ORGANIZED EFFORT OF PURSUING CONSCIENTIZATION: THE NIJERA KORI

#### Nijera Kori: The Beginning

Nijera Kori (NK) is an NGO in Bangladesh. After the famine of 1974, many destitute rural women made their way to the cities in search of food and work. Some women took the initiative of training some of these women in food processing so they were able to generate income. The process gradually resulted in the development of an organization “Nijera Kori”, which, in English, means, “We do it ourselves”. At its inception, therefore, famine-affected urban destitute women constituted the target group of Nijera Kori and the aim of the organization was to rehabilitate these women.

During the early period of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the mainstream NGOs in Bangladesh concentrated on rural social mobilisation to challenge the power structure, which brought a strong backlash from the rural elites particularly during the martial law. This was one of the reasons why there was a general move by the NGOs away from this and towards concentration on micro-credit. This concentration allowed professionalization of NGOs and increased the tendency of measuring progress in terms of money and quantity. However, a number of people working in leading NGOs, who felt that consciousness raising of the poor held the key to resolving the core problems of rural society joined in. NK with its current form and focus was formed in 1980 from a group of such people who had started working at field level and concentrating on rural social mobilization and felt that the increasingly service-based approach of NGOs would simply create dependency among the target population.

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<sup>1</sup> In developing this section, following documents were consulted:

- Annual Progress Report 2006-07, 2005-06, Nijera Kori
- Annual Report 2004-05, 2003-04, 2002-03, 2001-2002, Nijera Kori
- Mid-term Review, Nijera Kori: Social Mobilisation, Voice and Democracy Program, July 2004
- Naila Kabeer, ‘We don’t do credit’ Nijera Kori, social mobilization and the collective capabilities of the poor in rural Bangladesh, Nijera Kori, 2002
- Official web-site of Nijera Kori [<http://www.nijera.kori.org>]
- Annual Review of Nijera Kori: Social Mobilisation, Voice and Democracy Program, August 13, 2003, HDRC

This group brought about a change in the focus of the organization. It began to concentrate on addressing the situation which causes poverty and destitution of rural people rather than temporarily ameliorating, and that too at a superficial level, the suffering of those who faced such circumstances. The organizational

**Box 5: NK: Facts and Figures about Organization**

As on August 2007, the organization now has 260,034 group members, of whom 124,411 (48%) are male and 135,623 (52%) are female. It has a staff of 342 out of which 103 are female and 239 are male including 100 support staff consisting of both women and men and its program today is called 'Social Mobilisation, Voice and Democracy Program', which is operational in 1,353 villages, 172 unions, 37 upazilas, 17 districts.

objectives of Nijera Kori shifted to the struggle to create a society free from oppression and deprivation through the establishment of the fundamental rights of the people. In order to achieve this goal, the strategy that NK developed was to make people conscious of their rights and to assist them to develop the collective strength necessary to establish those rights. Under this goal, the target group of NK also expanded from its original concentration. Now NK defines its target group broadly as those women and men who earn their living mainly through physical labour. Its geographical concentration has an emphasis on rural rather than urban areas.

## Mission, Objectives, and Target Group of Nijera Kori

### *Mission of Nijera Kori*

- Development activities of Nijera Kori are directed for the establishment of rights of the downtrodden people.
- Women are an important and integral part of all production processes. In order to break the patriarchal system, Nijera Kori works to change the biased male perception towards women and encourages women to recognize and assert their own position in society.
- Nijera Kori feels that an accountable, democratic environment is absolutely essential for development. Nijera Kori imbibes democratic conduct through participation and accountability in planning, implementation, evaluation and overall management not only with the groups organised but throughout the organization itself.
- Nijera Kori believes in an environment friendly sustainable development process.

### **Objectives of Nijera Kori:**

- To unite people, both women and men who have long been the victims of exploitation, social marginalization, oppression and poverty.
- To enable people thus united to understand and develop awareness about their rights, causes of their problems and their responsibilities.
- To empower people to take up challenges within their own spheres to create better and more meaningful lives for themselves and their immediate community.

### **Target group of Nijera Kori:**

- Those dependant on physical labour as their main source of livelihood: wage labourers, sharecroppers, small and marginal farmers etc.
- Other vulnerable communities: indigenous communities, fisher folk, weavers, blacksmiths, barbers, cobblers, potters, small traders etc.

Nijera Kori (NK) works with the poorest women and men in Bangladesh. These are people who rarely have any voice in local or national structure of decision making; and who are kept in their places by powerful (and increasingly violent) social structure. And its program today (2001-2007) is called “*Social Mobilization, Voice and Democracy Program (SMVDP)*”.

**Box 6: Super goal and immediate objectives of “Social Mobilization, Voice and democracy Program (SMVDP)”**

The *supergoal* of the program is to reduce poverty and inequality, and to promote human rights in Bangladesh. The *goal* of the program is to improve accountability and capability of democratic processes and to create more responsive, people-centered governance at local and higher levels. The *immediate objective* is to enable the Nijera Kori members and their allies to increase effective pressure on the government, political and other elites in order to have better access to decision-making processes, resources and services for poor men and women. The *outputs of the project reads*: (a) sustaining the social mobilization of poor people, (b) raising their awareness of human rights and legal entitlements, (c) supporting collective actions on a wide range of issues, (d) influencing administrative and political decision-making processes at local and regional levels, and (e) improving Nijera Kori’s institutional capacity and coalition building at national and other levels.

According to program outline, the expected outcomes are the following:

1. Sustained and expanded social mobilization of poor men and women in NK areas at village, union, thana, and regional levels.
2. Poor women and men in Nijera Kori areas are more aware of their civil, political, economic and social rights, including gender equality.
3. Collective actions planned and taken by poor women and men in specific areas to:
  - protest abuses and protect rights at community and local levels (eg. actions on violence against women, better operation of village *shalish* courts, police accountability).
  - increase their security and access to resources and entitlements (eg. access to *khas* land and water; reduced land capture by elites, for shrimp farming and other uses; more wage and sharecropping bargaining power); and
  - improve the accountability and operation of government services (eg. health, education, food security, and employment schemes).
4. Poor people gain more influence in local level administrative and political arenas and related decision-making processes.
5. Improved organizational capacity of Nijera Kori and its members for learning, advocacy and coalition building at national and international levels.

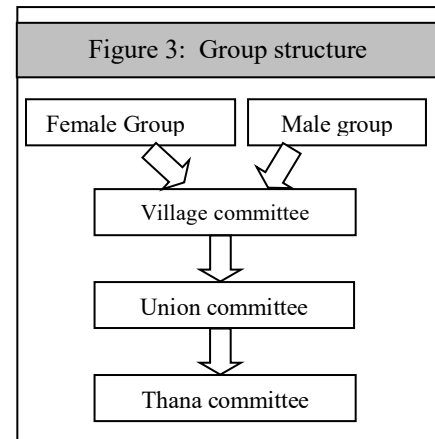
The organization uses social mobilization as a strategy to empower people in political and social terms. By building the collective capacities of the poor to mobilize in defense of their rights, NK seeks to engender a more self-reliant process of economic empowerment, with improved access to a range of tangible and less tangible resources. NK works to build capacity on a number of fronts, from building awareness of constitutional rights and mechanism, and seeking to improve accountability within government institutions, to local level dispute resolution and improving access to justice, safety and security.

## NIJERA KORI’S CONSCIENTIZATION EFFORTS

NK’s core activities include formation of landless organization, training and orientation, and cultural activities, amongst many.

### (a) Landless organization and formation

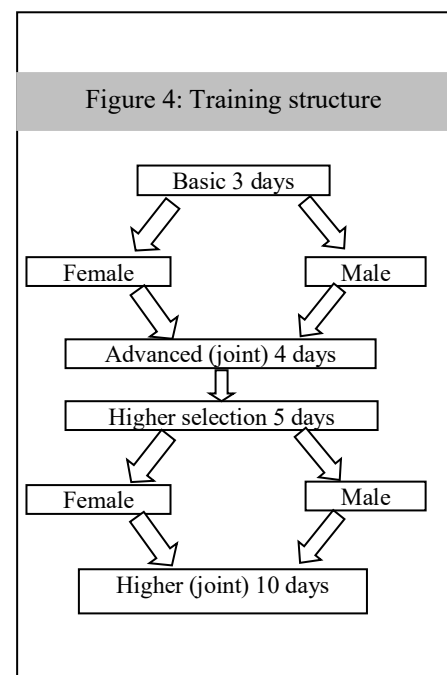
The landless groups are formed on a preliminary basis with a minimum of 16 to maximum 30 members. For reasons pragmatic and practical, groups are separately formed with male and female members. Rooted in the patriarchal values and the consequent social and religious beliefs, women in traditional Bangladeshi society are kept separate from men. For this reason at the preliminary stage, women groups are formed exclusively. But when at a later stage after necessary capacity building, the group’s member’s start working on various at par with their male colleagues, groups are formed with both male and female members. At a further level when two third of the targeted population at the village, union and upazilla level become group members, committees are formed. But the landless members, sometimes, form their own committee at regional level when situation demands and when such steps are felt necessary for the movement of the landless peoples even if this means less than two third of the targeted population are still not group members. At every level, the committees are formed and their terms renewed through annual group meetings. This is through such trial and above all of learning environment that the landless groups develop their organizational capacity, become aware of their rights and as well as responsibilities and gradually gain the capacity to claim their rights as citizen of the country.



The formation and renewal of the landless' committees at every level is done through annual conventions. In this process the landless organization gradually get strengthened and achieves a reputable identity, which ultimately ensures its share to the local power structure.

### (b) Training

Group trainings are organized with 20-25 members and are divided in four categories: basic, advanced, higher selection and higher. At basic level, male and female members are provided trainings separately. Fro advanced level, trainings are organized with both male and female members, but at higher advanced level male and female members are separated. At higher level, they both are again grouped together.



NK follows this particular approach to impart relevant skills to both the male and female members. The objective is to create an environment where both male and female members get an open environment of sharing and mutual learning. This is particularly important for the female members who

need such an environment and who, otherwise, feel shy to express their feelings in presence of male members. At later stage, they are mixed together so that they can build mutual trust and understanding, key elements for their successful empowerment. Along side, the main trainings, separate trainings at basic and advanced level are organized for members who are involved in cultural activities, each session having 20 members. Furthermore, based on specific needs of certain working areas, other trainings on relevant subjects are also provided. Some of such training courses are; ‘leadership development’, ‘collective production and management’, ‘rights to information’, ‘globalization and sustainable development’, ‘rights and constitutional security’, etc. Members who have already received basic level training are eligible for these trainings.

<b>Box 7: Nijera Kori’s Conscientization Efforts</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ NK uses social mobilization strategy to empower poor through 260,034 group members in 1,353 villages (172 unions, 37 upazilas, 17 districts).</li> <li>✓ Target people: Poor and vulnerable communities.</li> <li>✓ NK program contains - <i>dialogues, praxis, community and cultural circle, cultural synthesis</i> in the format of classical conscientization process.</li> <li>✓ Broad activities: Formation of primary landless groups (16-30 members), human development training and orientation, cultural activities.</li> <li>✓ NK members have become pro-active demander of rights rather than passive recipients of rights-based services.</li> <li>✓ Philosophy and programmatic interventions of NK fall in the realm of <i>conscientization</i>.</li> </ul>

*(c) Cultural activities*

Nijera Kori considers cultural activities an integral part of social mobilization. The objectives of all cultural activities of NK are to attack on the injustice, exploitation and repressions of the society on order to allow the poor and the disadvantaged people self-dependent, aware of their human dignity. With this aims, cultural groups are formed with 13-20 members, with the members who are interested to cultural activities. The members, at initial stage, sits 2-3 hours every day together among themselves, and play a very important role in the mobilization of public opinion by performing issue-based drama, music and other cultural performances. The cultural groups of the landless peoples, in the activity year, performed in various issue based events, besides in the important national and international days. They have written and performed 54 new pieces of drama, portraying the struggle for rights of the poor and the landless peoples. Furthermore, they have performed 412 popular dramas in various events, depicting themes like, violence against women, rights to *khas* land, commercial shrimp cultivation, corruption in government, globalization, etc.

Activities of Nijera Kori are shown in below. In Figure 6, various activities of various committees are depicted.

Category wise broad activities of Nijera Kori

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Broad activities</b>
Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of landless groups (<i>bhumiheen samity</i>).</li> <li>• Groups meetings, representatives’ meetings and collective meetings.</li> <li>• Group workshops.</li> <li>• Group formation at different levels, meetings and annual group meetings.</li> <li>• Group savings, bank accounts and collective economic activities.</li> </ul>
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group training.</li> <li>• Staff development training.</li> </ul>
Cultural Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Long march.</li> <li>• Drama festival.</li> </ul>

Livelihood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal aid activities.</li> <li>• Education.</li> <li>• Livestock vaccination.</li> <li>• Establishment of watch committees (to observe on <i>education, health, safe drinking water, agriculture and land and land development</i>).</li> </ul>
Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networking and action for advocacy.</li> <li>• Publications.</li> <li>• Research.</li> <li>• Planning, monitoring and evaluation.</li> <li>• Participation of various technical experts in the review and evaluation of activities.</li> <li>• Solidarity activities.</li> <li>• Infrastructure and construction.</li> </ul>

<b>Detail activities of Nijera Kori</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening economic base of <i>Bhumiheen Samity</i> members through greater accumulation of collective capital and increased revenue from collective investments.</li> <li>• Increase the landless in collective bargaining for living wages.</li> <li>• Increase in the amount of land recovered for landless and marginal farmers.</li> <li>• Increase <i>bhumiheen samity</i> members in conflict mediation.</li> <li>• Increase number of children of <i>bhumiheen samity</i> members attends schools.</li> <li>• Increase organized landless against religious fundamentalism, corruption, violation of rights (<i>including that of women and indigenous people</i>) and injustice.</li> <li>• Increase access of Nijera Kori female members to organisational leadership.</li> <li>• Increase access to justice for women survivors of violence.</li> <li>• Increase access of women to savings, khas land and economic resources (<i>cattle, poultry etc.</i>).</li> <li>• Challenging the stereotype image of women at community space by increased participation of women in shalish, bazaar committees, school committees etc. local bodies.</li> <li>• Increase men's participation on women issues.</li> <li>• Increasing number of times the <i>bhumiheen</i> samity members approached by other social actors.</li> <li>• Increase actions against irregularities and corruption in government schemes at local level.</li> <li>• Increase allotment and possession of landless on <i>khas</i> land and water bodies.</li> <li>• Increase eviction of land grabbers.</li> <li>• Increase access of genuinely vulnerable and deprived women and men in various social and economic safety net measures of the local government (<i>e.g. VGD, VGF, Elders Allowance, Widow Allowance, Female student-stipends etc.</i>).</li> <li>• Ensuring majority of the court verdicts in favour of organised landless regarding land and other human rights related cases.</li> <li>• Increase number of meeting between representatives of <i>Bhumihin Samity</i> and local government to discuss issues and concerns of the poor.</li> <li>• Developing public opinion on land reform issues at local and national level.</li> <li>• Establishing networks at national and international level against industrial shrimp aqua-culture.</li> <li>• Strengthening a policy forum on access to water resource and its sustainable use.</li> <li>• Increase knowledge base for pro-poor policy review and reform.</li> <li>• Increase number of issue based media interactions held at local and national levels.</li> </ul>

## ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT OF NIJERA KORI

### Management of Nijera Kori

The core value of Nijera Kori's management structure and decision-making system is guided by the philosophy of 'participatory democracy'. The overall governance of the organization rests with the 'General Body,' which elects the 'Governing Body' for two years. The 'Governing Body' meets regularly every three months while the 'General Body' holds its General Meeting annually. The 'Governing Body' appoints the Coordinator who is responsible for coordinating the overall programmes and management of Nijera Kori.



However, the main decision-making body of the organization is the Central Staff Convention, which is held every alternate year and attended by all staff of NK. Here they constitute a three-tier council for two years for overall management and coordination by electing their representatives (except coordinator) from among the staff. These councils are 1) *Anchal Parishad* (Area Council), 2) *Bibhagiya Parishad* (Divisional Council) and 3) *Nirbahi Parishad* (Central Executive Council). The overall activities of NK are planned and monitored through weekly sub-centre meeting, monthly anchal parishad meeting, bi-monthly divisional parishad meeting, quarterly nirbahi parishad meeting, annual divisional staff convention and finally at central staff convention/council. On behalf of the above councils the Coordinator regularly consults the Governing Body.

For linking the grassroots, on the other hand, each *Anchal* (area structure) has 3-4 sub-centres, which are made up of female and male field staff. They, through living collectively in a centre in the field, manage the activities of NK along with the landless people. The landless groups themselves have their own structure for group activities (See Figure 5 and 6).

Nijera Kori ensures that all staff and target group members have equal participation and say in the planning, monitoring and implementation of its activities. According to group structure, the groups, through annual group meetings, village, union, thana and anchal group/committee meetings, annual group conventions and groups' representative meetings, evaluate their previous activities, discuss problems and remedial measures and formulate their next plans of action. NK staffs, by participating in those meetings, become part of the decisions/outputs taken in these meetings, which they later share in NK's internal meetings/forums as per organizational structure. This process of synthesizing opinions from group level to central staff convention/council and its subsequent reflection in the formulation of a concrete plan shapes the participatory management system of Nijera Kori.

Figure 5: Organogram of Nijera Kori

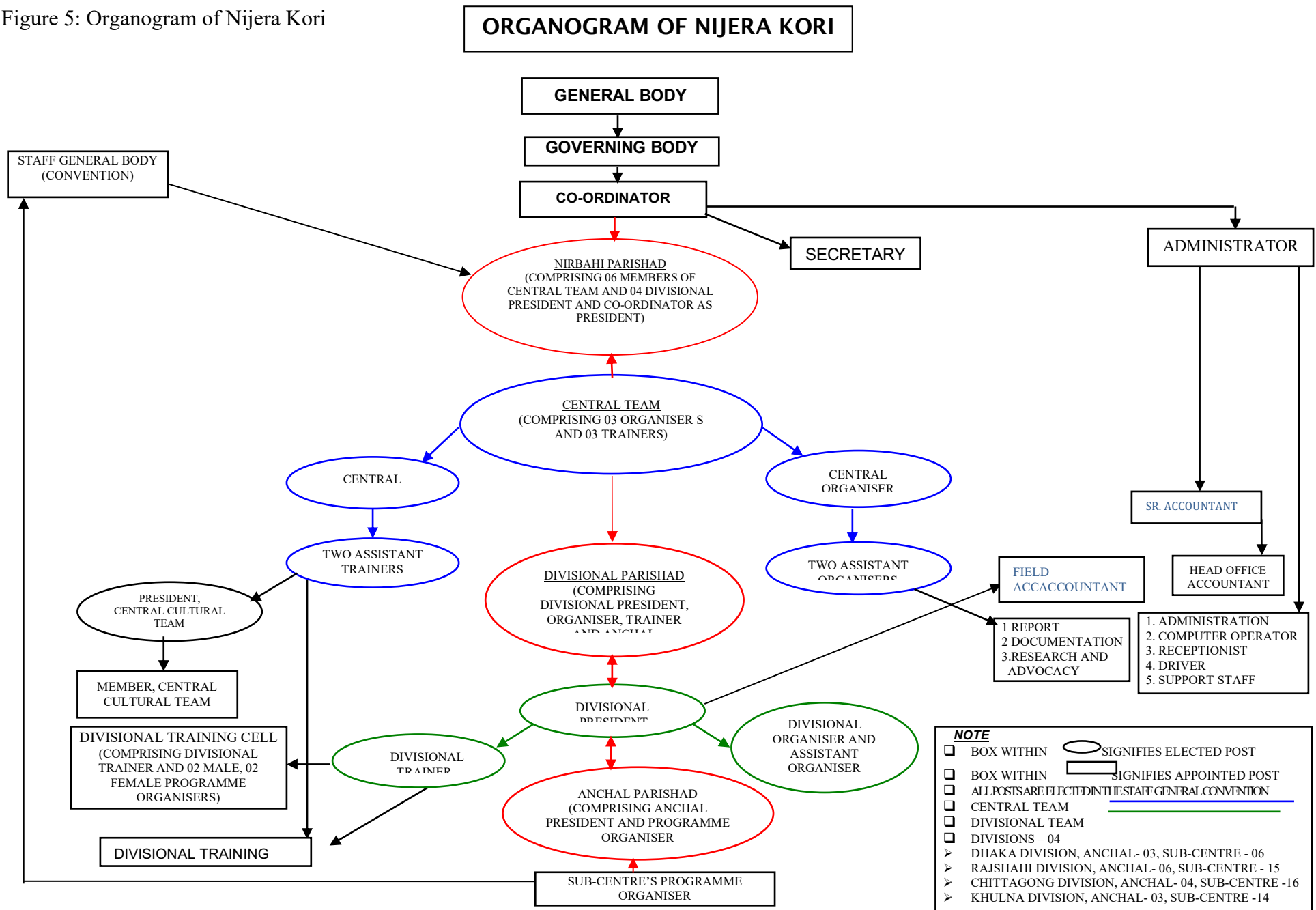
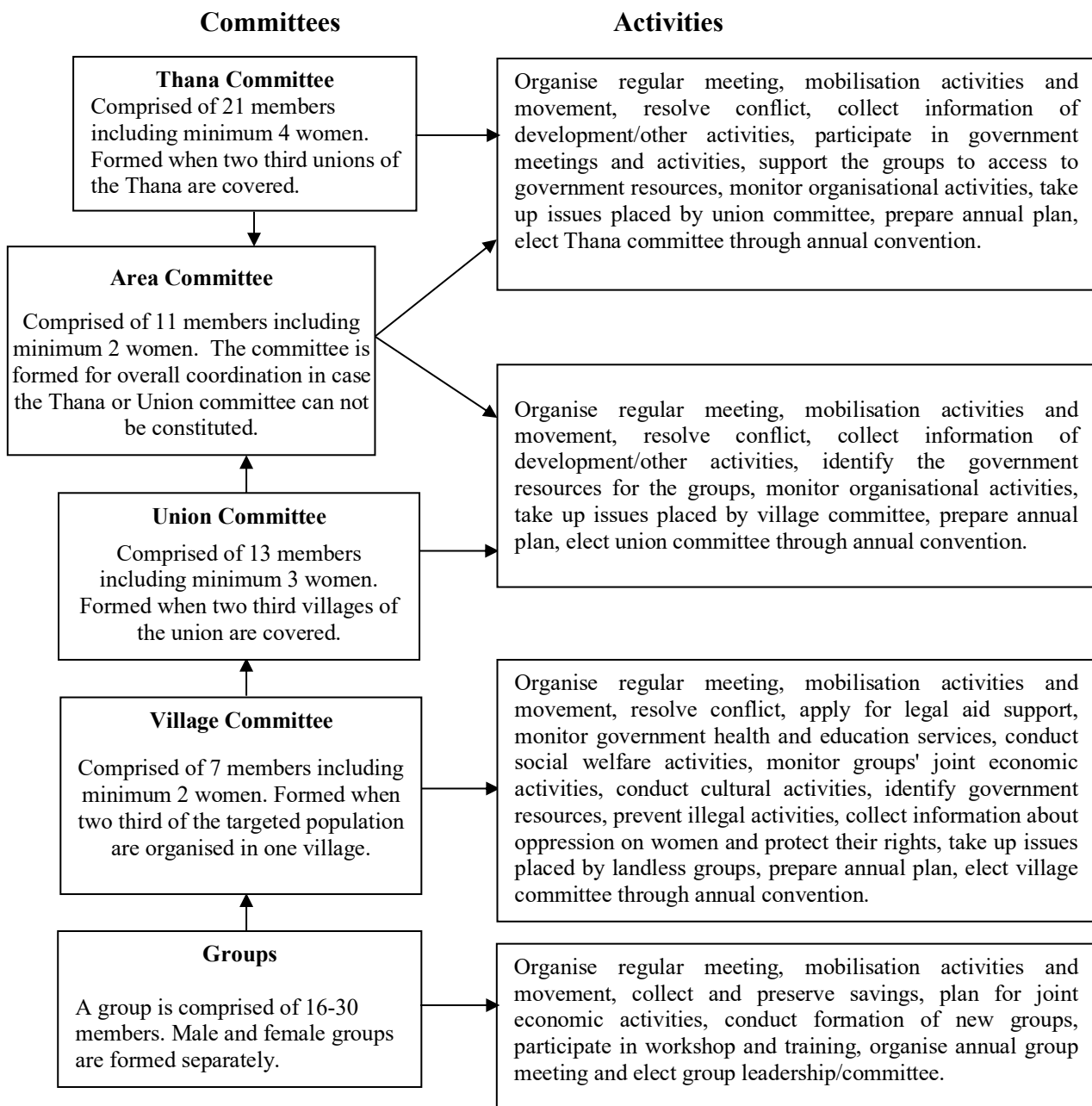


Figure 6: Nijera Kori: The committees and their activities

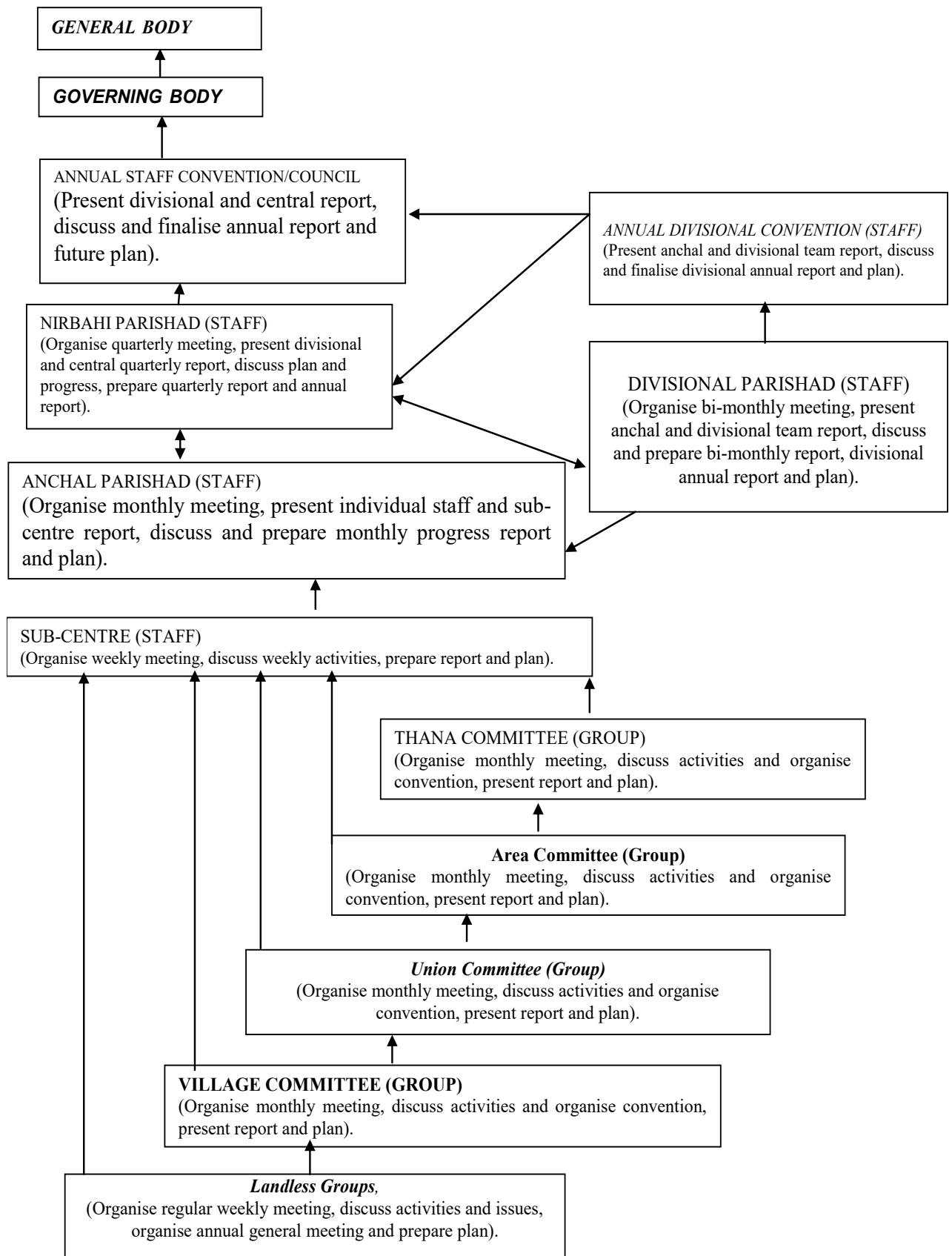


### Planning, monitoring, evaluation (PME) and reporting system of Nijera Kori

Nijera Kori has been practicing a comprehensive PME and reporting system ensuring equal participation of staff and landless groups in the whole process (see Figure 7). The landless groups through regular meetings evaluate their activities and formulate plans. In these meetings leaders, representatives of landless groups/committees from other working areas too actively participate, along with the field staff of NK. In fact, these meetings constitute the basis of the PME and management system. The information and recommendations generated from these meetings of the landless groups are discussed at various other levels (*i.e. village, union, area and thana committee meetings and conventions etc.*) of the organization. The opinions and proposals of the landless received through this process are then sent to the sub-centres of NK through NK field staff, which later are discussed and evaluated at various

levels of the organization as per the organizational structure. Through this process, guidelines for NK activities are set, based on which NK staffs formulate the plans for the organization. To help coordinate activities, facilitate interaction between staff and groups and share opinions and provide necessary suggestions; the executive council, divisional council and area presidents directly participate in field level activities on a regular basis. In addition, the staff and the groups at times visit each others' working areas with a view to assess, evaluate, monitor and provide necessary counseling to their counterparts. The same process is followed where written reports are produced in each meeting based on which the annual report is made at the end of every activity year.

Figure 7: Planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting system of Nijera Kori



## Working areas of Nijera Kori

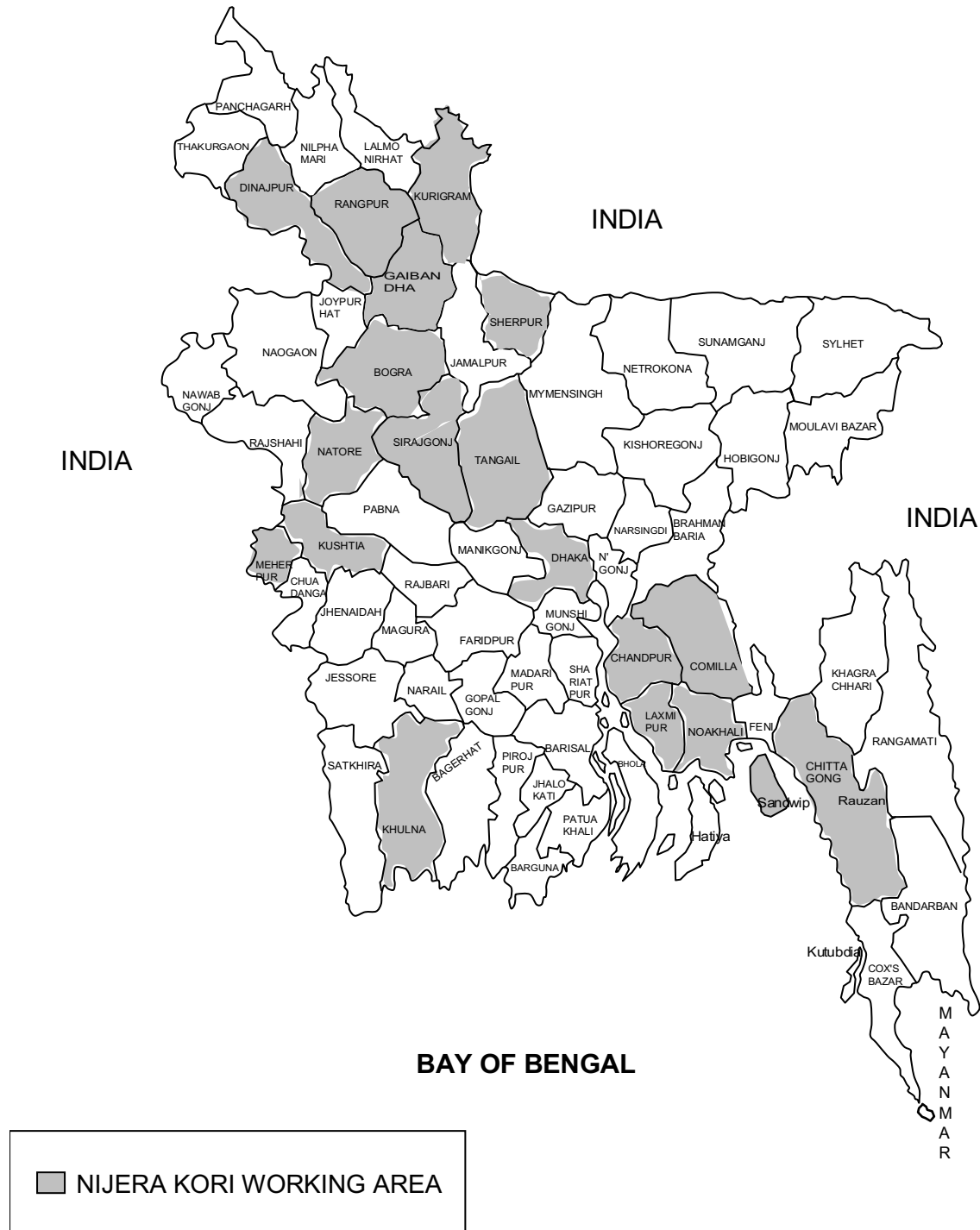
From the very inception, the NK activists started working in the areas where the poor constitute the majority of the population and who mainly depend on manual labour to earn a living. Most of these working areas fall in close vicinity of the seacoasts and river basins. Besides, Nijera Kori also works in some specific areas where most of the inhabitants belong to the vulnerable communities such as weavers, blacksmiths, tobacco and sugarcane farmers etc. and in the areas where fundamentalism, human rights abuse and violation against women is rampant.

### **Box 8: Working Areas of Nijera Kori**

As of August 2007, Nijera Kori has been operating in 1,353 villages in 172 unions, 37 upazilas, and 17 districts- covering 260,034 group members coming from 108,401 families with a total population of more than 585,000. The female: male ratio of memberships is 52: 48.

Nijera Kori provides enough logistical support to carry out its programmes at field level, coordinate all its activities including regular trainings. Overall activities in the working areas are being managed and coordinated through 51 sub-centres, 16 areas, 4 divisional offices cum training centres located respectively in Tangail (*Gala*), Bogra (*Noongola*), Comilla (*Chandina*) and Khulna (*Maniktala*). The Head Office of NK is located in Dhaka.

Map 1: Working Area: Nijera Kori



### To Recapitulate

Nijera Kori (NK) is an NGO in Bangladesh, formed in 1980. The organizational objectives of Nijera Kori shifted to the struggle to create a society free from oppression and deprivation through the establishment of the fundamental rights of the people. In order to achieve this goal, the strategy that NK developed was to make people conscious of their rights and to assist them to develop the collective strength necessary to establish those rights. Under this goal, the target group of NK also expanded from its original concentration. Now NK defines its target group broadly as those women and men who earn their living mainly through physical labour. Its geographical concentration has an emphasis on rural rather than urban areas. Nijera Kori (NK) works with the poorest women and men in Bangladesh. These are people who rarely have any voice in local or national structure of decision making; and who are kept in their places by powerful (and increasingly violent) social structure.

Its program today (2001-2007) is called “*Social Mobilization, Voice and Democracy Program (SMVDP)*”. The *supergoal* of the program is to reduce poverty and inequality, and to promote human rights in Bangladesh. The *goal* of the program is to improve accountability and capability of democratic processes and to create more responsive, people-centered governance at local and higher levels. The *immediate objective* is to enable the Nijera Kori members and their allies to increase effective pressure on the government, political and other elites in order to have better access to decision-making processes, resources and services for poor men and women. The *outputs of the project reads*: (a) sustaining the social mobilization of poor people, (b) raising their awareness of human rights and legal entitlements, (c) supporting collective actions on a wide range of issues, (d) influencing administrative and political decision-making processes at local and regional levels, and (e) improving Nijera Kori’s institutional capacity and coalition building at national and other levels.

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The organization uses social mobilization as a strategy to empower people in political and social terms. By building the collective capacities of the poor to mobilize in defense of their rights, NK seeks to engender a more self-reliant process of economic empowerment, with improved access to a range of tangible and less tangible resources. NK works to build capacity on a number of fronts, from building awareness of constitutional rights and mechanism, and seeking to improve accountability within government institutions, to local level dispute resolution and improving access to justice, safety and security. NK’s core activities include formation of landless organization, training and orientation, and cultural activities, amongst many. NK program contains - *dialogues, praxis, community and cultural circle, cultural synthesis* in the format of classical conscientization process.