

Final Report

Impact Assessment of Nijera Kori

Tomorrow together with
People

A.K.M. MASUD ALI
A.K.M. MUSTAQUE ALI
RATAN SARKAR



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost the researchers would like to recognize the contributions of the Bhumihin Samity Members and other rural landless who have participated in the study process withstanding their time constraints. This engaging participation of the rural activists and citizens has defined the analytical and conceptual framework of the study.

At the same time, the Research team acknowledges the wholehearted cooperation of Nijera Kori at Dhaka, Bagatipara, Peerganj and Pairaband. Nijera Kori has been both an information source as well as a source of supports in organizing engaging interactions with key informants.

Last but not the least, the researcher owes to all the civil society participants for their active involvement in the discussions organized during the study.

A.K.M. Masud Ali
Dhaka, 2007

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study has looked into the impact areas of Nijera Kori interventions with respect to the organization building and concretization process among the rural landless through Bhumihin Samity.

Purpose of the study:

The broad objectives of the study are two-fold:

- To identify empowering changes in the NK households
- To assess the trends in the organization building

Scope of Work

The scope of the study involves a qualitative assessment of impacts with respect to both short term achievements and long term sustainability. Special focus is given on organization building process of the rural landless along with the overall strategy of capacity facilitation by Nijera Kori and its impacts upon the lives of the rural landless

Methodology of the Study:

The study is based on a combination of primary and secondary data collection. Secondary data has been mainly extracted from the baseline of Nijera Korin carried out in Bagatipara in 1996.

The following methods were used in data collection:

- *PRA* (including mapping, seasonal calendar, grandparents chart, ranking and scoring etc.) was conducted with the BS members at each of the three study areas.
- *Focus group discussion (FGD)* was conducted with BS members, non-BS households, civil society members and NK staff at study areas.
- *Observation of the community situation* at village level helped the research team to put the findings of the interviews and FGD in the actual context of the community environment.
- *Tea stall discussions* were informal discussion held with the rural communities of in the study areas were another effective means to generate contextual understanding regarding the context and outcome of NK interventions.
- *Informal interview/meeting with* the BS members and leaders to develop case studies.
- *Participatory learning workshops* were conducted with the leaders of each of the three working areas of NK (taken as study areas).

- *Sample Household Survey:* The sample survey of selected households of Bhumihin Samity members. A sample of unorganized landless households was taken as control group. The focus of the household survey was to identify the areas of social, economic and political empowerment. The findings of the household survey were matched with the findings of the previous study conducted in Bangatipara on NK by INCIDIN Bangladesh.

The study has been carried out in three geographical locations, namely three working area of Nijera Kori in Bagatipara, Peerganj and Pairaband situated in the Northern parts of Bangladesh.

The sample of the study included individual members and households of Bhumihin Samit, leaders of Bhumihin Samity, and individual landless and landless households who are not members of Bhumihin Samity. Apart from that the sample included selected civil society members of the study areas.

Key Findings and Major Conclusions

These conclusions and recommendations have emerged during the FGD, ranking and scoring exercises and workshops conducted with the members and leaders of Bhumihin Samity.

The way to empower the landless to address the existing socio-economic problems:

To overcome the present socio-economic problems the organized BS should continue to strengthen the existing structures and resources. These include¹:

- The small groups organized in different Bhumihin Samities
- Village committees of BS
- Union committee of BS
- In some areas BS have Members who are elected as UP members
- Savings of the samities
- The assistance of NK (legal)
- Others (farmers, day labor) also help the samity members in their struggle.
- The knowledge and skills (memorandum, siege) to fight for rights.
- Courage
- Ability of the members to express
- In some areas the leftists are in contact with the samity and they also help BS.

In addition to that BS requires the following²:

- The members should be more united
- BS has to elect chairman or member from its members.
- BS has to work for the expansion of the organization.
- BS has to form Thana committee.
- BS has to build alliance with the fellow left organizations.
- The conceptual gaps between the members and leaders should be minimized through knowledge building.

¹ Workshop with the BS leaders at Bagatipara

² Workshop with the BS leaders at Bagatipara

- All the members of the groups need trainings. The trainings can be held at the office and at local level.

The members need to be made more aware of the vision and value of the organization and about the rights, responsibility, strength, courage, unity of the members. Thus the challenge is to enlighten them. When the members of BS will be able to identify the issues of the village and assert themselves through the movements at village, union, thana, zilla and at national level, then the organized landless can turn the samity into an institution.³

Identifying allies and ways of keeping them with BS:

The unorganized rural landless people are potentials allies of BS. The organizations like NK that work to raise awareness of BS, care about their sorrows and the political parties that care about the poor- the working class and those who dream to change the society are also friends of BS. BS members and leaders will have to take the initiative to stand beside them and build solidarity. BS gradually has to extend its supports for people of all walks of life to mobilize their support for the cause of the landless people.⁴

The BS members have further suggested the following ways to keep the friends with BS⁵:

- To take part with the left political parties in their procession and meeting and seek help from them whenever needed.
- BS has to urge them to protest against the high price of rice, oil, fertilizer, insecticide, electricity.
- BS has to ask them to join in its broader movement for khash land.
- BS has to help other samities in their hard times.

Ways to expand the samity:

To ensure a fast expansion of BS the following characteristics and components must be attained and/or strengthened⁶:

- Honest and just leadership
- Regular communication with other groups of the samity.
- Initiatives should be taken to create leadership among the general members of the group.
- All the groups should be formed with the aim of developing them as the groups of third-tier.
- Work should be accelerated to organize the landless who are not in the samity.
- The issues-based movements should be able to build alliance.
- Protest against the injustice of the society needs to be prioritized.
- Work on creation of employment opportunities among the landless people.
- Expansion of marriage without dowry within the organization.

The BS members have identified two challenges⁷:

³ Workshop with the BS leaders at Bagatipara

⁴ Workshop with the BS leaders at Pairabondh

⁵ Workshop with the BS leaders at Peerganj

⁶ Workshop with the BS leaders at Pairabondh

⁷ Workshop with the BS leaders at Peerganj

- At first BS needs to make people of its own village understand its aim and aspirations. The leaders and members can also try to involve their relatives and friends in other villages in BS groups.
- BS is now at samity level but it has not yet been able to turn it into an institution because :
 1. People spend more time with the NGOs regarding loan so they are not regularly present in the weekly meeting.
 2. If there is any dispute with the amount of savings among the members, the influential try to meddle in and separate them.

According to the BS members the way to get out of that includes the following:

- To extend help to the members of BS and others who are poor.
- To get justice in the shalish.
- To protest through meeting and procession.
- To make others understand that NGOs exploit rural landless in the name of giving loans to the poor. They need to be made aware that BS is the only organization for rural landless that provides them with a security from socio-economic turbulences- including that of inability of rural landless in repaying NGO loans. If needed BS can go the NGO offices to discuss about this installment issue.
- The savings of the samity should not be used to strengthen both the samity and its members.

Ways to ensure that the samities do not break down on periodic basis:

The members identified three main issues that may lead to disintegration and eventual split of samity. These are:

- When there is big amount of saving, some members want to borrow from it. If others do not agree they get into conflict. Even if they allowed to borrow the money there is a risk of conflict during the time of repayment. This may lead to a split in the samity and its eventual disintegration.
- Besides a group may also split due to disagreement regarding electing leaders.
- Sometimes a groups also face conflict when some members are motivated to disintegrate a samity by outsiders (usually the rural elites who do not consider BS as a friend).

If there is any such instance, BS members of different samities should all meet and try to solve the problem through discussion. If at village level the BS cannot find a solution then it should go to the village committee and if they fail to do anything about it, it should go to the union committee. Therefore each samity should help the other samity. Besides, if the members get into conflict over the saving, 75% of the saving should be distributed among the members and the samity should start afresh with a new saving scheme. If needed it can be framed as a common rule.

Ways to relieve the leaders of too many responsibilities and make the members as equally qualified as the leaders⁸:

⁸ Workshop with the BS leaders at Peerganj

The consultations with BS reveals an urgent need of freeing the leaders of the samities from multiple responsibilities. At the same time to ensure accountability of the leaders, creating of new leadership and capacity of aiding the leaders – the members should be gradually groomed both ideologically and functionally. In these regards the following are suggested:

- The committee should be reorganized every year (as the constitution suggests) if needed through annual meeting. The leader will also help the committee in this regard.
- The group members should be sent to the trainings.
- The responsibilities of the leaders should be shared by the members. In this regard the leaders should initiate a discussion at samity level.
- Others should run the samity in the absence of the leader.
- The members should be involved regarding all the issues of the samity (for example- if there is any conflict with the amount of savings)
- The leaders can take the members along with them when they participate in the shalish.
- It is necessary to raise awareness among the members through training and help them overcome their conceptual limitations and lack of self-confidence

Ways to have honest leaders of BS⁹:

The BS members reveals that the leadership of the samities are asset but there are situations when the members and leaders can have conflict of interests. In few occasions, samities have experienced corruption of leadership with respect to savings. However, in general the BS leaders are appraised by the members as pro-people. However, the members have suggested that, to maintain an activist role as well as pro-people role of BS the leadership needs to held further accountable to members. One of the members explained, *“We did not think much before making someone leader before. But now we know that a leader represents us everywhere in the salish and everywhere. So we have to be careful in the selection of leader.”*

- The leaders must be transparent in their work. It is important to have a situation in which BS members can always question them.
- Members have to keep track of the property of its leaders before and after being leader of the BS.
- Leaders need to give more time to samity. They should be good orators and posses a broad knowledgeable. The leaders should be of clean record, those who are cooperative and courageous.
- If a leader is accused of some wrong doing, there should be proper investigation to ensure that the leader is held accountable and justice is served.

Ways of politically empowering the BS¹⁰:

BS needs to have an impact upon the political process both at village and national level- opined the BS leadership and members. They urge that without ensuring a pro-landless government which would work to do way with exploitation, deprivation and pauperization of the rural mass, the goal of BS cannot be achieved. In this regard, along with direct political activism of BS; they propose both facilitation of support of BS towards the and acquiring support for BS from the left wing pro-people political forces. They suggested;

⁹ Meeting with Male BS members, Mithapukur, Pairaband

¹⁰ Workshop with the BS leaders at Pairabondh

- To be allied with the political parties, specifically, those which are leftist, progressive and which care about the landless people.
- The number of group needs to be increased and the members should be more united.
- There should be more members of BS in the local government as elected Members of UP and gradually there could be Chairman, MP and Minister from BS. For this the apex-structure of the samity should be elevated up to the National Level.
- There should be representatives of the samity in the local committees (e.g. the committees of bazaar, school, college and madrassa etc.).
- To share opinions with the respected civil society and the poor and marginalized.
- BS members should share their opinions, concerns and ideas with the friends and relatives to motivate and mobilize them and also to gain from their experience.

Ways of reducing the difference of knowledge between the leaders and the members of the groups: ¹¹

At present the gap between the general members and leadership is leading to uneven roles. To reduce this gap the BS proposes:

- After the training a leader has to share the knowledge with the members of the group.
- A leader has to take initiative to drive away the religious prejudices prevailing among the members by initiating a discussion (in a culturally accepted form) on the progressive philosophy and Marxism.
- The members should contribute in developing the qualities of a leader. They should be brave, honest and cool headed to generate feedback to a leader. They should be conscious, educated and more involved with the organizational responsibilities. In this regard the leaders will also have to be more cooperative and open with the members.
- The members should be taught to protest against the injustice.
- More members should be sent to the trainings.

Ways to free the BS members and landless in general from the trap of loan:¹²

Entrapment of BS members in NGO loan has been noted as a fact. In this regard, the BS acknowledges an urgent need of exploring alternate means of financing the landless population with economic resources for survival and development. In this regard the BS proposes:

- If possible the government should be asked to arrange loan for the rural marginalized, because the rate of interest charged by the government facilities (at 8%) is low. Whereas it is 15%-35% in the NGOs and mahajon takes 75%.
- NGOs should be pressured to charged less interest.
- Instead of periodic (weekly) installments, loans can be repaid seasonally.

¹¹ Workshop with the BS leaders at Pairabondh

¹² Workshop with the BS leaders at Peerganj and Bagatiparat

- The farming communities should have access to seeds and fertilizer (i.e. different agricultural inputs) from the government at a subsidized price.
- If instead of the Mahajan the Bhumihin Samity could extend small loans (Tk. 200-500) on zero interest and flexible mode of repayment.
- Only employment opportunities could relieve us of this burden. We need economic help for joint production. We can have industrial factory with our savings or we can ask government for that so there would be some job opportunities for us.

Ways to ensure access of the landless to khas land: ¹³

Allocation of khas land to the authentic landless, is a priority to BS.

However, khas land is just one of the public and natural resources upon which the rural landless has to ensure its entitlement. The core idea is that collective progress of the landless is ensured through a comprehensive reform at rural base. One of the members explained, although khas land is a priority, *“We cannot allure or cajole anyone to bring him in the movement; we should inform him properly. We have to make him understand that to acquire khas land is not the ultimate victory; our actual goal is to establish exploitation free society and to take initiative to fulfill our five basic rights.”*

- BS, in every locality, should have a priority in collecting information from the Upazilla land office to explore if khas land is available.
- BS should safe guard the interests of the landless by taking part/leading/organizing the struggle and the movement for khas land.
- Organization should have a commonly agreed and communicated guideline to decide how to distribute khas land among the landless (in the areas where there is khas land). In this regard not just quantity but the quality of the distributed land should be taken into consideration.
- Areas where there is no khas land, samity should work to raise awareness about different socio-economic issues such as the to facilitate fight for rights of the landless, to fight against injustice, fundamentalists, corruption, violence against woman, child marriage and oppression of the NGOs etc.

8.2. Concluding Comments by the research team:

The research team members have only a hand few of critical comments regarding NK and BS relationship and impact zones of the collective initiatives of NK and BS.

Having more BS and spread of NK¹⁴ :

BS is presently rooted within the project areas of NK. So BS can move in two ways:

1. It moves with the NK activists, it moves as far as the NK activists go- this is controlled by the central office
2. It moves with its leadership which is neither controlled by NK nor restricted by the narrow framework of project implementation

¹³ Workshop with the BS leaders at Peerganj

¹⁴ Peerganj

NK staff cannot go anywhere they like to form new organizations. There are certain limitations of the organizations. They have to plan before they move to new areas and help in formation of new groups. The plan might change due to situational demand but usually there are structural rigidity.

On the other hand, the movement of the leader of BS depends on his or her ability that determines the social sphere where he or she can work. Without direct involvement of the NK staff, new samities are created in two ways- firstly, by the relatives of the BS members and secondly, by friends, relatives and well wishers of the BS members.

BS cannot invite people to form BS as political parties can. Political parties always want more people to join them but BS have limitations as they need to organize people within the limited staff capacity of NK and even more restricted leadership capacity of BS.

Besides, BS people all live in the same area so they can not preach among the converted. But as missionary people if BS can go to many places they can spread. But for that BS need to work within NK structure. Presently NK is not providing any flexible organizational structure to facilitate the organic growth of BS. Thus there is a need of expanding the leadership and activists network and its span in order to ensure that the BS building process gets into motion even beyond the planned expansion of NK and its working areas.

At the same time it is observed that the members of BS are migrating to different areas all the time for work. If the BS members can actively use this mobile human network they can further spread their ideology and organization. For that BS can create "liaison centers" at popular destinations of migrant rural workers where they will be received. If there is no BS in the place where they are migrating they can facilitate formation BS at that particular area. Thus this would on one hand aid the rural migrants at destinations while on the other hand expand the organizational coverage of BS.

The study has noted that people are building networks at rural base for work related needs. These days during the harvesting and cultivation seasons the potential migrants are invited at destinations within the country over cell phone. It has been found that BS members of one locality are also informing over cell phone their fellow members of some other locality to join them when there are works in the agriculture sector. But this network and this form of communication can also be used to expand the organizational networking and coverage.

The cultural team can be used to extend BS working area. It has great potentialities for doing so if it can work in a desired way. The cultural teams of BS are quite well known and they perform when they are asked to contribute in different political meetings and programs by other political parties. It is true that it gives publicity about the activities of BS. But it would be more effective for the publicity of the BS if the cultural team could perform in the banner of BS. Cultural team of BS are popular and people enjoy the plays and songs as these are very much related to their lives and there fore the possibility to use cultural team to widely disseminate information regarding BS should be explored. If the cultural teams could perform on a regular basis in a particular place like hat then they could circulate more about the agenda and activities of BS. The cultural teams are performing in the hats now but only for celebrating some important days like Rokeya Dibosh and Independence Day etc.

Another obstacle in the expansion of BS is that people who own land like those who are middle farmer or even small farmer think they can not be a member of BS because they are not landless. They support BS activities and agendas but they are not joining. These people were asked that why they are not joining with BS if they are waiting to be landless. They have no answer but steps can be taken to include these people in to BS. Besides in some areas there are only women BS , the men are interested to have their organization but they are not

forming one because NK only has female worker in that area. Men are not forming on their own because they think the 'knowledge' will be provided by NK workers. So the number of workers or the human resource of the NK is an important factor in the expansion of BS. If a good number of people are not there who can talk about the agenda of BS and some volunteers within the civil sphere are not made then a strong people's movement cannot be created which can initiate a revolution.

Nk and BS: the basis of relationship¹⁵

Nk helps BS to be organized and it also works as a linkage. NK not only gives assistance to the BS to have the government administration on their side but also mobilized the opinion of the other human right organizations in favor of BS which worked as a social and moral safety-net and gave the BS members protection even when their activities are not legally permissible.

The relationship between BS and NK is based on the aspiration of people to have a place of their own where they are respected as a human being, where they can dream of a society without class exploitation. For the women there is another important factor that is the BS is a place where they can share their sorrows and can seek comfort. BS is a place where they can share their opinions and befriended. They have created a secured bond that has empowered them and has made them stronger. The weakness is that samity makes people to dream to bring changes in the society where they are living but people get frustrated when they cannot bring the perceived changes. In the discussions sometimes the frustrations are quite visible. People know they can bring change and they can win in smaller spaces as they have proved like Bamni Beel but they have question in their mind that if it is really possible to change the scenario at national level. If the victories cannot be achieved at the broader level then the victories like the possession of Bamni Beel will be temporary - they will not last long. If these local struggles and victories are not connected with the main stream politics of the country then people will not get what they dream of. The question lies in front is - who will link BS with the mainstream political parties?

NK may not take the responsibility of linking BS with the political parties as they have legal limitations. If NK decides not to take the responsibility then they should make it clear to the BS and can facilitate BS to explore ways of linking organized landless with active pro-people political processes. BS and NK should have a shared and clear understanding on this.

Women Empowerment:

The study has revealed a very humane aspect of gender empowerment. On one hand the There was a question among the female members how they can bring up their boys so that they will not hurt their wives. In this respect samity can work to find a way to stop this violence and make their boys grow up with proper respect to woman. The samity members are thinking about their children's health, education but they are still not that much worried about their moral growth. From the discussion with the samities it is found that samity can do a lot about it and can bring change in the patriarchal system. There is a need of looking into the inter-generational impacts of NK activities in terms of gender empowerment.

¹⁵ Peerganj

Access to Resources: Struggle for Khash land:¹⁶

Distribution of khash land and ensuring possession of khash land among the landless population have been the long standing issue of struggle both for Bhumihin Samity and Nijera Kori. The study reveals that although it is essential to address the agenda of Khash land, increasingly it is becoming evident that the entire issue of agrarian reform (not just land reform) is essential to ensure economic emancipation of rural landless.

People have been fighting for the possession of the Bamni Beel for decades. They tried to take possession of the khas land before the formation of Bhumihin Samity. At that time, the landless people were defeated by the land-grabbers who were well connected with power dealers. Later the landless formed the Bhumihin Samity which enabled them to take the possession of the Beel (i.e. the khas water-body). Thus the motivating factor in the creation of BS in Peerganj particularly in the village of Jahangirabad was the capacity of Bhumihin Samity as an organization of landless in coordinating struggle against the rural power elites. With the facilitation of NK, Bhumihin Samity could use the legal and administration systems to allocate the khash land to the landless.

So the existence of the khash land and the success of the BS to take the possession work as motivation factors in formation of BS. But if it is focused much and gets too much publicity then people may think BS is just a way to get khash land only. Then it can also make people of the other areas where there is no khash land to think that they have no reason to have a BS. This can work against the ideology and objective of BS.

Besides, when the people who live around the Bamni Beel fought for the Beel area the members of different BS of other unions also joined them and helped them in their struggle. But when they won only the people of the Bamni Beel area got the possession the others had to return in empty hand. Although BS members of other areas admit that they did not have any right to claim the land and they also consider this as a victory of all BS they are also slightly disappointed for not getting similar result of having BS of their own. So the struggle and the victory encourage the people but also put some kind of pressure on the organization.

Moreover, the struggle of BS for ensuring government services to the rural communities, holding the government duty bearers accountable to people, enforcing laws to secure justice to the cause of landless population and organizing social protests on behalf of the marginalized (landless, women, indigenous people and religious minority etc.) and in favor of social justice (including environment); have revealed that BS is addressing a bigger than “khash land”. This identity of “landless activist group” has been found an unifying factor for building a greater solidarity of landless.

Rural Leadership and Sustainability

The experience of NK reveals that the organization building process has given rise to a leadership from within the rural landless. This leadership includes both men and women. The strength of the leadership is continually being strengthened through experience of movement, participation in local governance, organizational management and training inputs from NK. The challenge lies in ensuring that this barefoot leadership is not burdened by organizational

¹⁶ Peerganj

responsibilities that it cripples their livelihood. The voices of the rural organizers stress that a pool of potential leaders and overall membership quality of BS has to be risen to ensure a continual flow of leaders to shoulder the growing organizational structure.

The growth of leadership has also to come in the arena of political hegemony. The landless leadership has emphasized on ideological politics leading to emancipation of the toiling masses. The class identity and consciousness on class-politics of landless, now push BS not just to explore political allies – but also to influence the existing political processes. The BS membership has not shown any intention of shying away from that challenge.

Tomorrow together with people:

The strategy of capacitating landless to build their own organization and to take up their own initiatives to address injustice and oppression – is in a nutshell the strategy adopted by NIjera Kori (NK). Through facilitation of Bhumihin Samity (BS) NK has demonstrated that an empowering (knowledge and organization building) process can leave a sustainable impact in the lives of rural landless. The experience of NK indicates that a solidarity and consultative process with people does not just inspire and mobilize the landless to address the daily does of injustice, it prepares them to be politically active against the system the breeds injustice, discrimination and deprivation on daily basis. The emerging empowering identities of rural landless reveal that in the bigger sphere of struggle and solidarity both NK and BS nurture and harness the potentialities of a new dawn.

Table of Contents:

| | |
|------------------------------------|----------|
| Acknowledgements | ii |
| Executive Summary | iii-xiii |
| Table of Contents | xiv-xv |
| List of Abbreviations and Acronyms | xvi |

Chapter-1 INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY 1-3

| | | |
|------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1.1. | Background and Rationale | 1 |
| 1.2. | Objective and Scope of the Study | 1 |
| 1.3. | Methodology of the Study | 1 |
| 1.4. | Limitations of the Study | 3 |
| 1.5. | Structure of the Report | 3 |

Chapter-2 PALM PRINT OF IDENTITY 4-18

| | | |
|--------|--|----|
| 2.1. | Identity of landless | 4 |
| 2.2. | Gender at the core of Identity | 6 |
| 2.3. | Political Identity | 9 |
| 2.4. | Class Identity of Landless | 11 |
| 2.5. | Indigenous and Ethnic Identity | 11 |
| 2.5.1. | The Indigenous people and the samity | 11 |
| 2.5.2. | Religious Minority and the issue of Communal harmony | 14 |
| 2.6. | BS member Identity Vs Identity as a creditor | 16 |

Chapter-3 THE ORGANIZATION BUILDING PROCESS OF RURAL LANDLESS 19-29

| | | |
|------|---|----|
| 3.1. | Organization of the landless | 19 |
| 3.2. | Reasons behind forming Bhumihiin Samity | 20 |
| 3.3. | Organizational Growth Path | 25 |

Chapter-4 BHUMIHIIN SAMITY AND ITS TRUSTED FRIEND 30-

| | | |
|-----|--|----|
| 4.1 | NK and BS: Strength of People's Organization | 30 |
| 4.2 | Challenges and Constraints to Growth | 33 |
| 4.3 | Strength and weakness of the Samity | 36 |

Chapter-5 THE WAY TO EMPOWERMENT 30-44

| | | |
|-----|-------------------|----|
| 5.1 | Women Empowerment | 40 |
| 5.2 | Leadership | 42 |
| 5.3 | Cultural Group | 44 |

| | | |
|------------------|--|--------------|
| Chapter-6 | THE CONTEXT AND VISION OF CHANGE | 45-46 |
| Chapter-7 | IMPACTS AT HOUSEHOLD LEVEL: CASES OF BAGATIPARA | 47-53 |
| Chapter-8 | WAY FORWARD: TOMORROW TOGETHER WITH PEOPLE | 54-62 |
| 8.1. | Tomorrow together with the rural landless | 54 |
| 8.2. | Concluding Comments by the research team | 59 |
| Annex-I | QUANTITATIVE ANNEXURE | 63-70 |

ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----|-------------------------------|
| NK | Nijera Kori |
| NGO | Non Governmental Organization |
| BS | Bhumihin Samity |

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1. Background and Rationale

The study is an attempt to learn from the experience of the organized rural landless organized in Bhumihin Samity and involved with Nijera Kori. The study as such has two-fold relevance. Firstly, it tries to register lessons learned for Bhumihin Samity and Nijera Kori. Secondly, it attempts to reveal the experience of Nijera Kori to those who seeks alternate to the mainstream development initiatives.

1.2. Objectives and Scope of the Study:

The broad objectives of the study are two-fold:

- To identify empowering changes in the NK households
- To asses the trends in the organization building

The scope of the study involves a qualitative assessment of impacts with respect to both short term achievements and long term sustainability. Special focus is given on organization building process of the rural landless along with the overall strategy of capacity facilitation by Nijera Kori and its impacts upon the lives of the rural landless. INCIDIN Bangladesh conducted a study on NK in Bagatipara in 1996. The present study also attempted to assess the change-trends in Bagatipara based on a sample household survey.

1.3. Methodology of the Study:

The study primarily applied qualitative means of data collection. However, in one of the three study areas a sample household survey was conducted to assess changed based on quantitative indicators. The methodology was consultative and participatory.

The following methods were used in data collection:

- *PRA* (including mapping, seasonal calendar, grandparents chart, ranking and scoring etc.) was conducted with the BS members at each of the three study areas.
- *Focus group discussion (FGD)* was conducted with BS members, non-BS households, civil society members and NK staff at study areas.
- *Observation of the community situation* at village level helped the research team to put the findings of the interviews and FGD in the actual context of the community environment.
- *Tea stall discussions* were informal discussion held with the rural communities of in the study areas were another effective means to generate contextual understanding regarding the context and outcome of NK interventions.
- *Informal interview/meeting with* the BS members and leaders to develop case studies.

- *Participatory learning workshops* were conducted with the leaders of each of the three working areas of NK (taken as study areas).
- *Sample Household Survey*: The sample survey of selected households of Bhumihin Samity members. A sample of unorganized landless households was taken as control group. The focus of the household survey was to identify the areas of social, economic and political empowerment. The findings of the household survey were matched with the findings of the previous study conducted in Bangatipara on NK by INCIDIN Bangladesh.

1.3.1. Study Areas:

The study has carried out qualitative approaches of data collection in Bagatipara, Pairabnd and peerganj – three working areas of Nijera Kori.

1.3.1. Sample of the study:

The qualitative study sample included:

- Members of Bhumihin Samity
- Leaders of the Bhumihin Samity
- Un organized Landless
- Nijera Kori local area team members
- Civil Society Member

For quantitative household survey in Bagatipara area 33 households of Bhumihin Samity members and 33 households of landless households were included in the sample.

Overview of the Study Samples (Qualitative)

| Name of the Samity participated in FGD | Number of Participants | | |
|--|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| | Peerganj | Pairaband | Bagatipara |
| Female Bhumihin Samity members | 46 | 45 | 42 |
| Adibashi Female group | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| Male BS members | 58 | 53 | 62 |
| Unorganized landless women | 15 | 12 | 8 |
| NK team | 7 | 10 | 11 |
| Civil society | 8 | 9 | 12 |
| Total | 141 | 129 | 135 |
| | 405 | | |

| Workshop | Area | Number of Participants |
|--------------------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| Workshop with Pairaband BS leaders | Pairaband | 21 |
| Workshop with Peerganj BS leaders | Peerganj | 20 |
| Workshop with Bagatipara BS leaders | Bagatipara | 23 |
| Total (workshop participants) | | 64 |

More than 80 percent of the study participants (sample) are female

1.4. Limitations of the Study:

The study was not able to capture the entire realm of experience and diversities of NK work as it was restricted within three working areas of Nijera Kori. Apart from that the household survey was carried out only in Bagatipara. Although the idea was to compare the findings of the present study with the findings of a previous study – the sample survey did not generate comparable data due to changed sample units (the sample units of the previous study was different).

1.5. Structure of the Report:

The first chapter presents the background along with the objectives, scope and methodology of the study.

The second chapter presents few of the key impacts of NK process on developing an unique set of identities among the members of the Bhumihin samity.

Chapter three the key impact of NK process on developing an unique set of identities among the members of the Bhumihin samity.

The fourth chapter identifies the key impact zones of NK's organization building strategy vis-à-vis the self-governed organization building process of rural landless. The chapter looks into the strength, weakness and challenges facing the empowering process of organized rural landless..

The fifth chapter, presents few selected areas of empowerment experienced by the organized landless. The chapter presents the critical elements of both the process and outcomes of NK facilitated Bhumihin Samity.

Chapter-six provides a brief overview of the context analysis. While Chapter-seven presents the quantitative analysis of the impacts of NK activities in Bagatipara based on the findings of the household survey.

The last chapter presents the major conclusions and recommendations drawn by the Bhumihin Samity members regarding the future of Bhumihin Samity and Nijera Kori. The chapter also presents few concluding comments by the research team members.

PALM PRINT OF IDENTITY

This chapter presents the key impact of NK process on developing an unique set of identities among the members of the Bhumihin samity. The study notes that one of the major sustainable impacts of NK process in facilitation of a self governed group building process of rural landless is development of class conscious identity of organized landless.

There are five identities of a BS member, which can be called the ‘palm print of identity’. These identities are:

1. Identity of landless.
2. Gender identity.
3. Identity as a member of BS.
4. Identity of a creditor.
5. Political identity.

There are two more identities. For the minorities and indigenous people the sixth identity is their religious identity and for the indigenous people the seventh identity is their ethnic identity. It is important to note that the majority of the BS members due of demographic distribution of the study areas come from the communities with Muslim religious identity. However, within BS, being Muslim is not a special agenda (i.e. there is no specific issue of organizing the Muslims in separate groups as in the case of the indigenous people). Even then within the broader social space the identity of Muslim is also a special factor.

2.1. Identity of landless:

*We maintain distance with the rich people as they try to exploit us in every possible way. Besides they let us down in various ways.*¹⁷

The identity of landless is a conscious class-identity. The BS members look at this identity to identify a section of rural population dependent on agriculture which is not just resource poor but also are the majority. The context of rural agriculture is found to have undergone some salient changes which contribute in defining both the identity and the character of today’s landless people at rural Bangladesh.

These changes have specifically three clusters: firstly, the arena of socio-cultural changes, secondly the arena of agricultural production relation and technology and lastly, the access of the rural landless to resources and market.

The *socio-cultural identity of landless* people within the BS, among others, has now a strong gender dimension. The BS members have strongly stated that the women in their respective communities have emerged as an active and visible section of landless population. The basic characteristics of the landless population in the rural Bangladesh have included;

¹⁷ Meeting with male BS members, Ahmedpur Pukurpar, Peerganj

- Sale of labor
- Share cropping

The present study notes that large proportion of women in rural economy has emerges as wage labor. The women within the BS have also taken active roles in agriculture based production activities (as share croppers or wage labor). The organization of BS has recognized this from the very on-set. In fact it has been the women who were primarily organized in most of the communities.

Women work in the field nowadays:

Women work in potato harvesting season and also in eggplant field. We are also getting wages although it is still less than that of the men. We are trying to increase our wages. We want 80 taka per day. We constitute 90 % of the total population. If all the laborers get united the rich people have nothing to do. They do not know how to work in the field; they cannot differentiate between grass and paddy. So they have to come to us. We must get united and demand 80 taka per day. And we will do it very soon.

(Grand parents' chart prepared through FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband)

environment and ecological balance, preservation of traditional varieties and protection of the livelihood of the landless and resource poor section of the rural communities are well established.

The last aspect of the identity of Landless encompasses *access to resources and market* or rather lack of it. The rural landless people have little access to health, education and utility services (such as organized energy supply and sanitation services etc.). The landless population's access to the market of land and water bodies (both privately owned or khash) is declining. The wage-increase is lagging behind the overall rate of inflation. Within BS there is a clear consciousness regarding the national and global actors that lead this continual process of marginalization, deprivation and discrimination. The BS members are aware of the exploitation of rural landless population at the hand of both the rural and urban elites; large landlords, water lords, mahajans, banks, micro-credit NGOs,

The BS members have noted that the *production relation and technology* of agrarian economy at rural Bangladesh have now revealed a trend of concentration of land at the hands of few and of those who are often absentee land owners. The technology has become more market dependent as a consequence of high influx of HYV and HB seeds, chemical fertilizers, chemical pesticides and mechanized tilling, irrigation and husking instruments. This has led to a hike in the costs of agricultural production. As a consequence the small and land/resource poor sections of agrarian population have rapidly acquired the identity of landless. The BS members are also aware of the negative consequence of this so called modern agriculture upon natural environment and health. Within the BS a concern towards, natural

Agriculture:

The local variety of potato, paddy, and fish are almost extinct now. Because of using pesticides in the field we do not have the small fish in the fields. People are now more interested to farm foreign fish. Our ancestors did not suffer from the diseases that we suffer because our local rice/vegetables were nutritious. They could work in the field in rains and never got ill. But now men have become 'soft as cotton'. Our cows used to give milk like khir (i.e. rich with cream). The foreign cow's milk is like water and it is not tasty at all. Now we have to spray even in the brunches of bean plant. It was profitable to sharecrop in the past. Now if someone takes land to sharecrop the person may have to sale own house to pay back the loan.

(Grand parents' chart prepared through FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband)

multinational companies and dealers of seeds, fertilizer and pesticides and the government mechanism.

2.2. Gender at the core of Identity:

*When we started, the first resistance came from the male members of our families, but we protested.*¹⁸

The core of BS identity holds the identity of a rural landless without discrimination based on sex but with full acknowledgement of such discrimination within the social space. For BS the emancipation of landless means not just economic and political freedom of the landless, it also means that such freedom for both men and women. Moreover, it interprets and addresses those freedoms not necessarily similarly for men and women. The BS members have noted that the exploitative structure based on market forces is mainly responsible for marginalization of rural landless. This helps them to converge the class and gender based exploitations, violence and discriminations within the agenda of change propagated by BS.

Women and BS¹⁹:

- When we started, the first resistance came from the male members of our families, but we protested. I (the president of the Bhumihin Mahila Samity) could not talk; I could not even say my name. Now I assert myself on stage. When I went for the training my husband did not want to let me go but I wanted to go out and see the world. In the past, the women of this area could not go out, now we do and have lots of experiences. We even had never been to Mithapukur, the reality now is that we know it like our own neighborhood. It is all about courage. Now we feel encouraged to do whatever we want to. All of us even went to Dhaka all alone. We believe 'parda' is something that lies within ourselves. Now we even besiege the DC office to ask for justice. Before we used to work in other's house from dawn to dusk but now we no more do that and even if we do, we will not do it without proper wage. Five years ago people used to say, "they sit together and only sing songs"; now they do not say that anymore. They now know we fight for our basic rights; we want proper wage and equal rights of men and women. There are 90% of poor people and only 10% of rich in this country. If we are the majority then why should we be deprived of everything? Why should not we get our basic rights?
- It took one year to make our husbands understand. Then we made a male group and get them into it too. We thought if we could also get them in it, they would no longer try to resist us. Before the samity there had been no peace in the family. Now our husbands treat us nicely. They used to take decision all alone but now seek our advice therefore there are less conflicts within the family. We now buy our own sari; our husbands used to buy them for us before. Now they want us to choose them for ourselves. The women are very much empowered now. "If my husband treats me badly, I warn him saying that I am going to the NK office right away to complain against him. He gets scared but even then I will say after being all these years in the samity, he still tries to torture me. I have to live with that only because of my children. People mock at me for I who join the procession for the discharge of SP, TNO or DC; cannot dismiss my own husband. But I believe when there is poverty; there is unrest or conflicts in the family. If we had better income we would not have faced such conflicts."
- There has been lot of protests against the disparity of wage between man and woman. If the men get 70tk, we get 35 tk. We then decided that we would not work if we do not get at least 40 tk and the rich had to agree that. We do not let women outside this neighborhood to work here for they should struggle for their own wage. If we can do it they can do it too. We hope to make it 50 tk next time.
- Now women contribute a lot in their families. Before a family of five could not eat properly with the earning of fifty taka of a man, now woman can also contribute thirty taka more. We work in the potato field for a month once a year; we have to husk rice (one month); in Jaishtha we again have to work in the field and besides these we have to rear cattle, sew kantha and weave the fishing net throughout the year. We spend our own money however we like to. We buy some household things and also use it to buy food for the family.
- Throughout the rainy season (6 months) we have to suffer. There is no work. In Baishakh and Kartik some of our husbands migrate to Dhaka, Chittagong or Sylhet to pull rickshaw or to work in the garments. From 1998 (after there is a bridge) some girls (5%) also migrate to work as a domestic labor or in the garments during that lean season. We could work in Rangpur if there were any garments or industries.

The major gender equilibrating factors include the following;

¹⁸ Meeting with Male BS members, Ibrahimpur, Pairaband

¹⁹ Meeting with Male BS members, Ibrahimpur, Pairaband

- **Access to shared organizational space, process and experience:** BS organizes women in separate groups. This provides the women with their own “private domain” for initial preparation and confidence building. This does not mean that female and male members of BS are kept in isolation. The structure of BS is such that the men and women can come together within the organizational space in three ways. Firstly, the concept of broader unity of landless creates a space of united stand for both men and women. The conceptual clarity on gender based discrimination also help build bridges between the members of the opposite sexes. This is more of a unity at ideological level. Secondly, the members of the BS irrespective of their sex take part in mobilization and other forms of public and organizational events. This is a unity of action. Lastly, the BS members of both the sexes jointly participate in different apex-bodies of the organizations (e.g. the village committee, union committee and Forum etc.) and specifically in the Cultural Teams. This three fold unity of thought, actions and structure facilitates a gender sensitive organizational process. The women are able to acquire an equitable status within not just the organization but also at the broader social space (as they are visible as BS leaders and activists along side the male members in the broader social spectrum). The process also helps to break the stereotype image of women among the BS members and community members at large (both male and female).
- **Constructing a pro-women’s rights human network:** The approach of promoting women’s rights through training and celebrating Rokeya Dibash (i.e. a day observed to commemorate the birth of a Bengali pioneer on women’s liberty) at public space have contributed in raising the awareness of both men and women on the issues of equity of women and the rights of women in general. The campaign against discrimination and violation against women has also contributed in raising community concern along with personal commitment to uphold the rights of women. The formation of women’s group in rural Bangladesh is now a common practice. But the BS has not kept these women’s groups in isolation – BS works with the men of these families to ensure that the men also become the part of the BS process. This along with the awareness building process leads to facilitate a human support group to uphold the rights of the women at family, community and organizational level.
- **Breaking the stereotype image of women at community space:** The approach of facilitating separate women’s group within BS has been used to promote a unique space for women to discuss and generate collective knowledge not just on women specific issues rather regarding the entire discourse of social progress. This has led to a confident role of women at community space. Women of BS are equally vocal on issues of concern not just on “feminine issues” but in general on issues of concern for the concerned community. Along with that the broad participation of women in mobilization activities also help to integrate women in the mainstream of social activism. BS has also promoted participation of women in local committees including that in local elected bodies. These activities have collectively challenged the stereotype image of women either as helpless victims or as organized voice in women specific issues- women in BS and communities are increasingly seen as “citizens with equal rights and capacities”. This does not mean that women have been liberated from their traditional domain but the trend of change is clearly marked towards that end.
- **Struggle for equal status in economic space:** This has three elements. Firstly, over the last few decades have experienced influx of large proportion of female landless population into the rural wage market. This entry has been caused mostly by an economic process of marginalization of rural population which made it difficult for rural landless to survive solely on the earning of the male members. Moreover, the technological change leading to changes in harvesting cycle and production level (e.g. expansion of potato cultivation and harvest) made the farming communities

to find workers in the rural women folks to meet the increased demand of workers in both during cultivation and harvesting seasons. Secondly, women have been found to be organized in BS to fight for their economic rights. It is found that usually compared to men the women are paid less for the same work. The women in BS have taken part in numerous mobilizations on the demand of equal wage for women in agriculture. This has led to a gradual increase of wage of women in agriculture. This increase in wage of women in agricultural labor market has two fold implications. Firstly, this reflects emergence of women as a workforce with organized bargaining capacity. Secondly, this reflects a changing mind frame of agrarian communities towards women in agriculture - instead of considering women as “inferior” or “unpaid” source of labor increasingly women are getting acknowledgement of being an integral part of rural workforce with equal standing along with the men. Women in BS have also taken part in wage hike movement in general. This as mentioned before hand helped the women to break away from women specific agendas of social and economic progress. Lastly, women’s role in income generating activities generally has increased in landless households. This further challenged the traditional role of men being the sole bread-winner. The BS as an organized political process of rural landless recognizes and builds upon these three features of gender transformation of rural economy to generate a valid claim for greater role of women in decision making process from family to governance level.

- **Greater participation in family decision space:** The BS process has involved both female and male members of the landless households in organizational process. Both the female and male members of the BS households have been therefore exposed and oriented on the ideology of gender equity in specific and that of exploitation free equity-based social construction in general. The organizational process has provided women to act beyond the gender specific roles (as per defined by the existing social norms) and thereby contributed in creating a different profile of women (one in which women is seen as members with equal rights, status and capacities) both at BS level (as the women are organizing, participating and taking lead in actions along the men in the on going mobilizations and other activities) and at societal level (as female leaders of BS are no less prominent in different community activities and such as school committees, shalish etc. than that of the male leaders). As a result the women in BS households are both aware of their rights and capacities in contributing in family decision making process. Moreover, the female BS members are also prominently visible as earning members of the households. These women are conscious of their economic contributions in family income and are much more conscious of their rights in family decision space.
- **The ideology of equity and social progress:** One of the greatest contributions of BS in promoting gender-based equity has been in the ideological sphere. The BS process does not only restrict in promoting the rights of women as citizens. It takes up the challenge of engaging its members in the analysis of the political-economy of gender based discrimination and violence against women. The historic materialism on social progress has been the core of this social analysis. This framework helps the BS members to identify the class, caste and gender based discriminations in relation to capitalist structure of economic exploitation, patriarchy-based social and legal dominations and hegemony of the exploiters in the ideological, political and cultural domain. As a result gender equity has not merely been reduced to an issue of women’s rights, rather it has been considered as an inalienable component of social progress – one of the core indicators of achieving exploitation free society for all. This also enables the BS to be pioneer and champion of resisting religion based fundamentalism and superstitions which aim at debasing and dominating women.
- **Bringing voice and justice to survivors of violence against women:** BS as an organization is continually monitoring the status of violence against women at community level. The members of BS are most vocal against dowry, polygamy of men, sexual abuse of women and children including rape, and physical violence against women within their respective communities. BS

members are aware of the class construction bias of our justice system. They are aware that the justice favors those with political, social and monetary power. They are also aware of the patriarchic values which guide both the laws and its enforcers. As a result the BS members are always prompt in bringing the cases of violence against women to the law enforcers as an organized group. In their experience if a landless, specially a woman goes to police with a complaint it is most likely to be either left unregistered or undermined. Whereas if BS takes up the case the administration and law enforcers are more willing and interested to apply the laws to ensure justice to the victims of violence against women even if the woman comes from a landless family. This process is however, not always peaceful or amicable – more often the process of ensuring justice involves protests through mass mobilizations, repeated petition and reminders to the administrations and law enforcers for proper investigation, arrests and prosecution and organized media pressure to keep the case alive etc. BS also meets the court costs when so deemed necessary by mobilizing resources from amongst its members. The process has two critical elements. Firstly, in any case of violence against women the entire leadership and membership of BS can be mobilized not just the samity at the locality. Secondly, the landless people, even the most marginalized of them – the landless women can access justice through the organization of landless because it as a collective can match the social, political and economic powers of the ruling class. This is also true when such a case is tried at a shalish (i.e. the traditional body of community-arbitration).

2.3. Political identity:

*We are class-conscious and we aspire a class and exploitation free society but it's still not clear to us how BS can work toward that end.*²⁰

The members of BS have clearly indicated that the major drive that unites them with the ambit of the organization is the urge of establishing a class and exploitation free democratic society ruled by the majority – the landless, marginalized and the toiling mass. To ensure the empowerment of the landless people, the BS members think they should be in alliance with the leftist political parties, those which work for the establishment of an exploitation free society in which men and women would also be treated equally. They want to work with the political parties with their identity of being landless and they think their leaders play an important role in this liaison.²¹

Fighting Fundamentalism: (Meeting with male BS members, Joyrampur, Pairaband)

That day a brother came to preach Islam. We said we are already Muslims and Allah protected us before you came to us. We have Allah with us and we always have had Allah with us. We have people who belong to 36 different races and cultures with us. But these shibir /jamatis only have fatawabaj with them. They did not let women work in the field all these years which made the poor people suffer. They tell us to send boys to madrasa to make them alem (i.e. Islamic scholars) but actually they trained these boys as jongis (i.e. militants).

The leadership is well organized and also greatly accepted outside the samity. BS leaders have become UP members with the votes of people from both within and outside the samity. They do not want to make BS a political party, but they dream of a change in the society. They want the representations of the organized landless even in the

National Parliament. But for that they recognize the importance of employing new strategies to expand coverage of BS membership and to raise political awareness of its members. Presently, there is a huge gap between the knowledge of a leader and other members of the BS, which needs to be bridged to achieve the goal of social transformation.²²

The arena of political education has two broad areas:

²⁰ Peerganj

²¹ Pairaband

²² Pairaband

- Firstly the domain of personal political position. In this regard, BS contributes in developing the political vision of its members. It also indoctrinates its members on the emancipator ideology based on the class-analysis of the society. Through this BS contributes in developing a landless leadership capable of competing in local elections as well as educating its members personally to take conscious position as voter in any such election.
- Secondly, the domain of social transformation; the political education at personal level also means that the members of BS are developed to interpret the social and political institutions from class perspective and thereby analyze, initiate discussions, debates and strategize on issues of social transformation and governance from the perspective of landless and the proletariat. The goal is set for social revolution leading to ‘proletarian dictatorship’ which would replace the existing ‘dictatorship of the Bourgeois’. In the short run the aim is extend support to the liberal, pro-independence, democratic political forces against the extreme-right pro-fundamentalist political forces.

BS is facing both opportunities and apprehensions on its way to political empowerment of its members at both these spheres.

| Political level | Achievements | Challenges/Limitations |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Personal | Class conscious socio-political outlook | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Not all members have equal status in terms of such analytical capacity or consciousness. ● Minority with respect to the mass of landless ● Inability of the individuals to challenge the ideological hegemony of existing pro-establishment social, political and religious institutes. |
| Local | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emergence of class conscious voters and leadership ● Organized voice of landless against religious fundamentalism, corruption, violation of rights (including that of women and indigenous people) and injustice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● BS does not hold united voice of the majority of the landless ● The support to candidates in election still reflect lack of class consciousness |
| National | Scattered voices of landless against corruption | ● No representation at the national level |

The samity members are well aware of these challenges. To face the challenges like for holding important political position they know that all the members should have more training and become more active. They think that more and more people should know about BS. Outside their villages, in other parts of the country more and more landless people as well as others should come to know about BS and their activities. They think religious fundamentalism is a problem against which they are fighting very effectively and strongly. BS activities have an influence on religious harmony among the people.²³

Political empowerment: (FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband)

We want the government that will take care of 90 % of the people of the country. We have 3 members in UP. We are getting more experience now. We come to know that government aids do come to UP but not properly distributed. This way we will get our member at parliament. During this BNP government tenure we did not get anything; not even a plant.

- The fundamentalists and the influential try to separate us but because of our unity they could not do anything.²⁴
- We cast our own vote for the right candidate. We do not listen to our husbands or others. We are poor and uneducated so how can we participate in politics?²⁵

²³ Pairaband

²⁴ Belbari para, Islampur Pairaband, FGD with Rahela group Bhumihin Samity (female)

²⁵ Belbari para, Islampur Pairaband, FGD with Rahela group Bhumihin Samity (female)

It is important to note that BS itself is not a political party. Therefore although it takes stand in favor of a specific political ideology (namely in favor of a political process addressing the All of us belong to different political parties like AL, BNP, JP, Jamat-e Islami. It is a trick to survive in any political regime. Whatever political associations we have outside, we are doing it for the sake of samity. These political identities are necessary to keep the samity moving onward. We are all united when it comes to it.²⁶

2.4. Class Identity of Landless:

*We will have our own people in government only when
all the landless are united and aware*

Bhumihin Samity (BS) is an organization of a socio-politico class; namely the rural landless working with a vision of exploitation free society in which the “majority will govern.” In the discourse of BS “majority” indicates the mass of landless and marginalized population of Bangladesh. Therefore, for BS “landless” is not an identity which reflects an economic construct of the economically marginalized and deprived section of the population; rather “landless” is a socio-politico construct in which the majority of the so called “economic poor” of Bangladesh finds empowerment in unity.

To the BS members “landless” people constitute a section of the community which can find immense social, economic and political bargaining power only if they are united. The term “majority” makes sense in terms of empowerment only when the landless people are conscious of their rights and are united within an organization to achieve those rights. The members perceive BS to be such an organization of conscious and visionary landless.

The study finds that the members of BS are almost in 100 percent of cases are economically landless. However, a portion of its members do own land and therefore are not economically landless. It has been further found that usually these few non-economic landless are in leadership position within BS. These indicate three critical elements of the “landless” identity within BS:

- BS primarily organizes economic landless population in rural communities. As such organizational membership is overwhelmingly occupied by the economically landless people. The leadership of BS in general also comprised of the landless. This however does not indicate that BS membership and leadership is deprived of individuals coming from any other socio-economic strata. But under no circumstances the membership and leadership of BS are open to the members of the “class of exploiters”. “The rich are never the fiends of the landless” explained a BS member, “In fact the rich acquire their wealth only by exploiting the poor. The rich can remain rich only by depriving the landless people from their rights and resources.”²⁷ BS identifies people who economically benefits from the class-based exploitative social structure and people who support such exploitation as “enemy of the landless majority”.
- The identity of “landless” is not merely defined by economic status. The small landholders who are in favor of economic emancipation of landless toiling-mass are also considered as “landless”. The difference between the small and marginal farmers and wage laborers are not considered as “huge”. Rather the BS members hold the opinion, “The small farmers and middle class can only ensure their own interests and security if they are united with the landless majority.”²⁸ The organization of landless therefore is also perceived as a space of building bridges among the socio-economic classes who are pro-landless or whose own freedom is

²⁶ Meeting with male BS members, Ahmedpur Pukurpar, Peerganj

²⁷ Meeting with the female BS members at Peerganj

²⁸ Meeting with BS members in Bagatipara

depended on the issue of emancipation and empowerment of landless. Thus a section of small and marginal farmers are also having the membership in BS and are holding the organizational and political identity of 'landless'.

- BS members are not in a static economic state. This is also true of the entire stratum of landless population. As a result a small portion of BS members has climbed up the economic ladder. The members who were landless can acquire land and occupation beyond the farm-based wage labor and overtime can fall out of the economic category of "landless". In such a case, BS does not discard them as long as they do not contradict with the ideology, mission and values of BS.

The Ideology of Stagnation:²⁹

In each society there are rich and poor people. These two can never be equal. The world would come to an end if these two were equal. But the poor people can try for their betterment because if they try Allah might help them. If we try we can get better food and clothes but it is impossible to become as rich as the wealthy people.

It should be noted that the ideology of "economic justice" and the vision of a "classless and exploitation free society" is not a common trend in rural Bangladesh. The religious beliefs that promise "justice in the afterlife" is in domination in the ideological sphere. These beliefs work against any vision of "equity among the classes" or even further "the elimination of the class and exploitation-based society". The strength of the BS process is clearly seen in countering this hegemony of fatalist world outlook when the ideological transformation of the BS members is observed.

For BS members the identity of "landless" is therefore also an ideological construction. In simple words a landless cannot be truly to its class interest if a landless does not have commitment towards a struggle for a classless society, free of exploitation and deprivation of majority at the hand of few rich and powerful. The elements of this belief include:

- Society is not static in its formation.
- The society is moving based a dialectical unity of social classes with often opposing interests.
- Landless as a class can work to eliminate the class-system and thereby ensure freedom for all
- Class and economic status are not god-given rather products of human-history

Thus Bhumihin Samity members identify themselves as change agents. The identity of landless within BS therefore is an empowering one. However, this broader role as emancipator is valid only in the collective identity of BS membership. At personal level the BS members do aspire and struggle for change but this does not mean that all of them are full-time social activists. At individual level of the BS members the landless identity is manifested through:

- Expression of solidarity with fellow landless in case of injustice and difficulties
- Choice of political parties and elected representatives
- Participation in local organizations, forums and committees (e.g. shalish, school committee etc.)
- Protest against discrimination and violence against women and religious and ethnic minorities,
- Resistance towards religious fundamentalism
- Organizing landless in BS
- Participation in different social, cultural and political events of BS

²⁹ Meeting with unorganized landless women, kazipara, Peerganj

- Initiating collective economic interventions (e.g. leasing water bodies from samity)
- Pushing for proper distribution of khash land among the landless population

Interestingly, these initiatives and roles at private level often unite individual BS members both within their samities as well as with other samities of their localities and even beyond.

2.5. Indigenous and Ethnic Identity:

The identity of BS members coming from religious-minority and/or indigenous community holds these dimensions along with the general elements of identity associated with BS membership.

2.5.1. The Indigenous people and the samity³⁰:

Everybody says adivashis are stupid that is why we have formed BS to get some ideas from the NK workers and by knowing other's thoughts, ideas and activities. ³¹

Bhumihin Samity and Nijera Kori are both organizations having origin in mainstream Bengali communities. When compared with the socio-cultural context of the indigenous people living in the study areas, it is found that the samity is general do not go with the indigenous way of life. The structural feature of the Bhumihin Samity is also not something that can easily be accommodated in the life of the indigenes. The study finds that although the indigenous people are getting involved with the BS, the structure and the nature of the organization are novel in comparison with the traditional structure of the indigenous communities.

BS and the Indigenous struggle: (Meeting with indigenous female BS members, Peerganj)

When we are involved in BS we have an opportunity of being with the majority, the Bengalis. We are happy to be in their midst but we do not want to be just like them. We want to use BS to fight against the unjust acts of the Bengalis against us and to preserve our identity. Presently we are trying to understand the samity.

traditional rights on the land is respected by the Bengalis and the government. Our people have lost most of their land already to the Bengalis.” He added, “We enjoy support from the Bengali-BS members in our struggles. But we have to go a long way.” Another indigenous BS member explained, “We are thinking to get into it first and to understand what it is.”

Along with the struggle for land rights, the indigenous people are also pushing the agenda of education for the adivashi children. Two-third of the children go to school. Those who are not studying one part of them are young and the others are engaged in work.

Problems in education: (Meeting with indigenous BS members, Binodpur, Pairaband)

- Language problem
- Do not have any adivashi teacher
- We cannot provide them uniform
- We cannot feed them properly

³⁰ Peerganj

³¹ Meeting with indigenous female BS members, Peerganj

Adivashi people are also struggling as their traditional livelihood and resource base have been destroyed. One group of indigenous people mentioned, “*These days we do not always have rice. Then we try to collect jongli alu (i.e. roots etc.). But the bushes are declining so also the alu. We cannot hunt these days because there are no animals to hunt. Once we used to hunt shojaru, khorgosh, kochchop, ghughu, bajpakhi, dahuk and bok.*” Most of the indigenous people have now become mere sellers of wage labor.

Adivashi case study on BS:

People used to hate the indigenous people before. We could not go to the tea stalls, restaurants. We were not served. We were treated as untouchables. Others used to think that the indigenous people are dirty and hated them for drinking alcohol. But now we can go to tea stalls. We can sit on chairs with others and take tea. We can talk properly now, so that people are accepting us. Our children are going to school now. We are not considered as “idiots” anymore. Another reason for accepting us is that we have changed many things in our way of life. Our social environment has improved. We have learnt to live in a better way. We can mix with them because we are no longer afraid of Bengalis. In past we were very afraid of them because they were different, their language is different and they hated us.³²

The case reflects that for the adivashi people BS is also a space in which they acquire the strength of facing the Bengalis as equals. The BS is also a space in which they come in touch with Bengali culture and change. This cultural transformation of the adivashi (i.e. indigenous) people is not welcomed by all. Some of the participants in group discussions have mentioned this as a “risk factor”. One adivashi BS member mentioned, “*Some of us try to be too close to Bengalis. They even try to speak, look and act like them. But this will only divide us and make us weaker.*”³³ Thus there is a dichotomy in the participation of adivashi communities in BS and NK activities. On one hand, these opens up avenues of “mainstreaming”. While on the other hand, it works to disintegrate the very cultural norms and values that constitute the identity of an “adivashi”.

2.5.2. Religious Minority and the issue of Communal harmony³⁴:

*We believe we are all human beings; it does not matter which religion we follow.*³⁵

Both NK and BS have identified a need to organize landless not just across gender and ethnicity but also across religions and religious identities. In all the three study areas the majority of the BS members are found to be Muslims – as the majority of the population of these localities is Muslim. However, through the facilitation of NK, Bhumihin Samity has taken up the challenge of resisting religious fundamentalism and promoting communal harmony. It needs to be mentioned that nowadays the massive majority of the indigenous people have been converted into Hindu and Christianity. As a result the cause of ethnic identity of the indigenous people often converges with the cause of protecting the rights of the religious minorities.

Preserving communal harmony is indeed a real challenge. NK has taken up the challenge at national level while the BS addresses it at local levels. However, BS contributes at national level just as NK facilitates at local levels. The opposition to religion-based and fundamentalist politics is common for both NK and BS. This opposition is also a social process a meeting with female BS members reflected this social commitment. One of the member explained, “*It does not matter if we are Hindus or*

³² Meeting with indigenous female BS members , Peerganj

³³ Meeting with indigenous female BS members , Peerganj

³⁴ Meeting with male BS members, Ahmedpur Pukurpar, Peerganj

³⁵ A Muslim BS member in Peerganj

Muslims; everyone can follow his/her religion. Whatever comes we stay together. As we are united we can overcome anything. The fundamentalists (both men and women) think we are not right to be wtogether but we drive them away if they come to tell us anything.” Another of the women added, “These days the number of Islamic preachers is decreasing. Before they used to come in a group (both men and women) to teach people about ‘Islam’ and during elections asked them to caste vote for Jamat-e- Islami.”³⁶

However, it is not just the politically organized Islamists who try to disrupt the communal harmony at

The minority has never been under pressure in this area. There is a wonderful harmony among communities round here. Once my house was burned into ashes in an accident - everyone in the neighborhood helped me anyway they could. I did not have to buy food for an entire month. In this neighborhood I am the only member of the Hindu community and the rests are Muslims but I never feel uncomfortable thinking about it. Every other day there are pujas or other rituals held in my house and my neighbors help me doing that.

*Source: Commented by a BS member
(of Hindu religious belief)*

the grassroots. The social interaction between different religious community also leads to some humane but no less dangerous challenges. Describing the social challenges, a female BS member stated, “There are young boys and girls in the village who are converting into different religions due to cross religious marriages. There was a Muslim girl in our locality in love with a Hindu boy. The father of the boy was a member of the samity; he wanted to compromise by offering 40,000 taka to the father of the girl but the girl threatened to commit suicide and eventually married the boy. Now she considers herself a Hindu girl. If in future something like this happens within the samity, we will try to solve it ourselves as we are a family.”³⁷ This does not only show the

dynamic nature of “religious harmony’ but also the strength of BS in retaining communal harmony even in case of a social challenge from within the community.

The indigenous people have described a different challenge. Religions have disrupted the tradition cultural homogeneity of the indigenous communities. One of the indigenous BS members explained, “All of our ancestors used to follow “madhuai” religion; it was also known as “nitya dharma”. The main ritual of this religion is to worship the Tulsi tree. Now there are 18 households of Hindus, 11 households of Buddhists, 2 households of Christian and 14 households of Madhuai among 44 households of Urao round here. Difference in religions is the only difference that lies among us. But it does not stop us to marry across the religions. Therefore there are followers of different religions within the same family.”³⁸The indigenous people therefore face two-fold challenges with respect to religions:

- Firstly, the infiltration of institutional religions such as Hinduism and Christianity disrupts their traditional homogeneity in communal existence.
- Secondly, as the indigenous people are usually converted to Hinduism and Christianity they face challenges as religious minorities even after such conversions.

The BS members are found to be more vocal and organized to address the second issue in general – they are united to ensure rights of the religious minorities within their communities.

The religious identity has a much more profound impact upon the status of women. In case of Hindu women the inheritance (based on Hindu laws) entitlement is different from that of the Muslim women. The Hindu women do not have any rights over her father’s property. She is however entitled to inherit certain portion of mother’s property (if so exists). The Hindu women at the same time suffer from dowry just as the Muslim women. One of the Hindu BS member explained, “As the family needs to

³⁶ Meeting with Female BS members, Borodaudpur, Peerganj

³⁷ Meeting with Female BS members, Borodaudpur, Peerganj

³⁸ Meeting with indigenous (Urao) BS members, Amodpur, Peerganj

*pay dowry when they marry off a daughter of the house, the family feels that she has no claim left over her ancestral property.”*³⁹ Multiple-marriage is not commonplace among the Hindu men but the Hindu women are no less vulnerable to other forms of deprivations and domestic violence. The BS members belonging to different religious communities have highlighted that other than the Hindu property laws, in general the women of different religious communities suffer from almost similar state of discrimination and deprivation.

The anti-fundamentalist stand of BS attracts the landless and in general the marginalized section of rural communities belonging to different minority religions. These individuals as members of BS also represent the interests of the religious minorities. The Muslim members of BS are in solidarity with them as they ideologically disown religious fundamentalism and communal disharmony. In all three study areas the BS members have mentioned that they perceive fundamentalism as an “evil”. They have stressed that no one should be forced to perform any specific religion or to perform a religion in a specific manner. They have identified Jamat-e-Islami Bangladesh and other religion-based political parties as “opportunists” and/or “frauds” – exploiting religion for own benefits.

It is significant to note while the NK staff and BS members at the grassroots (both women and men) are aware on fundamentalism and are vocal against it, the concept regarding “fundamentalism” is not at all very clear among landless communities. As group of un-organized landless women stated, “We have never heard the word “fundamentalism”.”⁴⁰ This reflects two dimensions of NK and BS interventions:

- Firstly, the process had led to formulate a conscious group of rural landless who are aware of the risks of communal disharmony and are active to resist religion based discrimination and violence. The BS members are also non-dogmatic regarding religion. At leadership level there are people who call themselves even agnostics or atheists or materialists. Thus for BS members, religious affiliation has an impact on their personal and social life, but it does not overshadow their political identity of “landless”.
- Secondly, there exists a conceptual gap between the landless organized in BS and those who are left out of it. This gap originates at the backdrop of strong influence of “religious emotion” among the rural communities which motivates BS members to be cautious in spreading the critical discourse on religions.

The analysis of religion in restricting women’s liberty is also echoed by the BS members in all the three study areas. The patriarchic-bias of the religions has been more critically discussed during meetings with the leaders of BS. Generally, BS members identified the so called “religious leaders” and fundamentalist political forces to be the key actors working against “women’s interests”. This analysis also helps the BS members to avoid religious emotions and dogmas in addressing women’s issues.

2.6. BS member Identity Vs Identity as a creditor

All the BS members are landless. Almost all of them work as agricultural wage laborer. So their work and income depend on the agricultural calendar. There are certain months in the calendar when there is much work in the field and some times there is little to do. For this reason in particular seasons land less labors have work and they can manage to earn for their living while in certain seasons they have to take loans. Taking credit is their strategy of coping with the lean-period. The BS members also like

³⁹ Meeting with Female BS members, Borodaudpur, Peerganj

⁴⁰ Meeting with unorganized landless women, kazipara, Peerganj

others are bound to take loans. More than 80 per cent of the BS members have taken credit from micro-credit NGOs or from the mohajons (i.e. the traditional moneylenders). 90- 95 per cent have taken credit at some point of their lives. They sometimes sell their labor in advance as a precondition of accessing credit. The credit NGOs, in the eyes of the BS members, are actually doing business in the name of the development of the poor and marginalized people. Although, the rural landless are unable to meet the lean period and emergencies without credit, they feel hopeless and extremely powerless when they realize how much they are being exploited by the credit NGOs and mohajans. All the members of BS are aware of this exploitation. The strength of BS members is that they are aware of this exploitative process but the weakness is that although they are aware they are compelled to accept this bond of slavery.

Within this context the BS members are not happy with their identity as creditors. They do not want to be identified as such. At present, 80% of them go to the mahajan for credit. 20% of them go to the NGOs. They take loan from BRAC, Grameen Bank, Assort and they also go to Bazaar samity. Many of them take loans from all the sources available. The identity as a member of the BS is more important to them than the identity as a member of those other organizations. They take loans from those organizations but do not think themselves as a part of those organizations and deal with those as one would deal with a commercial financial body or bank.⁴¹

On the other hand, their identity as BS member is important to them because that gives them a platform where they can raise their voice and they believe they are heard. They feel empowered as member of the Samity and they come here for their development. When a samity accumulates certain amount of money in forms of savings, the members do not consider it solely as an economic resource. As such, the savings not only have an economic value to the members but also have a social value. It makes them confident and empowered because that helps them to keep their head high when some one speaks of their samity contemptuously by saying it is a 'samity of two-taka'.⁴²

Although the newly developed BS members are motivated by the economic drive, in time it is found that they put more value on their unity and the 'moukhik shahajjo' i.e. the knowledge resources that they receive from NK. Leaders do not consider it unjust if the marginalized NGO-creditors escape with the money, as they think poor people have rights over that money. The pro-people value-base of the BS members find not the marginalized NGO creditors as guilty if they fail to repay, rather it finds the repressions of NGOs, police and the pressure from the government to be unjust.

They also think that if they can accumulate all the savings of the samities, it can be used for extending credit to the landless people without any exploitative conditionality. But they fear two-fold risks in such an attempt. Firstly, they fear that if samities' use all the savings only for credit there will not be any money left for the other activities of the samity. Secondly, they have observed that people are relaxed or reluctant to repay their loans to

Micro Credit¹:

All the members are indebted to mohajon. The amount of loan varies from 900 taka to 3000 taka. Most of them have taken loan from the banks as well. The amount of loan taken from different organizations like - ASA, Krishi foundation, Shomokal varies from 4000 taka to 30,000 taka.

We have to take loan. When we go to market to sell our products we get less price but when we go to buy we have to pay much. The price of every essential thing for living is getting higher only the price of labor is getting cheaper. That is why we have to take credit. It is necessary; if there was not any chance to take loan we could not have cultivated our land. It is the only way to survive in the time of natural disaster like floods. So it helps us in that sense. But it is destroying our lives in many ways also.

Now we have a saving of tk 1200. We had more savings but all the members took 300 taka each to cultivate land this year. But we do not want to use our savings any more. We have to save more and invest the money to get more economic benefits in the future.

(Meeting with Female BS members, Amodpur, Peerganj)

⁴¹ Pairaband

⁴² Pairaband

BS because they feel that BS will not force them. In their words, “When we take loan from BS we feel as if we have taken loan from our family without any compulsion to return it”.⁴³

Therefore, although the BS members do not want to perceive their primary identity as creditors nor do they want to get engaged in the business of credit, to protect the interests of the landless, the BS members have four demands⁴⁴:

1. The interest of this credit should be lower.
2. The household resources of a creditor should be protected from the micro-credit NGOs, credit associations (such as haat samity, bazaar samity etc.) and mohajans.
3. The NGOs have to negotiate with BS before taking any steps against a landless creditor.
4. Government has to extend soft-loans to the landless at zero or low rate of interest and should focus on expanding employment opportunities at rural areas.

They want to work. They think that if they get enough employment opportunities they do not have to take loan. It is in those months when there is no work particularly in the agricultural sector that they have to take loan. They think the nationalization of industries could introduce job opportunities. They want government to introduce cheap and flexible institutional credit like “agricultural credit”.⁴⁵

Many BS help their members by providing loans in time of crisis. The leaders of BS also give support to their members when they become defaulters and they negotiate with the official of that credit organization. So it shows the strength of the organization.

Government can take initiative in this regard. Government Banks can give small amount of money as loans. So that people need not borrow 100 or 200 taka from the mohajons. And Government can also give money to people with a low interest rate. But what makes the members feel bad and weak is that even if they understand and they talk against the exploitation of credit organization they have to take the loan. When they go for taking loan other villagers teases them.

BS members and Credit:

(Meeting with Male BS members , Jahangirabad, Peerganj)

When we do not have any work we have to take loan. People have to migrate when they do not have work. But they also have to take loan to pay for migration. They take credit from the traditional money lenders (mohajons) or from the credit NGOs. If they take 100 tk from the mohajons they have to pay back 150 taka in six months or they can sell their labor in advance.

In 2000 one of the BS members failed to pay back his loan and they had a conflict with Grameen Krishi Foundation and the NGO stopped their activities in this village. It is true that one should give back money that he or she has lent from one, but the way these NGOs torture it is not a sin or crime if we do not pay back the money. Nijera kori does not give anything but they do not take anything as well. These NGOs take away more than what they give. They do business with the money we save in their bank. They do not give back our savings when we want it. If they give 3000 taka they take 400 taka as savings so we get 2600 taka but we have to give interest on 3000 taka. We have to give them money even if we do not have daily necessities like -oil, salt or clothing. These NGO activists do not treat us human beings. They do not speak with due respect. When we think about these organizations the first thing that come up to our mind is “to fight them off” (dangadangi).

Government can provide loan to the poor but they do not think about the poor at all. They give loan to the rich people to build industries and buildings but when these rich people do not pay back the money the Government does nothing.

⁴³ Pairaband

⁴⁴ Pairaband

⁴⁵ Pairaband

THE ORGANIZATION BUILDING PROCESS OF RURAL LANDLESS

This chapter dissects the key impact of NK process on developing an unique set of identities among the members of the Bhumihin samity.

3.1. Organization of the landless:

We wanted to be a part of the BS as we thought that the poor people should be united. The influential of the village used to exploit us. We wanted to get rid of that exploitation. ⁴⁶

The assessment of NK-BS relationship can be best made through an assessment of the process of BS formation. The study reveals two process leading to formation of BS in the study areas. Firstly, BS is formed through the initiative taken by NK by motivating the rural landless to form groups. Secondly, BS is formed through self-initiatives of rural landless. In both the ways NK has been found to play some critical roles.

In case of direct facilitation of group-formation by NK:

| Role of NK | Role of BS |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identification of potential landless leaders and activists ● Providing the rural landless with the information on BS and the need of such an organization for empowerment and poverty alleviation. ● Facilitating a process of organization building through extending staff-support to the groups. The staff initially assists the groups to form its committee and gradually takes up the role of assisting the groups in accounts and record-keeping, knowledge building and information networking etc. through which individual groups are linked with the broader umbrella of BS. ● Continual process of knowledge and capacity building. ● Legal assistance and services. ● Motivational and moral supports' ● Supports in mobilization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitating a process of organization building through extending supports through leaders/apex bodies to the groups. This includes knowledge building and information networking etc. through which individual groups are linked with the broader umbrella of BS. ● Continual process of knowledge and capacity building. ● Motivational and moral supports' = ● Supports in mobilization |

When samity is formation is facilitated through NK, the major challenge lies in ensuring a process of gradual role transformation. The study finds the components of capacity building and knowledge sharing to be two critical elements in the process of role transformation through which a samity gradually develops its own identity as an activist group - this does not however indicate any form of distance between the two. Role transformation indicates a process that enables a samity to pick up few roles which NK initially performs (such as accounts keeping, supervision of regular meeting of the samity, group building etc.). It there by frees NK of day to day responsibility of maintaining a samity as the samity leadership and

⁴⁶ Meeting with Male BS members, Ibrahimipur, Pairaband

members begin to play active roles in ensuring not just retention of the samity but also in fostering organizational growth.

In case of self-initiative in group-formation by landless and BS:

| Role of NK | Role of BS |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitating a process of organization building through extending staff-support to the groups. The staff initially assists the groups to form its committee and gradually takes up the role of assisting the groups in accounts and record-keeping, knowledge building and information networking etc. through which individual groups are linked with the broader umbrella of BS. ● Continual process of knowledge and capacity building. ● Legal assistance and services. ● Motivational and moral supports ● Supports in mobilization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Landless people form groups with direct assistance from BS without NK assistance. People are either motivated by examples of other communities and therefore approach BS for support. Or BS leaders take initiative and form groups by providing the rural landless with the information on BS and the need of such an organization for empowerment and poverty alleviation. ● Facilitating a process of organization building through extending staff-support to the groups. The staff initially assists the groups to form its committee and gradually takes up the role of assisting the groups in accounts and record-keeping, knowledge building and information networking etc. through which individual groups are linked with the broader umbrella of BS. ● Continual process of knowledge and capacity building. ● Motivational and moral supports ● Supports in mobilization |

When samity formation process is initiated by the BS leadership, NK from the very on set plays the role of backbencher. NK continues its role in capacity facilitation. It has been found that each of the samities is attached with an apex of BS at local level. This enables BS to support individual samities side by side the NK staff not just in mobilization but also in capacity facilitation. However, NK has the unique role, regardless how a samity is formed in systematic knowledge and capacity facilitation, national level coordination and in mobilizing legal, administrative and civil society support for BS.

3.2. Reasons behind forming Bhumihin Samity:

Initially we were motivated towards samity for economic betterment. After the training we realized that samity will help us to fight socio-economic exploitation.⁴⁷

When the question was raised regarding the key reasons of formation of Bhumihin Samity at their localities, almost similar responses came from all the samities in all the three study areas. The most frequent answers to the question “why did you first decided to form Bhumihin Samity?” are as follows:

- a) To generate income in the family, saving 2 tk
- b) To learn things essential to improve our lives
- c) To educate our children
- d) To borrow money in daughter’s wedding/in illness
- e) Get money without interest
- f) To get together and talk
- g) Enjoy power of being united

Formation of BS:

(Meeting with Female BS members, Amodpur, Peerganj)
Shabitri saw the formation and activities of BS in her aunt's place. She liked what the NK activist was saying to them. She became interested and after coming back to her home she talked to other women of her neighborhood. Then they asked the assistance of the NK worker and

Meeting with Male BS members, Boropukoria, Bagatipara
⁴⁷*formed the group in a day. They formed it because they wanted to know and see better what others are doing in BS. They though it would be good for their family if they could save 2 taka in every week and if they can collectively do something. Their samity is now 10 years old.*

In few specific cases , the decision of forming BS has been taken by the

communities to address some specific local problems. During a meeting with New Male BS members, Nekua Pukurpar, Pairaband a case has been recorded in Pairaband, which reflects that there is usually no single reason of forming BS by a specific group of landless. Moreover the reasons behind affiliation with BS change with time, experience and organizational growth. The case further shows that when BS provides the landless people with some victory over the “exploiters” and “wrong doers” – who are usually people with money, social and political power, the landless people find new value of BS.⁴⁸

Reason behind forming Bhumihin Samity⁴⁹

Two years ago women formed a BS group and it has been successful. The women have introduced this samity in this area and their activities were going on fine therefore the men decided to form one for them. The staff also invited the male community members to form a group. “We thought it would be good to have some saving.” We have already invested 6000 taka in potato (at cold storage). There have been other NGOs in this area that exploited us. They threat us and forcefully take our money. We do not want those foreigners to come here and make money at our expense so we decided to form a samity where we can keep our money to ourselves thus support each other and also can help out someone in personal and family crisis. We formed the group for a better income and for our betterment. Besides we also hope to get justice through this organization. There has been a rape case recently. A local police raped a landless woman who did not get any justice from the rural elites but the BS staged demonstration at DC office and ensured justice at the court of law. This incident also inspired us to join BS.

The case shows that success of one BS can work as motivation and education for others . In this case the success of the women’s group in economic sphere worked to motivate men of the locality to form BS. So their initial motivation was economic wellbeing. However, later the success of the samity in ensuring justice to a landless women (who survived a rape) helped the men to aspire membership of BS not merely for the “monetary gain” but for social and political empowerment.

Urao Community Settled in a Cluster Village⁵⁰:

We have been with the BS from 97. We used to go to the Mithapukur court, there we heard from a BS member about NK and BS. We then went to the NK office.

We came to know it is a khash land in 93 and from then there had been lot of conflicts with the Jotdar. He was not landless but even then he was enjoying it. We went to the TNO office for justice and then we fought for it with the help of NK. We held a press conference and gave the paper cuttings of that conference to the DC and TNO office. The other BS members (Bengali) also extended their support to us. But even then government

⁴⁸ Meeting with New Male BS members, Nekua Pukurpar, Pairaband

⁴⁹ Meeting with New Male BS members, Nekua Pukurpar, Pairaband

⁵⁰ Community meeting with Urao groups, Mithapukur, Rangpur

did not take any initiatives in this regard. Eventually we held a meeting one night and decided to enter the barrack. The army was here then and they tried to resist us. When they started beating us we attacked them with bows and whatever we had. We then started staying in the verandas of the barracks as they locked up the rooms. We stayed there throughout the winter (for one month). They tried to threaten us in different ways. We said “if you want us to get out of here you have to kill us first.” After a month they hand us the keys of the rooms. Now 60 families live here permanently. There are 50 families who have not got to live here permanently but they also took part in the movement.


Government built some houses in 2000 and others were built in 2005. In each barrack there are ten families, as there are six barracks so sixty families live here. Government wanted to rehabilitate 132 families but we wanted that only the Urao community should be here.

The case study on Urao community in Mithapukur reveals that when there is a need of united resistance against organized opposition – NK and BS has become sources of support and solidarity. This works to organize people, even the adivashis, under the banner of BS. Thus for the marginalized communities NK and BS have become both a space in which they can find greater strength through unity and a space in which they can find solidarity supports of organized landless. This dual nature of the organization has made it popular among people who seek to organize or facilitate a movement of landless people; be it concerning the Bengalis or the Adivashis. It should be noted that in Mithapukur, the Uraos have taken self initiatives to reach and bring NK within their community to facilitate BS as they recognized both of these two dimensions of BS.

At the beginning we had 20 members. We still have 20 members but 4 of them are new. We formed our samity in 1988. When we started some women were interested but they did not join us because of the rumor that we would be converted to Christianity. We came to form this samity because we did not want to be imprisoned 12 months a year just because we were women. There was a man named Jalal who was a member of leftist political party. He first told us about the samity.⁵¹

Urge for gender equity and freedom has also motivated many to join BS. This has been usually the common case for women. It needs to be highlighted that in Pairaband a women’s BS first heard about the BS and NK from a leftist political activist. This on hand reveals that NK and BS have established a well accepted political identity of being on the side of not just landless but also of being on the side of all those who are exploited and marginalized including the women. On the other hand, it shows that the political lefts identify BS as an organization of the “proletarians” – which reflects that NK and BS has a solidarity network going beyond the NGOs and community actors . It also covers the political actors.⁵²

The organized landless in the study areas have identified some common sets of problems to be addressed by the BS. These can be clustered into following categories:

 **Economic Motivation:** This has been found to be the initial expectation of the landless people while they form BS. In time this economic motivation declines.

Problems identified by the landless:
(FGD with Female group, Iqbalpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband)

1. Low income/poverty
2. dowry
3. violence against women
4. early marriage
5. Lack of access to khash land
6. Exploitation by the loan in NGO samity
7. Fundamentalism
8. Exploitative wage
9. Lack of participation in local government

⁵¹ FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband

⁵² FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband

The BS members have repeatedly informed that they are involved with NK not for money as they depend on other NGOs for such needs. Moreover, for NK poverty alleviation is not perceived narrowly as individual level economic progress only. Rather it is perceived as a process which contributes in ensuring economic empowerment of the landless as a whole. As a result the economic motivation of formation of BS gradually transforms into economic empowerment of rural landless. This economic empowerment includes access to khash land and open water bodies, greater bargaining power in wage market, government initiative towards creation of rural employment and access to resources for emergency management in form of zero-interest loans etc. Thus although at initial level weekly savings and prospect of having access to emergency and investment credits from samity attracts landless to NK and BS, in time it evolves into macro-economic agenda of pro-poor financial governance. In case of investment initiatives, NK motivates BS to go for collective investment schemes rather than individual level investments schemes.

- **Political Motivation:** The political motivation behind participation in BS starts with having representation of organized landless in local government. Participation in local governance is seen as a key factor in ensuring that government benefits are not misappropriated by the rural elites rather the landless and rural poor have the rightful access to those benefits (e.g. relief, elder citizens' allowance etc.). The political motivation of the organized landless goes up to "establishment of the government of landless majority to put an end to exploitation based social construction." This motivates the organized landless to be politically active beyond BS - to be enrolled in political parties with the aim of putting their own candidates in national elections in the long run. The organized landless also perceive themselves politically more active and effective by emerging as an organized and conscious vote-bank in local to national elections. The landless members of BS have explained that the ruling political parties fail to serve the interests of the poor in general although it is the poor who constitute the majority of Bangladesh-population. Therefore the BS members are motivated to be involved with left-wing political forces who aim at establishing the rule of toiling majority.
- **Social Motivation:** The members of BS are motivated to attain greater social status. This has been found to be a common factor for the adivashi people as well as the Bengali landless. The social motivational factor includes recognition of landless people as equal rights holders by the ruling elites at community level. This the BS members aims to achieve through their unity which makes BS a respectful organization at the community space. The cultural activities, mobilizations and celebrations of special days (e.g. Begum Rokeya Day, Victory Day etc.), participation of BS members in local committees (e.g. school committees, Haat committees etc.), electing BS leaders in local government and united stand in shalish (i.e. informal arbitration) etc. lead to formation of greater esteem and social recognition of landless community as a whole in their respective localities. The process of change in social status also has an economic factor. The BS members have explained that with the growth of their collective savings and span of collective investment schemes their social status tends to enjoy a positive mobility. Thus social motivation is closely linked with almost all other motivational factors involved in organization building.
- **Security and Justice Motivation:** The organized landless have mentioned that unity in BS works as a protection for the landless who are marginalized to the extent that they lack legal protection offered by the state. The BS works both as a preventive and curative wing of organized landless in the sphere of security and justice. BS organizes

landless in small units at the village level (i.e. the samities) as well as links individual units with an umbrella reaching upto Thana level. Moreover, there is a strong networking among the BS up to national level facilitated through NK. This apex is effective in organizing protest, resistance and pressing administration or shalish for justice. In case of dispute among its own members BS works as space of informal arbitration. BS has a strong focus against violence against women (rape, domestic violence, dowry, multiple marriage, hilla marriage, early marriage, discrimination against girls etc.). The participation of a woman in Bhumihin Samities does not only link them with a group of women motivated to protect her interests, it also link her with a group of men organized in BS who are equally active towards the same goal. Lastly, the issue of security and justice is also facilitated through NK which offers legal services through the BS and works as linking pin between the grassroots organization and the national legal framework. It should be noted that the protection and justice is offered to all the landless not only to those who are affiliated with BS. This class-based approach of BS facilitated through NK is a key factor that attracts landless people towards NK and BS. Thus the apex of BS works as watchdog, pressure group and a body of informal arbitration focused on ensuring justice and security of its members in specific and landless people in general.

During a group discussion the BS members have indicated that as BS and NK takes the side of landless, the organizations enjoy a special status – landless people own them as their own organizations.⁵³

The strength of BS and NK lie not only in the fact that both the organizations work to champion the rights of the landless people. More importantly, landless people find NK and BS to be on their side because they put the interests of the landless before anything else – they do not put landless people at risk to attain any “higher goal”. This has been best explained by a group of male BS members in Mitapukur, Pairaband. During group discussion one of the participants explained, “*We wanted to take possession of khash land beside the river. There are two very powerful joddars (i.e. big landlords) in our locality. If we took the possession of land or fought for the land that the joddars could have harmed our BS members. So we came back and did not try to take possession then.*” This reflects that BS facilitated through NK is an organization of landless which takes care of its members. Thus even when people fail they do not abandon the organization.

Why the BS survived?

1. BS is working for people and therefore people are keeping this organization alive.
2. We have faith on our organization. We know BS will not create any problem for us and will help us therefore we do not leave BS even in the crisis period.
3. BS empowered us to fight against the powerful people.

3.3. Organizational Growth Path:

The study reveals that BS like any other organization building process goes through different stages of development. Each of these stages has its own characteristics both in terms of internal organization and external facilitation (i.e. facilitation by NK).

⁵³ Meeting with Male BS members, Mithapukur, Pairaband

Organizational time line⁵⁴:

- 1987- Now in this area there is no incident of 'hilla' marriage and divorce. In 1987 one of our members was forced to a 'hilla' marriage and we stopped that. Now we do not let this kind of incidence to occur.
- 1989- Public speech on Begum Rokeya and speech on the five basic rights.
- 1988- In 1988 after the flood we went to the TNO office and we demanded aids. We got medicines for human and for our cattle. One of the doctors of the local government hospital was never on duty, we complained against him and he had been transferred.
- 1990- In 1990 we arranged a meeting in the Pairabond School. The members of Shibir attacked the local NK office and locked down the Nk office. All the members where mobilized and protected the office. The membes remained at the NK office for 20 days. Later khushi apa came, a case was filed against those shibir members and NK won the case.
- 1995- We took part in the protest against the death of Yasmin. Jaheda's hilla was also stopped. Petition to DC office for a bridge on the river Dhangot and to build a dam to protect the village from river erosion. But there is still no response from the government.
- 2003- Manjela killing- A domestic girl 16 years old was killed by the employer. The employer was a police officer. The employer claimed that she committed suicide. But the BS stopped burial and identified it as a case of rape and murder. The BS pushed for post –mortem and filed case and organized a citizen mass and submitted the sergent to the police station. Solidarity protest gathering in Mltha pukur to establish the rights of the landless families on the khash land. Police on false allegation arrested one of the landless. We encircled the thana and that person was released.
- 2004- Jamat printed leaflet against BS that they are against Islam. The community people dug a pond to divert the flow of the river.
- 2006- Protected and resisted leasers out of open water body. There was a governmental initiative to mach chash. We decided to stop them because we as landless had the right over that water body and if there was a governmental intervention we would lose our right. Then we talked to the local elites and with their supports we stopped that project.
- 2003- The corruption of 'Dustho Mata' card has been decreased.
- 2005- There was a movement against the corruption of Red- Crescent local committee. It took place 6 months ago. The local Red Crescent committee misappropriated 34 thousand taka. We complained to the head office and later distribute the money among the members.
- 1985- We opened an account at Krishi Bank.
- 1988- We leased in land from the savings of our samity.
- 2006- Now we have 80,000 taka as savings and we are cultivating 50 shotok-mortgaged land.

The following case study reveals growth path of a BS.

There is no single growth patter for the Bhumihin Samities. However, time-line analysis of several BS in the study areas revealed some generic features. These include;

- **Initiation stage** which is characterized by group formation and consolidation process. At this stage weekly savings and discussions are two most important actions.
- **Linkage building stage** which involves a process of networking with NK and other BS in the localities. The members at this stage learn about NK's program interventions and the broader organization of BS.
- **Indoctrination stage** is a phase in which the members gradually get into the class based social analysis framework introduced by NK. This phase involves training of samity

Organization

(FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband)

We landless have a space in this samity where we can share each other's troubles. We can stand together. This samity is our pride and pleasure. In Rukaiah dibosh we give speech in front of the elite people and journalists. We don't get scared to ask in front of all these people that why Khaleda/ Nijami's sons are getting their education in foreign countries when we cannot send our children to schools? We can move on with our organization even if NK workers do not come to talk to us anymore. We can manage our own things in our samity now. But it was impossible for us to know so many things without their help.

⁵⁴ FGD with Female group, Husen nagar, Sadar Thana, Pairaband

leader(s) and conceptualization of the development philosophy of NK. The role of BS in social transformation is placed for discussion and orientation.

- **Phase of social consciousness and actions** is a stage in which the members begins to experience the strength of new found world-outlook and organizational unity. This is a phase in which the BS members contextualizes their social analysis and begins to address challenges (e.g. movement for khash land, protest against violence against women or misappropriation of government fund etc.).
- **Phase of solidarity and participation** makes the BS a part of the broader movement of landless. The members begins to consider their samity as a part of the bigger struggle of the landless for a free, fair and exploitation free society. This phase also ensures greater participation of the BS members in community affairs and organizations (including that of shalish and local elected bodies). The BS members emerges as conscious voters with a bias towards political forces with commitment for an exploitation free society.
- **Phase of collectivization and consolidation** marks a stage in which the samities accumulate comparatively large savings and begins to invest them in collectively owned investment schemes.
- **Phase of visionary movement** is a stage in which the BS leadership usually takes up the challenge of spreading the movement as organizers.

Organizational time line⁵⁵:

- 1992- We are 'poor'; we took loan from the Mohajons and jotdars. We had to pay high interests but still they pressured us for more. At that time NK came to the area. We liked NK as they always spoke in favor of us. We called the worker of Nk and found the BS in the village.
- 1997 – The president received training. We gathered strength. We stated to take part in shalish.
- 1998- The village committee was formed. The village committee considered and linked all the groups of the village.
- 1999- There was a river which dried up and become a cultivating land (4 acre). All the 7 samities of the village went to land office to register the river as khash cultivable land. Than the 56 member of the samity applied to TNO for registration and legal distribution. The members tried to take possession of the land but due to the resistance of the Jotdars the landless had to retreat. Till date the application of the landless is not responded.
- .2000- To protest against the rape of a child (Aduri) . The samity member went to Bhanga union.

It should be noted that the phases do not follow any set sequence and the sequence in which they are presented is not at all should be taken as a general trend. More often these phases co-exists and not all the phases need not be experienced by each BS.

Organizational time line⁵⁶:

- 1985 – There were many problems in the first year. The very word “Samity” seemed incomprehensible to us. The NK staff tried very hard to make us understand to have a samity of our own. The fundamentalists tried to resist it saying – “These people are Christians;” “Women should not go outside; they have to maintain parda.” The movement against violence against women started from the very first year.
- 1986 – We celebrated “Begum Rokeya Dibosh” in the next year but they pulled down our stage. At that time government did not celebrate this day we were the first to do it.
- 1987 –Next year we celebrated “Rokeya Dibosh” in another place successfully. In this year the movement against hilla and verbal divorce was also being initiated.
- 1988 – We started celebrating the other important days like Independence Day, Victory Day, and Language Day besides the Rokeya Dibosh.
- 1989 – In this year the NK staffs were being harassed.
- 1990 – People outside the samity also started to join in the celebration of those days. In this year we began our movement for wage and against dowry problem. Throughout these years the mahajons tried to threat us in different ways as we managed to have some savings and did not care to go to work for them anymore. The movement for the equal wage for men and women is still going on.

⁵⁵ FGD with Female group, Husen nagar, Sadar Thana, Pairaband

⁵⁶ FGD with Male group, Husen nagar, Sadar Thana, Pairaband

- 1991 – In a meeting a female BS leader stated that Golam Azam should be hanged to death and after that Shibir locked up the NK office. At that time we used to guard the office throughout the night and tried to encourage the staffs. Gradually the movement against those fundamentalists became organized and they failed to do anything.
- 1992 – Before only the influential used to conduct the shalish but from this year the landless also started to participate in it.
- 1994 – In this year they sent letters of false accusations to the mosques against us but they could not do anything as we vehemently tried to protest it.
- 1995 – There had been a case against a BS member. It was the first case against us. We besieged the DC office to protest that. Around 94/95 we also did the same to protest the murder of Yasmin.
- 1997 – In this year's UP election Foyej Ahmed (the president of this group) became the first UP member on behalf of the BS.
- 1998 – There had been a flood in this year. We submitted an application for relief to the TNO office with the advice of NK staff. It really worked and we got more relief than the other villages did. From that time on we submit application to the TNO office whenever there is flood or if any disease breaks out.
- 2000 – Our struggle continued. We started to help others in wedding to collect money for the dowry. Finally in 2000 the incidents of verbal divorce and hilla marriage came to an end. We saved the entire area from the erosion of the river by digging the riverbank that made the river to take a turn into different direction. Though it was our land even then some men from Mithapukur filed a case against sixteen members of our samity. We submitted an application against it to the TNO office.
- 2002 – We launched a protest against the rape and murder of Manjila.
- 2005 – We besieged the BRAC office to take back the allegation against a woman member. BRAC filed a case against her.

The phases described in the presented cases are taken only from Pairabond as similar generic phases could be traced in the remaining two study areas. Thus although there is no common sequence, the study could trace a set of generic phases of organizational development in case of the BS in general.

The experience of growth path of studied Bhumihin Samities reveals that certain experience and capacities could only be attained by a samity, only if it undergoes certain phases. In this regard, one basic distinction is experience of movement and confrontation with power-structure. This experience brings the members close to each other and also let them test the strength of their unity. The experience of achievement through hard earn victory and the agony of brutal defeat, both leaves a long lasting impression and impact upon any such samity. The experience also reveals true nature of social and political commitment of NK to BS members and forges a different type of bonding between the two. NK usually offers strategic advice, coordination, moral support and organizes media and mobilizes administrative as well as civil society support in favor of the struggling landless samity. NK also extends legal services (by paying court expenditure through samity and by referring cases to committed lawyers within its solidarity network).

Organizational Growth⁵⁷:

The Samity was founded in 1990.

1990- There were 18 members when we started now two of them left. Those two have migrated to Dhaka. They come to visit village sometimes.

1993- We arranged a meeting of all the BS of the village. AT that time there were 22 BS in the village. We founded village committee and started to do the salish within our own committee.

1994- Our president first went to any local salish. They call us to attend the salish now because they know we have power.

1994- We protested against the murder of yasmin.

2003- Ali hossain was arrested in a movement of possession of khash land. A case has been filed against him. We all went UNO office and later he was released. In that year we also protested against the sexual violence against a girl named Aduri. Police arrested the man who was responsible for that act after we talked to the OC of the police office.

1993- We saved 5000 taka and leased in 10 kathas of land. We started farming collectively since then. Every body works in

⁵⁷ Meeting with male BS members, Joyrampur, Pairaband

the field whenever they have time.

2004- A female BS member took loan from BRAC. She could not pay the kisti. The BRAC officer came and tried to take away her cow. He couldn't. Then he tied himself up with a rope and sent some one to inform the BRAC officials to come to rescue him. Later the BRAC people came with the police and filed a case against that women demanding 33 thousand taka. 350 BS members then went to the BRAC office and encircled the office. The BRAC officials were afraid and arranged a meeting with the BS leaders. The UP chairman and members were also present at that meeting. Then the matter was settled and BRAC demanded only 3300 taka the amount actually taken by the woman.

2003- We had 1 lakh 25 thousand taka collectively. We distributed the money among us every one got 5/6 thousand taka. Now we have 50 thousand taka. We are not going to liquidate the money anymore. Even if we do not have our money we will have our samity but if we have money we can invest for the future, which is a good inspiration.

2004- We celebrated the Rukkaiyah Dibosh. After that some shibir people sent letters to the mosque saying that BS members talked against Islam in that gathering. But we did not say anything against Quran. They sent this letter to many different places of Pairabond, Kaprikhal, Hossain Nagar, Bhangni. Many BS of different places almost believed in it. We went to these places and talked to our BS members about it. 1 or 2 BS broke up after this incident except those all BS stood together and fought against this propaganda.

1992- The shibir people locked down the Nijera Kori office at Pairabond. We went to the office and opened it. After that they did not take any further action.

It should be noted that BS members can go through these experience either at the phase of social consciousness and actions when they struggle for their own cause or in the phase of solidarity and participation in which they join others' struggle in the spirit of solidarity. Also it has been found that most of the BS which have entered the phase of visionary movement have undergone the experience of struggle.

Adivashi BS⁵⁸:

The jotdars took the possession of this 7 acre of land for 21 years. We started living in this place since 1986. We continued to stay in that land and tried to take the possession when we came to know that this land is khash. In 1989 jotdars filed a case against us. We also fought against the matbors of our urao community who tried to take lease of the land with their names. We fought for this land many times. Four times it was fearsome many of us were 'half murdered'.

1996- Karitash wanted to build a shelter for flood in this area. We informed karitash about the case and in the presence of the chairman and members others of the civil society they helped to solve the case.

1999- We used to collect money to carry on the legal fight in the court. In 1999 we won the case.

1996- We formed our BS and Nijera kori helped us since then in the legal affairs.

With the help of Army the government tried to put Bengali settlers here. We drink alcohol, we eat pigs, and it is difficult to live with Bengali Muslims. The whole area was then in control of armies. Section 144 was observed. We fought against the army too. We won this time also.

Then our new homes were made. We had to stay in the veranda of the school for three months in the cold.

Government built these houses under the 'Abashon prokolpo'. Through out this time the entire BS tried to help

⁵⁸ Meeting with indigenous BS members, Binodpur, Pairaband

The experience of adivashi communities in BS has been more or less same as the Bengali landless communities, at least as long as the path of organizational development is considered. This reveals that the process of organizational facilitation followed by NK influences both the communities almost similarly with respect to self-organization. The nature of the organizations and their perceived roles may be different for these two communities who may share same habitat and resource base and may even undergo similar process of economic marginalization, can still hold completely different cultural and social setups. The final challenge of integration and union of these two communities within the overarching identity of “landless” is also taken up after a BS has reached certain level of organizational growth. For Bengalis this may come at the phase of solidarity while for the Adivashis this may come at the phase social consciousness and actions. This however, should be taken as a mere example and certainly not as a rule of thumb.

BHUMIHIN SAMITY AND ITS TRUSTED FRIEND

This chapter identifies the key impact zones of NK's organization building strategy vis-à-vis the self-governed organization building process (i.e. BS) of rural landless. The chapter looks into the strength, weakness and challenges facing the empowering process of organized rural landless.

4.1. NK and BS: Strength of Peoples' Organization

*We landless have a space in this samity where we can share each other's troubles. We can stand together.*⁵⁹

The Bhumihin Samity has been recognized by the members as an authentic people's organization. They have mentioned that there are two types of peoples' organizations.

- Firstly, the self initiated community-based groups or cooperatives at the rural base. Usually these initiatives are taken by the medium and large farmers or the shop keepers and business people. The basic nature of these organizations is "savings and credit groups" or "production and marketing cooperative". In other words, these are organizations formed and maintained with the sole aim of economic gain.

- Secondly, there are groups and organizations of rural poor, landless and marginalized people formed with the facilitation of "outsiders". The BS members have explained that other than NK, rest of these external organizations (namely NGOs) use these groups or organizations mainly to disburse credit or to carry out their own programmed activities. From this context, these organizations are much more owned by the NGOs than that of the people involved. On the other hand, BS, although facilitated by NK, is owned and managed by the landless members of the samity.

Organizational Strength:

(Meeting with male BS members, Ahmedpur Pukurpar, Peerganj)

We started Bhumihin Samity 4 years ago by saving two taka weekly. We always used to be a part of the samity. Previously there was only one samity with 500 members, now there are many according to the number of villages. 30% of the villagers of this village are in the BS. There are 3 samities here. There is a pond in our neighborhood that was being used by others. After accumulating 15 thousand taka, we went to the Chairman to take lease of the pond. Now it belongs to us.

In case of NK facilitated Bhumihin Samity the organized landless have identified two-fold distinctions. Firstly, they identified distinctions of NK from other NGOs. Secondly, they identified distinctions of

Difference between NK and other NGOs:

(Belbari para, Islampur Pairaband, FGD with Rahela group Bhumihin Samity (female))

- *The other NGOs give loans but NK does not. The other NGOs take lot more than what they give.*
- *NK only provides us with knowledge and good advice. They have never given us any wrong advice. We have not joined the samity for money; we have joined so we can stay together through thick and thin.*

NK facilitated people's organization (i.e. BS) from other village level self initiated groups. The BS members have noted that:

- Unlike the other NGOs NK does not try to entrap the rural poor (i.e. the landless and the marginalized) into the exploitative trap of micro credit. Instead of physical or monetary resource NK provides the BS with "mukher shahajjo" (i.e. verbal aid) – indicating the knowledge, information, capacity building supports and strategic guidance extended to

⁵⁹ FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband

the BS through different training programs and workers' support etc.

Moreover, NK does not target the rural poor to deliver services such as health care, education etc. rather they work with them to ensure that the landless people take self initiatives to ensure their access to such services. "NK work with the landless people to establish five fundamental rights" informed one of the female BS member in Bagatipara.

The BS members have noted that NK does not take control over the savings generated at BS level. This in their opinion is the key distinction of NK from other NGOs. The members have explained that by extracting the money saved at group level usually the credit-NGOs create their own capital. The NGOs later use this accumulated capital to extend loans to the group members at a high interest to generate its own revenue. By letting the individual BS to retain its savings at its own disposal, NK provides the organized landless to accumulate an investment capital which may create revenue for the BS – not for NK.

The role of NK in accompanying movement is another distinction that the organized rural landless appreciate. In this regard, the BS members have stressed on the few facts that reflects NK's commitment to the cause. Firstly, NK itself has undergone attacks of the oppositions of BS (as in case of Pairabondh the fundamentalist forces attacked the office of NK). Secondly, the staff members of NK stays with the BS members all the way through in case of any movement or mobilization and share the same risks. Lastly, NK extends legal supports to the BS members if the counter forces (i.e. mahajans or land grabbers etc.) take a BS member to court or if they are arrested by the Police.

Lastly, NK works with BS members as per the needs of BS. The planning process followed by NK takes inputs from the organized landless. This participatory process of planning leads to greater ownership of the landless on the NK interventions. The members have cited examples of other NGOs working in their localities who simple deal with the landless as passive recipients. They have explained that as a result of this distance between the people and the NGO planners in most cases the NGO interventions fails to contribute in empowering the people.

NK and other NGOs

(Meeting with Male BS members, Nekua Pukurpar, Pairaband)

NK helps us with their advice and cooperation. The other NGOs only want to exploit the poor. One of us had been with the Grameen Bank for 14 years but he left it as they promised to give him a loan of taka ten thousand but actually gave taka 3000. Gradually people are trying not to go to these NGOs anymore and more people are joining in with the BS.

NGO Experience of the Urao in Peerganj: We, the Urao community is involved with several other NGO s besides NK, like CARITAS & Shomokal. Nine of us are members of CARITAS while no male members but three households are involved with Shomokal.

Shomokal – This NGO has been carrying out its activities here for the last ten years. Besides credit they sell latrine and tube well in cheaper price (a tube well costs taka1300, they sell it in taka 750). They also give seeds of different trees and also domestic livestock like pigs, goats and rabbits. We do not find it useful; there is not enough grazing land left for the pigs.

Organizational Strength⁶⁰

We started Bhumihin Samity 4 years ago by saving two taka weekly. We always used to be a part of the samity. Previously there was only one samity with 500 members, now there are many according to the number of villages. 30% of the villagers of this village are in the BS. There are 3 samities here. There is a pond in our neighborhood that was being used by others. After accumulating 15 thousand taka, we went to the Chairman to take lease of the pond. Now it belongs to us.

On the other hand, the BS members have also identified some clear distinctions of the people's organizations facilitated by NK from those which are created by the villagers themselves without any

⁶⁰ Meeting with male BS members, Ahmedpur Pukurpar, Peerganj

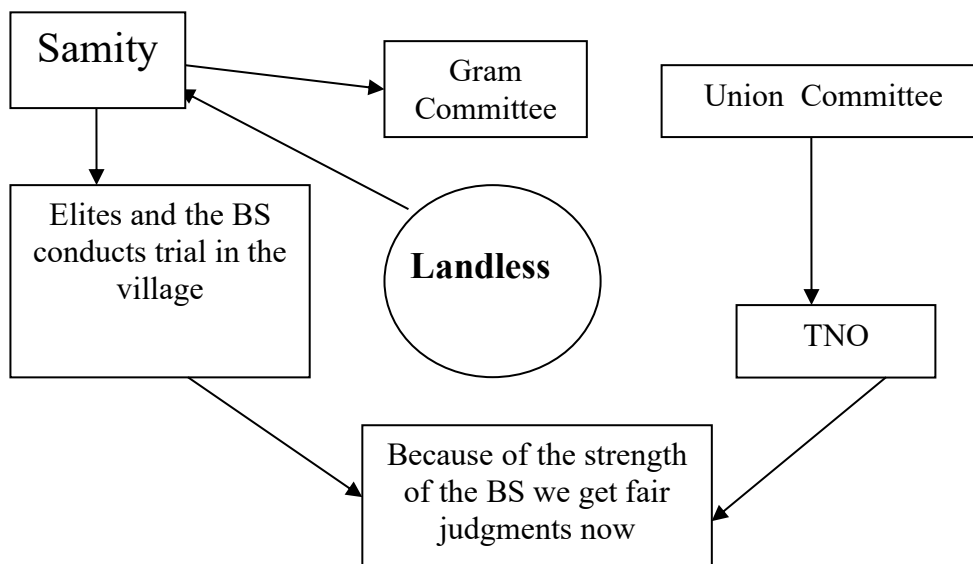
external facilitation. BS member in Bagatipara explained that when the villagers form samity without the facilitation of NK, there are certain limitations. These involve:

- a) Mere focus on economic benefits;
- b) The broader goal of social progress (e.g. establishment of exploitation free society) is not addressed;
- c) No protection from the opposition of the power structure
- d) Lack of continuation and consistency in actions (no strategic guidance)
- e) The samity may generate savings but may not have any clear goal of utilizing it as investment capital
- f) Usually in such a samity when the savings grows a little larger the members break the samity to withdraw their savings. Usually after such a withdrawal the samity cease to exist.
- g) The samity is usually a close-group and works in isolation from any other social or political actors.⁶¹

If we have any problem we first come to our samity and if we cannot solve it we go to NK office. They give us advice, courage and protect us.⁶²

- We are in good terms with other samities. In the absence of the NK staff we facilitate the meeting and hand the weekly saving to the cashier.⁶³
- We have our rules regarding the samity. One cannot leave whenever she wants to but if she wants to leave she cannot have the interest of her money. We put our savings in the bank (krishi bank), so none can draw money from it whenever she wants to, therefore none can leave the samity.⁶⁴

One of our members could not pay the weekly kisti of BRAC a couple of months ago. The worker of that NGO wanted to take away the tin roof of his house. We stopped it and make the NGO worker to talk to us because we think he must talk to our samity before taking any action against our members.⁶⁵



On the contrary, the case described by male BS members (Ahmedpur Pukurpar, Peerganj) shows that the samities facilitated by NK is not just sustainable but also expanding. Moreover, for BS the

⁶¹ Meeting with Male BS members, Boropukuria, Bagatipara

⁶² FGD with Female group, Iqbalpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband

⁶³ Belbari para, Islampur Pairaband, FGD with Rahela group Bhumihin Samity (female)

⁶⁴ Belbari para, Islampur Pairaband, FGD with Rahela group Bhumihin Samity (female)

⁶⁵ FGD with Female group, Iqbalpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband

economic growth of the samities comes not just based on the growth of investment capital but also through the growth of bargaining power with the local power-structure.

At the same time BS continues to work as dispute resolution body for its members. One of the members recalled, *“We solve many problems with in family members particularly between husbands and wives. A girl was being tortured by her in laws for dowry and her husbands used to beat her often. We threatened her husband if the girl committed suicide we would not let him get away with that.”*⁶⁶ Another member similarly informed how BS works to ensure it members interests when conflict arises with non-members. She recalled, *“One of the BS member’s sons was beaten by a man. The man was a Muslim, his cow was eating the paddy of other’s land and the boy protested. The man used abusive language and beat him. The boy was taken to medical hospital. Later the BS members talked to that man and made him pay 500 taka needed for the medical treatment.”*⁶⁷

4.2. Challenges and Constraints to Growth:

Unorganized women and BS:

(Meeting with unorganized landless women, kazipara, Peerganj)

Only two or three of us have heard about BS; but we do not know much about it. We have heard about their meetings but do not have any idea about them. We have heard that there is a samity (BS) in Kajipara that saves money and then use it with interest. If one takes 10 taka he has to pay back 12 taka after three days.

do not let them to.

- Some fail to understand the importance of samity.
- Some of them are in connection with the rich so they think it will not be wise of them to join us.

The BS members have explained that not all the landless are united in BS. They have explained that this is not sole due to imitations of BS or NK. In Peerganj, BS members have explained, *“There are some who will never join the BS. These people are the rich ones and the ones who are involved in politics.”*⁶⁸ They have cited the following as reasons behind poor people’s not joining the BS:

- Some really want to join us but their families

The discussions with unorganized landless (e.g. in kazipara, Peerganj kazipara, Peerganj) reveal that:

- The unorganized landless people are not much aware of NK or BS
- There are some misconceptions regarding the NGO activities (e.g. BRAC turns members into Christians and force the female members into unethical activities etc.⁶⁹), which creates distance between a section of the landless and NGOs in general.
- There are some misconception regarding Bhumihin Samity. As for example in Peerganj the unorganized women considered it similar to credit-selling NGOs.
- The membership in BS has a time-cost. For a section of landless who are unable to spare time for organizational activities (such as attending meetings or mobilization) due to work pressure or migration in lean period, membership in samities in general is difficult.
- A section of the landless fears the movement or struggle oriented activities of BS. However, they support the cause of those struggle as they see that it serves “the interests of the landless.”
- A section of unorganized women have been found to support BS but are unable to participate in its activities due to resistance from their husbands or other male family members. One of the women stated, *“If we are not required to take part in outdoor activities no one will stop us from joining Bhumihin Samity.”*
-

⁶⁶ Meeting with Female BS members, Amodpur, Peerganj

⁶⁷ Meeting with Female BS members, Amodpur, Peerganj

⁶⁸ Meeting with male BS members, Ahmedpur Pukurpar, Peerganj

⁶⁹ Peerganj

- In general the awareness level of the unorganized landless lags far behind the BS members. One of the unorganized landless stated, “We don’t know what fundamentalism means”.⁷⁰

Why we are not in the samity?⁷¹

- Our husbands and son do not want to go and walk in the streets in front of other (begana) men.
- The women are thinking that they are becoming powerful and not showing respect to their husbands ‘shamike chintesena’. Husband is the most important person in life, mathar upor thakte hobe.
- For samity the guys have to low their heads in front of women. ‘pan theke chun khoshle’ the women say that they do not need their husbands.
- From the NGO s we just take the loan. But our husbands decide everything, they pay the loan, they invest the money according to their decision.
- If our husbands let us we can join BS. But we do not like the way BS women take part in procession and utter slogans in front of thousands of men. If we do not have to take part in the procession we can also join BS but we will not because they will convert us to Christianity.
- We can save money and economically can become more solvent. We want to stay at home because it is the best place for women. Women should be in purdah. Samity korle pa lomba hobe. But we do not have any problem to join BS if our husbands want us to. When the BS women do procession on the street our husbands say ‘if my wife did this sort of thing I would have divorced her’.

The experience of BS reveals that some of these arguments and observations placed by the unorganized landless is generic state of landless communities prior to NK interventions. Through the interventions of NK and activities of BS usually these constraints are removed in time. As for example during a group discussion a female BS member informed, “*We could not go out, now we can and can talk to lot of people and thus have a social life. We even get on stage to assert ourselves. We are no longer scared of anything.*” She added, “*In the last five years there has been a change in our family life. Our husbands now let us do things we want to.*”⁷²

amity : Past / Present⁷³

- There has been a change in the education sector. We have arranged for scholarship protesting through samity.
- The previous chairman was against the samity; this year we have a chairman who is one of us.
- There has been a change in the man –woman relationship. We are trying to establish the equal rights. If we come to know about any incident of violence against woman, we protest it, we even besiege the TNO office or get the SP transferred. If a husband treats his wife badly, we talk to him as we try to solve the internal family conflicts through samity. We convince the husbands who are not involved with the samity to join it and they eventually agree with us.
- The number of child marriage, polygamy, divorce and incidents of rape has decreased.
- We could not do anything regarding the dowry problem but recently BS members have decided to get their children married within the smaity without dowry and there have been two such marriages so far.
- We even try to help people outside the samity financially or with physical labor.
- Before joining the BS we did not know much about each other, now know a lot about each-other. We meet once a week and talk about the joy and sorrow of our everyday life. If anyone is in trouble we plan to do something about it. We encourage each other to talk about what is eating us inside. People express themselves when they are ensured they will be heard with sympathy and with care. We keep the secret of each other to ourselves and try to do something good for each other.

The other aspects of growth lies in the open structure of the organization and the commitment of the BS leadership in expanding the membership. Regarding the open structure one member explained, “*New member can join in an old group by giving the same amount of money as the saving as we give.*”

⁷⁰ Pairabondh

⁷¹ Pairaband, FGD with unorganized marginalized women

⁷² Meeting with Female BS members, Asmatpur, Peerganj

⁷³ Meeting with Female BS members, Borodaupur, Peerganj

A group is not perfect without having sixteen members. We always try so the number of members increases.”⁷⁴

The other landless also want to join samity. Some cannot, as their husbands do not let them. If anyone wants to join us she has to give the same amount of saving. We have 13,000 taka as saving so one has to give 610 taka to be a member of our samity. Sometimes the new groups tend to break up after one or two year then we make them understand with our own past experience. We also went through the same problems but after some time things become all right.⁷⁵

The BS members think that they have 90% of the total population with them because 90% of the people of our country are poor. But they are aware that a portion of these poor earn livelihood by share-cropping. These share croppers do not come with BS because they think that if they are with the rich people they will get more land for share-cropping and get other opportunities. They also fear that they may loose the option of sharecropping if they join BS. The small and middle farmers also try to be with the rich people. But the BS members think that some day these people will have to join them. They think there is a great chance of expansion of their samity. For that they do not want anything from NK. BS members think that they themselves have to do whatever needed to spread BS among the poor and the marginalized. This independent urge of the organized landless towards organization building is a great achievement on the part of NK and it took quite a while to reach this stage. Although not all the BS are in the same level of growth the achievement should not be undermined as it indicates a brighter future for both BS and NK in organizing the landless.

How the unorganized people can be incorporated within BS?⁷⁶

- We have to make them understand. Particularly the middle farmers should understand that they can gain more if they join us. Because the rich will not take them in their class ever.
- But we can not have those who are fundamentalist in our group.
- Those who have to hard work cannot join BS because they do not have that time or physical strength. I drive van and this job requires a lot of labor. I have a great pressure of work too. It is not always possible for me to come to BS always. We all have time constrain and there is no way we can give 24 hours for BS. We have to work to live.
- When people face trouble and ask for our help they feel interested to join us.
- NK also has a role to play in expansion of BS.

Thus the BS members indicate that the very character of the organization of BS continues to draw landless into its ambit. The BS is willing to take up the challenge of organizing the landless within BS but it does not mean that NK has no role to play in the process. Rather the BS members expect NK to continue its role of facilitation. In fact they feel that the program coverage of NK needs to be expanded to accompany any expansion of BS.

The BS members have further indicated that as BS has a class character (i.e. an it is an organization of landless working class) people of all walks of life will not find it acceptable. In other

People who are not in BS:

1. The bootlickers of the rich people. Those who sharecrop rich people's land and therefore they can not protest. If these kind of people get in the samity they usually creat problem that leads to the break of the samity.
2. The fundamentalists who think that the samity is going to convert us to Christianity.
3. Those who have some land. They are not rich but they do not want to come to BS and mix with the poor people.
4. There are many landless people who still do not know about BS and therefore they cannot join. We as BS members should try to spread our organization.

⁷⁴ Meeting with Male BS members, Nekua Pukurpar, Pairaband

⁷⁵ Belbari para, Islampur Pairaband, FGD with Rahela group Bhumihin Samity (female)

⁷⁶ FGD with male group, Mithapukur, Pairaband

words the rich and those who have vested interests in continuation of the exploitation based social order will never find any interest to join BS. At the same time the religious fundamentalists do not agree to the world out look of NK and BS as it is based on materialist interpretation of history (which call for equity for all human being irrespective of class, ideology, cast and sex). The BS members are therefore found to be aware that the conflicting class interests will keep few social actors always outside the realm of BS and NK programs.⁷⁷

4.3. Strength and weakness of the Samity⁷⁸:

To understand how people view their strength and weakness within their samity and their society we used PRA techniques. Participatory research methods are evolved with the idea that people know their situation best and they also know the solutions of their problems. Participatory research process therefore try to grasp people's ideas and knowledge and then show the way to the people to take decisions on the basis of their knowledge. The main idea behind this research method is that the researcher can not tell what would be best for the people who are being studied and that would disempowered the people. The participatory research methods that ensure people's participation in the research process have its roots in Marxist thoughts.

| Achievement/Benefit of the BS | Bagatipara | Peerganj | Pairabondh |
|--|------------|----------|------------|
| Knowledge/training– Class awareness | 7 | 3 | 5 |
| Courage | 5 | | |
| Regular meeting and interaction | | 9 | |
| Struggle/ movement/protest | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| The dream of an exploitation free society | 3 | | 1 |
| Savings | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Unity | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Child education | 2 | 0 | |
| Equity among girls and boys | | 2 | |
| Cultural activities | 1 | 2 | |
| Freedom of movement | | 1 | |
| Collective production | 1 | | |
| Acquiring khash land | 1 | | |
| Freedom of expression for women/landless | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Movement to increase wage | 0 | | |
| Shalish about violence against women | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Organization/rules of organizations | | 2 | 2 |
| Participation in the movements/struggle | 0 | | |
| Freedom from domination of the rich | 0 | | 2 |
| Participation local committees/UP/ respect | 0 | | |
| Celebration of special days | 0 | | |
| Legal assistance | 0 | | |
| Collectively helping each other | 0 | | |
| Leaving the superstition behind | 0 | | |
| Khash land and water bodies | | 0 | |

We used participatory research tools in this research process. We used ranking and scoring method to find out what the members expect from their samity and what are their dreams. NK and also the leaders of BS can use this technique. When the result of this ranking and scoring of problems and dreams are presented before the leaders in the workshop they seemed happy not because they found any solution but because they could see a problem identifying process in front of them. They not only saw the problems but also a process.

⁷⁷ FGD with male group, Mithapukur, Pairaband

⁷⁸ Peerganj

“Money” got less priority in ranking and scoring the benefits and achievements of BS. Though it is important in the life of landless people the BS members have explained that they look at NK and BS not with mere financial expectations rather for overall change in social, political and cultural status in which “collective economy” of the landless is simply a part. The reason behind this is that they consider Samity as a source of their social empowerment. They want to see it as a place from where they can get their social identity. The member may find that the samity is not getting as much empowered as they would want it to be. But the strength of the samity lies in the fact that people are forming BS to bring a greater change.

At the same time, the study has found “multiple NGO involvement” of the BS members. The explanation of this involvements is also clear to the organized landless. They look for “economic supports” from other NGOs while they continue with NK which works to develop them as an organized social stratum with ability of changing their relationship with the existing power-structure.

Adikvashi Micro Credit Experience:

Credit – Among the 18 members 12 have taken loan from different organizations like – shomokal, grameen , caritas. The amount of loan varies from 2000 taka to 6000 taka.⁷⁹

Development org – We get advice from the Nk. The other organizations give nothing but loan. Once ‘shomokal ‘ got 25 lakhs taka to distribute among the flood affected people but the money was not distributed and none received anything. We were informed about this relief by the shomokal worker. However, they gave money to dig in a tube well at the center of the village.

Each NGO comes once a week⁸⁰ –

- The worker from the Caritas comes to collect money on Saturday
- The worker from the Shomokal comes every Tuesday
- The worker from Asrai comes on Thursday
- The worker from Nk comes on Wednesday

Many of us are members of all these organizations. The presidents and the secretaries of these organizations are member of BS as well.

The indigenous BS members have explained that they look at the credit NGOs with complete distrust and apprehensions but they accept them because to access other services such as health, education, housing etc. they need to be involved with the savings-credit groups of these NGOs. At the same time due to end of their traditional resource base (the community cultivable lands, forests, open water bodies etc. are no longer under their informal community ownership – they have been either turned into Khash or private properties), these communities are increasingly forced to accept the market based livelihood strategies similar to that of the Bengalis.

⁷⁹ Meeting with indigenous female BS members , Peerganj

⁸⁰ Meeting with indigenous female BS members , Peerganj

- ❖ Sources of government loan: Agricultural Bank, Janata Bank, Shonali Bank, Rupali Bank.
- ❖ Sources of NGO loan :
 - A. Agrani Bank: It only gives loan for business.
 - B. NGO:⁸¹
 1. BRAC (15 years) gives loan to buy seeds and cattle. 10% members of the BS are involved with BRAC.
 2. ASA (8 years) gives money. 3-4% of BS members are involved with it.
 3. Grameen Bank (24 years) gives loan in group system. 20% of BS members are with it.
 4. CARE (15 years) gives loan to plant trees and fish cultivation. 2-3% of BS members are with it.
 5. Shomokal (15 years) gives loan after opening a saving account. 2% of BS members are involved with it.
 6. Kutirshilpa (10 years) gives loan to buy sewing machine and other staffs for handicrafts after opening a saving account. 2% of BS members are involved with it.
 7. Grameen Foundation (10 years) gives loan to buy seeds and fertilizer. 5% of BS members take loan from it.
 8. Chashi Kalyan Samity (15 years) Jamaat-e- Islami Bangladesh gives loan to make or buy blankets, mattress, sewing machine, fertilizer, tin, TV, fan, bicycle and van. 1% of BS members and 20% others are involved with it.
 - C. Mahajons give loan on paddy. For 1000 taka we have to give him 2 mands of paddy in three months. 15% of BS members take loans from the mahajons.
 - D. Some mahajons give fertilizer as loan taking 285 taka for each sack. For it he takes 100 taka in advance and 300 taka after harvesting.

Therefore 95% of BS members are trapped in debt.

The Bengali BS members have also revealed that the largest portion of their members (90% or so) are involved in savings and credit based NGO activities beyond NK. They are compelled to accept these NGOs under a strict financial context. The BS members in general do not “buy into” the “development philosophy” of these NGOs which propagate that through proper investment of savings and credit the landless can break away from the “cycle of poverty”. They look at these NGOs as “exploiters” and “banks” which only extends financial resources at the cost of unfairly high rate of interests.

Thus when the landless comes to NK which does not extend any financial resource rather is more known to the landless members as source of “moral and oral resources”, the study identifies that:

- The strategy of non-instrumental use of people in implementing it’s own sustainability strategy (as other credit NGOs do by taking group savings as NGO’s investment capital in credit business), NK has appeared as an unique pro-people experience at the grassroots.
- The ideology of empowerment of class rather than individuals also have been widely accepted by the organized landless as it contributes to a bigger dream of exploitation free, equitable and democratic tomorrow.
- The supports of NK in struggle for rights and entitlements of the landless has provided it a space within the core of the rural communities of the landless mass. The concept of “us” and “them” is found to be kept by the rural communities for all the other NGOs but NK. This is because they put NK and BS side by side as their only space of comfort, consolidation and consultation to deal a hostile socio-economic and political environment that continually marginalizes them – even with the high sounding call of “development and poverty alleviation”.

There will not be class differentiation in the society. Allah did not create any difference between men. The rich people of the society create it. It is not true that there will always be rich and poor people in the society. One day the landless people will take up power. We will have our chairman in UP and one day we will have someone to represent us in the national parliament.

We got united to get our rights and to get justice not only for economic interest. We demand due respect in the society as human beings. There are many political parties in the country more than 50 political parties. But none think about us. Only the communist party protests when the price of things goes up. No one else does that. The only political force that can work with us and for us is the left wing socialist force (e.g. workers’ party).⁸²

⁸¹ Workshop with BS members , Peerganj

⁸² Meeting with male BS members, Joyrampur, Pairaband

The BS members are quite aware of their achievements together with NK:⁸³:

1. We have unity
2. We have knowledge- we didn't have Brain- budhdhi previously. Now we have brain.
3. We are class conscious.
4. We are not afraid to go out.

The members have been found to be critical of their organizational progress and are also conscious of both the strengths and weakness of BS as an organization of socio-political change.

Strength and weakness: ⁸⁴

| Strength | Weakness: |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organized the poor people according to the social condition 2. To have our leaders in grameen salish more and do proper justice to the poor 3. The BS leaders are practical 4. We can protest on issues (issue bhittik andolon korte pare) 5. We succeeded in our fight to get the possession of Bamni beel and many other water bodies. 6. Because we are organized we can participate in local government administration. 7. Because we are organized it became possible to get VGF card and adult pension 8. We are now participation in the primary school, high school managing committee 9. We can use the knowledge about economy, society , politics and international arena which we have received from the trainings that we received from NK. 10. We can ensure the distribution of scholarship among the children of poor people. 11. We can celebrate national and international important days and also be united in the death anniversary of Joinal. 12. By forming more BS we hope to change the society. 13. We have managed to stop some of the exploitation in the society 14. We will have to expand the samity and take it onwards. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Economic condition 2. Little opportunity to be educated 3. Religious stigma and the activities of the fundamentalists. 4. Not to be able to organize all the poor people 5. We cannot have all the poor in our samity because of the strategy of the capitalists. 6. Due to the present social situation 7. Due to the present administrative situation 8. Due to globalization that leads to economic hardship 9. Due to the leadership 10. Due to inequality between men and women 11. Some water bodies are taken leased by the powerful people 12. Because we failed to have the government of poor labors 13. Because the laborers are not getting proper wages 14. We do not have the middle class in our group. We have few but we need more |

⁸³ FGD with Female group, Husen nagar, Sadar Thana, Pairaband

⁸⁴ Workshop with BS members , Peerganj

THE WAY TO EMPOWERMENT

This chapter presents few selected areas of empowerment experienced by the organized landless. The chapter presents the critical elements of both the process and outcomes of NK facilitated Bhumihin Samity.

5.1. Women Empowerment:

NK has made them aware of their rights. BS offers them security and certainty in the organizational and human networking. It has helped them to open their eyes and to get the power to speak up. It is somewhere they can talk their heart out. For a woman the impact of these is more intense. BS has also provided her with trustworthy and congenial surroundings not only at family level but also at social level. But in spite of all these the dowry system prevails. They feel helpless as they fail to do anything against it. They think they can try resisting it if they can get their children married within the BS families. They have unanimously decided it as their first step against dowry system because for them samity is the miniature of the ideal society they want to live in. However, even there lies an intergenerational impact of transferring knowledge and notion.

Women empowerment⁸⁵:

- It took one year to make our husbands understand. Then we made a male group and get them into it too. We thought if we could also get them in it, they would no longer try to resist us. Before the samity there had been no peace in the family. Now our husbands treat us nicely. They used to take decision all alone but now seek our advice therefore there are less conflicts within the family. We now buy our own sari; our husbands used to buy them for us before. Now they want us to choose them for ourselves. The women are very much empowered now. “If my husband treats me badly, I warn him saying that I am going to the NK office right away to complain against him. He gets scared but even then I will say after being all these years in the samity, he still tries to torture me. I have to live with that only because of my children. People mock at me for I who join the procession for the discharge of SP, TNO or DC; cannot dismiss my own husband. But I believe when there is poverty; there is unrest or conflicts in the family. If we had better income we would not have faced such conflicts.”
- There has been lot of protests against the disparity of wage between man and woman. If the men get 70tk, we get 35 tk. We then decided that we would not work if we do not get at least 40 tk and the rich had to agree that. We do not let women outside this neighborhood to work here for they should struggle for their own wage. If we can do it they can do it too. We hope to make it 50 tk next time.
- Now women contribute a lot in their families. Before a family of five could not eat properly with the earning of fifty taka of a man, now woman can also contribute thirty taka more. We work in the potato field for a month once a year; we have to husk rice (one month); in Jaishtha we again have to work in the field and besides these we have to rear cattle, sew kantha and weave the fishing net throughout the year. We spend our own money however we like to. We buy some household things and also use it to buy food for the family.
- Throughout the rainy season (6 months) we have to suffer. There is no work. In Baishakh and Kartik some of our husbands migrate to Dhaka, Chittagong or Sylhet to pull rickshaw or to work in the garments. From 1998 (after there is a bridge) some girls (5%) also migrate to work as a domestic labor or in the garments during that lean season. We could work in Rangpur if there were any garments or industries.

⁸⁵ Meeting with Male BS members, Ibrahimipur, Pairaband

A BS member feels the urge of freedom, but does samity have the same impact on the next generation? A father who is a BS member gets his son married without dowry but the boy himself wants to take it. In the case of women it is found that a woman has to struggle for any kind of freedom against her husband; but even then she is pushing her own daughter to go through the same predicament when or before she turns 18, knowing that this marriage will only lead towards her misfortune. Therefore it is a great challenge on the part of BS to maintain the next generations. Even if one can get his/her daughter married without dowry with a boy outside the samity, the boy does not belong to the samity and therefore he is not supposed to behave like a member of BS. That is another reason why the members noted the expansion of samity is necessary.⁸⁶

Grand parent's chart⁸⁷:

- 20 years ago the girls were not usually sent to schools. We could not even imagine going to school. People used think that if a woman could read Arabic that was enough of her education. Now our girls are going to school. They are going to fairs to enjoy festivals. We could never go to the fairs. We were married at a very early age but our girls are not. In our time only the son of the house could eat the macher matha. We were not treated well at our father's place and we were physically abused when we were married. Our husbands beat us when we are just a little late to serve food. If a woman was divorced she never got her mohor. But things are little different now. The girls are still physically abused now. They are tortured for dowry which is the biggest problem in the society. But if a woman is divorced she can file case against her husband and get her mohor. 4 years ago one of our members Rahima filed a case against her husband demanding mohor after getting divorced. We did not know about these legal things before forming the samity.
- Dowry- The dowry problem is increasing. When we got married there was not any system of dowry. Our fathers did not have to pay money to our husbands. Before that our fathers had to pay money when they married our mothers. So things were totally different at our parents' time. Yesterday a girl got married in our neighbourhood. Her father has got money. The bride groom got one lakh taka and besides bride's side spent huge amount of money on the wedding. Three cows and two goats were slaughtered in the wedding. We were not invited although the house is very close to ours. This morning they sent food, only polao. They did not send a single piece of meat. However, this kind of wedding can make other males greedier. Those who already got dowry put pressure on their wives to ask more money from her father. Their demands get higher. Even a boy from the landless family who does not have anything and who has to beg for his living demands 20 thousand taka.
- Domestic violence- When we were young brides we were physically abused by our husbands. 'Mair khaite khaite, achar khaite khaite tatna hoisi'. Now our husbands do not abuse us as we have grown old and learned many things from samity. If they come to say something bad we say 'shut up'.

Before we used to do whatever our husbands suggested but now my husband respects my decision. We have been working in the field along with our husbands for the last five years and it has contributed in the economic condition of our families. Women could not work before because of the fundamentalists. (Belbari para, Islampur Pairaband, FGD with Rahela group Bhumihin Samity (female))

In Pairabond the BS members narrated, "In 2001 the munshis wanted to arrange a hilla marriage for a woman. But the couple did not agree. Then they were secluded from the society for 3 months. We dealt with that and tried to minimize it. Later it came to the news paper. Even the DC, SP came to solve the matter. Now there is no incident of hilla marriage. We do not let this kind of thing to occur. This is a torture towards the women. Actually the husband guilty but the woman has to suffer which is not just. If any 'talak 'or 'hilla' incident occurs people come to us, to our BS to solve the matter. We try to do our best to stop these and we are successful in doing so."⁸⁸ This indicates that the BS has become capable of addressing the agenda of social change

⁸⁶ Pairaband

⁸⁷ FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband

⁸⁸ FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband

(specifically with respect to women's rights) in an effective manner. BS is found to use:

- Awareness campaign
- Mobilization
- Media
- Networking

It has further been noted that in application of all these strategic components NK is the main source of support, resource and ally.

■ **Changes in women's lives after BS⁸⁹:**

- We could not talk to the outsiders before, now we can.
- We can protest against false case, rape and any kind of oppression.
- We can protest if anyone or NGOs like BRAC keep us under pressure regarding interest of loans.
- Now we participate in the shalish. Samity provides us with legal access for free. NK is doing it with the cooperation of "Mohila ainjibi samity" and BLAST.
- After discussing among ourselves we go to the chairman or member.
- There is no more hilla. There has not been any child marriage over the last five years. The number of divorce has also decreased but nothing happened regarding dowry problem.
- We did not have a land to build a house of our own but now we at least have that. With the money of the samity we first bought a goat then a cow and now we have our own house.
- Now the men are also concerned about the equal rights of women.
- We also help others outside the samity.
- People now respect us.

However the positive changes in women's lives had to be achieved through a tough process of organization building and activism of landless women facilitated through NK and BS. A woman described, *"At the beginning we had to face troubles like people used to say we do not maintain purdah and we would be converted to Christianity. It was like Begum Rukkayah's time. We didn't even know about her. It was after we founded this samity that we came to know about her and her mission although she belonged to this very place. After one year of forming our samity we talked about her and our basic rights in a meeting. People used to say that we were destroying pardah culture and religion. They condemned our husbands in the mosque. They created pressure on our husbands to make us leave this samity. At that time there were fatawas and extreme case of violence against women."*⁹⁰

5.2. Leadership:

*We select our own leader for a year through discussion and annual meeting. If we find her alright we keep her otherwise we change leader each year. We prefer one who can give enough time to the samity.*⁹¹

The leadership is well organized and strong Electing a leader is important for the BS. A leader requires having enough time, qualification, strength and endurance during the hours of crisis. But one can find only six out of twenty people with the aspired qualities of leadership. Therefore leadership moves around the same circle.

There is a huge difference of knowledge between the leaders and members of the BS. The training of NK is very important for them. Only very few persons of samity get the training; and most of them are

⁸⁹ Belbari para, Islampur Pairaband, FGD with Rahela group Bhumihin Samity (female)

⁹⁰ FGD with Female group, Husen nagar, Sadar Thana, Pairaband

⁹¹ Belbari para, Islampur Pairaband, FGD with Rahela group Bhumihin Samity (female)

leaders. It gives them a glimpse of class-based secular world outlook. It helps them to question their previous beliefs and to acquire new world outlook along with access to a vast pool of new information, skills and knowledge. As a consequence of conceptual reconstruction initiated by the training they are no more the persons they used to be; they now can realize the unjust disparity everywhere and feel there should be changes. They know they have to involve more people in this regard. But they cannot even share 30% of the knowledge that they received from those trainings with their fellow samity members. This is primarily because of two reasons:

- Firstly, not always those who receive training are themselves good trainers. This is a natural barrier in dissemination of knowledge at second tier.
- Secondly, not all the members can be considered equally able to absorb and appreciate this knowledge; specifically the theory of historical materialism and secular interpretation of the origin of life and universe.

Thus training leads to a knowledge gap at BS level. Even in those BS which are more than 20 years old the difference between the leaders and others are very much visible. Moreover, as the training leads to a changed world outlook it also leads to a cultural alienation. The leaders enlightened with the doctrine of social revolution suffer as they are not able to openly and full heartedly share their new aspirations, questions and analysis within their immediate communities. The Shohojia Bauls have also disappeared from the villages therefore these leaders get little satisfaction in fulfilling their need of sharing philosophical thoughts. These philosophers (darshonik manush) search for a place where they can share their thoughts.⁹²

Training⁹³:

- Three of us got training and discussed whatever they learnt there in the weekly meeting among samity members. Members usually ask questions about legal access regarding violence against woman.
- Those of us who did not get training think that they should also be given some on whatever needed to live a healthy and peaceful life.
- Though we (three of them) got training, we still think there should be some training on trees. There are some foreign trees in our locality that we do not know about. We did not know anything about the Eucalyptus trees but now we have found out that it is harmful. People of other NGOs encouraged us to plant these trees, saying we can get them sold in a year and thus can earn a lot.

Only the president had the opportunity of it. He thinks, "It would be wonderful if each of the members could get same training." According to the members "we learned about his experiences of training. Although we could not learn it all we learned at least half of it."

As the knowledge-gap between leaders and the members widens the members become more dependent on their leaders. This also creates a situation where leaders cannot be replaced by untrained members as they are the most capable persons in their samity. The leaders have to face many pressures and one of the major problem s/ he faces is that s/he has to give more time to BS. This time pressure hampers his/her economic activities and sometimes forces a leader to disassociate her/himself from the leadership process. This "brain drain" is also a loss for the samity. Thus the leaders have recommended more training for the members so that the dependency of he members on the leadership for knowledge would reduce and there will be more people with leadership capacity to reduce time-pressure upon the existing leaders.⁹⁴

It has been noted that there is a demand for acquiring more knowledge among the members of the BS. At the same time they have demanded that there should be a process of ensuring broader coverage (if

⁹² Pairaband

⁹³ Meeting with Female BS members, Asmatpur, Peerganj

⁹⁴ Peerganj

possible 100%) of the training. Nijera Kori wanted to create some agents of change. They succeeded in doing so. But to have more agents there is now a demand for more training.

5.3. Cultural Group:

The women who act on stage seem to be empowered in a different sort of way. They are happy because they think that they can transmit what they believe among many people in an effective way. They can make people see the injustice and inequality in society. They are often teased when they walk down the road but they retaliate ‘don’t come to watch our play if you don’t want to, but we will keep on acting’. They enjoy people’s appreciation as artists. The cultural group can work successfully to bring all cultural and humane people together.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Pairaband

THE CONTEXT AND VISION OF CHANGE

*We expect from nijera kori advice, moral and legal support and courage.*⁹⁶

This chapter provides a brief overview of the context analysis. The analysis regarding the problems and the aspiration of addressing those problems have emerged through a participatory discussion process among the BS members and between the BS members and the research team members.

The vision of a new world is quite clear to the landless organized in BS. One of the female BS members expressed the vision of the aspired society as follows; *“We have a vision to change the society where there will be no corruption, every one will live in peace and there won’t be any class difference. We know that property that the rich people have will not be distributed among the poor. We can not get share in their property, no one will do that. But we can have better wages, we can have proper wage for our labour. Government should determine the wage. But the government does not think about the poor people, the prices of every thing are going up. If one kg of rice costs so much how can poor people survive? We want work. We do not need aid. Some people of our village have gone to different areas of the country to work in Garments factory. If there was a garments factory in our village we could have worked there.”*⁹⁷

This vision of the society is drawn at the backdrop of a very hostile social construction. The exploitative and discriminatory socio-economic structure pushes women into dual subjugation. Along with being exploited as landless the women also undergo sex based violence and deprivation. One of the women explained, *“In this society the men and women are not equal. We the women do not get equal amount of wage as men. Dowry as a social problem is increasing. The laws concerning divorce are not observed. Women are being physically abused by their husbands. All men are not same. There are some men who are very angry sort of person. There are some who do not want to listen and understand. They often beat their wives. If they find any faults it is normal to be angry .We cannot beat them back.”*⁹⁸

What do we expect form Nk⁹⁹-

- Nk cannot help us economically; they are assisting us and giving us advice which is enough.
- When we will be conscious we do not have to go to NK. We will do our own things. Nk will remain with us as our allies and strengthen us.
- “amra shobar jonno , bachar jonno BS gothon korechi, amra khawa dawar jonno dol gothon korini “.

Expectations:

(FGD with Female group, Iqbalpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband)

1. Learn new things and to become more conscious.
2. To get involve in earning activities. If we can earn money our husbands will pay us respect.
3. The incidents of divorce and rape have decreased.
4. We want to get our five basic rights to be fulfilled.
5. One day we will have our chairman in UP and have our minister at national level.
6. We do not want to sell cheap labor.

⁹⁶ Meeting with male BS members, Joyrampur, Pairaband

⁹⁷ FGD with Female group, Husen nagar, Sadar Thana, Pairaband

⁹⁸ FGD with Female group, Husen nagar, Sadar Thana, Pairaband

⁹⁹ Meeting with Male BS members, Mithapukur, Pairaband

- We will change the society by working with the parties which are based on Marxist and Leninist ideas.
- The members of the BS are worried about their livelihood but we have to think about our BS too.

The visions of tomorrow aspired by BS members is one which is political in its true content. This is why the relationship aspired between NK and BS has also been projected as one based on true value of equity and solidarity. The financial resource flow –which is the key element that binds the NGOs these days with the marginalized social groups, is not the aspired element for future. The BS members have stressed on a continual flow of inputs which would contribute to build its capacity truly as a social change agent and reflect the political vision of the landless mass. In this regard they also look for broader networking support from NK.

Expectations:¹⁰⁰

- Proper wage
- Justice
- Remove fatawabaj people
- Change the society
- remove corruption
- remove rentseeking
- reduction of violence
- living with freedom
- Exploitation free society
- less price of daily necessities
- Women education- equal rights.
- Dowry less marriage
- Possession of khash land
- Stop acid violence

Dreams : (Meeting with New Male BS members, Nekua Pukurpar, Pairaband)

- a. If we continue it even for 5 years perhaps we can buy some cattle, if we manage to get 20,000 taka.
- b. “If we can make 5 lakh taka in samity, I can buy some land and have a house of my own.”
- c. We are landless but we are in this samity to see the better days for our children. In 10 years time if I can get 20,000 taka, I will buy my son a shop and run my family with it.
- d. We have 7000 taka and will invest that to increase our saving.
- e. As an agricultural labor I get 70 taka and put 5 taka as saving in BS in the hope of better future.

Interestingly the personal level aspiration of the BS members do have economic dimension but the BS members have repeatedly stressed that they realize that without the change in broader context no single family can make a headway for long. Moreover, they perceive progress also by achieving “freedom from exploitation and disrespect” not jus monetary gains.

Economic development:

We want industries and factories in this area so that we can have jobs. We want proper wage for women. The women are working in the field to harvest potato for last 8-10 years. The women can sow and cut the potato seeds in to pieces properly. They can do it better than men. Cultivation of potato is profitable. But the fertilizer and insecticide cost high. People are not cultivating local variety, which was tasty and did not need insecticides. They are cultivating hybrid potato which needs chemical fertilizer and pesticides. This year the pesticide was contaminated and most of potatoes were rotten. So, there was a huge loss for those who cultivated potato. But this potato cultivation took women to the field.¹⁰¹

Lastly, Although, BS works on Khash land it is not available all over the country. As for example one member stated, “*We did not have land before. We still do not have any land property. We do not have khash jomi here so we do not have any chance to get it.*”¹⁰² So in future the broader call of exploitation free society will need to be more prominently discussed so that landless people view BS as the means of progress with or without the Khash land issue.

¹⁰⁰ Meeting with male BS members, Joyrampur, Pairaband

¹⁰¹ FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband

¹⁰² FGD with Female group, Bahadurpur, Mithapukur, Pairaband

IMPACTS AT HOUSEHOLD LEVEL: CASES OF BAGATIPARA

This chapter presents the quantitative analysis of the impacts of NK activities in Bagatipara. The data have been collected through household survey. A two-way comparative analysis of the impacts have been conducted. Firstly, in between a sample of members of BS and the non BS households. Secondly, the household data of the present were compared with the findings of the previous survey (treated as the baseline of 1998) carried out in Bagatipara. However, the tools of the two surveys as well as the sample of the surveys were not identical. As a result the data collected under present study were not indiscriminately comparable to that of the previous one.

Trends in Education:

The education status of the BS members in general has registered progress in comparison with the baseline of 1998. The BS members with inability of writing own name or only with the ability of counting have not been found. While all the non-BS members were also able to write own name there were still a small proportion of non-BS respondent who could only count. At the same time, the participation of household members in primary education has increased significantly from previous 13 percent it climbed up to 34 percent. Although, the level of participation of non-BS households also improved (from 12 percent to 13.5 percent), it fell far from the steep rise (164 percent) registered by the BS households.¹⁰³ Thus the study finds that the association of landless households with NK and BS activities continues to lead to higher participation of the landless population in education.

Status of Immunization:

The data regarding immunization of the sample reveals that the overall status of the BS-members is better than that of the non-BS villagers. It should be noted that for both BS and non-BS villagers the situation regarding immunization has improved in 2006 in comparison to the situation prevailing in 1998. While the proportion of BS members without immunization declined from 6.2 percent to 5.7 percent the decline was much steeper in case of the Non-BS villagers (from 42.1 percent to 11 percent). On the other hand, the proportion of BS members with complete immunization has increased from already a higher range of 59 percent to 80 percent while the increase was from a low range of 18 to a high range of 73 percent for the non-BS households.¹⁰⁴ The trend shows an upward mobility for both the group. It further shows that the trend of growth in case of complete immunization is comparatively much slower for the BS members (36 percent) than that among the non-BS villagers (297 percent). This is mainly reflects two aspects:

- Firstly, the non-BS villagers progressed from a very low status to a significantly higher status over this time
- Secondly, the growth rate at a higher range significantly slows down (as has been experienced among the BS-members).

The findings however clearly reveals that even with that higher pace of adoption the non-BS members are still lagging behind the BS members in the sphere of complete immunization.

¹⁰³ Table:7.1

¹⁰⁴ Table: 7.2

Water and Sanitation:

The findings of the household survey show that just as in case of the baseline the BS members are having a better knowledge on diarrhea management that of the non-BS villagers. On the other hand the knowledge of the non-BS members regarding diarrhea in general has also increased however for both the groups there seems to be a confusion regarding in-take of solid food during diarrhea (43 percent of BS members and 46 percent of non-BS villagers believes lower in-take of solid food is better).¹⁰⁵

The assessment of the sources of cooking and drinking water reveals that presently irrespective of their involvement with BS, all the villagers presently use tubewell just as found during the baseline. This again reflect that there are some changes in the rural base which cut across of the communities.¹⁰⁶

The defecation practice of the BS and non-BS villagers a clear distinction; in general the BS members have access to comparatively better quality of toilet facilities. While small proportion of the non-BS members use open fields as the place of defecation, this practice is not present in BS members. The trend of use of Katcha latrine is declining among the BS members (88 percent lower than baseline). Although the trend is also declining among the non-BS villagers (67 percent lower than baseline) still a larger section of them use Katcha latrine (19 percent). The overwhelming majority (94 percent) of the BS members use Pit Latrine while little less than three quarter (70 percent) of the non-BS members use such facilities. However, eight percent of the non-BS villagers has been found to use water seal latrine and concrete/slab latrine respectively, while none of the BS members were found to use water seal latrine and only a small proportion (three percent) were found to use the concrete/slab latrine.¹⁰⁷

This reveals that the BS members have achieved a minimum standard of hygienic toilet facilities which is largely centered around pit latrine. Compared to baseline this is a clear progress. However, the findings also indicate that the BS members, although aware, are largely still unable to afford and/or maintain the quality of latrine higher than pit latrine.

Health Seeking Behavior:

The data on health seeking behavior reveals a striking feature. In comparison to the baseline, access of the BS members to hospital has almost been halved (29 percent from the previous 56 percent in other words declined by 49 percent). The same downward trend has also been observed among the non-BS villagers (16 percent from the previous 28 percent in other words declined by 42 percent). This has occurred when the dependency of both the groups increased upon the Rural Medical Practitioner(RMP/LMF) massively (i.e. increased by 227 percent for BS members and by 325 percent for the non-BS villagers). On the other hand from a very poor access to NGO clinics, both the group has lost their complete access to those facilities. The field level interactions reveals two key aspects:

- Firstly, the increased access to the RMP/LMF has occurred due to both increase in the number of these rural health practitioner increased;
- Secondly, the mismanagement at the government health centered decreased the quality of services at those centers and consequently decreased the interest of the community members to seek services at those facilities.

At the same time from previous zero access a small proportion of the BS members have began to seek services from locally based MBBS physicians. While none of the BS members presently visits the traditional healers and faith healers. These reveals a mixed feature in which we find while the BS

¹⁰⁵ Table: 7.3

¹⁰⁶ Table: 7.4

¹⁰⁷ Table: 7.5

members move towards non-institutional health practitioners this does not mean that they are undermining the modern health care. In fact they are increasingly moving out of the superstition based treatment facilities.¹⁰⁸

In general, the awareness and concern of the female BS members regarding family planning has changed little from the base line. However, for both the BS and non BS groups the proportion of women not using any form of contraception increased (by 15 percent for BS members and by 24 percent for the non-BS members). The non-use of contraception by the men has also increased in both categories; 91 percent of BS male do not use any contraception (i.e. an increase of nine percent) while 95 percent of the non-BS men do not use any contraception (i.e. an increase of six percent). Important to note that even with the decline in use of contraception, still more BS men use condom (nine percent) in comparison to the non-BS men (three percent). Nevertheless, the use of contraception has been found to decline among the study sample of rural landless.¹⁰⁹

Household demography:

The largest cluster of households of both BS and non-BS households has remained within the range of 3-4 members. However, it is interesting to note that although a small proportion (six percent) of BS households have 1-2 members, it is still around a 180 percent increase over the previously recorded two percent. Moreover, the non-BS households have shown a two notable changes with respect to household size; first the proportion of households having up to two members have declined to eight percent from the previous ten percent. Secondly, while there is no BS households with above eight members, eight percent of non-BS households at present have more than eight members (while previously it was nil). This implies that in terms of trend, the household size of the BS members (average 4.4) is lower than that of the non-BS households (average 4.6).¹¹⁰

The figures regarding child per household has changed little for the BS members; it hovers around two. The number of children per non-BS households has also on average declined from three to two.¹¹¹

Women Empowerment:

The findings of the household survey clearly shows that the dowry situation has been worsen for the BS households. A fifth of the households have reported incidence of dowry-free marriages in their households (a 63 percent decline from previous 54 percent). At the same time there has been a 43 percent increase in the presence of at least one male members in their households who is refusing marriage without dowry. Even with these increases still the situation is much better in BS households in comparison to the non-BS households.¹¹²

In case of social action in response to violence against women, the BS members are found to be much more active. More importantly, the participation of the female BS members in mobilization, shalish, informal protests at community space, legal litigation and work as pressure group is much higher (37 percent) in comparison to the non-BS villagers (11 percent). The trend of this social resistance is also growing (it has increased almost by 50 percent).¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Table: 2.5

¹⁰⁹ Table 7.7. and 7.8.

¹¹⁰ Table: 7.9

¹¹¹ Table: 7.10

¹¹² Table: 7.11

¹¹³ Table: 7.12

The issues against which the BS members have raised their voices include cases of polygamy (37 percent), physical violence (68 percent) and unlawful divorce (46 percent). It has been found that in all these areas of social protests the participation of the BS members has grown over the years.¹¹⁴

Participation of women in decision making process reveals a declining feature among the BS members. In comparison to the baseline the proportion of female reported to have decision authority has declined with the BS members by around a quarter (from 96 percent to 86 percent). On the other hand, the decision power of female members of the non-BS households has almost doubled (48 percent to 81 percent). However, in absolute terms still more women have reported to have decision authority with the BS households in comparison to the women in the non-BS households.¹¹⁵

women's participation in economic decision making in general is significantly higher in the BS households. As for example in BS households the participation of women regarding investment is 70 times higher in comparison to the non-BS households. The other areas in which the women have reported their participation shows two new areas; namely employment outside house (31 percent for BS and 19 percent for non-BS villagers) and income generating work (63 percent for BS and 46 percent for non-BS villagers). In the areas of child education (77 percent for BS and 60 percent for non-BS villagers) and marriage (54 percent for BS and 35 percent for non-BS villagers) have identified participation of women in decision making. In all the identified areas of women's participation BS members are ahead of the other unorganized landless villagers. More importantly, in all these spheres the participation of the women in BS have increased in comparison with the levels recorded in the baseline year.¹¹⁶

Environmental Sustainability:

The tree planting pattern of the surveyed households reveal that the rate of planting trees have been slightly reduced in the both categories of the households. It has been interesting to note that although the proportion of BS households planting fruit tree slightly declined from baseline, it still remains the most popular form of planting for the BS members (31 percent). On average the BS members have annually planted 12 trees while the non-BS villagers have annually planted seven trees. Planting both fruit and wood tree is most popular among the non-BS households (22 percent); but even there the BS members are ahead (29 percent).¹¹⁷

Political Empowerment:

The findings on participation of the BS members in local institutions have further deteriorated for women; while in baseline 88 percent of female members of the surveyed households did not have any participation at the local institutions presently the proportion has increased to 100 percent. This is a particular limitation of the quantitative survey as it worked with two different samples in the baseline and present study. However, more male BS members have been found to be involved with local institutions; presently only around a third does not have any such involvement while previously two-third did not have any such involvement with local institutions. The non-BS landless households under the survey just as baseline have displayed a negligible institutional involvement at local level. The institutions in which the BS members have one or other form of participation include: *Union Parishad (six percent), Primary/Secondary school Committee (nine percent), Mosque/Madrassa (six percent), Shalish / darbar/ Village court (14 percent) , Political party (11 percent), Cultural organization (three percent), Club (three percent) and Hut committee (three percent). In every category the participation*

¹¹⁴ Table: 7.13

¹¹⁵ Table: 7.13

¹¹⁶ Table: 7.13

¹¹⁷ Table: 7.14 & 7.15

*of BS members in general has improved other than in the hut committee and cultural organization. The participation of the BS members in local political parties has increased almost by 470 percent.*¹¹⁸

The findings have also revealed that the participation of the surveyed BS households in local election process as voters has declined to 80 percent from previous 92 percent. Presently, the non-BS villagers are more active as voters in local election (89 percent). However, among all the surveyed rural landless households, only three percent of the BS members have participated as candidates in such elections. Although, this participation has declined from previous four percent, at least BS has retained participation of the rural landless as candidates in local election. As the candidacy of the BS members has declined so has the proportion of participation of the BS members in election campaign (from 40 percent to 14 percent). However, when the participation of the non-BS villagers (at three percent) is considered, it is clear that the BS members are still quite ahead among the rural landless in terms of being politically active in promoting political candidates and agendas at local level.¹¹⁹

The awareness as voters of the BS members is a little different from the non-BS villagers. While majority of BS (60 percent) and non-BS villagers (65 percent) of the surveyed households have mentioned that they have prioritized the honest candidates, almost a third of the BS members have also voted based on other considerations such as; group membership, economic class and political affiliation of the candidates. Although, the proportion of BS female members whose vote was decided by their husbands increased from previous two percent to present 11 percent, still slightly lower proportion of the BS women are influenced by their husbands as voters than that of the non-BS women (14 percent).¹²⁰

However, social activism through direct participation in social movement is still almost exclusively being championed by the BS members (91 percent). This reflects that as an organized force the BS members are much more committed and able to react to the local cases of rights' violations than the unorganized landless or landless population organized as group members of credit based NGOs.¹²¹

It is found that for a third of the BS members movement against misappropriation of relief goods by thana officials has been a priority. While for another third, movement in response to cases of violence against women has been the priority. The next involving movement for the BS members has been the movement of Khash land (involving a fifth of the surveyed BS members). The pattern of involvement in localized movements further reveals that BS members are quite able and interested to address local problems with administrations such as to break and lift the ban on using power-crusher for making molasses (17 percent). This type of involvement also created opportunities of the BS to build greater social base (across the economic classes). It has been found that around same proportion of the BS members have experienced movement against police to prevent or protest arrests of local activists or of fellow BS members.¹²²

On the other hand, the BS members have also participated in movements on issues which specifically concerns the landless population. Such as Khash land (a fifth) and increment of wage of the agricultural workers (14 percent) etc.¹²³

The participation of the BS and non-BS villagers in national level political activities have a lot of similarities. The household survey reveals that around a tenth of these landless hold membership of

¹¹⁸ Table: 7.16

¹¹⁹ Table: 7.16

¹²⁰ Table: 7.16

¹²¹ Table: 7.17

¹²² Table: 7.17

¹²³ Table: 7.17

political parties. Greater proportion (around 97 percent) of the BS have reported to exercise their voting rights in the national elections than that by the non-BS villagers (86 percent). It is important to note that compared to the baseline the BS members have registered a 13 percent growth as voters. Around a fifth of these landless are also found to vote in favor of the candidates of their own political parties. Little less than a half of both these two groups of rural landless vote in by selecting candidates whom they consider as “honest” and a tenth of the female voters’ votes of these households are decided by their husbands. However, one significant difference is observed when participation in political mobilization at village level is considered. While none of the non-BS villagers participates in such political activism, around a quarter of the BS members work actively as political actors at the community level.¹²⁴

Economic Empowerment:

There are great deal of similarities in terms of economic demography among the surveyed BS and non-BS landless households. In both cases around three-quarter of the households have single earning member. The second largest cluster of households have two earning members (a fifth of the BS and 16 percent of the non-BS households). It is interesting to note that from the baseline period the number of households with two earning members has been halved.¹²⁵

The household income related data has revealed few significant differences between the BS and non-BS households¹²⁶:

- The most note worthy distinction lies in the fact that while the number of households with lower than Tk. 500 income has increased almost by a fifth (19 percent) among the non-BS sample, it has declined by two-fifth (42 percent). This shows that between the baseline and the present survey the BS members included in the sample has experienced an upward economic mobility from the e the reverse was true for the non-BS household.
- At the income range of Tk.500 – Tk.1,500 the number of BS members have declined from the that of baseline but it has been found in the upper range up to Tk.3,000 the participation of BS households have increased. Just the reverse is true for the non-BS households. This also indicates that income situation of the BS households have been redistributed towards a better economic state.

Economic empowerment was explored also in terms of the disaster coping capacity of the sample population. In this regard, the strategy of coping the lean period was taken for consideration. It has been found that, the coping strategy of BS and non-BS households is largely similar. Borrowing money has emerged as the dominant means of coping the economic hardship endured during the lean period (80 percent of BS households and 81 percent of non-BS households). It is to be noted that the dependency on loan has increased at a very large pace (264 percent rise among the BS households and 171 percent rise among the non-BS households). On the other hand for both the groups dependency on lean time migration has declined (66 percent decline among BS households and 84 percent decline among the non-BS households). In general migration is slightly a preferred lean period-coping strategy among the BS households (17 percent) than that among the non-BS households (11 percent).¹²⁷

The status of economic empowerment of a community has been assessed in the study to some extent related with the ability of the community in determining the wage. From this perspective the position

¹²⁴ Table: 7.18

¹²⁵ Table: 7.19

¹²⁶ Table: 7.20

¹²⁷ Table: 7.21

of the BS members have been found much better than that of the non-BS villagers. This can be found from the following findings¹²⁸:

- Little more than a third of the BS members have mentioned that their employers set the wage while a half of the non-BS respondents has mentioned of such a situation.. Thus a much smaller section of BS members are absolutely dependent on their employers for wage determination. Another interesting aspect is that although this rate has declined for the non-BS members while it has increased for the BS members, still less BS members are having zero participation in wage determination.
- Another distinction between the two group of samples lies in the mode of participation in wage determination. The BS members have revealed that in large majority (66 percent) of cases they depend on collective bargaining for wage determination. In fact they do not at all set wage as individuals. While a tenth of the non-BS villagers have mentioned that they set wage as individuals and a little more than a third has mentioned of negotiation. This indicates that the BS members have emerged as an organized community in the rural wage market.
- In the number of BS members setting wage through collective negotiation an increase of 186 percent has been recorded over the baseline while a 100 percent decline has been registered in the mode of individual bargaining. This shows that the mode of collective negotiation is a growing trend among the BS members. Although the non-BS villagers are lagging behind the BS members, they have also registered 119 percent increase in their participation in collective bargaining. This indicates that in general collective bargaining is becoming an integral part of rural wage market.

¹²⁸ Table: 7.22

CHAPTER-EIGHT

WAY FORWARD: TOMORROW TOGETHER WITH PEOPLE

This chapter presents the major conclusions and recommendations drawn by the Bhumihin Samity members regarding the future of Bhumihin Samity and Nijera Kori. The chapter also presents few concluding comments by the research team members.

8.1. Tomorrow together with the rural landless

In this sub-section the recommendations of the Members and Leaders of Bhumihin Samity are presented. These conclusions and recommendations have emerged during the FGD, ranking and scoring exercises and workshops conducted with the members and leaders of Bhumihin Samity.

The way to empower the landless to address the existing socio-economic problems:

To overcome the present socio-economic problems the organized BS should continue to strengthen the existing structures and resources. These include¹²⁹:

- The small groups organized in different Bhumihin Samities
- Village committees of BS
- Union committee of BS
- In some areas BS have Members who are elected as UP members
- Savings of the samities
- The assistance of NK (legal)
- Others (farmers, day labor) also help the samity members in their struggle.
- The knowledge and skills (memorandum, siege) to fight for rights.
- Courage
- Ability of the members to express
- In some areas the leftists are in contact with the samity and they also help BS.

In addition to that BS requires the following¹³⁰:

- The members should be more united
- BS has to elect chairman or member from its members.
- BS has to work for the expansion of the organization.
- BS has to form Thana committee.
- BS has to build alliance with the fellow left organizations.
- The conceptual gaps between the members and leaders should be minimized through knowledge building.
- All the members of the groups need trainings. The trainings can be held at the office and at local level.

The members need to be made more aware of the vision and value of the organization and about the rights, responsibility, strength, courage, unity of the members. Thus the challenge is to enlighten them. When the members of BS will be able to identify the issues of the village and assert themselves

¹²⁹ Workshop with the BS leaders at Bagatipara

¹³⁰ Workshop with the BS leaders at Bagatipara

through the movements at village, union, thana, zilla and at national level, then the organized landless can turn the samity into an institution.¹³¹

Identifying allies and ways of keeping them with BS:

The unorganized rural landless people are potentials allies of BS. The organizations like NK that work to raise awareness of BS, care about their sorrows and the political parties that care about the poor- the working class and those who dream to change the society are also friends of BS. BS members and leaders will have to take the initiative to stand beside them and build solidarity. BS gradually has to extend its supports for people of all walks of life to mobilize their support for the cause of the landless people.¹³²

The BS members have further suggested the following ways to keep the friends with BS¹³³:

- To take part with the left political parties in their procession and meeting and seek help from them whenever needed.
- BS has to urge them to protest against the high price of rice, oil, fertilizer, insecticide, electricity.
- BS has to ask them to join in its broader movement for khash land.
- BS has to help other samities in their hard times.

Ways to expand the samity:

To ensure a fast expansion of BS the following characteristics and components must be attained and/or strengthened¹³⁴:

- Honest and just leadership
- Regular communication with other groups of the samity.
- Initiatives should be taken to create leadership among the general members of the group.
- All the groups should be formed with the aim of developing them as the groups of third-tier.
- Work should be accelerated to organize the landless who are not in the samity.
- The issues-based movements should be able to build alliance.
- Protest against the injustice of the society needs to be prioritized.
- Work on creation of employment opportunities among the landless people.
- Expansion of marriage without dowry within the organization.

The BS members have identified two challenges¹³⁵:

- At first BS needs to make people of its own village understand its aim and aspirations. The leaders and members can also try to involve their relatives and friends in other villages in BS groups.
- BS is now at samity level but it has not yet been able to turn it into an institution because :
 1. People spend more time with the NGOs regarding loan so they are not regularly present in the weekly meeting.
 2. If there is any dispute with the amount of savings among the members, the influential try to meddle in and separate them.

¹³¹ Workshop with the BS leaders at Bagatipara

¹³² Workshop with the BS leaders at Pairabondh

¹³³ Workshop with the BS leaders at Peerganj

¹³⁴ Workshop with the BS leaders at Pairabondh

¹³⁵ Workshop with the BS leaders at Peerganj

According to the BS members the way to get out of that includes the following:

- To extend help to the members of BS and others who are poor.
- To get justice in the shalish.
- To protest through meeting and procession.
- To make others understand that NGOs exploit rural landless in the name of giving loans to the poor. They need to be made aware that BS is the only organization for rural landless that provides them with a security from socio-economic turbulences- including that of inability of rural landless in repaying NGO loans. If needed BS can go the NGO offices to discuss about this installment issue.
- The savings of the samity should not be used to strengthen both the samity and its members.

Ways to ensure that the samities do not break down on periodic basis:

The members identified three main issues that may lead to disintegration and eventual split of samity. These are:

- When there is big amount of saving, some members want to borrow from it. If others do not agree they get into conflict. Even if they allowed to borrow the money there is a risk of conflict during the time of repayment. This may lead to a split in the samity and its eventual disintegration.
- Besides a group may also spilt due to disagreement regarding electing leaders.
- Sometimes a groups also face conflict when some members are motivated to disintegrate a samity by outsiders (usually the rural elites who do not consider BS as a friend).

If there is any such instance, BS members of different samities should all meet and try to solve the problem through discussion. If at village level the BS cannot find a solution then it should go to the village committee and if they fail to do anything about it, it should go to the union committee. Therefore each samity should help the other samity. Besides, if the members get into conflict over the saving, 75% of the saving should be distributed among the members and the samity should start afresh with a new saving scheme. If needed it can be framed as a common rule.

Ways to relieve the leaders of too many responsibilities and make the members as equally qualified as the leaders¹³⁶:

The consultations with BS reveals an urgent need of freeing the leaders of the samities from multiple responsibilities. At the same time to ensure accountability of the leaders, creating of new leadership and capacity of aiding the leaders – the members should be gradually groomed both ideologically and functionally. In these regards the following are suggested:

- The committee should be reorganized every year (as the constitution suggests) if needed through annual meeting. The leader will also help the committee in this regard.
- The group members should be sent to the trainings.
- The responsibilities of the leaders should be shared by the members. In this regard the leaders should initiate a discussion at samity level.
- Others should run the samity in the absence of the leader.
- The members should be involved regarding all the issues of the samity (for example- if there is any conflict with the amount of savings)
- The leaders can take the members along with them when they participate in the shalish.

¹³⁶ Workshop with the BS leaders at Peerganj

- It is necessary to raise awareness among the members through training and help them overcome their conceptual limitations and lack of self-confidence

Ways to have honest leaders of BS¹³⁷:

The BS members reveals that the leadership of the samities are asset but there are situations when the members and leaders can have conflict of interests. In few occasions, samities have experienced corruption of leadership with respect to savings. However, in general the BS leaders are appraised by the members as pro-people. However, the members have suggested that, to maintain an activist role as well as pro-people role of BS the leadership needs to held further accountable to members. One of the members explained, *“We did not think much before making someone leader before. But now we know that a leader represents us everywhere in the salish and everywhere. So we have to be careful in the selection of leader.”*

- The leaders must be transparent in their work. It is important to have a situation in which BS members can always question them.
- Members have to keep track of the property of its leaders before and after being leader of the BS.
- Leaders need to give more time to samity. They should be good orators and posses a broad knowledgeable. The leaders should be of clean record, those who are cooperative and courageous.
- If a leader is accused of some wrong doing, there should be proper investigation to ensure that the leader is held accountable and justice is served.

Ways of politically empowering the BS¹³⁸:

BS needs to have an impact upon the political process both at village and national level- opined the BS leadership and members. They urge that without ensuring a pro-landless government which would work to do way with exploitation, deprivation and pauperization of the rural mass, the goal of BS cannot be achieved. In this regard, along with direct political activism of BS; they propose both facilitation of support of BS towards the and acquiring support for BS from the left wing pro-people political forces. They suggested;

- To be allied with the political parties, specifically, those which are leftist, progressive and which care about the landless people.
- The number of group needs to be increased and the members should be more united.
- There should be more members of BS in the local government as elected Members of UP and gradually there could be Chairman, MP and Minister from BS. For this the apex-structure of the samity should be elevated up to the National Level.
- There should be representatives of the samity in the local committees (e.g. the committees of bazaar, school, college and madrassa etc.).
- To share opinions with the respected civil society and the poor and marginalized.
- BS members should share their opinions, concerns and ideas with the friends and relatives to motivate and mobilize them and also to gain from their experience.

¹³⁷ Meeting with Male BS members, Mithapukur, Pairaband

¹³⁸ Workshop with the BS leaders at Pairabondh

Ways of reducing the difference of knowledge between the leaders and the members of the groups: ¹³⁹

At present the gap between the general members and leadership is leading to uneven roles. To reduce this gap the BS proposes:

- After the training a leader has to share the knowledge with the members of the group.
- A leader has to take initiative to drive away the religious prejudices prevailing among the members by initiating a discussion (in a culturally accepted form) on the progressive philosophy and Marxism.
- The members should contribute in developing the qualities of a leader. They should be brave, honest and cool headed to generate feedback to a leader. They should be conscious, educated and more involved with the organizational responsibilities. In this regard the leaders will also have to be more cooperative and open with the members.
- The members should be taught to protest against the injustice.
- More members should be sent to the trainings.

Ways to free the BS members and landless in general from the trap of loan: ¹⁴⁰

Entrapment of BS members in NGO loan has been noted as a fact. In this regard, the BS acknowledges an urgent need of exploring alternate means of financing the landless population with economic resources for survival and development. In this regard the BS proposes:

- If possible the government should be asked to arrange loan for the rural marginalized, because the rate of interest charged by the government facilities (at 8%) is low. Whereas it is 15%-35% in the NGOs and mahajon takes 75%.
- NGOs should be pressured to charged less interest.
- Instead of periodic (weekly) installments, loans can be repaid seasonally.
- The farming communities should have access to seeds and fertilizer (i.e. different agricultural inputs) from the government at a subsidized price.
- If instead of the Mahajan the Bhumihin Samity could extend small loans (Tk. 200-500) on zero interest and flexible mode of repayment.
- Only employment opportunities could relieve us of this burden. We need economic help for joint production. We can have industrial factory with our savings or we can ask government for that so there would be some job opportunities for us.

Ways to ensure access of the landless to khash land: ¹⁴¹

Allocation of khash land to the authentic landless, is a priority to BS.

However, khash land is just one of the public and natural resources upon which the rural landless has to ensure its entitlement. The core idea is that collective progress of the landless is ensured through a comprehensive reform at rural base. One of the members explained, although kash land is a priority, *“We cannot allure or cajole anyone to bring him in the movement; we should inform him properly. We have to make him understand that to acquire khash land is not the ultimate victory; our actual goal is to establish exploitation free society and to take initiative to fulfill our five basic rights.”*

¹³⁹ Workshop with the BS leaders at Pairabondh

¹⁴⁰ Workshop with the BS leaders at Peerganj and Bagatiparat

¹⁴¹ Workshop with the BS leaders at Peerganj

- BS, in every locality, should have a priority in collecting information from the Upazilla land office to explore if khash land is available.
- BS should safe guard the interests of the landless by taking part/leading/organizing the struggle and the movement for khash land.
- Organization should have a commonly agreed and communicated guideline to decide how to distribute khash land among the landless (in the areas where there is khash land). In this regard not just quantity but the quality of the distributed land should be taken into consideration.
- Areas where there is no khash land, samity should work to raise awareness about different socio-economic issues such as the to facilitate fight for rights of the landless, to fight against injustice, fundamentalists, corruption, violence against woman, child marriage and oppression of the NGOs etc.

8.2. Concluding Comments by the research team:

The research team members have only a hand few of critical comments regarding NK and BS relationship and impact zones of the collective initiatives of NK and BS.

Having more BS and spread of NK¹⁴² :

BS is presently rooted within the project areas of NK. So BS can move in two ways:

3. It moves with the NK activists, it moves as far as the NK activists go- this is controlled by the central office
4. It moves with its leadership which is neither controlled by NK nor restricted by the narrow framework of project implementation

NK staff cannot go anywhere they like to form new organizations. There are certain limitations of the organizations. They have to plan before they move to new areas and help in formation of new groups. The plan might change due to situational demand but usually there are structural rigidity.

On the other hand, the movement of the leader of BS depends on his or her ability that determines the social sphere where he or she can work. Without direct involvement of the NK staff, new samities are created in two ways- firstly, by the relatives of the BS members and secondly, by friends, relatives and well wishers of the BS members.

BS cannot invite people to form BS as political parties can. Political parties always want more people to join them but BS have limitations as they need to organize people within the limited staff capacity of NK and even more restricted leadership capacity of BS.

Besides, BS people all live in the same area so they can not preach among the converted. But as missionary people if BS can go to many places they can spread. But for that BS need to work within NK structure. Presently NK is not providing any flexible organizational structure to facilitate the organic growth of BS. Thus there is a need of expanding the leadership and activists network and its span in order to ensure that the BS building process gets into motion even beyond the planned expansion of NK and its working areas.

At the same time it is observed that the members of BS are migrating to different areas all the time for work. If the BS members can actively use this mobile human network they can further spread their ideology and organization. For that BS can create “liaison centers” at popular destinations of migrant rural workers where they will be received. If there is no BS in the place where they are migrating they

¹⁴² Peerganj

can facilitate formation BS at that particular area. Thus this would on one hand aid the rural migrants at destinations while on the other hand expand the organizational coverage of BS.

The study has noted that people are building networks at rural base for work related needs. These days during the harvesting and cultivation seasons the potential migrants are invited at destinations within the country over cell phone. It has been found that BS members of one locality are also informing over cell phone their fellow members of some other locality to join them when there are works in the agriculture sector. But this network and this form of communication can also be used to expand the organizational networking and coverage.

The cultural team can be used to extend BS working area. It has great potentialities for doing so if it can work in a desired way. The cultural teams of BS are quite well known and they perform when they are asked to contribute in different political meetings and programs by other political parties. It is true that it gives publicity about the activities of BS. But it would be more effective for the publicity of the BS if the cultural team could perform in the banner of BS. Cultural team of BS are popular and people enjoy the plays and songs as these are very much related to their lives and there fore the possibility to use cultural team to widely disseminate information regarding BS should be explored. If the cultural teams could perform on a regular basis in a particular place like hat then they could circulate more about the agenda and activities of BS. The cultural teams are performing in the hats now but only for celebrating some important days like Rokeya Dibosh and Independence Day etc.

Another obstacle in the expansion of BS is that people who own land like those who are middle farmer or even small farmer think they can not be a member of BS because they are not landless. They support BS activities and agendas but they are not joining. These people were asked that why they are not joining with BS if they are waiting to be landless. They have no answer but steps can be taken to include these people in to BS. Besides in some areas there are only women BS , the men are interested to have their organization but they are not forming one because NK only has female worker in that area. Men are not forming on their own because they think the 'knowledge' will be provided by NK workers. So the number of workers or the human resource of the NK is an important factor in the expansion of BS. If a good number of people are not there who can talk about the agenda of BS and some volunteers with in the civil sphere are not made then a strong people's movement cannot be created which can initiate a revolution.

Nk and BS: the basis of relationship¹⁴³

Nk helps BS to be organized and it also works as a linkage. NK not only gives assistance to the BS to have the government administration on their side but also mobilized the opinion of the other human right organizations in favor of BS which worked as a social and moral safety-net and gave the BS members protection even when their activities are not legally permissible.

The relationship between BS and NK is based on the aspiration of people to have a place of their own where they are respected as a human being, where they can dream of a society without class exploitation. For the women there is another important factor that is the BS is a place where they can share their sorrows and can seek comfort. BS is a place where they can share their opinions and befriended. They have created a secured bond that has empowered them and has made them stronger. The weakness is that samity makes people to dream to bring changes in the society where they are living but people get frustrated when they cannot bring the perceived changes. In the discussions sometimes the frustrations are quite visible. People know they can bring change and they can win in smaller spaces as they have proves like Bamni Beel but they have question in their mind that if it is really possible to change the scenario at national level. If the victories cannot be achieved at the

¹⁴³ Peerganj

broader level than the victories like the possession of Bamni Beel will be temporary - they will not last long. If these local struggles and victories are not connected with the main stream politics of the country then people will not get what they dream of. The question lies in front is - who will link BS with the mainstream political parties?

NK may not take the responsibility of linking BS with the political parties as they have legal limitations. If NK decides not to take the responsibility then they should make it clear to the BS and can facilitate BS to explore ways of linking organized landless with active pro-people political processes. BS and NK should have a shared and clear understanding on this.

Women Empowerment:

The study has revealed a very humane aspect of gender empowerment. On one hand there was a question among the female members how they can bring up their boys so that they will not hurt their wives. In this respect samity can work to find a way to stop this violence and make their boys grow up with proper respect to woman. The samity members are thinking about their children's health, education but they are still not that much worried about their moral growth. From the discussion with the samities it is found that samity can do a lot about it and can bring change in the patriarchal system. There is a need of looking into the inter-generational impacts of NK activities in terms of gender empowerment.

Access to Resources: Struggle for Khash land:¹⁴⁴

Distribution of khash land and ensuring possession of khash land among the landless population have been the long standing issue of struggle both for Bhumihin Samity and Nijera Kori. The study reveals that although it is essential to address the agenda of Khash land, increasingly it is becoming evident that the entire issue of agrarian reform (not just land reform) is essential to ensure economic emancipation of rural landless.

People have been fighting for the possession of the Bamni Beel for decades. They tried to take possession of the khas land before the formation of Bhumihin Samity. At that time, the landless people were defeated by the land-grabbers who were well connected with power dealers. Later the landless formed the Bhumihin Samity which enabled them to take the possession of the Beel (i.e. the khas water-body). Thus the motivating factor in the creation of BS in Peerganj particularly in the village of Jahangirabad was the capacity of Bhumihin Samity as an organization of landless in coordinating struggle against the rural power elites. With the facilitation of NK, Bhumihin Samity could use the legal and administration systems to allocate the khash land to the landless.

So the existence of the khash land and the success of the BS to take the possession work as motivation factors in formation of BS. But if it is focused much and gets too much publicity then people may think BS is just a way to get khash land only. Then it can also make people of the other areas where there is no khash land to think that they have no reason to have a BS. This can work against the ideology and objective of BS.

Besides, when the people who live around the Bamni Beel fought for the Beel area the members of different BS of other unions also joined them and helped them in their struggle. But when they won only the people of the Bamni Beel area got the possession the others had to return in empty hand. Although BS members of other areas admit that they did not have any right to claim the land and they

¹⁴⁴ Peerganj

also consider this as a victory of all BS they are also slightly disappointed for not getting similar result of having BS of their own. So the struggle and the victory encourage the people but also put some kind of pressure on the organization.

Moreover, the struggle of BS for ensuring government services to the rural communities, holding the government duty bearers accountable to people, enforcing laws to secure justice to the cause of landless population and organizing social protests on behalf of the marginalized (landless, women, indigenous people and religious minority etc.) and in favor of social justice (including environment); have revealed that BS is addressing a bigger than “khash land”. This identity of “landless activist group” has been found an unifying factor for building a greater solidarity of landless.

Rural Leadership and Sustainability

The experience of NK reveals that the organization building process has given rise to a leadership from within the rural landless. This leadership includes both men and women. The strength of the leadership is continually being strengthened through experience of movement, participation in local governance, organizational management and training inputs from NK. The challenge lies in ensuring that this barefoot leadership is not burdened by organizational responsibilities that it cripples their livelihood. The voices of the rural organizers stress that a pool of potential leaders and overall membership quality of BS has to be risen to ensure a continual flow of leaders to shoulder the growing organizational structure.

The growth of leadership has also to come in the arena of political hegemony. The landless leadership has emphasized on ideological politics leading to emancipation of the toiling masses. The class identity and consciousness on class-politics of landless, now push BS not just to explore political allies – but also to influence the existing political processes. The BS membership has not shown any intention of shying away from that challenge.

Tomorrow together with people:

The strategy of capacitating landless to build their own organization and to take up their own initiatives to address injustice and oppression – is in a nutshell the strategy adopted by NIjera Kori (NK). Through facilitation of Bhumihiin Samity (BS) NK has demonstrated that an empowering (knowledge and organization building) process can leave a sustainable impact in the lives of rural landless. The experience of NK indicates that a solidarity and consultative process with people does not just inspire and mobilize the landless to address the daily does of injustice, it prepares them to be politically active against the system the breeds injustice, discrimination and deprivation on daily basis. The emerging empowering identities of rural landless reveal that in the bigger sphere of struggle and solidarity both NK and BS nurture and harness the potentialities of a new dawn.

QUANTITATIVE ANNEXURE

Table 7.1: Level of Education by sex

| | BS MEMBER | | | | | | NON-BS MEMBER | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|------|--------|------|-------|------|---------------|------|--------|------|-------|------|
| | Male | | Female | | Total | | Male | | Female | | Total | |
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| Can count only | 4.9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.4 | 0 | 13.0 | 0 | 11.0 | 4.5 | 12.0 | 2.7 |
| Can't write own name | 20.0 | - | 32.0 | - | 26.0 | - | 33.0 | - | 38.0 | - | 35.0 | - |
| Can write only | | 7.1 | | 0 | | 2.9 | | 6.7 | | 36.4 | | 27.0 |
| Can read and write | | 64.3 | | 23.8 | | 40.0 | | 13.3 | | 36.4 | | 27.0 |
| Primary level | 13.0 | 50.0 | 13.0 | 23.8 | 13.0 | 34.3 | 9.5 | 0 | 15.0 | 22.7 | 12.0 | 13.5 |

(Multiple Response)

Table 7.2: Immunization status of children

| | BS MEMBER | | | | | | NON-BS MEMBER | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Male | | Female | | Total | | Male | | Female | | Total | |
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| No Immunization | 6.2 | 14.3 | 6.2 | 0 | 6.2 | 5.7 | 42.1 | 13.3 | 42.1 | 9.1 | 42.1 | 10.8 |
| Some Immunization | 18.8 | 21.4 | 50.0 | 9.5 | 34.4 | 14.3 | 10.5 | 26.7 | 26.3 | 9.1 | 18.4 | 16.2 |
| Complete Immunization | 75.0 | 64.3 | 43.8 | 90.5 | 59.4 | 80.0 | 47.4 | 60.0 | 31.6 | 81.8 | 18.4 | 73.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 7.3: Knowledge on Diarrhea Management (P-20)

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|------------------------------|--------------|------|---------------|------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| LIQUID FOOD | | | | |
| Higher intake of liquid food | 91.8 | | 97.1 | |
| Normal intake of liquid food | 6.1 | | 2.9 | |
| Lower intake of liquid food | 2.1 | | 0 | |
| Don't know | 0 | | 0 | |
| Total | 100.0 | | 100.0 | |
| SOLID FOOD | | | | |
| | 1998 | | 2006 | |
| Higher intake of solid food | 69.0 | | 14.2 | |
| Normal intake of solid food | 25.0 | | 42.9 | |
| Lower intake of solid food | 6.0 | | 42.9 | |
| Total | 100.0 | | 100.0 | |

Table 7.4: Source of Cooking/Drinking water

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| River | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pond | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ring well | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tube well | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

*Total will exceed 100, because of the multiple mode of responses

Table 7.5: Type of Latrine Used

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| Open field | 2.0 | 0 | 12.0 | 4.5 |
| Katcha latrine (Traditional latrine) | 24.5 | 2.8 | 58.0 | 18.9 |
| Pit Latrine | 63.3 | 94.3 | 22.0 | 70.3 |
| Water Seal Latrine | 10.2 | 0 | 8.0 | 8.1 |
| Concrete/Slab Latrine | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 8.1 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 7.6: Health Seeking Source (P-21)

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| None | 0 | 8.6 | 6.0 | 13.5 |
| Hospital | 56.0 | 28.6 | 28.0 | 16.2 |
| NGO Clinic | 4.0 | 0 | 2.0 | 0 |
| Rural Medical Practitioner(RMP/LMF) | 14.0 | 45.7 | 14.0 | 59.5 |
| Pharmacy | 14.0 | 2.9 | 12.0 | 5.4 |
| Homeopath | 6.0 | 2.9 | 8.0 | 2.7 |
| Traditional Healer | 4.0 | 0 | 12.0 | 0 |
| Herbalist | 0 | 2.9 | 14.0 | 0 |
| Faith Healer | 2.0 | 0 | 4.0 | 0 |
| Doctor(MBBS) | 0 | 5.7 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Person in house | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 7.7: Family Planning Method Used (Female) (P-25)

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| None | 22.4 | 25.7 | 19.6 | 24.3 |
| Pill | 36.7 | 34.3 | 37.0 | 56.8 |
| Foam | 0 | 5.7 | 0 | 0 |
| Injection | 18.4 | 8.6 | 8.7 | 5.4 |
| IUD/ Copper -T | 2.0 | 5.7 | 2.2 | 0 |
| Sterilization | 16.2 | 2.9 | 26.1 | 5.4 |
| Traditional Method | 0 | 0 | 2.2 | 0 |
| Ligation | 0 | 14.3 | 0 | 10.8 |
| Operation | 0 | 5.7 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

*Total will exceed 100, because of the multiple mode of responses

Table 7.8: Family Planning Method Used (Male)

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| None | 83.7 | 91.4 | 89.1 | 94.6 |
| Condom | 12.2 | 8.6 | 8.7 | 2.7 |
| Sterilization | 4.1 | 0 | 2.2 | 0 |
| Non response | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 7.9: Distribution of families based on Number of Family Member (P-25)

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| 1 - 2 | 2.0 | 5.7 | 10.0 | 8.1 |
| 3 - 4 | 60.0 | 48.6 | 62.0 | 48.6 |
| 5 - 6 | 36.0 | 37.1 | 24.0 | 32.4 |
| 7 - 8 | 2.0 | 8.6 | 4.0 | 2.7 |
| 8 + | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8.1 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Mean | | 4.40 | | 4.59 |

Table 7.10 : Number of Child Per Household

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| Child Per Household | 2.3 | 2.14 | 2.6 | 1.95 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 7.11 : Dowry-less Marriage

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|---|-----------|------|---------------|------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| % of household having marriages without dowry in the last two years | 54.0 | 20.0 | 22.0 | 16.2 |
| % of household that have a male member refusing a marriage because of lack of dowry | 18.0 | 25.7 | 58.0 | 27.0 |

Table 7.12 : Action Taken by Women For Injustice Toward Them (P-31)

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| Polygamy | | | | |
| Yes | 25.0 | 37.1 | 0 | 10.8 |
| No | 75.0 | 62.9 | 0 | 89.2 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| Physical Abuse | | | | |
| Yes | 57.1 | 68.6 | 5.4 | 21.6 |
| No | 42.9 | 31.4 | 94.6 | 78.4 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Divorce | | | | |
| Yes | 33.3 | 45.7 | 8.3 | 8.1 |
| No | 99.7 | 54.3 | 91.7 | 91.9 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 7.13: Female Decision Authority Over Family Matters (P-32)

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|--|-----------|------|---------------|------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| Female Reported to have Decision Authority | 96.0 | 85.7 | 48.0 | 81.1 |
| Have Some Decision Authority over* | | | | |
| Investment | 44.8 | 45.7 | 40.0 | 27.0 |
| Child Education | 53.8 | 77.1 | 45.5 | 59.5 |
| Marriage | 15.4 | 54.3 | 4.2 | 35.1 |
| Family Planning | 46.6 | 60.0 | 12.5 | 37.8 |
| Employment outside home | 0 | 31.4 | 0 | 18.9 |
| Income generating work | 0 | 62.9 | 0 | 45.9 |

*Total will exceed 100, because of the multiple mode of responses

Table 7.14: Number of Tree Planted Per household Last Year

| | BS MEMBER | | | | | | NON-BS MEMBER | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Male | | Female | | Total | | Male | | Female | | Total | |
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| % of those who planted tree | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 80.0 | 92.9 | 80.0 | 61.9 | 80.0 | 74.3 | 32.0 | 80.0 | 80.0 | 36.4 | 56.0 | 54.1 |
| Number of Tree Planted | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 0 | 20.0 | 7.1 | 20.0 | 38.1 | 20.0 | 25.7 | 68.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 63.6 | 44.0 | 45.9 |
| 1 – 5 | 40.0 | 35.7 | 48.0 | 23.8 | 44.0 | 28.6 | 28.0 | 20.0 | 60.0 | 18.2 | 32.0 | 18.9 |
| 6 – 10 | 32.0 | 14.3 | 12.0 | 0 | 22.0 | 5.7 | 4.0 | 26.7 | 16.0 | 13.6 | 10.0 | 18.9 |
| 11 + | 8.0 | 42.9 | 20.0 | 38.1 | 14.0 | 40.0 | 0 | 33.3 | 4.0 | 4.5 | 2.0 | 16.2 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Mean | | 16.93 | | 9.14 | | 12.26 | | 14.93 | | 2.0 | | 7.24 |

Table 7.15: Pattern of Tree Planted Per Household

| | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| None | 20.0 | 25.7 | 44.0 | 45.9 |
| Fruit Tree | 38.0 | 31.4 | 30.0 | 18.9 |
| Wood Tree | 10.0 | 14.3 | 12.0 | 13.5 |
| Both | 32.0 | 28.6 | 14.0 | 21.6 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |

Table 7.16: Participation in Local Institutions

| | BS MEMBER | | | | | | NON-BS MEMBER | | | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Male | | Female | | Total | | Male | | Female | | Total | |
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| Membership in Local Committee | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| None | 64.0 | 28.6 | 88.0 | 100.0 | 76.0 | 71.4 | 92.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 96.0 | 100.0 |
| Union Parishad | 0 | 14.3 | 4.0 | 0 | 2.0 | 5.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Primary/Secondary school Committee | 4.0 | 21.4 | 4.0 | 0 | 4.0 | 8.6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Mosque/Madrassa | 12.0 | 7.1 | 0 | 0 | 6.0 | 2.9 | 4.0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.0 | 0 |
| Shalish / darbar | 12.0 | 14.3 | 4.0 | 0 | 8.0 | 5.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Political party | 4.0 | 28.6 | 0 | 0 | 2.0 | 11.4 | 4.0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.0 | 0 |
| Cultural organization | 20.0 | 7.1 | 0 | 0 | 10.0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Club | 4.0 | 7.1 | 0 | 0 | 2.0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Village court | 0 | 7.1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Hut committee president | 0 | 7.1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Involvement in Union Parishad Election | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| As Voter | 96.0 | 71.4 | 88.0 | 85.7 | 92.0 | 80.0 | 88.0 | 93.3 | 88.0 | 86.4 | 88.0 | 89.2 |
| As Candidate | 8.0 | 0 | 4.0 | 4.8 | 4.0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| As Campaigner | 64.0 | 21.4 | 16.0 | 9.5 | 40.0 | 14.3 | 32.0 | 6.7 | 0 | 0 | 16.0 | 2.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Reason Behind choosing Candidates for voting | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Relative | 4.2 | 7.1 | 0 | 4.8 | 2.2 | 5.7 | 4.0 | 6.7 | 9.1 | 4.5 | 6.4 | 5.4 |
| Honest person | 20.8 | 64.3 | 22.7 | 57.1 | 21.7 | 60.0 | 32.0 | 86.7 | 31.8 | 50.0 | 31.9 | 64.9 |
| Group / NGO member | 50.0 | 7.1 | 63.6 | 4.8 | 56.5 | 5.7 | 8.0 | 0 | 0 | 4.5 | 4.3 | 2.7 |
| Member of a reputed family | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 32.0 | 0 | 4.5 | 0 | 19.1 | 0 |
| Richman | 4.2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.2 | 0 | 24.0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 12.8 | 0 |
| Matabar decided | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9.1 | 0 | 4.3 | 0 |
| Husband decided | 0 | 0 | 4.5 | 19.0 | 2.2 | 11.4 | 0 | 0 | 40.9 | 22.7 | 19.1 | 13.5 |
| Others | 20.8 | 28.5 | 9.1 | 23.8 | 15.2 | 25.8 | 0 | 6.7 | 4.5 | 18.1 | 2.1 | 13.5 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *Total will exceed 100, because of the multiple mode of responses | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Table 7.17: Participation in Social Movement

| | BS MEMBER | | | | | | NON-BS MEMBER | | | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Male | | Female | | Total | | Male | | Female | | Total | |
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| Participation in Social Movement | 100.0 | 92.9 | 100.0 | 90.5 | 100.0 | 91.4 | 32.8 | 20.0 | 8.0 | 0 | 20.0 | 8.1 |
| Nature of Social Movement | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Against misappropriation of relief goods by thana officials | 24.0 | 50.0 | 24.0 | 19.0 | 24.0 | 31.4 | 4.0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.0 | 0 |
| Movement of Khash land | 96.0 | 21.4 | 80.0 | 19.0 | 88.0 | 20.0 | 4.0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4.0 | 0 |
| Ensuring employment in the lean season | 12.0 | 7.1 | 0 | 4.8 | 6.0 | 5.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Increment of wage for agricultural worker | 20.0 | 14.3 | 10.0 | 14.3 | 15.0 | 14.3 | 0 | 6.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Prevent violence against women | 44.0 | 14.3 | 20.0 | 47.6 | 32.0 | 34.3 | 0 | 20.0 | 4.4 | 0 | 2.2 | 8.1 |
| Using power Crusher for making Molasses | 52.0 | 35.7 | 44.0 | 4.8 | 48.0 | 17.1 | 4.0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.0 | 0 |
| Road Construction | 24.0 | 0 | 44.0 | 0 | 34.0 | 0 | 8.0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4.0 | 0 |
| Against illegal arrest of fellow members | 0 | 0 | 0 | 9.5 | 0 | 5.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Against police for sugarcane crushing machine | 0 | 14.3 | 0 | 9.5 | 0 | 11.4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Against increased price of goods | 0 | 7.1 | 0 | 4.8 | 0 | 5.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Against raid at drama | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4.8 | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Protest the misappropriation of public property/fund by rull | 0 | 7.1 | 0 | 4.8 | 0 | 5.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Theater Movement protesting social injustice | 0 | 7.1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| *Total will exceed 100, because of the multiple mode of responses | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Table 7.18: Participation in Politics (P-48)

| | BS MEMBER | | | | | | NON-BS MEMBER | | | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Male | | Female | | Total | | Male | | Female | | Total | |
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| Voting in National Election | 96.0 | 100.0 | 76.0 | 95.2 | 86.0 | 97.1 | 90.0 | 86.7 | 75.0 | 86.4 | 82.5 | 86.5 |
| Reason behind choosing Candidates for voting | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Candidate of own party | 52.6 | 42.9 | 25.0 | 4.8 | 38.8 | 20.0 | 39.1 | 20. | 10.0 | 22.7 | 24.6 | 21.6 |
| Honest person | 26.3 | 35.7 | 20.0 | 52.4 | 23.1 | 45.7 | 30.4 | 60. | 5.0 | 40.9 | 17.7 | 48.6 |
| Matabar decided | 5.3 | 0 | 5.0 | 0 | 5.2 | 0 | 30.4 | 0 | 15.0 | 0 | 22.2 | 0 |
| Husband decided | 0 | 0 | 25.0 | 19.0 | 0 | 11.4 | 0 | 0 | 55.0 | 18.2 | 0 | 10.8 |
| Others | 15.8 | 21.3 | 25.0 | 24.0 | 20.4 | 23.1 | 0 | 20.0 | 15.0 | 18.1 | 7.5 | 18.9 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Participation in political mobilization in your village | 56.0 | 57.1 | 32.0 | 9.5 | 44.0 | 28.6 | 52.0 | 0 | 4.0 | 0 | 28.0 | 0 |
| Membership in Political Parties | 4.0 | 28.6 | 0 | 4.8 | 2.0 | 14.3 | 4.0 | 13.3 | 0 | 9.1 | 2.0 | 10.8 |

Table 7.19: Earning Member Per Household (P-51)

| Earning Member Per Household | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| 1 | 57.2 | 74.3 | 79.6 | 75.7 |
| 2 | 40.8 | 20.0 | 14.3 | 16.2 |
| 3 | 2.0 | 0 | 2.0 | 5.4 |
| 4 | 0 | 2.9 | 4.1 | 0 |
| 5 | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 |
| Don't know/Can't say | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Mean | | 1.40 | | 1.30 |

Table 7.20: Income Per-Household

| Income Per Household | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| <= 500 Taka | 39.2 | 22.9 | 31.7 | 37.8 |
| 501 - 1000 Taka | 25.7 | 20.0 | 21.8 | 32.2 |
| 1001 - 1500 Taka | 16.2 | 8.6 | 27.5 | 8.1 |
| 1501 - 2000 Taka | 9.5 | 11.4 | 13.4 | 0 |
| 2001 - 3000 Taka | 5.4 | 8.6 | 4.2 | 2.7 |
| 3001 - 4000 Taka | 1.4 | 0 | 1.4 | 0 |
| > 4000 Taka | 2.6 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Don't know | 0 | 7.0 | 0 | 17.0 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 7.21: Coping Mechanism in Lean Season

| Income Per Household | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|---|-----------|------|---------------|------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| % of household whose members migrate elsewhere for job | 42.0 | 14.3 | 66.0 | 10.8 |
| Surviving strategy during lean season | | | | |
| Migration | 42.0 | 17.1 | 66.0 | 10.8 |
| Loan | 22.0 | 80.0 | 40.0 | 81.1 |
| Change occupation | 42.0 | 14.3 | 20.0 | 16.2 |
| Sell household utensils | 4.0 | 8.6 | 20.0 | 2.7 |
| Selling labour | 0 | 5.7 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Installing tubewell | 0 | 11.4 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Cutting grass for cattle | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Constrained | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Savings | 0 | 11.4 | 0 | 8.1 |
| Nothing | 0 | 11.4 | 0 | 0 |
| Same income round the year | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 |
| Selling hens and ducks | 0 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 |
| Others | 16.0 | 0 | 4.0 | 0 |
| *Total will exceed 100, because of the multiple mode of responses | | | | |

Table 7.22: Method of Wage Determination

| Income Per Household | BS MEMBER | | NON-BS MEMBER | |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| | 1998 | 2006 | 1998 | 2006 |
| By the employer | 23.0 | 34.3 | 73.0 | 51.4 |
| By her/himself | 54.0 | 0 | 11.0 | 10.8 |
| Through negotiation | 23.0 | 65.7 | 16.0 | 35.1 |
| Depends on seasonal factor | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |