

# SOCIAL PROTECTION BY AND FOR TEMPORARY WORK MIGRANTS AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS IN NORTHWEST BANGLADESH

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A telephone booth in the study village used by the migrants' families

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## Abbreviations and Bangla Terms

<i>Bangla</i>	: Bengali language
<i>Bigha</i>	: Unit of land measurement (1 <i>bigha</i> = 1335.4 sq metres or 1/3 <sup>rd</sup> of an acre)
<i>Decimal</i>	: Unit of land measurement (1 decimal = 40.3 sq metres)
<i>Eid</i>	: Greatest religious festival of the Muslim community
HSC	: Higher Secondary [School] Certificate (HSC)
<i>Madrasa</i>	: A Muslim school, but not necessarily solely religious in mission
<i>Monga</i>	: Time of scarcity of work and food, which is an annual event in some parts of Bangladesh, particularly the North West, in October/November.
NGO	: Non Governmental Organisation
<i>Para</i>	: Cluster of houses making part of a village
<i>Purdah</i>	: Seclusion and accompanying set of restrictions on women's activities
<i>Ramadan</i>	: Muslim holy month (ninth months of the Islamic calendar) during which people fast from dawn to dusk
<i>Seer</i>	: Unit of weight (1 seer = 850 grams)
<i>Shalish</i>	: Informal judiciary meeting convened by local leaders to resolve conflicts
<i>Samaj</i>	: Society
<i>Samity</i>	: Group formed by NGOs
SSC	: Secondary School Certificate
<i>Taka</i>	: Currency unit of Bangladesh (£1 = 130 <i>taka</i> , as of December 2006); divided into <i>poisha</i> (100 <i>poisha</i> = 1 <i>taka</i> )
<i>Thana</i>	: The lowest-level administrative units in Bangladesh; divisions are partitioned into districts, which are further divided into <i>thanas</i> ; also refers to the police station
<i>Union Parisad</i>	: Lowest tier of local government
<i>Upazila</i>	: Lowest administrative unit (another word for 'thana')
VGD	: Vulnerable Group Development (card)
VGF	: Vulnerable Group Feeding

Map 1: Bangladesh and Location of Research Site



 Research area

## Summary

This is the final report of the Bangladesh findings of the research project on 'Social Protection by and for Temporary Work Migrants', which focuses on Bengali speaking temporary work migrants and their families from rural areas in Murshidabad in West Bengal and Gaibandha in north-western Bangladesh. The research, involving fieldwork with sending communities of migrants, explored how families left behind respond to the absence of the temporary worker and how migrants in their temporary workplaces and as they travel, cope with the risks and hazards they face. The research examines the forms of social protection provided by the state, non-governmental organisations, kin and community which may provide support to migrants and those left behind in the sending community. In addition, attention is paid to the ways in which state and civil society structures and policies may increase the vulnerability of migrants and their families.

The objectives of this research were:

- To understand the changing causes and consequences of seasonal/temporary migration for individuals and households in the study area;
- To examine vulnerability (and security) of those staying behind in the work migrants' households;
- To investigate the practices and measures taken for social protection by those who stay behind;
- To examine the role of public action in providing social protection for migrants and their households during the migration process.

In Chapter One, we give the background to the subject of study and detail the specific research questions that we set out to answer. In Chapter Two we explain how data were collected during the eight months of fieldwork. The main methods of data collection were participant observation and in-depth interviews. A small team of three people spent time in the village (which we call Badalpara) getting to know the people in 20 selected case study households and others in the wider community. We go on in this chapter to provide an overview of the study village and the type of environment in which the people who participated in the study live. We explain the types of formal provision that exist in the village in terms of social protection that people may access on a regular basis (savings and credit, old age allowances) or at times of need (VGF cards) if they are fortunate enough to gain access to these schemes. We then present the list of our case study households and give some information on the wealth rank and educational status of migrants from households in the village to introduce the nature of the variation in terms of wealth and access to NGO and government services. In 2005, members from 83 households migrated for work, so migration affects more than one-fifth of households in the village.

In Chapter Three we provide more detail on the background to the study, the study village and the migrants and their households included in the study. At first glance it would appear that the majority of migrants are very similar, in the third or fourth wealth rank categories, which are the poorest people in the village. However, we illustrate through brief descriptions of each household that if one looks in detail at the background and present lives of migrants, it is apparent that some are much better off than others. Carpenters and some of the rickshaw pullers seem to be able to make a reasonable living, while agricultural labourers and housemaids struggle to make a decent wage. However, agricultural labourers only migrate for a few months a year, while the majority of rickshaw pullers are away most of the year. The

families that were the worst off were those struggling to make up for losses that they had suffered due to river erosion and those disadvantaged by chronic poverty and disability. The brief histories of each household show how the ownership of land and the existence of supportive kin or richer patrons makes a big difference to the migrant's family situation, as does the number of daughters a family has. Dowry has been a major source of impoverishment for some families. Education seems to make no difference at all with the migrant with the highest level of education being amongst the worst off economically and socially.

In Chapter Four we describe the type of work migrants do: rickshaw pulling, carpentry, agricultural labouring and work as housemaids as also begging. We explain the reasons for the choice of work as well as the choice of destination. We describe the different ways that migrants travel to their place of work and their living conditions at the destination. We also outline the good and bad points about the different places people work in. It is apparent that the experience of other migrants from Badalpara at a particular destination in particular kinds of is very important in influencing migratory patterns. The choices that people make over the type of work they do and when they do it is, not surprisingly, influenced by their reasons for migrating; if money is very short at home then someone may have little choice but to take up a low paid job. In the second part of the chapter we describe when the different occupational groups migrate and the level of wages they can expect to earn.

In Chapter Five we describe the different levels of income that migrants from different occupations earn as well as the variations in earnings between migrants doing the same work because of experience and the intensity of work. We look at the ways in which they send their earnings back to their families through trusted friends, bus helpers, as well as carrying it themselves. We then examine the uses the earnings are put to. So called productive uses are paying for household necessities as well as investing in crops and land but the repayment of loans to NGOs and individuals, as well as buying assets (such as livestock and grain) to serve as 'reserves' for the future, are also important. Equally important are reproductive uses which include investment in children's education (which will, hopefully, bring economic or social returns in the future, through work opportunities or a 'good' marriage) as well as payment of dowry and marriage costs. Money also has to be spent on the not inconsiderable costs of treatment of illness which is a fact of life for all the migrant households. Earnings from a month or so of employment, therefore, have to stretch in many different ways in each household. Few have the opportunity to accumulate assets; most were paying day to day living expenses.

In Chapter Six we look at the ways in which migration contributes to the increased vulnerability of families who stay behind in the village. Illness, harassment over loans and problems getting enough food pose formidable obstacles for many households. Accessing support from others, earning money and making resources stretch while the migrant is away all enable the migrant to spend time away without worrying too much about the family at home. For some households migration over a long period of time has a significant positive impact on their income and long-term well being so the short term suffering that comes when an adult member is away for prolonged periods is seen as worth it for the sake of the family. It is also apparent, however, that the resourcefulness of wives, mothers, daughters as well as sons left behind makes a considerable contribution to the success of migration and the families demonstrate considerable ingenuity in keeping the household going, often coping with the considerable disadvantages that women face in this society. It is ironic that in the cases of ex-migrants, or successful migrants among present migrants, when people spoke about the outcomes, it was the migrant who was generally given all credit for the success of his accumulation; the role his partner and children had played went unmentioned.

In Chapter Seven we explore the many challenges the migrants face as they journey and stay at their destinations. Travelling with others and finding somewhere safe to stay and managing well prepared food to eat can make a big difference to their sense of well-being. Successful, long-term migrants had established routes, practices and contacts, which made their migration experience bearable. For both migrants and for their families who stay behind, their main security comes from their friends and family, as well as trusted employers and mess owners. Working in the informal sector, migrants have little contact with formal systems of protection or the regulation of wage rates or conditions of work. The existence of legislation to protect workers has little meaning in their lives. The only contact they do have is with officials like the police, and that contact is seldom positive or helpful.

We conclude that for all migrants and their families, social protection comes from their own resourcefulness in seeking support and making alliances with friends and employers to get help when needed. What drives so many people to migrate for work is not only the lack of employment opportunities in the village but also the rewards in terms of income and future security that can come when things work out well. Investing in land, livestock and education are a tangible form of social protection for the future that has been attained by some in the village through their migration efforts. Nevertheless, the cost to the lives of migrant and family are great and the sacrifices they make trying to secure their futures, considerable. For some, migration compounds their problems rather than easing them, and for the poorest people, economically and socially, the formal and informal systems of social protection provide little support.

## Chapter 1: Background to the Study

An alarming rise in unemployment accompanied by *monga* in Rangpur and Kurigram has triggered a massive exodus of jobless northerners to Dhaka and other parts of the country. People here are growing increasingly desperate for job to overcome the acute financial hardship during the ongoing off-season. The Bengali month of Ashwin and Kartik are the off-season for farmers when the transplanted Amon paddy matures and is harvested. The off-season always forces people to leave home. Most of them, however, do not have money enough to travel seeking job elsewhere. They take loans from the moneylenders. Many loaned 500/- to 1000/- on high interest rates and sometimes there are condition to repay it with paddy in addition to the original amount after two-months (*sic*) (*The Daily Star*, 1 November 2004)<sup>1</sup>.

In November 2004 a *monga* (a near famine when there is also a shortage of work) threatened large parts of North West Bangladesh. The newspapers, like the one quoted above, contained stories about the thousands of people in Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha and Nilphamar who were 'virtually starving for days together due to want of job and food'<sup>2</sup>. This was not an unusual occurrence; in most years a time of scarcity follows the end of the monsoon. People's response to this crisis, to move to other places in search of work, was not unusual either: for many of Bangladesh's 140 million inhabitants, temporary work migration is an essential part of their livelihood strategy. Yet seasonal or temporary work migration and the income gained has a price: not only might family life, including education, be disrupted but poverty, exploitation and danger may threaten the security of both, those migrating and those left behind. This research focuses on how migrants and their families cope and find support to counter their vulnerability.

This final report is on the Bangladesh part of the Migration DRC-funded 'Migration, Livelihoods and Social Protection' project, which focuses on Bengali speaking temporary work migrants and their families from rural areas in Murshidabad in West Bengal, India, and Gaibandha in North Western Bangladesh.<sup>3</sup> The research, involving fieldwork with sending communities of migrants explores how families left behind respond to the absence of the temporary worker and how migrants in their temporary workplaces, and as they travel, cope with the risks and hazards they face. West Bengal and Bangladesh share much in terms of culture and agro-ecological systems, but they have very different political histories, which have created very different polities and policy regimes. This allows for a comparison of the contribution that the State, NGOs and voluntary and community associations make, or *could* make, to the social protection of migrants and their families in contrasting policy environments.

Bangladesh lies in the northeastern part of South Asia. The country is surrounded by India on the west, north and northeast, by Myanmar in the southeast and the Bay of Bengal in the south. According to the Human Development Report 2002 an estimated 49.8 per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line and 32 million people (24 percent of the population) are living in extreme poverty (Sen and Hulme 2004). One-third of the population is

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<sup>1</sup> We begin each chapter with a newspaper cutting from one of the national newspapers published during the time of our research project. There were many stories about migration published during the two years of the study, but many, like this, told of crises or tragedies. The millions of people who get on with making a living away from home in Bangladesh every day do not grab the headlines.

<sup>2</sup> *The Independent*, 4 November 2004, page 16 (Bangladesh newspaper).

<sup>3</sup> The authors of this report are the members of the Bangladesh research team. The West Bengal research team is made up of Deeptima Massey, Abdur Rafique and Ben Rogaly.

unemployed or underemployed, with one million job seekers being added to that every year. Unemployment and under employment keep the poverty cycle going because the lack of job opportunities and limited agricultural land make it difficult for people to make a living.

Research in Bangladesh has been carried out on rural to urban migration and international migration (Afsar 2000, Ahsan 1997, Dannecker 2002, Gardner 1995, Huq-Hussain 1996, Kabeer 2000 and Kuhn 2000, for example) but much less attention has been paid to internal rural to rural migration and the ways in which different forms of migration (rural-rural, rural-urban, and international) are used by people at different times as part of their livelihood strategy (Hossain, Khan and Seeley 2005). A search of the literature for this project revealed a paucity of published work on this topic.

This chapter sets out the research objectives and research questions, providing some background to the concepts to be explored, before describing the research setting in the district of Gaibandha, the sample selection and methods used for data collection.

### **Research Objectives**

The focus of this research is internal migration, looking specifically at seasonal/temporary migration where the migrant returns home after working away for a period of weeks or months.<sup>4</sup> The research examines the forms of social protection provided by the state, non-governmental organisations, kin and community which may provide support to migrants and those left behind in the sending community. In addition, attention is paid to the ways in which state and civil society structures and policies may increase the vulnerability of migrants and their families.

The objectives of this research were:

- a. To understand the changing causes and consequences of seasonal/temporary migration for individuals and households in the study area;
- b. To examine vulnerability (and security) of those staying behind in the work migrants' households;
- c. To investigate the practices and measures taken for social protection by those who stay behind;
- d. To examine the role of public action in providing social protection for migrants and their households during the migration process.

### **The Conceptual Context for the Study**

#### *Migration and Social Protection*

Migration, as noted above, is a part of the normal livelihood strategy of poor people (McDowell and De Haan 1997). Many people in Bangladesh make a living by going where work can be found when none is available where they live. Other people are forced to leave their homes temporarily because of political, social or religious pressure (sometimes that 'temporary' move may become permanent if conditions do not improve in the home). In addition, natural disasters play a part in forcing people to migrate. In this research we focused on temporary work migrants, rather than forced migrants. Temporary work migration is a selective process, because not everyone wants to or can migrate and some of those who do not wish to move are forced to look for work elsewhere to survive (Hossain, Khan and Seeley 2005).

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<sup>4</sup> He or she may leave home again to work away, but always returns and considers the rural base 'home'.

Social protection consists of policies that assist people, households and communities to protect themselves against shocks and risks. An ODI paper for DFID (Conway *et al.* 2000) defines social protection as 'the public actions taken in response to levels of vulnerability, risk and deprivation which are deemed socially unacceptable within a given polity or society.'<sup>5</sup> For the UN Economic and Social Council social protection is broadly understood as a set of public and private policies and programmes undertaken by societies in response to various contingencies to offset the absence or substantial reduction of income from work; to provide assistance for families with children as well as provide people with health care and housing. Sabates-Wheeler and Waite (2003: 8) add to this already broad definition by including 'promotive measures, which aim to improve real incomes and capabilities' and 'transformative measures, which aim to alter the bargaining power of various individuals and groups within society such that social equality concerns are addressed, and people are protected against social risks such as discrimination and abuse.'

It has been argued that the inclusion of promotive measures makes 'social protection' indistinguishable from development in general, but Sabates-Wheeler and Waite (2003: 9) argue that if one focuses on the poorer people in society, and see the promotion of beneficial changes in their incomes and general well-being as being an extension of relief and welfare, then these two elements do fit into 'social protection'. However the term is defined, there is consensus that a multitude of agents provide social protection, both in the public and private domains: governments, NGOs, local institutions (clubs or cooperatives), households and communities, posing a challenge for identifying which measures are being provided by whom.

The broad definition of social protection incorporates two sets of issues, which are partly overlapping but generally call for separate policy approaches.

- First, the emphasis on *risk, vulnerability, and shocks*. This recognises the dynamic nature of states of well being and poverty, and focuses our attention on the need to be prepared for crises of various kinds.
- Second, social protection emphasises the need to provide *support to the poorest*. This is often associated with social assistance and welfare/relief but may also encompass promotive measures, as mentioned above.

However social protection is defined, the form of social protection provided by governmental and non-governmental organisations usually depends on people being stationary so that they can be registered for particular schemes. In Bangladesh such support comes in various forms including the 'vulnerable group development cards' (VGDs) which entitles the holder to certain rations of essential food stuffs, schooling stipends and disaster relief (World Bank 2005). So where do migrants and their families fit into such formal systems of social protection?

As indicated above, our understanding of social protection for this study was broad. We took a wide view of the concept which included within it the collective support that may be provided by social networks or wider kin groups in response to vulnerability, risk and deprivation, which thereby reduce insecurity, as well as government and non-governmental development initiatives. The units of analysis for this study were the individuals and the households in which they lived -- differentiated by wealth, ethnic group, size and structure. We considered the

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<sup>5</sup> Conway *et al.* 2000 summarise the approaches adopted by important agencies. The DFID Target Strategy Paper on economic well-being (para 3.22 ff, and 4.19 ff) emphasises the need for well designed (affordable and sustainable) policies to address the needs and risks of particular groups.

provision that may or may not come from kin or friends as well as the welfare and developmental provisions by state and non-state sectors.

The study was also concerned about the lack of social protection, which may prompt migration to cover current needs. The benefit of migration as a form of livelihood diversification strategy, which helps poor people to manage large expenditures has been described in the work of commentators such as Deshingkar and Start (2003). As such, migration can provide income to smooth consumption, to protect assets (that might otherwise be sold in times of emergency) and to build assets for investment.

While accepting that for some migration may be an accumulative option, the situation is dynamic and shifting for people who are poor. Rogaly *et al.* (2002) provide a social analysis of seasonal migration and try to examine the welfare/ill fare outcomes of that migration for both migrant workers and employers. They show that while seasonal migration may contribute to the welfare outcomes of people involved in the temporary or seasonal labour market, migrants also face hardships in their quest to make a living away from home. However, despite difficulties in the destination area, their research shows that migrants are not absolutely powerless in the labour market. They travel in groups and maintain networks through which they are informed about places and employers.

If large numbers of people are involved in seasonal migration there is an impact on the society and economy at the places of origin. Given the scale of movement of temporary migrants in Bangladesh, this is certainly an important point to consider. If men and women both migrate, families left behind may consist only of children and elderly people, with a potential impact on family life. If only men migrate, women may take on men's roles. While there is some evidence that this may improve women's social and economic position (Sheng 2003), women and children may be left without money for long periods of time or face harassment because of the absence of the male head. It may also happen that the male migrant may start a new family at the destination and thereby use his earnings on them rather than the family at home. He may also gradually cut ties with his rural family.

Social protection is directly linked to vulnerability to risk and hardship. This research therefore looked carefully at the forms of vulnerability faced by migrants and those left behind. A study carried out by Barkat and Akhter (2003) on urbanization and internal migration in Bangladesh concluded that the internal migration streams are mainly to two big cities, namely Dhaka and Chittagong, and most migrants come for employment opportunities, while some are pushed by natural disasters, landlessness, and health problems. Most of these migrants are extremely poor and live in slums and squatter settlements, which often lack security and basic amenities. Conditions may not be much better in rural areas where migrant agricultural labourers are forced to camp near the fields in which they work in temporary shelters.

## **Research Questions**

This research set out to understand migration as a means of reducing vulnerability (economic, physical and consumption) and risk. The following were the key research questions for the study:

- a. Is migration a means of reducing vulnerability?
- b. If so, *in what ways* does migration contribute to reducing vulnerability?
- c. And, *how much* does migration contribute to reducing vulnerability?

The population for whom migration can contribute to reducing vulnerability is important. Indeed, the 'for whom' question is linked with all three key research questions (whether, in what ways and how much) and to understand this, household characteristics and composition are very important. Even at the household level social protection may vary according to the age and sex of family members. 'For whom' is also linked to types of migration. Different types of migration refer to i) place of migration, ii) duration, iii) who is migrating, iv) period, and v) types of work.

Connected to the above, the research sought to understand the link between migration and social protection. This part has three key research questions:

- a. Does migration contribute to vulnerability?
- b. In what ways does migration contribute to vulnerability?
- c. How much does migration contribute to increasing vulnerability?

### *Migration, Risk and Vulnerability*

Risk is usually defined as the probability of an undesired event occurring or the probability that some sort of hazard will contribute to a potential disaster. Risk depends on the existence of hazards, and a person's vulnerability and exposure to those hazards. Vulnerability is a broad concept, 'encompassing not only income vulnerability but also such risks as those related to health, those resulting from violence, and those resulting from social exclusion—all of which can have dramatic effects on households' (Coudouel and Hentschel, 2000:34).

Ellis (2003) discusses the role of migration in livelihoods emphasizing the assets, activities and outcomes within the vulnerability context and shows how poor people migrate to improve their livelihood and reduce vulnerability and poverty. Poor people manage their livelihoods 'in a context of pervasive uncertainty' (ibid.: 6), and migration may play a very important role in enabling them to do that by providing a route to income that might smoothe consumption, enable the accumulation of cash or other assets and mitigate the risk of livelihoods otherwise dependent on agricultural practices, which are vulnerable to the vagaries of seasonality and natural disaster.

While migration may be viewed as a positive livelihood option, and even a form of social protection in terms of providing an income 'cushion' for use in times of hardship, migrants may also face exploitation in terms of the nature of work, negotiating over wages, timing of work, amount of food, food-serving process, and may be cheated by employers at destination area. Rogaly and Rafique (2003) in their work on seasonal migration in West Bengal looked at the vulnerability of poor people and their families left behind and the ways people struggle to earn and save a lump sum.

Mosse *et al* (2002), in their research in western India, list the sources of vulnerability of migrants which include unsafe working sites, insufficient allowances, limited and poor diet, living in the open, and lack of sanitation that make migrant workers suffer ill health or severe injury and even death. Migrants also face social isolation, lack of respect and humiliation. Migrant women may have less work opportunities and lower wages. They are also vulnerable to abuse and sexual harassment by their employers.

Looking specifically at the situation of women who have been forced to migrate because of floods in Bangladesh in 1998, a case study by Saadi (2003) argues that women are more vulnerable during and after floods since all displaced people lose their kitchens, gardens, poultry and livestock. Food insecurity thus becomes one of the major problems during and after

floods, despite relief programmes initiated by the government, NGOs and political parties. But none of these are quite enough to fulfil the requirements of the affected people. So people have to borrow money or food to survive. In addition displaced people have to fight against the local elite to gain access to government (*khas*) land. The same problems faced by these forced migrants can also affect people who are temporary migrants and their families at home.

Migrants are vulnerable during the course of their journey, as they are betwixt and between their origin and destination. On the journey they are vulnerable to cheating. In some cases they can be harassed or face degrading behaviour. Sometimes, for example, labour migrants are not allowed to sit during their journey by train or bus because of their low socio-economic status. Or migrants might travel on the roof of the bus as this is cheaper than getting into the bus, thus risking their life and rendering themselves open to inclement weather.

There are also other sorts of harassment: harassment by bus contractors/helpers, by policemen and brokers at bus terminals. It is useful to divide the vulnerability on the journey into two parts: vulnerability on journey to destination and vulnerability on journey from destination since on the journey back labour migrants are more likely to have assets, be it cash or recently purchased goods for their family members.

Here, the research questions were:

- a. What measures are taken to reduce the vulnerability of family members left in the sending community?
- b. What measures do migrants take to reduce their vulnerability at their origin, on their journey and at the destination?

### *Migration and Policies*

The main focus of this part of the research was to understand the policies, programmes and the role of the state, NGOs, trade unions and community based organizations (CBOs) in providing social protection for migrants and those left behind. This section had three key sub-questions:

- a. Do government (local/national) or other public actors have any policies and programmes for migrants' social protection and the social protection of those left behind?
- b. In what ways do existing development policies and programmes contribute to migrants' social protection, and to those left behind?
- c. How much do governments and other public actors contribute to migrants' social protection and to those left behind?

It was important to consider both policies/practices specifically designed for the social protection of migrants *and* those that indirectly either provide protection to them or do the opposite -- increase their vulnerability.

The fieldwork took place from June 2005 until early 2006. The latter part of this research (late 2005, early 2006) coincided with a period of heightened political insecurity which 'allowed' us to see first hand the effects on temporary work migrants of this crisis -- our chosen research area was seen to be a place of dissent against the government and its policies, which led to people from the area being harassed and abused at work destinations and on the journey to and from home.

## Chapter 2: Research Setting, Methods and Case Studies

A seasonal job crisis in the agriculture based region covering greater Rangpur, Dinajpur and Bogra districts is forcing people to migrate to cities. Some of them are rickshaw pullers, hawkers, day labourers. Aged people, women and children have started begging. Some women have taken up work as maids and teenagers, who are lucky enough, have found jobs in garment factories. Younger children work as porters in kitchen markets and as domestic help (*The Daily Star*, 3 November 2004).

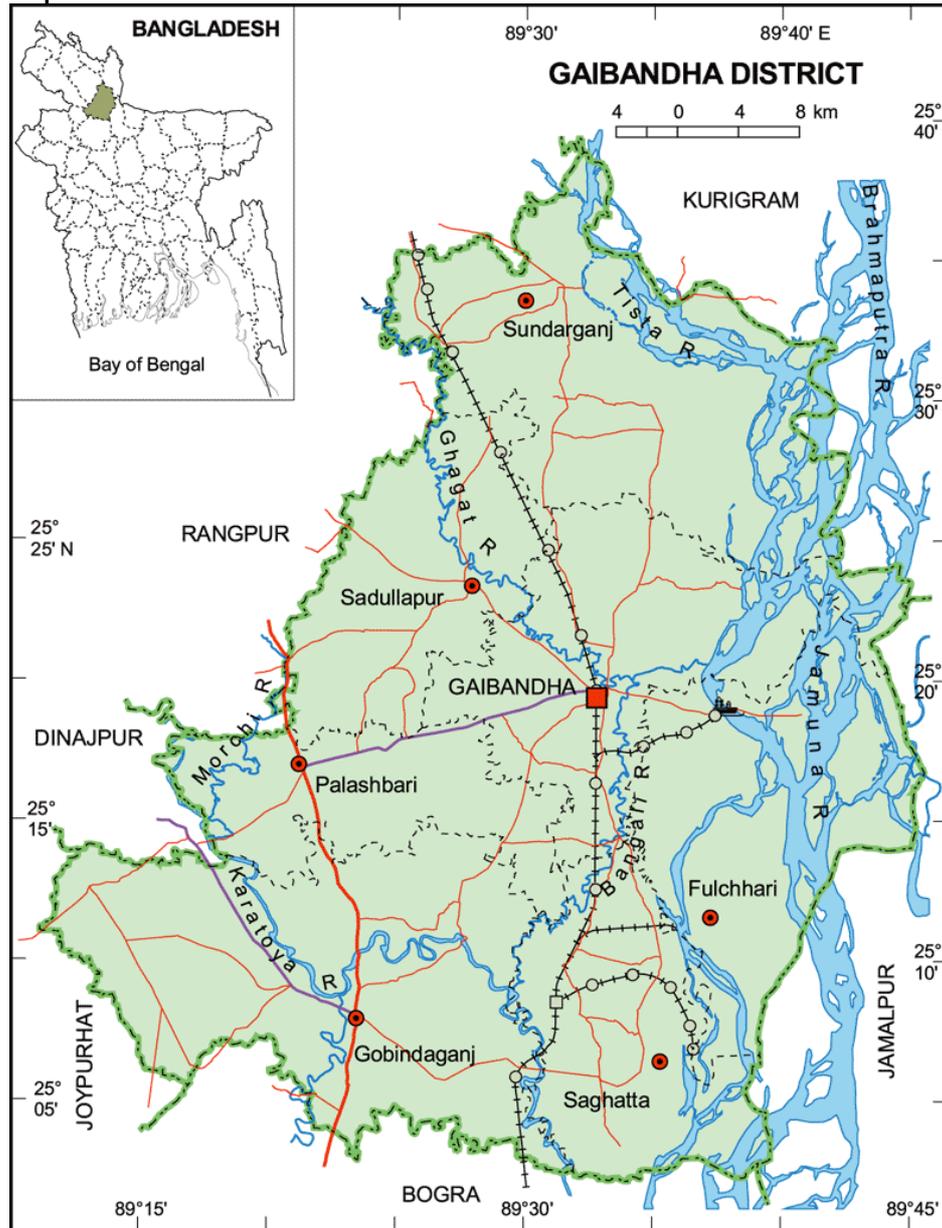
As noted earlier, this project consisted of a comparative study of two Bengali speaking temporary work migrant communities and their families from rural areas. In West Bengal in India, Murshidabad district was chosen as Rafique and Rogaly had already carried out research there, and they wanted to build on this earlier research. It was, therefore, important for the site in Bangladesh to be similar to the bagri region (the part of Murshidabad district in which the West Bengal team worked) in terms of size of population and ethnic/religious mix, as well as agro-ecological environment and incidence and type of migration.

### Site Selection

Two flood-prone districts, namely Rangpur and Gaibandha in rural northwest Bangladesh were initially selected as sites for this research. We narrowed in on Gaibandha after consultation with the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) at the University of Dhaka, a partner of the Migration DRC, as well as CARE-Bangladesh and RDRS, two NGOs that had long experience of work in the region. Gaibandha displayed both rural to rural as well as rural to urban migration in certain upazila (sub-district unit), and poverty levels comparable to the Indian site.

Gaibandha District is under the Rajshahi division which is adjacent to the Murshidabad district of West Bengal. The rivers within the district are Ghaghat, Karatoya, Bangali and Tista. The district consists of seven Upazila and the total population of the district is 2,117,959; where Muslims make up 91.29 per cent and Hindus 7.79 per cent. The main occupation of the district is agriculture: agriculture 44.45 per cent, agricultural labourer 27.72 per cent, and wage labourer 2.58 per cent. Paddy, wheat, jute, sugarcane, potato, brinjal, mustard seed, chilli, onion, garlic and vegetables are main crops in Gaibandha district (<http://banglapedia.search.com.bd>, accessed 1/1/2007).

**Map 2: Gaibandha District**



Source: <http://banglapedia.search.com.bd>, accessed 1/1/2007)

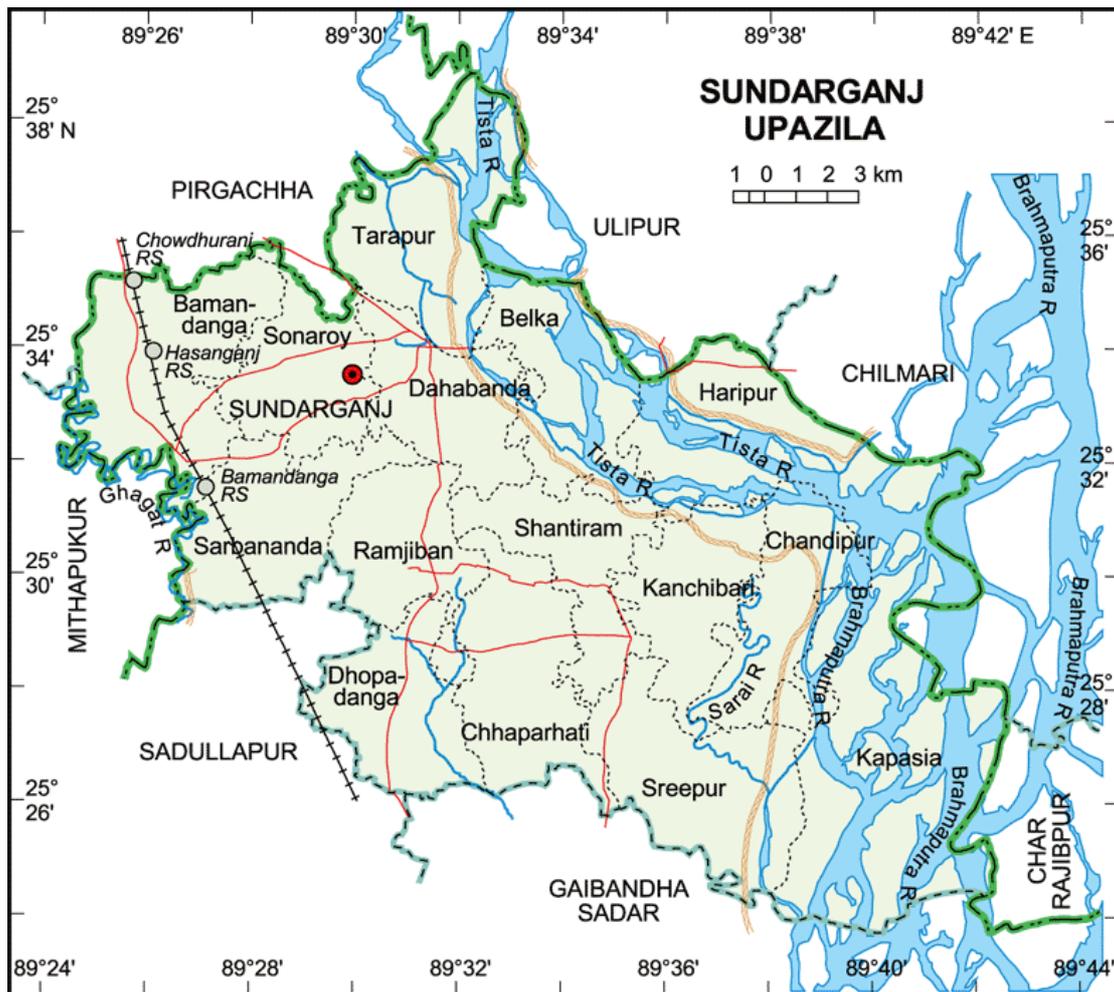
To select an upazila, two sources of information were used: i) existing literature and poverty maps and ii) information from experienced organizations and individuals from those districts. The report produced by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with the United Nations World Food Programme (BBS/WFP 2004), *Local Estimation of Poverty and Malnutrition in Bangladesh*, also proved useful in the selection process. According to this report, all upazila of Gaibandha district display the highest levels of poverty. Among seven upazila, Shaghata, Sundarganj and Sadullapur have the lowest incidence of calorie intake. Sundarganj and Sadullapur also show a high prevalence of stunting. The largest number of underweight children under five is also to be found in Sundarganj, Sadullapur and Gaibandha sadar. Based on this poverty information as well as the agro-ecological comparability to the bagri region in West Bengal, Sundarganj upazila was selected.

**Table 1: Upazila of Gaibandha District by Poverty and Nutritional Status**

Name of Upazila	Map1 Poverty incidence	Map3 Resource required by Upazila	Map4 Calorie Intake	Map5 Food Poverty	Map6 Stunting Children under Five	Map7 Probability of High Prevalence of Stunting	Map8 Underweight Children under Five	Map9 Probability of High Prevalence of Underweight
Sundarganj	37-55%	20-30	1683-2154	Very High (>30%)	50-60%	Very High (>75%)	>56%	Very High (>75%)
Sadullapur	37-55%	13-15	1683-2154	Very High (>30%)	50-60%	Very High (>75%)	>56%	Very High (>75%)
PBbari	37-55%	10-13	2154-2318	High (20-30%)	<40%	Low (<25%)	51-55%	Very High (>75%)
Gobindaganj	37-55%	20-30	2154-2318	High (20-30%)	40-50%	Low (<25%)	51-55%	Very High (>75%)
Shaghata	37-55%	13-15	1683-2154	Very High (>30%)	40-50%	Moderate (25-50%)	51-55%	Very High (>75%)
Fulchari	37-55%	5-8	2318-2535	Moderate (10-20%)	40-50%	Moderate (25-50%)	51-55%	Very High (>75%)
Gaibandha Sadar	37-55%	18-20	2154-2318	High (20-30%)	40-50%	Moderate (25-50%)	>56%	Very High (>75%)

Source: Collated from BBS/WFP 2004

**Map 3: Sundarganj Upazila**



Badalpara,<sup>6</sup> the study village, is in the northern most part of the upazila.

Source: <http://banglapedia.search.com.bd>, accessed 1/1/2007

Sundarganj Upazila is with an area of 426.52 sq km and it consists of 15 Union Parishads (Ups), 110 Mouzas and 178 villages. The total population of the Upazila is 360676; Muslim 89.99 per cent and Hindu 9.30 per cent. Main occupation is agriculture. About 48.57 per cent of people are involved with agriculture, agricultural labourers make up 29.64 per cent of the workforce and main crops are paddy, jute, wheat, ground nut, tobacco, sugarcane, mustard seed, onion and garlic. Operationally important NGOs are BRAC, ASA, CARE, Swabalambi Sangstha, Swanirvar Bangladesh, Muktir Path, Sonar Bangla, Adarsha Janakalyan Uddag. There is one Upazila health complex, plus 8 family planning centres, 7 satellite clinics and 55 community clinics in the Upazila. There are 481 mosques, 69 temples and one 'sacred place' (*sic*) (<http://banglapedia.search.com.bd>, accessed 1/1/2007).

Following visits to the area and discussions with NGO workers active in the district, Badalpara was selected as the research site. The village is closer to the embankment of a nearby river than the fieldsite in West Bengal, but the proportion of Muslims and Hindus in the village is

<sup>6</sup> This is not the real name of the village.

similar, as are patterns of migration (including a large number of agricultural rural-rural migrants).

## **Methodology**

Field research commenced in April 2005. The team (Kabir, Lipi, Afrin) carried out the main field research from June 2005 to January 2006. This research followed an ethnographic approach using qualitative data collection methods. The research sought to gather long-term case studies of migrant households. In addition, the attempt was also to gain an overview of the socio-economic and political environment of the whole village. Attention was paid to the individual household and community level forms of social protection upon which migrant households depended. An assessment was made of the forms of social protection at the Upazila, district and state levels which do, or do not, provide support for migrants and their families in their home village and, in some cases, at the work destination.<sup>7</sup>

The main method used in this research was participant observation, complemented with semi-structured interviewing to collect life histories and information on migration-related activities. Some rapid appraisal tools were used in the first weeks in the village to gather some initial data on the research setting and some were used from time to time to gather particular forms of information. Details on the data collection methods used are available in Annex 1.

### *Sample Selection*

Twenty households were selected for in-depth study. This was done by first taking a census of the whole village and carrying out a wealth ranking exercise. From this listing it was possible to establish which of the 444 households had someone currently involved in migration. Ninety-two households were initially identified as containing migrants. This was later refined to 83 households when more was learned about migration activities in the village.

The team then visited all 83 households and collected information to select households for case studies. Forty-four households were selected as being of particular interest because of the level of migrant activity and willingness to take part in the study. Out of these, 36 were from wealth category three, five from wealth category four, two from wealth category two and one from wealth category one. Twenty households were then chosen purposively from this list to represent different types of migrants, wealth rank and family situations. In two households two migrants were identified for follow-up, so the total number of migrants was 22 in 20 households. The list of case study households, and the pseudonym used for the migrants, is given below:

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<sup>7</sup> The main focus of this research will be in the home village of the migrants but some visits will be made to rural and urban destinations.

**Table 2: List of Case Study Households**

HH Number	Name of Migrant	Sex of Migrant	Age of Migrant	Wealth Rank
1	Mobin	male	24	3
2	Ahmed	male	23	3
3	Smarajit	male	28	2
4	Shuvra	male	50	3
5	Deepak	male	32	3
6	Jamal	male	38	3
7	Samsed	male	36	3
8	Rasheed	male	30	3
9	Ajij	male	35	3
9	Alima	female	55	3
10	Ramjan	male	40	4
11	Liki	female	40	4
12	Samsuddin	male	35	3
13	Ajinul	male	40	3
14	Utpal	male	40	3
15	Debashish	male	22	3
15	Snehashish	male	16	3
16	Israil	male	40	3
17	Zubair	male	38	3
18	Iqbal	male	44	3
19	Ansar	male	16	3
20	Salim	male	35	3

Four households of ex-migrants and three of never-migrants were purposively selected to provide some information on such households for comparison with the 20 case study households:

**Table 3: Ex-migrants' Households**

HH Number	Initials of Ex-migrant	Type of Work	Wealth Rank
21	Rafique (ex-migrant) (Son present migrant)	Agricultural work	3
22	Umer (ex-migrant) (Son present migrant)	Agricultural work	1
23	Nazir (ex-migrant) (Son present migrant)	Agricultural labour	3
24	Hamidul (ex-migrant)	Carpenter	3

**Table 4: Non-migrant Households**

HH Number	Initials of Hh Head	Types of Work	Wealth Rank
25	Zulfique	Green vegetable seller	3
26	Suliman	Agricultural work	2
27	Rohan	Petty trader	3

The 20 case study households were visited regularly (at least once a month) between July 2005 and January 2006. A follow up visit was made to the households in February 2006 to tell them about the initial findings of the research.

One or two visits were made to the ex-migrant and non-migrant households to collect information on family history and livelihood activities, and the team sometimes interacted with

the members of these households in public places in the village, but they were not studied as intensively as the 20 case study households.

A map drawn with the villagers is shown below (the different coloured squares of paper were used to show the place of residence of different social groups).



### **The Study Village**

The name given to the village for the purposes of this study is 'Badalpara'. The village is situated in Sundarganj Upazila of Gaibandha district and consists of three wards -- 7, 8 and 9. Ward number 7 is our study area. It is in the middle of Badalpara village. The village is bounded by the Tista River in the east and north, Chachya Mirganj bazar in the west and Sundarganj upazila in the south.

#### *General Background*

According to the participants in the social mapping exercise there are about 440 households in the village (the number varied over the period of study). The census found a total population of 1801, with almost equal numbers of men and women as show below in Table 5.

The villagers confirmed information that we had obtained from secondary sources that there were a significant number of Hindus here. They said that the ratio of Muslim and Hindu households to total households would be *dosh ana* and *choy ana* (if you take 16 households in the village, there are 10 Muslim and 6 Hindu households). However, according to the census, of the 442 households, 353 were Muslim and 89 were Hindu, suggesting that the 16:10

calculation offered by the villagers is not quite correct<sup>8</sup>. The different communities live together in peace. There are no separate 'para' (hamlet) for Muslims or Hindus.

**Table 5: Age Distribution in the Village**

Age	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
0-12	286	281	567
13-18	116	132	248
19-24	103	84	187
25-44	257	265	522
45-60	104	108	212
61-80	28	32	60
>81	3	2	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>897</b>	<b>904</b>	<b>1801</b>



View of the agricultural land adjacent to Ward 7.

Fifty-seven households in the village had *de jure* female heads. However, the majority of these households (33) were women (widows and divorcees) living alone, usually close to natal kin or near their children (usually a son). The numbers of family members in the different households (excluding the household head) is shown in Table 6.

Most of the people living in this village are poor. There is a concentration of the poorest people on the embankment and on the northeast of the village which is close to river Tista and prone to flooding.

<sup>8</sup> It may be that the ration was 16:10 in the past but recent out migration by Hindus, which has occurred in many parts of the country, has resulted in a fall in the Hindu population.

**Table 6: Numbers of Family Members by Sex of Household Head**

Family Members*	Sex of HHH		Total
	Male	Female	
0	1	33	34
1	42	9	51
2	73	8	81
3	105	3	108
4	82	3	85
5	49	1	50
6	24	0	24
7	5	0	5
8	3	0	3
9	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>444</b>

Note: \*Family members not including household head

Only 24 of the 444 household heads had studied beyond primary school. All 24 were men. The majority of female household heads were non-literate. The educational level of household heads is shown in Table 7.

Among the 83 migrants in the village, 66 were non-literate (or could only sign their name). Only two had received education beyond primary level (both were included in our case study households).

**Table 7: Educational Levels of Household Heads**

Education Group	Sex of Household Heads		Total
	Male	Female	
Non-literate	252	53	305
Attended primary school	111	4	115
Secondary School Certificate	10	0	10
Higher Secondary School Certificate	8	0	8
Teritary education	6	0	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>444</b>

There is a government primary school, an NGO (BRAC) school, three mosques, one temple and some grocers' shops in the village. The roads of the village are *katcha* (unpaved). Rickshaws, vans (bicycles which push or pull a trailer) and bicycles are the main forms of transport available here. There is no madrasa in the village, but we saw children gathered in front of the mosques in the early morning every day for religious instruction and some families hire a teacher to give their children Arabic lessons and religious instruction.

There is no government health centre in the village. People receive primary health treatment from the traditional village doctor. They also go to the government upazila health complex that is not so far from the village. There is no bazaar in the village either. Villagers go to nearby Sundarganj and Mirganj bazaars. A market, or *haat*, is held twice a week (Saturday and Wednesday) where people gather in an open area for making sales and purchases.

Through the census the team found that there are a significant number of people who do not have any land (131 households) and some of them do not even have a homestead plot on which to build a house. These have built their houses on others' land. The majority of those who do own land, own plots in the char (sandy land) area close to the river where they cannot

cultivate paddy or vegetables. They can cultivate only groundnuts in those plots and only for a few months of the year after the annual flooding. The data on land size, in Table 8 below, needs to be read in this context. Data on the productivity of land was not collected by the team.

**Table 8. Land Ownership by Sex of Household Head**

Decimals* of Land	Sex of HHH		Total
	Male	Female	
landless	94	37	131
1-250	263	19	282
251-500	26	1	27
501-750	1	0	1
751-1000	1	0	1
>1000	2	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>444</b>

\* 1 decimal = 40.5 square metres.

### *Occupations in the Village*

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in the village. Even those who own land may not own enough productive land to provide them with food throughout the year so most of the people in the village are agricultural wage labourers.

The village also has small businessmen, carpenters, rickshaw-pullers and masons. Indeed, there is a concentration of carpenters in the village. This, we were told, is because it is a traditional craft of people in this area. Among the 83 migrants in the village, 11 worked as carpenters.<sup>9</sup>

Crops and Cropping Patterns: There are two rice crops grown in Badalpara village. These are aman rice and High Yield Variety (HYV) irrigated rice (commonly known as IRRI rice). Aman rice is transplanted in Sravan-Bhadra (August) months and harvested in Agrahayan-Poush (November-January). Harvesting starts at the end of Kartik (October-November) and is completed in Agrahayan (November-December). The aman rice needs five months from transplantation to harvesting. HYV irrigated rice is transplanted in Magh (January-February) on irrigated land and harvested in Jaistha (May-June). This crop also requires five months from transplantation to harvesting.

Apart from rice, jute, maize and groundnuts are also grown. Jute is sown on the unirrigated lands in Chaitra (March-April) and harvested in Bhadra (August-September). Jute is also grown on the land where aman rice is grown. Aman rice seedlings are transplanted after harvesting jute. Rice under irrigation is grown in lowland areas. Maize and groundnuts are cultivated on sandier soils close to the river that are water logged from time to time and where vegetables and rice cannot grow.

Most of the cultivated lands of this village are in the char land (land that has been newly formed on the banks, or as islands, in the river as a result of the continual process of erosion and

<sup>9</sup> The vast majority of migrants, 42 (all men) were labourers (either agricultural or construction site workers); 21 were rickshaw pullers. The remaining migrants worked as domestic workers, vegetable hawkers, rubbish collectors and beggars.

deposition). Three-quarters of the total land area is char land. The majority of the villagers are affected by river erosion as the land for cultivation borders the river. Many people have homestead land in the village and cultivated lands in the char land. Some people lease or take land on a sharecropped basis to cultivate cash crops like jute or groundnuts.

In addition to rice and jute, various kinds of vegetables are also grown in the village. Radish, spinach, bitter gourd etc are grown here throughout the year. Vegetables are grown on the slightly higher land closer to the village. Vegetables are often grown in quick succession. Many of the villagers depend on selling these vegetables to make some part of their livelihood.

Land in the char area has emerged from the river during the last seven years, and it became suitable for rice cultivation over the last five years. Before that the land was only suitable for groundnut or millet/maize. Rice cultivation is more profitable than other crops. Groundnut is still cultivated on lands where rice and vegetables cannot be grown.



*A male farmer with straw for storage at the homestead*

Groundnut cultivation began about 10-12 years ago. It is cultivated in sandy soil. That soil was earlier under the river and more people had to migrate (up to 50 percent of the village, according to the villagers) at the time because of a shortage of livelihood options. Over the last 10 years, the number of people migrating has reduced as people are able to take up groundnut production and the cultivation of vegetables for sale in nearby towns.

#### *Wealth Distribution in the Village*

In May and June 2005 the team carried out wealth ranking exercises with 20-25 people in an open space in front of the temple, which is in the middle of ward 7. The team invited people who were from different parts of the village, of different ages and different classes to take part

in this exercise. Amongst those who took part were men and women, Muslims and Hindus, rich and poor and people in different age groups. The second exercise in June was used to fill in gaps for 122 households that were not ranked during the May exercise.

The objective of the wealth ranking exercise was to understand people's perception about wealth and their definitions of poverty. Based on these definitions, households were divided into different wealth categories. Before conducting the exercise the team developed a wealth ranking card (as below) and filled up the relevant information from the census form like name of household head, his/her father's/husband's name,<sup>10</sup> to identify a particular household.

### Wealth Ranking Card

Name of Hh Head					Hh No.
Father's/Husband's name					
Other information					
Wealth Category	1	2	3	4	5

The team began by asking the participants if everyone in the village was equal. The participants said 'no' and explained that some people had more land and more assets than others and some were of a higher social status. After discussion and some debate among those taking part, they decided to divide households into four different wealth categories:

1. *Uchhabitto* (the rich): Wealthier households.
2. *Maddhabitto* (the middle class): Households who can fulfil their daily needs but have no surplus.
3. *Nimnobitto* (the poor): Largely day labourers who are mostly in debt.
4. *Hotobhaggo/Hotodaridra* (ill fated/ extreme poor): Largely beggars with no assets.

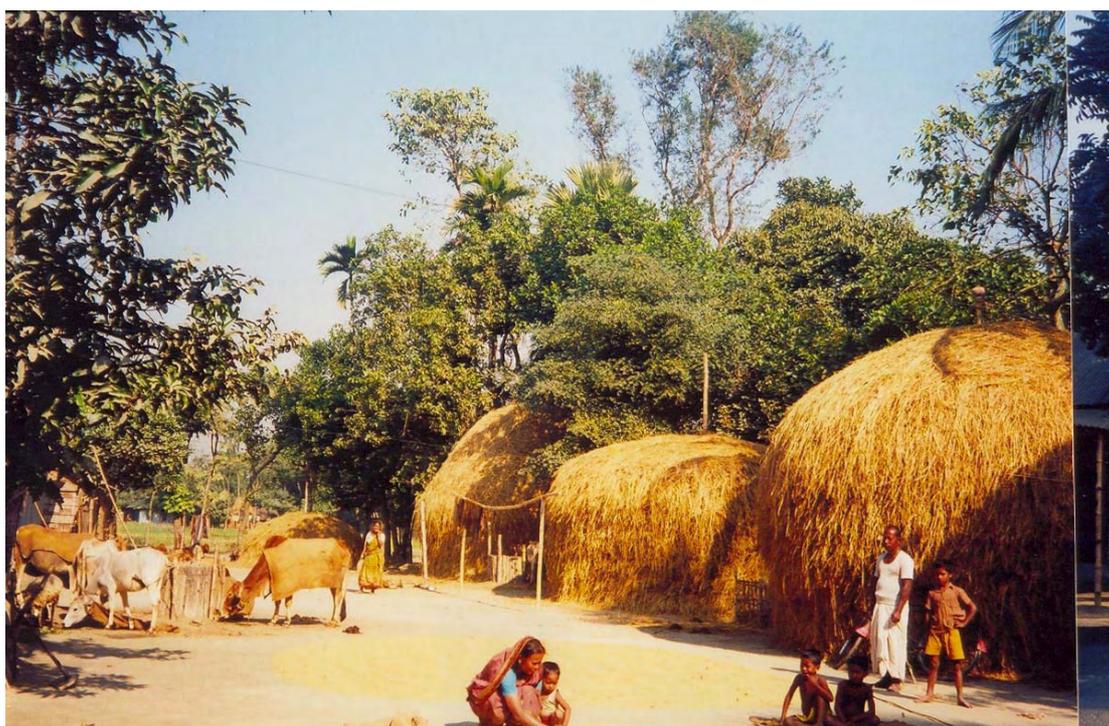
Four hundred and forty four households were included in the wealth ranking. After dividing the households into different categories, participants described the characteristics of the different wealth categories as follows:

**Table 9: Wealth Rank Categories**

Category	Characteristics
1. <i>Uchhabitto</i> (Rich)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a lot of agricultural land and other assets</li> <li>• Have livestock and poultry</li> <li>• Have extra income source (service, business)</li> <li>• Some of them are educated</li> <li>• Few of them migrate as service holders to other districts</li> </ul>
2. <i>Madhabitto</i> (Middle class)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have 2-4 bighas (a bigha is 1335 sq metres) of land</li> <li>• Have livestock and poultry</li> <li>• No food deficit, capable of maintaining their family properly</li> <li>• Some of them migrate for higher income</li> </ul>

<sup>10</sup> We followed the standard format used in Bangladesh for identification of households, which follows patriarchal norms, given that residence for women is either with their father before marriage and then in their husband's village with his family. A few families practice cross-cousin marriage, which means that the woman's natal village and husband's village is likely to be the same.

3. <i>Nimnobitto</i> (Poor class)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have homestead land and 2-4 decimals of land</li> <li>• Day labourers -- sell labour to work on others' land</li> <li>• Have some cattle, some shared with others</li> <li>• Most of them are illiterate, some can sign their name</li> <li>• Most of the people migrate for working</li> </ul>
4. <i>Hotobhaggo</i> <i>/Hotodaridra</i> (ill-fated/ extreme poor) <sup>11</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not have homestead or cultivable land</li> <li>• Sell labour in another's house or land</li> <li>• Day labourer, beggar, physically disabled person, divorced, abandoned</li> </ul>



*A richer household of the village*

The tables below show the distribution of households by sex of household head and religion by wealth rank.

**Table 10: Households by Sex of Household Head and Wealth Category**

Sex of Household Head	Wealth Rank				Total
	<i>Uchhabitto</i>	<i>Madhabitto</i>	<i>Nimnobitto</i>	<i>Hotobhaggo/Hotodaridra</i>	
Male	15	73	285	15	388
Female	1		10	45	56
Total	16	73	295	60	444

<sup>11</sup> We are aware that one does not need to be poor to be 'ill-fated', but the villagers used this term in a very specific way to describe people who had nothing and who seemed to be unable to change their situation and get assets or money to improve their lives.

**Table 11: Households by Religion and Wealth Category**

Religion	Wealth Rank				Total
	<i>Uchhabitto</i>	<i>Madhabitto</i>	<i>Nimnobitto</i>	<i>Hotobhaggo/Hotodaridra</i>	
Muslim	6	52	249	48	355
Hindu	10	21	46	12	89
Total	16	73	295	60	444

The available data show that female-headed households tend to belong to poor and extremely poor categories with one exception. Among the 16 households belonging to the wealthier category, 10 are Hindus.

Discussions were held concerning the wealth ranking of households that included present and past migrants. The results are shown below.

**Table 12: Migrant Households and Wealth Category**

Wealth Category	Migrating status (Number of households)			
	Presently migrating	Previously migrating	Never migrating	Total
<i>Uchhabitto</i> (Rich)	1	1	14	16
<i>Madhabitto</i> (Middle class)	7	14	52	73
<i>Nimnobitto</i> (Poor class)	136	68	91	295
<i>Hotobhaggo/Hotodaridra</i> (ill-fated/ extreme poor)	9	5	46	60
Total	153	88	203	444

Note: If there is any household with both present and previous migrants, it has been considered as a presently migrating household.

Households were divided into three types, households with present migrants, households with previous migrants and never migrant households. If there was a household who had a present and previous migrant, it was deemed a present migrant's household. The table above shows that 241 (55 per cent) households have had some experience of migration. From wealth category 1, only two out of 16 households have experience of migration, while 21 (29 per cent) from *madhabitto* (middle class), 204 (69 per cent) from *nimnobitto* (poor class) and 14 (23 per cent) households from *hotobhaggo/hotodaridra* (ill-fated/ extreme poor) are presently and previously involved in migration. Participants in the ranking exercise also stated that more than 60 per cent of households from the *nimnobitto* (poor class) are involved in migration, while pointing out that few people from the top-most and bottom wealth categories migrate. People from *uchhabitto* (rich) do not migrate because they do not need to; people from *hotobhaggo/hotodaridra* (ill-fated/ extreme poor) often cannot migrate because they cannot afford to.

### The Case Study Households

The table below summarises the age, sex, and household wealth rank, usual occupation engaged in while away from home and migration experience of the migrants from the 20 case study households:

**Table 13: Case Study Household Migrant Details**

HH Number	Initials and age of migrant	Wealth rank	Type of migrant work and years of migration experience
1	Mobin (24)	3	Carpenter, experience for: 7/8 years
2	Ahmed (23)	3	Carpenter, experience for 5 years
3	Smarajit (28)	2	Agricultural day labourer and rickshaw puller, experience for: 3 years,
4	Shuvra (50)	3	Agricultural day labourer; experience for 20 years
5	Deepak (32)	3	Rickshaw puller; experience for one year
6	Jamal (38)	3	Rickshaw puller; experience of 2 years
7	Samsed (36)	3	Rickshaw Puller; experience of 5 years
8	Rasheed (30)	3	Rickshaw puller, experience of 6-7 years
9	Ajj (35)	3	Rickshaw Puller, experience of 10 years
9	Alima (55) (female)	3	Maid servant and beggar, 25 years experience
10	Ramjan (40)	4	Beggar, begging since childhood.
11	Liki(40) (female)	4	Maid servant , 6 years experience
12	Samsuddin (35)	3	Agricultural day labourer, , 20 years experience
13	Ajinul (40)	3	Rickshaw Puller, 20 years experience
14	Utpal (40)	3	Rickshaw puller; experience of 15 years
15	Debashish (22)	3	Rickshaw puller and agricultural day labourer; experience of 5 years
15	Snehashish (16)	3	Rickshaw puller, experience of 2 years
16	Israil (40)	3	Carpenter; 20 years experience
17	Zubair (38)	3	Rickshaw puller, 10 years experience
18	Iqbal (44)	3	Rickshaw puller;10 years experience
19	Ansar (16)	3	Agricultural day labour and rickshaw puller; experience for 5/6 years
20	Salim (35)	3	Rickshaw puller; Exp: 20 yrs

In order to provide some comparison with present migrants' households, we also selected four ex-migrant and three non-migrant households to provide case studies.

**Table 14: Ex-migrants' Households**

HH Number	Initials of ex-migrant	Type of work	Wealth rank
21.	Rafique (ex-migrant) (Son present migrant)	Agricultural work	3
22	Umer (ex-migrant) (Son present migrant)	Agricultural work	1
23	Nazir (ex-migrant) (Son present migrant)	Agricultural labour	3
24	Hamidul (ex-migrant)	Carpenter	3

**Table 15: Non-migrant Households**

HH Number	Initials of Hh Head	Types of work	Wealth rank
25	Zulfique	Green vegetable seller	3
26	Suliman	Agricultural work	2
27	Rohan	Petty trader	3

Profiles of each of the case study households, as well as on the ex-migrant and non-migrant households, is provided in Annex 2.

At first glance it would appear that the majority of migrants are very similar, in the third or fourth wealth rank categories, and therefore poor. However, when one looks in detail at their background and their present lives it is apparent that some are better off than the others. Carpenters and some of the rickshaw pullers (like Utpal) seem to be able to make a reasonable living, while agricultural labourers like Deepak and housemaids (Liki and A) struggle to make a decent wage. Again, while agricultural labourers like Smarajit only migrate for a few months a year, the majority of rickshaw pullers are away most of the year. The families that were the worst off were those of Samsuddin, who was struggling to make up for losses that he had sustained due to river erosion and Ramjan, who was disadvantaged by poverty from birth and begs for a living. Ramjan's family prospects seemed to be improving because they have sons who are now earning and taking responsibility for their parents.

The ownership of land and the existence of supportive kin or richer patrons make a big difference to the migrant's family situation, as does the number of daughters a family has. Dowry has been a major source of impoverishment for some families. Education seems to make no difference at all. There is a big difference between Utpal's situation as a successful rickshaw puller and Zubair, who seems to be continually in financial difficulties, and spends long periods away from home pulling a rickshaw. Utpal left school after class IV (primary) while Zubair successfully passed his SSC and went on to try for his HSC.

The volume of migration has, according to the villagers, gone down in recent years because of an increase in the cultivation of vegetables and cash crops. However, members from 83 households migrate for work, so migration affects more than one-fifth of households in the village.

In the next chapter we explore the nature of migration and examine who migrates, when, and why.

## Chapter 3: Migration and Distant Labour Markets

In Bogra, where hundreds of people from Kurigram, Gaibandha and Nilphamari gathered to find a job, the employers pay a labourer hardly TK30 for eight hours' service. 'As poverty-stricken people are streaming to the urban areas, the wage rate remains low. The supply of agricultural labourers is much higher than the demand,' said Jamir Uddin, a well off farmer. The labourers who came to Bogra despite the low wages said the situation in Kurigram and Gaibandha districts is so bad that they have no option but to beg. 'Many of us came to Sariakandi but only a few have got jobs. The others have become beggars,' said Kamal Hossain (*The Daily Star*, 9 November 2004).

### Definition and Perceptions of Migration

The people of the village called temporary labour migration outside Sundarganj Upazila '*bidesh kora*' which means 'do as if abroad not go abroad'. They said if someone goes outside the country then they call it '*bidesh jawa*'. There were, however, no international migrants in the village.

The people of Badalpara village undertake temporary migration for four major reasons:

- To meet daily household expenses, educational costs etc.
- To make more substantial purchases, such as land, to bring about their economic improvement.
- To recoup losses due to crop damage due to natural calamities
- Young people may migrate to visit new places as well as earn some cash.

Older people from migrating and non-migrating households often seem to have a more conservative view of migration, preferring non-migration to migration. There is, however, acceptance of the fact that people would migrate to make a living. For example, an older man and father of three migrants, said:

It is mentioned in the holy religious book of the Hindu that if a person is free from any borrowings and if he does not migrate, then he is a very happy person, even if he eats poorly with vegetable and rice only (comment made during a group discussion).

He later contradicted himself and acknowledged the value of migration when he said: 'Sorrow comes along with laziness. People should work hard. So, if possible it is better to earn by migration.' This comment illustrates the ambivalence towards migration as a 'necessary evil', which is important to many people's livelihoods.

Better-off people in the village tend to have a negative attitude towards migration. According to them, dignity is eroded if you leave the village as a migrant labourer. Some people talked of migrants as being '*bideshi*' (foreigner). It was apparent that the better off in the village were concerned that it was detrimental to the image of the village to have so many migrant labourers. For example an old man and comparatively better-off person of the village, said:

Migration is bad, because one cannot keep his prestige intact, if he works as a labourer outside his village. Sometimes lower class people migrate under the compulsion of earning, and then it is tolerable and can be accepted. But those middle class persons, if they migrate, people do not like that and tell bad things about them everywhere, if not in front of them. Those who are poor

can migrate because of scarcity but even so they must keep their prestige (comment made during a group discussion).

Some non-migrants had a more damning view of migration. A young man from a better-off family who had never migrated said: '*Deshe thakur ar bideshe kuku*', meaning eminent in the village but a mere dog in the migration destination.

Even the people who do migrate, and needed it to support their livelihoods, seemed to have mixed feelings about migration. For example, Ansar, 16 years of age and a student, managed his educational expenses and the maintenance of his family through migration. He had been migrating for the last 6 years and earned an income pulling a rickshaw. He said:

On the one hand a migrant leaves his family behind and he faces a difficult situation at the destination, while on the other, from the income from migration he can support his family. So, migration has both good and bad sides.

Few felt that migration would lead to any dramatic improvements in socio-economic status but it was acknowledged that migration helped one take regular meals and improve the quality of one's house. Shuvra, who is 50 and started migration at the age of 10, gave some examples of the impact of migration. He said that one villager of Badalpara had constructed and repaired his house from the income from migration, pulling a rickshaw. He listed seven other men from the village who had improved their economic condition to some extent by the income from migration. However, he said that most of the migrants could not effect much improvement as migrants tended to remain idle, living off their migration earnings when they returned to the village. This was put down to the lack of employment opportunities in the village.

Israil said that those who had any useful skills did not migrate. He said that he does not like migration, arguing that nobody likes leaving their family. The family worries about the migrant because they are concerned about accidents on the way or what the migrant may do in another location. He gave the example of a man from the village, a carpenter, who met and married another girl in his migration destination, despite having a wife and son at home. The first wife is now worried about whether she will continue to get any support from her husband.

The people who did migrate said that migration was an essential part of their livelihood strategy. They said that they felt sad to leave their family behind in the village and also felt like outsiders at the destination. Mobin said, 'If one cannot maintain his household expenses by staying in the village, then one should migrate.' Mobin is a young carpenter who migrates for eight months of the year. Interestingly, Mobin has not stopped migrating even though he has made good money and now has savings in the bank. He wants to earn and save more so he can start his own business.

However, all the migrants said that they would stop migrating as soon as they could secure a regular source of income in the village. Zubair, who maintains his livelihood by pulling a rickshaw in Feni said: 'Nobody willingly wants to migrate. One would prefer to live with family and relatives, if one becomes economically solvent. Due to scarcity of money, one has to migrate.'

Given the negative opinions about migration it is not surprising that we found some people hiding the fact that they had migrated. Iqbal, who is 44 years old who has been migrating for 25 years said:

Many young men migrate wearing good clothes and if met in the bus on the way, they say that they are going to visit the place. But after reaching the destination, they are found in the rickshaw garage. They pull the rickshaw at the destination. Many of them are students and they migrate in order to earn enough to meet their educational expenses.

Once, in a group discussion on the attitude of the villagers towards migration and migrants, having listened to what people were saying, one ex-migrant, known to be a calm, quiet and hard working person became very agitated. He said that once he was a very poor man but he had improved his economic condition through migration. Now he is the owner of land and property and he cultivates his own land. He said, 'When I had a financial crisis, no one came to help me, no one gave me a bowl of rice. So what is the problem if I go to pull a rickshaw!' He said that he has now become economically solvent through migration. He saved money for starting his own business from income from migration (he hoped to open a furniture store in a nearby town). He felt that some people were being hypocritical, criticising migrants.

### Who Migrates?

The table below shows that from the Hotobhaggo/Hotodaridra (*ill-fated/ extreme poor*) wealth category only nine (15 percent) of the households have migrants at the present time, while about 136 households (46 percent) are from Nimnobitto (*poor class*). During the wealth ranking exercise, those in the Hotobhaggo/Hotodaridra (*ill-fated/ extreme poor*) wealth category said they did not migrate because they did not have the wherewithal to migrate. These are mostly female-headed households which do not have an adult male member to migrate, and nor do they have the ability to bear the cost of migration. For some households, the cost of the fare to the migration destination and the worry of leaving the family at home are also important deterrents.

**Table 16: Wealth Rank and Migration Status**

Wealth Category	Migrating status (Number of households)			
	Presently migrating	Previously migration	Never migrating	Total
<i>Uchhabitto</i> (Rich)	1	1	14	16
<i>Madhabitto</i> (Middle class)	7	14	52	73
<i>Nimnobitto</i> (Poor class)	136	68	91	295
<i>Hotobhaggo/Hotodaridra</i> (ill-fated/ extreme poor)	9	5	46	60
Total	153	88	203	444

Note: Households with both present and previous migrants have been considered as presently migrating households

As noted before, very few households in the village have female migrants; the majority of the migrants are men aged between 20 and 40 years.

### Types of Migration

Temporary labour migration can be classified on the basis of occupation and destination, as well as by the reason for migrating.

### *By Occupation*

In Badalpara village people migrate mainly for three types of work at destination, as rickshaw pullers, agricultural workers and carpenters, which can be at different levels: semi-skilled, unskilled and skilled work.

Salim, a Rickshaw Puller: Salim is a rickshaw puller and an agricultural labour migrant. He goes to Dhaka, Feni, Rangpur, Rajshahi and Sylhet for rickshaw pulling, and has been doing this for nine years now. Salim migrates in a group with two to four others. According to him, there are many problems in the destination area such as hijacking (when someone takes over your rickshaw forcibly), illness etc. Travelling in a group is helpful as the group members can support or help each other.

Salim mainly goes to Dhaka, pulling a rickshaw in Mouchack, Gulshan, Khilgaon and Badda. He stays in Badda area near his rickshaw garage. As he has been migrating to this area for many years now, he knows the employers in the area and has no problem securing a job. He has to pay 50 taka per day to his employer for rickshaw pulling. He manages to save about 3000 taka in 16 days, after which he returns home. He rests and recoups his energy at home, leaving again as soon as his money has run out.

Yosef<sup>12</sup>, an Agricultural Labourer: Yosef is an agricultural labourer who lives in Badalpara village. He is 28, is married and has a child. He lives in his father-in-laws' house with his family. Yosef has no land. To make ends meet, he migrates to Dhaka, Bogra, Feni and Comilla.

Yosef was a rickshaw-puller before becoming an agricultural labourer, though now he only does agricultural labour. There are two agricultural seasons in Badalpara village -- aman and 'scheme'<sup>13</sup> season (IRRI season). For this season, Yosef works in Badalpara. When there is no work in the village, he migrates to another destination.

According to Yosef, wage depends on distance to the agricultural land. In Bogra the wage is low if the land is near the landowner's house. In contrast if the land is far from the owner's house, then the wage is high. Yosef works on a contract basis. There are 3-5 labourers engaged in the work and they are paid for one bigha land per day. Their wages include a free meal and some money (350 taka for near land and 500 taka for far land from home). The wage rate is much lower for planting (about 100 to 150 taka). In Comilla it is 80 to 110 taka per day, and is paid on a daily basis.

Israil, a Carpenter: Israil is a 40-year-old carpenter who lives in Badalpara village. He is married with two children. His parents also live with him. Israil is landless. He started to work as a carpenter when he was 22 years old, and is considered an expert in making all kinds of furniture.

Israil goes to Dinajpur, Bogra and Dhaka to work as carpenter. However he migrates more to Dinajpur than other districts. Dinajpur is not so far from his home district and it costs only 50 taka to travel there by bus. Sometimes he even cycles there.

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<sup>12</sup> Yosef's household is not a case study household. We gathered this information from him in the course of identifying our case study households.

<sup>13</sup> The 'scheme' season is known as such because this is when people cultivate paddy under one particular deep tubewell for a particular command area.

He migrates for five or six months in a year. Generally he migrates in January-February (Bengali month 'Poush and Magh') and April to June (Baishakh, Jaistha and Ashar) after the harvest, as this is the time people have some money and are looking to buy furniture and other assets.

Israil has never had a problem finding a job in the destination. Employers contact carpenters like Israil using their mobile phones (which are now widely available in Bangladesh). Unlike in the village where he gets paid a daily wage, in the town he secures a lump sum payment, much higher than his daily earnings in his village would be. However, Israil's financial condition has not improved much after going to 'bidesh' as he is the only earner in his family. He finds it difficult to maintain the family and meet the educational costs of his children. He asked, '*duita haat, pachta mukh, kemne hobe?*' ('How it is possible to maintain a five-member family with the income from a single pair of hands?')

#### *By Destination*

The destination is influenced by the type of work that people do. For rickshaw-pulling, people migrate to cities (rural-urban migration), agricultural labourers migrate to rural areas of other districts (rural-rural migration). And carpenters, particularly from this village, migrate to peri-urban areas of cities (areas where furniture shops are found) or small towns.

Both the level of skill and destination are closely linked to the reasons why someone migrates. A person with few marketable skills in desperate need of money because of some crisis may have little choice in terms of the type of work or destination.

#### *By Reason*

Temporary labour migration is a necessity for many poor people. Zubair, for example, is a rickshaw puller who migrates for 10 months in a year to Feni. He has to be away that long because he has to support his family. He has no alternative. However, as will be apparent from the brief stories of each case study household given in Annex 2, not everyone who migrates does so because of abject poverty. There are some people who migrate to improve their economic situation. Mobin, for example, has been a head carpenter for the last five years. He has all the necessary equipment and three to four carpenters who work under him. He migrates because he can get a good income at certain times of the year because of the demand for someone with his skill. He has accumulated assets like land and cows and managed savings from his migratory income with formal and informal financial institutions. He plans to start his own business, which is why he continues to migrate to raise the capital he needs.

Some people migrate not in response to a crisis but because they can earn more outside the village than in it. For example, Utpal migrates to Feni for rickshaw pulling. Previously, he used to work in a shop selling shallow tube wells. However, his wages were too low and he could not maintain his family with that wage as well as meet the educational expenses of his children. So he decided to migrate to earn more, which he did successfully.

However, people do migrate from the village to cope with crises, be they natural disasters, health-related or other. For example, in April 2005, a severe hailstorm struck Badalpara village and many farmers lost their crops. Smarajit had transplanted aman rice seedlings and on the land in front of his homestead area, he cultivated vegetables. His entire crop was lost due to the hailstorm. In order to cope with the financial loss, Smarajit migrated and worked first as an

agricultural labourer and then pulled a rickshaw in Dhaka.<sup>14</sup> Samsed also started to migrate in response to a natural disaster. In 2000 he cultivated onion, chilli and rice on a sharecropped basis but a hailstorm damaged all the crops. Samsed used to run a business selling his vegetables, which incurred heavy losses as a consequence. He was forced to abandon the business and started to migrate and pull a rickshaw.

In Badalpara village a significant number of people have become landless as a consequence of river erosion. Eleven of our case study households had been victims of serious river erosion; indeed, it was striking that few people we spoke to in the village had *not* been affected in some way. People who lose their cultivateable land become landless wage labourers and, at least initially, take shelter in relative's or friend's houses. For example, Israil has already experienced the impact of river erosion eight times. His father was a farmer and had had eight bigha of land (10,680 sq metres or nearly three acres). Israil was the only son and until the age of 20 he was engaged in farming with his father. Now he does not have even a homestead plot and he lived for much of 2005 in a house on his brother-in-law's land before building a small house on a friend's land. All of his cultivatable land had gone under river water. In order to survive without land Israil learnt carpentry.

Another reason for migration is the pressure to repay loans. Ajj migrated to Feni so he could manage the cash needed to repay a loan 11,000 taka (£84, a large sum for a poor household). The loan had been taken when he had returned from Feni because he was suffering from jaundice and other ailments. When he was a little better he could not follow the doctor's advice to rest because the family had no money, and the earnings of his mother-in-law Alima could not cover their debts.

In the Bengali months of Ashwin-Karti there is no work in the village or the surrounding area, and this is the period when the majority of people migrate to find work. Jamal, for instance, purchased a bag of rice with an advance payment of 100 taka, a small percentage of the cost. Then he found he could not pay the balance. During this '*monga*' period he could not get a loan either, so he had to migrate to Dhaka to make some money.

Some people migrate in the hope of getting a better wage and a more secure position. For example, Smarajit had to go to Dhaka several times by train to lobby for a position in a textile mill. He even paid 10,000 taka (£76) as a bribe, but still failed to secure the job. Another migrant, Zubair, went to Dhaka to try and get work in a garments fact in frustration after he had been unsuccessful in his HSC examination. Unfortunately for him the factory that he joined was in crisis, the partners were in dispute. The factory closed after only 20 days of his joining, and Zubair returned to the village. When he did not get a job in the village he decided to go to Feni and started rickshaw pulling.

There are a few young people who began to migrate to cover their educational costs. Ansar is one such example. Ansar had earned small amounts of money from an early age in order to help to cover the cost of attending school but when he was in class VI, his father died the family's economic condition deteriorated. He became responsible for looking after his mother and younger sister when his older brother left home. He went to Dhaka and got a job in an iron rod company. But after 15 days of work he left the job to learn to pull a rickshaw. Ansar stayed about 28 days in Dhaka and then returned to the village and restarted his schooling. With the

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<sup>14</sup> Gallagher (1992: 6) points out that combining rickshaw pulling with seasonal work in other fields is a long established livelihood strategy.

help of the income from migration Ansar could continue his education and sustain the family expenditure.

There were also a few women who started to migrate due to poverty either when they were separated from their husbands or widowed. Alima, for instance, was the second wife of her husband. Her co-wife always used to blame and abuse her. After four years of conjugal life, Alima could not tolerate the situation any more and left her husband. She came back to her parents' home in Sundarganj with her one-year-old daughter and started to work as a housemaid, but the income was not enough. Then she decided to migrate. She was introduced to a woman who had experience of migration to Feni, and Alima began to migrate with her.

### **Mechanisms and Processes of Migration**

People tend to migrate to places they have some information on from previous migrants. Thus, there are many migrants in Badalpara village who go to Feni, Dhaka, Bogra, Rangpur and Dinajpur to work as rickshaw pullers, agricultural workers and carpenters, following in the footsteps of others who have gone there before them.

We found that Utpal, who migrates to Feni as rickshaw puller, had encouraged a number of people to migrate there and we found that as a result there was a group of men who travelled together to Feni regularly, a distance of 450 km, in order to work as rickshaw pullers. We also found a few female migrants who started to migrate to Feni to work as housemaids with the help of A, for example.

#### *Preparing to Leave Home*

During our stay in Badalpara we witnessed many migrants preparing for their time away from home. When the time came for migrants to leave their families they were often faced not only with ensuring that they left food behind but also had to factor in ongoing problems which some times delayed their travel. When there was no work to be had in the village, such crises put the migrant in a dilemma -- if they did not leave they could not earn money but if they left the crisis could get worse.

In October 2005 Iqbal was at home. He had planned to go to Feni for rickshaw pulling but his daughter-in-law was sick and pregnant and his son was away so Iqbal needed to be there in case she had to be taken to hospital.

The sickness of the migrant him or herself also posed considerable problems since their jobs required physical strength and their health and well-being were essential to their ability to earn.

In September 2005 Salim could not go to Dhaka. Some of his group had already migrated and he had prepared to go but he could not leave on account of the pain in his legs, developed due to pulling the rickshaw. Occasionally he felt pain in his chest as well. Only four to five months ago, his legs were in a very serious condition and he had to visit the doctor in Sundarganj for an injection in his legs that provided some temporary relief.

Salim had to stay put in the village for two and a half months until he was well enough to pull the rickshaw in Dhaka again.

### *The Journey Itself*

Normally migrants start their journey early in the morning or at 4 pm in the afternoon. The bus 'Anamika' leaves for Dhaka in the morning and for Feni and Chittagong in the afternoon. A rickshaw puller who works in Dhaka told us that he travels by bus to Dhaka either on the daytime bus or the night bus for a fare of 120 taka (£1). If he starts from the village in the morning, he can reach Dhaka at 1700 hrs, a distance of about 350 km. If he starts in the evening, he reaches Dhaka early the next morning. After resting a day, he then starts work. The bus fare is 50 taka for passengers who stand all the way; these are people who are very short of money. Previously the bus drivers used to take passengers on the roof of the bus. However in 2005, due to an increasing number of accidents, this practice was stopped. There are four buses that travel up to Chittagong and eight buses that travel to Dhaka from Sundarganj. Migrants said that the crush of passengers is more on the Dhaka-bound bus service compared to the Chittagong-bound one, because in this bus service fewer 'mofiz' are taken. 'Mofiz' refers to those who travel standing. Sometimes passengers share seats to reduce costs. The bus fare for a seat is 120 taka if the ticket is bought at the ticket counter. If bought on the bus, a ticket costs 100 taka per seat, but there is no guarantee that any seats will be left.

Samsuddin, an agricultural labourer, migrates in a group from the village. His transport cost to Bogra is 50 to 60 taka. Normally he travels to Bogra standing or on the roof of the bus (when that is allowed). He gets a seat on his return as he then has sufficient money with him. He also pays for a seat if he is going further afield, to Comilla or Feni. Jamal who goes to Dhaka to pull a rickshaw, sometimes travels in a group and sometimes alone. He prefers to buy a seat on the bus, but often has to travel standing due to a shortage of money.

Sometimes people travel by bus on credit, and this is usually true of groups. Before travelling, the migrants contact the bus contractor and arrange to travel on credit, paying the full price upon reaching the destination when the migrant workers borrow the money from their employer or mess owner.

Although the practice of sitting on the roof of the bus is said to have decreased (because of moves by bus operators and the police to stop it), some extremely poor people continue to travel on the roof of the bus when they can. For example, Ramjan goes to Dinajpur, Rangpur and Bonarpara to beg, and he usually travels to Rangpur on the roof of the bus, despite a previous experience of sustaining cuts on his face from a low-hanging bamboo tree. He prefers to travel that way because the fare to Dinajpur on the roof is 20 to 25 taka compared to 35 taka for travelling inside the bus.

The length and experience of migration as well as its frequency varies from person to person. From our case study households it was observed that some have been migrating for many years while others have been migrating for only two or three years. Samsuddin, an agricultural day labourer, started migrating for work 20 years ago; Utpal, a migrant rickshaw puller, more than 14 years ago. On the other hand, Smarajit started migration only three years ago, and he migrates only twice a year, to stay for only a month at the destination. Mobin, a carpenter, started migration eight years ago, and stays at the destination for nine months. Some women too have long experience of migration. H, for instance, has been migrating for 15 years. She migrates for six months in a year. Initially she migrated to Chittagong, where she worked as maidservant for six months and then came back to the village. Then she migrated to Feni along with A, mother-in-law of Ajij, again to work as a maidservant. Once she even migrated to

Khilkhet area of Dhaka, where she dug earth for money. At present, she travels mainly to Feni as a housemaid.

The migrants who worked as rickshaw pullers, agricultural workers and carpenters all said that they preferred to travel in a group if they could. The three women migrants, for instance, tried to travel together or with other workers when they went to Feni for domestic work, for there is safety in numbers and security in travelling with people you know. The safety of the group became more even more important towards the end of the study period when migrant workers from the village began to experience increased political harassment as they travelled because of where they came from -- a place known to be an opposition stronghold.

Migrants who are used to travelling find different ways of coping with the problems they face. Rasheed, for example, told us that most of the time he travelled to Dhaka by the 'Anamika' bus service. He told us how once when he was travelling from Sundarganj to Dhaka by that bus service, though he had purchased a ticket from Sundarganj and occupied a seat, at the very next stop the conductor told him to leave the seat and travel the rest of the way standing. Rasheed simply got off the bus and returned to Sundarganj by another local service run by the same owner. He refused to pay the fare and put in a complaint to the owner of the bus service. Next day he was able to travel by the same bus without a problem.

We travelled with migrants on some of their journeys and experienced how crowded and noisy the buses were. There was always much shouting and pushing as passengers bargained with the bus contractor for seats. There were some brokers at the bus stand who bargained for a good fare on behalf of the passengers for a small fee. These brokers also received a commission from the bus contractor if they managed to get enough passengers to fill the bus. The rough nature of the bus terminal and the arrangements on the vehicle favoured the strong and young. The story told below, from one of our journeys, illustrates this fact:

Once we saw an old man getting into the bus we were travelling on with a little bag. He was about seventy or eighty years old. The old man paid 230 taka so he could get a seat. But once on the bus, the old man found he had no seat. The bus helper told him to sit on the engine. A little later, the bus helper ordered the old man to leave the engine and asked him to squeeze into a narrow space behind the driver's seat. When he could not manoeuvre himself into this space, the driver, helper and others on the bus laughed at him. It was an awful thing to witness. We were moved from our seats too and told to sit on the engine so we managed to talk to the old man. He was going to Chittagong to beg, which was how he sustained himself and his wife. They lived in the village, and had sons there too, but they did not take care of them.

Even relatively young, strong, male migrants like Samsuddin occasionally run into problems. He told us how once when he was returning from Bogra he lost 600 taka to a pickpocket. Pickpockets resort to different means to steal from passengers, including offering betel leaf mixed with medicines or placing a handkerchief mixed with 'medicine' under a passenger's nose, which rendered them unconscious. Clearly, travelling with others helped guard against such problems.

Road travel is not only hazardous because of the crowds and the treatment on the bus; there is also the constant danger of road accidents, which sadly are quite frequent given the speed many vehicles travel at and the behaviour of other traffic on the road. The newspapers often report road and waterway mishaps that involve migrant workers. Two such newspaper stories, published during our study, were as follows:

'Twenty-one people died and four others were injured in road accidents in Tangail. The accident occurred on the Dhaka-North Bengal highway at Askekpur under Sadar upazila when a Gaibandha-bound fertilizer-laden truck from Chittagong skidded off the road and fell into a ditch. At least 28-day labourers were travelling by the truck. 21 of them died on the spot and four others were injured. They were returning to their homes in Gaibandha' (25/12/2004, *The Daily Star*).

'The air of Habibpur in Charghat upazila is thick with grief as seven youths from this village are missing since the Jamuna launch sinking near Arichaghat in Manikganj. Nine peasants left the village in search of jobs during the harvest. But only two of them survived the launch disaster and returned home' (21/05/2005, *The Daily Star*).

Iqbal claimed that after his 20 years of migration he now tried to stay at his destination for an extended period, avoiding frequent trips home, because of his fear of accidents. Even if they had not suffered themselves, all the migrants knew of someone who had been in an accident.

Once Salim, while travelling to Dhaka by bus, had an accident near Shirajganj. Several persons with him died. He was injured and was taken to hospital for treatment. After staying in the hospital for a few days without any care or food, he decided to go to Dhaka. He did not have any money with him, so he had to beg for the fare. It was only from Dhaka that he managed to call his family and inform them of the accident, using a mobile phone.

#### *At the Destination*

Experienced migrants like Utpal, who travel regularly to one particular place, can establish a safe and secure place that they can stay in while they are away from home. Some long-term migrants spend more time away than at home, so comfort at their destination is essential to their well-being. Utpal, for instance, stays with a Hindu family in Feni. He takes all three meals with the family, which costs him 40 taka per day.

Rasheed, another rickshaw puller, is not so fortunate:

Rasheed migrates to Dhaka two or three times in a year and each time he stays for 15 to 20 days. In Dhaka, he lives in the rickshaw owner's garage. He also migrates to Feni sometimes, when he resides in the mess. Rasheed says that illiterate people prefer to go to Feni over Dhaka, as they find the road network in Dhaka confusing. He himself has problems of food and lodging in both Dhaka and Feni. In Feni they often have to stay eight persons to a bed for five. In addition, he has to carry his own bedding and mosquito net.

Samsuddin commented that a migrant cannot expect to live away as he would at home and told us that there are often problems for agricultural workers like spending nights on the veranda of other people's houses without bedding or mosquito net. Samsuddin carries his bedding with him when he migrates for agricultural work.

Samsuddin talked about the meals he got while he was away: in Bogra, the farmer offers three meals a day. However, in Comilla, the farmer offers only two breakfast and dinner. In Bogra for breakfast they get rice with potato smash or fish curry; small fish for lunch, and fish and vegetables for dinner. When one recalls what many migrant families live on while the men are away, such meals sound like a feast.

The main sources of support for migrants in their place of work are other migrants and the mess owner or farmer they stay with. Sometimes the mess owner, when he is well known to the migrant, also provides a safe place for earnings to be stored until they go home or send the money home with someone else. Even Ramjan, who migrates to beg, tries to find someone to stay with he can trust. And Alima and Liki both have safe places to stay in Feni -- in houses where they do some domestic work and where they are well known.

Keeping up a good relationship with the employer at the destination also makes it easy to get a job in the future. When relationships are good, employers inform migrants about job availability over the mobile phone, as was the case with Zubair, discussed above. And during the peak seasons for agricultural work or carpentry (this is after the harvest when people have cash for new furniture or house building) employers sometimes come to the village to collect potential workers.

Migrant carpenters always try to keep a link with their customers. When a carpenter works with a customer, he leaves a contact mobile telephone number with him, so that next time the customer can contact him through one of the mobile phones in the village. Rickshaw pullers and agricultural labourers from the village who migrate also inform the village carpenters about opportunities for carpentry work.

Sickness While Away from Home: Staying away from home in places where it is hard to get good water or hygienically cooked food, as well as the strain of hard work pulling a rickshaw, cleaning houses or digging fields, can place a considerable strain on the migrant's body. There is also evidence that the crowded and poor living and working conditions of workers such as rickshaw pullers leaves them prey to gastrointestinal illness, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases, while long absences from home make them likely to access commercial sex workers and acquire and spread sexually transmitted infections (Carrin *et al.* 1999; Begum and Sen 2004).

Each migrant had some story to tell of illness or injury that they encountered while away. In most cases, if they could travel, they came home to be cared for because staying away not only meant that care was limited but it also constituted a cost they could not immediately recoup.

Police Harassment: Rather than being a source of support for migrants, the police are often a source of insecurity. Police may stop rickshaw pullers to check their documents, and even if they produce the correct papers claim that they are wrong, so that they can claim some bribe in return for releasing the rickshaw and the puller. The police know that migrant workers are in a vulnerable position, renting their vehicles on a daily basis. The loss of the vehicle, as well as earning time, can be catastrophic for them, so they are likely to pay a bribe.

The situation is worse in times of political turmoil, as it was in December 2005. Ajj said that because of unrest and bombings throughout the country the police were on high alert and had taken several miscreants into custody at Feni. He said that the police and the Rapid Action Battalion were searching rickshaw pullers and accusing them of being miscreants. A bomb was found under the seat of a rickshaw so police were searching all rickshaws and harassing rickshaw pullers. Police also searched Ajj. Under these circumstances Ajj felt it was too unsafe to stay and try to work so he returned home.<sup>15</sup>

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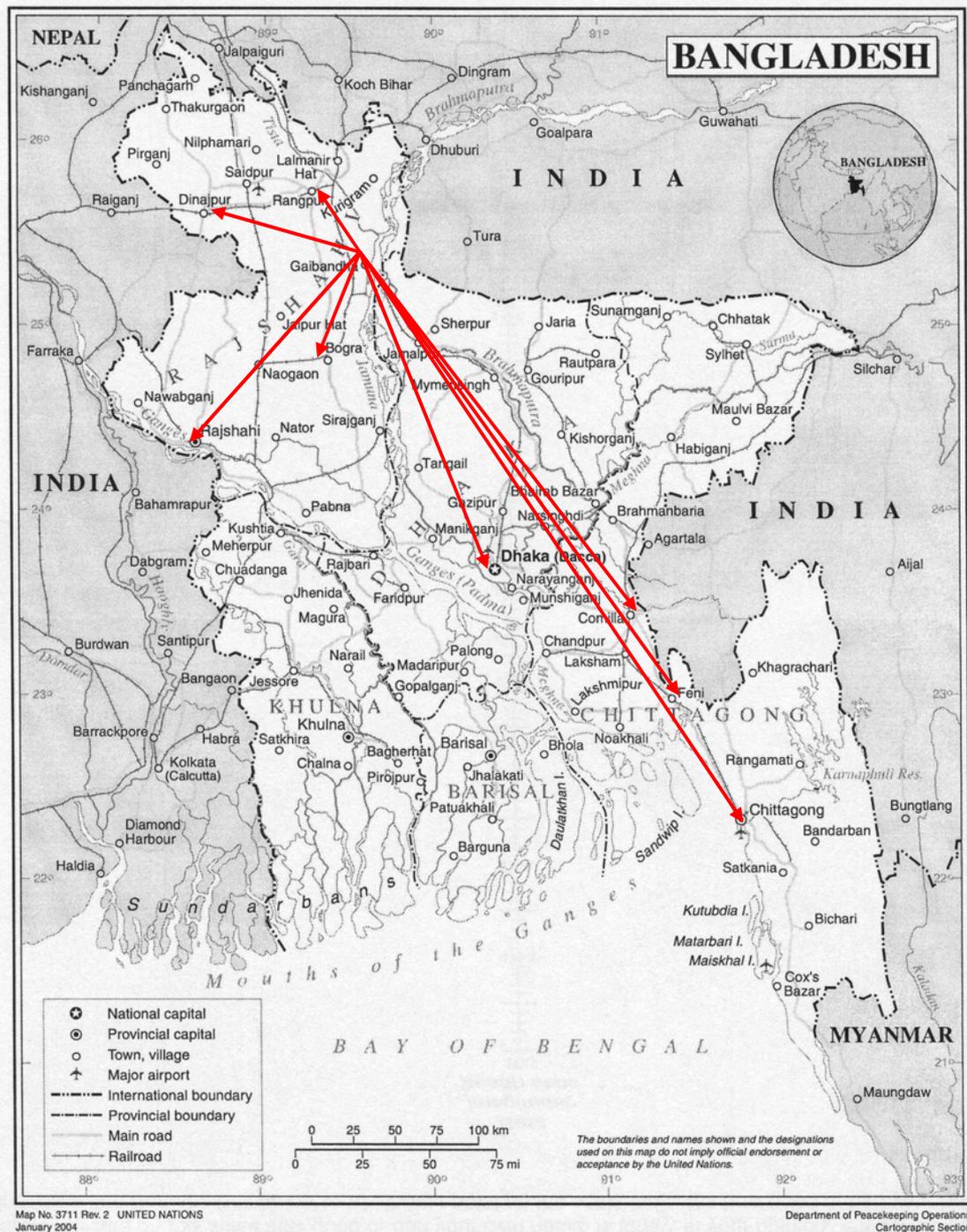
<sup>15</sup> Sadly this situation of insecurity in the country has continued throughout 2006. Times of political uncertainty, blockades and hartals (strikes) make working life very difficult for everyone, but particularly for migrant workers.

People from different occupational groups migrate to different areas of Bangladesh. Agricultural workers migrate to Bogra, Comilla, Dinajpur and Feni; rickshaw pullers to Dhaka, Feni and Rangpur. Most of the carpenters migrate to different areas of Dinajpur district and some migrate to Dhaka. The migrants travel largely by bus or train. Indeed, a number of new bus services have been started because of the good niche for transporting migrants. Buses named 'Anamika', 'Arnab', 'Sundar Paribahan' leave for Dhaka, Feni, Chittagonj, Bogra and Comilla.

*A group of migrants going to catch the afternoon bus*



**Map 4: Main Work Destinations of Temporary Migrants**



Note: The main destinations are marked with the arrows.

People who are regular migrants tend to take a loan before migrating. Indeed, many migrants are very dependent on loans. The expectation of income from migration helps them secure a loan for household expenses when their previous migratory earnings are exhausted. Some people seem to put off migrating for as long as they can, living on credit. People borrow from different NGOs or *bazaar samities*. They also borrow from other villagers, often on 15-20 percent interest per month. Sometimes villagers prefer to be given the interest in kind -- if one takes a loan of 500 taka, for example, one has to repay with one maund (37 kilograms) of paddy as interest.

## Factors Determining the Migration Destination

People from different occupational categories migrate to different areas as mentioned above. In Badalpara village people who migrate for pulling rickshaws mostly go to Feni, Dhaka and Rangpur. Most of these people prefer Feni to live in and to pull a rickshaw. They said they faced many problems in Dhaka including robbery, water shortage and air pollution. We heard stories of rickshaw hijackers, in the guise of police, or cheats who, claiming to change their notes to smaller denominations, then vanished with the money.

Here are some examples of the choices people make on their destination. Deepak migrates for rickshaw pulling. Initially he migrated to Dhaka for rickshaw pulling, but when he was once cheated and his rickshaw stolen, he found himself faced with a fine of 1,000 taka from the owner of the rickshaw garage. Deepak paid 500 taka from his earnings and is yet to return to Dhaka to pay the balance. Meanwhile, he has started migrating to Feni.

For about 12 years, Salim worked as an agricultural labourer in Dinajpur district. When he came back home his younger brother (who works as rickshaw puller in Dhaka) suggested he go with him to Dhaka for rickshaw pulling rather than agricultural work, and Salim has been pulling rickshaws in Dhaka ever since.

Two brothers were encouraged by Utpal to work in Feni. Once they went to Chittagong along with Utpal and some others intending to work in a ship company but there they found that the person who had brought them had sold them as bonded labour. After a few days they escaped, following which Utpal brought them to Feni. They worked in Feni for five days as rickshaw pullers. Since then for the last five years, both the brothers have been migrating to Feni for rickshaw pulling. Another migrant, Zubair, pulls a rickshaw both in Dhaka and Feni, but says he prefers Feni during the summer, as the weather here Feni is not as hot and humid as in Dhaka.

The research team went to Feni to see where the migrant rickshaw pullers from Badalpara work as well as to observe their working and living conditions. In addition to the attraction of the weather, Feni is a smaller town than Dhaka and is not very crowded. In Dhaka, although the income can be good, there are problems of food and lodging. The rickshaw pullers said that they fell sick less often in Feni. Dysentery and jaundice are common in Dhaka because there are problems with toilets and drinking water. In Dhaka the water pipe line at the place where they tend to stay remains closed on Friday after noon, so they cannot bathe despite the hot weather. In Feni, on the other hand, there are plenty of ponds where they can easily take a dip. The income in Feni is not too bad either. The relatives of many residents of Feni have migrated to Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and the USA, and the remittances from family have made those in Feni able to afford rickshaws rather than walk. The minimum rickshaw fare is 3 taka and rickshaw pullers here are able to make a good living.

Agricultural workers migrate to Bogra, Comilla, Dinajpur and Feni. Generally they migrate twice a year -- during transplanting and harvesting. We observed that most people go to Bogra and Comilla. Samsuddin, for instance, has been migrating for 20 years and usually goes to Bogra. He has also migrated to Comilla. However, according to him not only are the transport costs higher to Comilla and Feni, it is also more expensive to stay there. Meals have to be purchased at the migrant's own cost and room rent is about 60 taka per month. On the other hand in Bogra all costs including food and lodging are borne by the farmers the migrants work for. The

cost of transport to Bogra is only 40 to 50 taka, while the transport cost to Feni is about 200 taka.

As noted above many of the carpenters go to Dinajpur where people from Badalpara village are well known or to Dhaka where they have contacts.

### **Factors Determining Nature of Migrant Employment**

The work a person does in the village does not necessarily determine what they do when they migrate. Most of the rickshaw pullers do agricultural labour when they are at home; they do not pull rickshaws in the village because there is little demand for it and the earnings are low (they would also have to hire a rickshaw to do this). Smarajit, for example, works as an agricultural worker in the village but when he migrates to Dhaka once or twice a year, he pulls a rickshaw to earn a living.

Similarly another migrant from Badalpara village, Deepak, used to work on his father's land until he turned 18, when he started driving a power tiller for his uncle, for which he got paid 160 taka per bigha. Out of this, he gave 140 taka to his uncle and kept 20 for himself. In this way, his daily earnings varied between 200 and 500 taka depending on how much land he managed to work. He continued this work for two years. After he moved away from his father, Deepak worked as a day labourer on others' land. Once he went to Bogra along with other villagers to harvest paddy. He stayed there for 15-20 days and returned to his village, but did not migrate again for agricultural work. He has since been migrating to Feni as a rickshaw puller. When he is back in the village he cultivates land on a share-cropped basis and works as a day labourer on others' land. Deepak migrates for three months in a year. The rest of the time he works in the village. When he comes back from Feni Deepak has a lot of work waiting to be done, including harvesting and threshing paddy.

The women who migrate to be housemaids seldom work in other people's houses when they are in the village. For example, Liki is the main earner of her family. She migrates for six months in a year to work as a housemaid in Feni. While she remains in the village she works in a rice-husking mill at nearby, boiling, drying and cleaning paddy, earning 15 to 20 taka per day and sometimes one or two kilos of rice and two kilos of broken rice. Her work depends on the weather. On sunny days she gets work because the rice can dry in the sun. However, when there is rain, she does not get work. The day when she does not get any work in the mill, she may help someone in their home. For such kinds of part-time house works, she gets 5 taka and a plate of rice per day. If she gets three kilos of rice from the rice mill, she sells two kilos retaining the rest for herself, her husband and granddaughter. When there is no work in the husking mill, then she migrates to Feni.

Another woman migrant Alima also goes to Feni on a regular basis. There she begs and sometimes works as a housemaid. Even in the village she is sometimes forced to beg; at other times she sells nuts to school children so she can get some money.

The carpenters tend to follow their profession whether at home or away. We had three carpenters among our case study households: Israil, Mobin, and Ahmed. Once Ahmed had to work as a rickshaw puller in Feni because he could not get the work he wanted. This was five years ago when Ahmed went to Feni intending to work in carpentry. At the time he did not know any carpenters in Feni and was not acquainted with any furniture shops. So he decided to pull

a rickshaw with Utpal. Then Ahmed started migrating to Dhaka to work in carpentry with a friend in Badalpara village. The first time Ahmed stayed for 21 days in Dhaka and came back to his village with 1200 taka, which he was pleased about. While back in the village he works as a carpenter in nearby Sundarganj. If there is no work in Sundarganj, he works as an agricultural labourer.

It was found from the study data that many people have experience of different types of work and many have had a number of different jobs. Indeed they were obliged to shift their job as the situation demanded, be it the loss of their business or due to natural disaster. Utpal, for instance, has experience of a lot of different kinds of work. Twentyfive years ago he was a driver of shallow tube well engine. He received training for shallow engine repair at Gaibandha and worked as a mechanic for six years. While he worked as a mechanic he developed a skin problem and the doctor suggested that he quit the job. He then began selling shallow tube well parts in a shop owned by his previous employer but the salary was meagre so he did not do that for long. He left the job to sell rice in the nearby Mirganj market, but he made a loss and found himself in debt. Finding no other alternatives, Utpal decided to migrate, which is when he went to Feni and started to pull a rickshaw. When Utpal stays at the village he is not idle, he works on others' land as a day labourer.

In the same way Jamal, another migrant from the village has also gained experience of different types of work. He cultivates land on a sharecropped basis and works as an agricultural day labourer on others' land. Jamal also migrates to pull a rickshaw in Dhaka. Jamal started migration when he was 15 years old, first as a woodcutter. He used to migrate to Dinajpur, Panchagarh and Thakurgaon. He then stopped migration and started selling wood. After six years, when his business was making a loss and he fell into debt, he contacted a friend in a nearby ward of the same village and migrated with him to Dhaka. He has been pulling a rickshaw for two years now.

Samsed, a migrant rickshaw puller was forced to shift his job due to a natural disaster. He was a petty trader and had a retail business in vegetables. He also cultivated land on a share cropping basis. In 2000 his cropland was damaged by a hailstorm. Then his business collapsed and he fell into serious debt. That is when he began migrating to Dhaka as a rickshaw puller. When he is back in the village he works as an agricultural labourer.

Shuvra works as an agricultural day labourer in the village and also migrates for the same work. However, he also earns money as part of a group of singers at religious festivals. During the festival season, he works in the daytime on the fields, and sings through the night, for which he gets paid about 50 taka, which augments his income for household essentials.

Debashish, a young migrant, is involved in different types of work. Sometimes he migrates to pull a rickshaw and sometimes as an agricultural worker. In the village he works on his father's land as well as on others' land as a day labourer. He used to run a small business, selling sweets, *chanachur* (bombay mix), pickles, and other snacks in front of a school and in the market place of Sundarganj upazila. His mother prepared the pickles. Debashish continued this business for two years. However, he realized that the returns in this business were very low. Moreover, he did not like the business much. So he took up a job in a bedding shop in nearby Mirganj *bazaar* through some contacts in the village. Here he made mattresses, quilts and pillows, working from 0800 hrs in the morning until ten at night, for a 20-taka wage per day. As he learned the job, his wage increased to 50 taka per day. Moreover, if he would work over time, he could get more than 40 taka extra per day, all of which he would hand over to his father for the family's expenditure.

## **The Timing of the Migration**

In Badalpara village men migrate for three types of work at destination -- as rickshaw pullers, agricultural wage labourers and carpenters. During a group discussion with representatives from the three occupational groups we established that most of the rickshaw pullers migrate during the months of Srabon (July-August), Bhadra (August-September) and Chaitra (March-April), whereas most of the agricultural labourers migrate during the months of Jaistha (May-June), Srabon (July-August), Agrahayan (November-December) and Magh (January-February) and most of the carpenters migrate during the months of Agrahayan (November-December), Poush (December-January) and Magh (January-February).

In the months of Baisakh (April-May) and Jaistha (May-June), a large number of agricultural labourers migrate, fewer number of rickshaw pullers migrate and carpenters do not migrate at all -- this is because it is harvest time and the carpenters' clients are busy harvesting and they do not have money to spend until after harvest. Again, during the months of Ashar (June-July) and Srabon (July-August) more rickshaw pullers and agricultural labourers migrate. But due to lower demand for carpentry work during this time, fewer carpenters migrate. However, the carpenters who can pull a rickshaw migrate for that work if they are short of money.

Bhadra (August-September) and Ashwin (September-October) are the worst months for all occupational groups. Many people remain unemployed and often face a shortage of food because there is no crop in the field. Agrahayan (November-December) and Poush (December-January) are the best months for all the occupational groups. During this period, due to harvesting of aman paddy, work is available, farmers have money with them and hence food is available. Livestock and poultry also get sufficient food from the aman straw.

People do not always migrate in a period of scarcity alone; it has also to do with how much can be earned. During the months of Agrahayan (November-December) and Poush (December-January) the employment situation in the village is good but different occupational groups migrate on a large scale in this period. This is because if they migrate they are likely to earn more, which can be saved for use in the scarce period. Some of them use the additional income earned during this period to purchase goats or cows. During the period of scarcity, these can be sold to cope with the crisis.

The women who work as housemaids go when there is no work available in the village, although they have to go regularly otherwise they lose the jobs they have with regular employers.

### *When do People Migrate for Rickshaw Pulling?*

It was observed that when men migrate to cities for rickshaw pulling varies over the year. The largest migration is during the month of Srabon (July-August), Bhadra (August-September) and Chaitra (March-April). The month of Ashwin (September-October) and Falgun (February-March) come second and the month of Ashar (June-July) and Kartik (October-November) are third highest in terms of the numbers of people migrating for rickshaw pulling.

During Bhadra (August-September), Ashwin (September-October) and Kartik (October-November), the rates of pay are lower at destinations because employment opportunities in the village are at their lowest, many people migrate, and thus there are several contenders for the

same jobs, with often more rickshaw pullers available than the number of rickshaws in the cities. The migrants also tend to stay longer in Srabon (July-August), Bhadra (August-September) and Chaitra (March-April). In the month of Falgun (February-March), a large number of persons migrate for rickshaw pulling, because immediately after the plantation of crops, they need to earn more money for purchasing fertilizers and other inputs. Apart from the regular rickshaw pullers, this period also finds agricultural labourers and carpenters pulling rickshaws, also migrating to cities because they have no other opportunities.

In the month of Poush (December-January), a moderate number of rickshaw pullers migrate. In the months of Baisakh (April-May), Jaistha (May-June) and Magh (January-February), fewer rickshaw pullers migrate and in the month of Agrahayan (November-December), the fewest number of rickshaw pullers migrate -- this is because it is often festival time and there is work in the village harvesting aman paddy. By December it is winter and it is foggy and cold in Dhaka and other towns in which the rickshaw pullers work, and those who do the work only occasionally prefer not to do this work then unless they really have to. The cold weather is worst in Magh (January-February) and there is alternative employment transplanting irrigated paddy. So employment is available for agricultural labourers. It is also the case that fewer rickshaw pullers migrate in the month of Baisakh (April-May) and Jaistha (May-June), because the weather is very hot and rickshaw pulling becomes difficult in cities. Moreover, in the village, employment is available in the crop fields. In these months only rickshaw pullers who do the work as a full-time job migrate. Those who do migrate in the month of Chaitra (March-April) tend to go mostly to Feni and Chittagong as the weather is hotter in Dhaka.

In the month of Baisakh (April-May), Jaistha (May-June), Agrahayan (November-December) and Magh (January-February), employment is available in the crop fields in the village. Hence agricultural labourers do not migrate. For the rickshaw pullers this means that earnings are more because there is less competition for work. Utpal, a rickshaw puller, said: 'Normal income of 20 days can be earned in 10 days during this time, with income per ranging from from 150 to 200 taka. During this period only professional rickshaw pullers migrate as they cannot work in the crop field.'

In the month of Agrahayan (November-December) harvesting of aman paddy and the plantation of wheat and onions begins, and hence employment is available in the village. During this period, agricultural wages also remain high. In the village, the wage is 50 taka per day and one meal. At the same time, in Feni, a rickshaw puller can earn 100 to 200 taka per day. Migrants said that instead of earning this amount of money in Feni or some other place, it was better to stay in the village because, in addition to work as a farm labourer on others' land, they could also work their own land, if they had any. The cost of food and lodging was much less in the village compared to Feni. So the rate of migration for rickshaw pulling is at a minimum in this month.

Apart from hot weather, problems of pure drinking water, cooking gas, higher number of vehicles and high rate of accidents discourage men from migrating to Dhaka. However, the rickshaw fare is more in Dhaka city. So those, who are habituated to pulling a rickshaw in Dhaka, do not prefer to migrate to Feni or other places because they earn less. Most of those who migrate to Dhaka stay in Badda area. In their opinion, as the area is on the outskirts of Dhaka city, the traffic jam is less and more rickshaw garages are located here. However, during winter, because of the cold and fog accidents are more frequent in this area.

### *When do People Migrate as Agricultural Wage Labour?*

In the month of Jaistha (May-June), Srabon (July-August), Agrahayan (November-December) and Magh (January-February) most people migrate for agricultural work. During these months demand for labour outside is higher than in the village as are also wages. If the wage rate is 50 taka per day in the village, it would be 80 to 100 taka with three meals per day in Bogra, Feni and Comilla.

In the month of Baisakh (April-May), Ashar (June-July), Kartik (October-November), Poush (December-January) and Falgun (February-March) a moderate number of people migrate and in the month of Ashwin (September-October) fewer labourers migrate for agricultural work. In the month of Baisakh (April-May), irrigated rice harvesting starts in some plots and in the month of Jaistha (May-June), the irrigated rice is harvested so that demand for labour is high.

In the month of Bhadra (August –September) and Chaitra (March-April) there is no work in the crop fields and nobody migrates in these two months for agricultural work.

**Table 17: Calendar of Work for Agricultural Wage Labourers**

<b>Months</b>	<b>Crop season</b>	<b>Rank considering the number of migrants (10 is the highest and 0 is the lowest)</b>
Baisakh (April-May)	Irrigated rice harvesting starts in some plots	8
Jaistha (May-June)	Irrigated rice harvesting goes on in full swing and the demand for labour is high.	10
Ashar (June-July)	Transplantation of aman seedlings starts.	8
Srabon (July-August), Bhadro (August-September)	Transplantation goes on in full swing and the demand for labour is high. No work in the crop field.	10 0
Aswin (September-October)	Low demand for labour. Some agricultural labourers migrate to work for vegetable cultivation.	4
Kartik (October-November)	Aman paddy harvesting starts and demand for labour gradually increases.	8
Agrahayan (November-December)	Aman paddy harvesting goes on in full swing and the demand for labour is high. So maximum number of labourers migrate in this month.	10
Poush (December-January)	Irrigated rice transplantation starts. Demand for labour gradually increases.	8
Magh (January-February)	Transplantation of irrigated rice goes on in full swing and demand for labour increases. Maximum numbers of labourers migrate in this month.	10
Falgun (February-March)	Demand for labour is low. But for weeding some labourers migrate in this month.	8
Chaitra (March-April)	No demand for labour and hence, no body migrates in this month.	0

In Jaistha (May-June), Srabon (July-August), Agrahayan (November-December) and Magh (January-February) (January-February) the maximum numbers of labourers migrate. Farmers pay 80 to 100 taka for agricultural labourers in addition to providing three meals a day. During these periods, 80 percent of the labourers migrate to Bogra, Feni and Comilla, while 20 per cent migrate to Dinajpur and Chittagong. Demand for labour is so high in these periods that all the migrants manage to get work. Some of the rickshaw pullers also migrate in these periods to work as agricultural labourers because they can earn a decent wage not far from home.

In the month of Jaistha (May-June), demand for labour is very high because it is the season for natural calamities, and the rice harvest needs to be completed within a short period of time. Hence, wages are also high. Sometimes farmers of Bogra stop buses heading for Dhaka and beyond on the highway and collect labourers. Farmers also come directly to the village and make contact with the labourers in order to secure the workers they need.

In the months of Ashar (June-July) and Srabon (July-August), migratory labourers get 40 to 60 taka with three meals per day. But in the village the wages are only 30 to 40 taka with one meal. Sometimes employment may not be available at all in the village.

In Kartik (October-November), demand for labours is higher, because harvesting of aman paddy and potato planting start simultaneously, and wages stand at 40 to 50 taka per day with three meals. In Agrahayan (November-December), harvesting of aman paddy gets fully under way, raising the demand for labour. In Poush (December-January), transplantation of rice seedlings at Feni and Comilla starts, but now the wages are not high (40-50 taka) because the demand is not so great. In Magh (January-February), transplantation of rice seedlings starts in several districts including Bogra, Feni and Comilla. Wages are comparatively higher in this month at about 60 and 70 taka per day. Then, in the month of Falgun (February-March), demand for labour decreases again as do wages.

In the month of Ashwin (September-October), there is no major work in the crop field so the demand for labour is very low. There is no work in the village during this period either. Very few labourers migrate this month. For those who are desperate for money, some work is available weeding the banana garden or chilli plots, at rates of 20-25 taka per day. In Bhadra (August – September) and Chaitra (March-April), there is no work available, making it a difficult period for agricultural labourers. Either they have to depend on their savings or they have to borrow money. Some try to migrate as rickshaw pullers but the income from this is very low.

There are different contractual arrangements for agricultural work. In Bogra, there is a system between the farmers and agricultural labourers for specific jobs in the crop field, settled through bargaining. The contract is normally made in the form of a lump sum payment for a package of work like paddy harvesting, threshing, packing the gunny bags and storing in the farmer's bins. For one bigha of paddy land, the lump sum is usually between 500 to 550 taka. A group does the work and it is up to them to get it done as quickly as possible to do well out of the contract.

For transplantation of rice seedlings, two labourers are required per bigha of land per day and 100 taka is contracted, at 50 per head. In Comilla, labourers are engaged on a daily wage basis. Usually, per day per person the wage rate is between 100 and 120 taka. Farmers are more likely to pay a daily rate than do a lump sum payment.

### *When do Carpenters Migrate?*

Most carpenters migrate in Agrahayan (November-December), Poush (December-January) and Magh (January-February). There is also considerable migration in Kartik (October-November). In Falgun (February-March), Ashar (June-July) and Chaitra (March-April) very few carpenters migrate. And almost none migrate over Baisakh, Jaistha (May-June), Bhadra (August-September) and Ashwin (September-October). During this period the irrigated rice harvest begins and employment is available in the village. Demand for carpentry is also low as few people have money available for buying furniture.

Ashar (June-July) and Srabon (July-August) are the wet months when demand for carpenters is low, and transplantation of aman seedlings begins. The demand for carpentry work gets under way in Kartik (October-November). Since little work is available within the village at this stage, carpenters start migrating in this month. And in Agrahayan (November-December), Poush (December-January) and Magh (January-February) months, demand for carpentry work reaches its peak because money is available.

Carpenters migrate to Dinajpur, Panchagarh, Thakurgaon, Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet districts and Sundarganj Upazila. Badalpara village has a long history of carpentry. Ahmed, a carpenter, said, 'Everywhere in Bangladesh, carpenters of Sundarganj are available.'

Normally, carpenters migrate in groups of three or four, which includes one or two head carpenters and assistants. Usually, carpenters work on a contract basis. The wage depends on the nature of the furniture being made: for example, carpenters charge 500 to 1000 taka for a table or showcase. To make a bed, the maximum charge is 3000 taka while the minimum charge is 500 taka. It would require three carpenters to complete the bed within 15 days (maximum) but if they work fast so they can get it done in three to four days. The customer supplies the wood and provides food and lodging. The maximum income of a carpenter is earned during the months of Agrahayan (November-December), Poush (December-January) and Magh (January-February).

In the month of Baisakh (April-May) and Jaistha (May-June), harvesting of the irrigated rice crop starts and demand for carpentry work becomes low. In the village, they can get work so carpenters do not migrate though their earnings are not very high in this period.

### *When do Maidservants Migrate?*

With only two women in our sample currently migrating to do domestic work, it was very difficult to identify any seasonality in the work patterns of either of them. The main determining factor for both was the availability of work in the village (husking rice or other crop processing work) and the need for their services in Feni where they both worked. They needed to spend enough time in Feni each year to ensure that they did not lose their jobs. However, neither had a full time job in Feni; they both cleaned the homes of a number of different householders, and both needed to supplement their maidservant salary with begging in order to eat and save a little.

A, one of the women, lamented about the strenuous nature of domestic work and complained that she could no longer lift or carry heavy objects, which the people she worked for expected her to do. She was, therefore, looking for opportunities to scale down the amount of domestic work she did and was looking for alternatives. Begging on Fridays and at festival times seemed to provide an alternative for some of the time.

## **Summary**

In this chapter we have described the types of work migrants do: rickshaw pulling, carpentry, agricultural labouring, working as housemaids and also begging. We have explained the reasons for the choice of work as well as the choice of destination. We described the different ways that migrants travel to their place of work and their living conditions at the destination. We have also outlined the good and bad points about the different places people work in. It is apparent that the experience of other migrants from Badalpara at the destinations plays an important role in influencing the migratory patterns of others. The choices that people make over the type of work they do and when they do is not surprisingly influenced by their reasons for migrating; if money is very short at home then there may be little choice but to take a low paid job just to make ends meet.

In the second part of the chapter we described when the different occupational groups migrate and the level of wages that they can expect to earn. In the next chapter we look at how the income from migrating contributes to people making a living.

## Chapter 4: Migration -- A Livelihood Option for Poor People?

It is the month of Kartik. It is observed that in Sundarganj upazila of Gaibandha district most of the agricultural day labourers migrated to Sylhet district about one or two months ago. In a few days time the Holy Eid-ul-fitre will be observed. But most of the male members in the family didn't come back to the village. The families, which remain behind, are facing a severe financial crisis. They are surviving by taking loans with interest and waiting for husbands. If they return home before Eid, then the family will observe the Eid festival happily (*The Daily Ittefaq*, 31 October 2005).

In this chapter we will describe how income from migration contributes to household livelihoods.

### Earnings and Remittances

#### *The Amount of Income*

People migrate because they need money and thus they try to maximize their income at destinations by working hard and staying as long as they reasonably can at the destination. The amount of income and wage depends on the type of employment. The wage rate for a skilled labourer is higher than that for a semi-skilled or unskilled labourer.

A rickshaw puller's stay at his destination is on average 15-20 days at a time with a few exceptions. For example, Utpal, who migrates to Feni, prefers to stay at the destination for at least a month if not longer. The carpenters too stay at their destinations for a month and sometimes more. Agricultural labourers' stay at their destination depends on the type of work they are engaged in; their average staying period is about 15-20 days for planting and harvesting.

A rickshaw puller who stays in the cities all the time usually earns 100 to 120 taka per day but a migrant rickshaw pullers work harder, working longer hours. They pull the rickshaw for both shifts<sup>16</sup> to maximize their income. Thus, it was observed that migrants could earn around 200 taka per day if they worked both shifts. Rasheed earned 4,000 taka in 20 days pulling a rickshaw in Dhaka. Deepak stayed for 25 days in Feni to pull a rickshaw and during this period he earned 5000 taka after deducting his food, lodging and pocket expenses. Utpal earned 7500 taka in one month in Feni.<sup>17</sup> During the Eid festival, when he chose to stay in the town through the festival period (he is a Hindu and therefore does not celebrate Eid) he earned a good income at 300 to 350 taka net, out of which he had to pay for food and lodging. On Eid day itself he earned 475 taka. He did not have to pay any rent for the rickshaw for the first four days of Eid as the owner let him have it for free. As a result, he saved 160 taka each day during Eid.

Samsed went to Dhaka two days before Eid-ul-Azha and he earned 2500/- by the pulling rickshaw. Like Utpal, Samsed stayed in Dhaka during the Eid festival leaving his family in the village. On the Eid day, he earned 500/-. The rickshaw owner did not take any rickshaw rent on the Eid day. More over, the food in the mess was also free for that day. Samsed said that he was happy that the income is better in Dhaka during the Eid festival.

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<sup>16</sup> There are two shifts for rickshaw pulling: morning and afternoon shifts. The morning shift starts at 0600 hrs and ends at 1400 hrs. The afternoon shift lasts from 1400 hrs until midnight.

<sup>17</sup> In 2006 the garment workers were lobbying for a minimum wage of 3000 taka per month, so the wage of a rickshaw puller compares favourably, given that many garment workers still earn less than 2000 taka a month.

All migrants from the same occupation cannot earn equally. Those who work harder and have established themselves in the places that they work in earn more. For example, during one and a half months of his staying in Feni, Zubair earned 3500 taka excluding food and lodging, which is less than Utpal earns, who is well established in Feni. Zubair had to repay the mess owner for a 2000 taka loan he had taken and he sent the rest to his wife through a messenger.

A, a female migrant, gets 200 taka as monthly salary as a maidservant. In addition, she also resorts to begging, which gets her 25-30 taka per day and some rice. Sometimes she also gets old clothes which she gives to her family or sells.

Ramjan, a beggar, migrates for twenty days to a month to return with 15-20 seers of rice, money and some old clothes. The last time Ramjan went to Rangpur in 2005, he went with his second son and came back after ten days, bringing back 150 taka and some clothes, which he sold at Mirganj market for another 150 taka. Ramjan's 15-year-old eldest son migrated to Dinajpur for 12 days as an assistant to a carpenter, which got him 300 taka, out of which he spent 100 to meet his expenses and buy a watch.

If Liki goes with her elderly and disabled husband, as she occasionally does, and they beg from door to door, they earn about 20 to 30 taka. Samsuddin, an agricultural labourer, earned 1000 taka by working for 30 days at his destination.

The wage rate for a carpenter is higher compared to a rickshaw puller, maidservant or agricultural labourer. Ahmed earned 2000 taka in 15 days when he migrated to Dhaka to work and he earned 2500 taka in Jamalpur. On that occasion he went with a team of eight carpenters who got a contract with an NGO and received 550 taka for building one room. The employer arranged their accommodation, which minimized their costs at the destination.

The staying period depends not only on the level of income and availability of employment but also on the mental strength of migrants to leave their family behind for longer periods of time. Some migrants know that their families suffer when they are not there. Support from kin and neighbours reduce the anxiety but still it is worry that often brings migrants home prematurely. Utpal stays at Feni at least a month, whereas Rasheed stays in Dhaka for a maximum of 15 days. Rasheed's income from rickshaw pulling in Dhaka is higher than in Feni and he does not like staying away too long. Though Rasheed lives close to his parents and brothers and they provide support to his family, he worries about his son and daughter when he is away. On the other hand, Utpal, who does not have many relatives in Badalpara stays longer because he, and his family, are accustomed to his absences. He has developed good relationships with his neighbours over time, which means he can safely stay at his destination more than a month leaving his family. He said he has been migrating for more than 15 years and he has friends at the destination, so he does not become homesick for his family like others do.

### *Mechanisms for Income Transfer*

Migrants send their income home in three ways:

- with other migrants from the same or neighbouring village,
- with bus conductors and/or
- they bring it themselves.

The ubiquity of the mobile phone, which works throughout Bangladesh, even in remote villages, has been a big help. If a migrant is sending money through another migrant or bus conductor, (s)he is also able to send a message to inform their family so they can collect money.

Here are some examples. While he was in Dhaka, Samsed sent 2,000 taka in four instalments. He sent 500 taka through a migrant, a known villager. He sent some money through a bus helper. The bus helper delivered the money to a studio in Sundarganj. The owner of the studio resides in Badalpara village so he gave the money to Samsed's wife. In Feni Iqbal earned 5000 taka in one and a half months, which he home at different times through different persons, personally carrying 1300 taka when returning home. Iqbal sent 1000 taka to his wife through one of the villagers. However, once when Ajinul's wife needed money she went to Rangpur by borrowing 50 taka from others for the fare to get to her husband. Her youngest daughter accompanied her. At Rangpur, she collected 300 taka from Ajinul. But this was an exception; generally, Ajinul prefers to send his income to his family through a bus helper.

### **The Uses of Income**

An individual does not migrate to meet one single need. The same person sometimes migrates to repay the loan taken from relatives or from an NGO and sometimes to invest in agriculture or to pay the dowry for a daughter or sister. In the two sections that follow, we describe how the income from migration was used to meet economic or so-called productive needs and then illustrate how income was used for social as well as reproductive purposes.

#### *Use for Economic/Productive Purposes*

Paying Everyday Expenses: The most common use of income from migration is for day to day expenses. However, we found that for most migrants the income from a single migration had to stretch to cover a number of different needs. Most was used for household consumption. remainder was divided into different uses, both economic and social. For example, Israil worked for a wood workshop in Bholanath area under Tambulpur union, which is nearer to Sundarganj. He earned 1100 taka for seven days' work. Every week Israil came home, purchased all the necessities for the household, met his children's requirements, including their school fees, and repaid the instalment on loans he had taken out, including a BRAC loan instalment of 100 taka and a TMSS loan instalment of 65 taka. After that there was nothing left.

The poorer households are solely dependent on income from migration for survival. In Badalpara village are also households like those of Ramjan, Ajj/Alima and Liki who sometimes migrate for begging when there is no work available. Ramjan, for instance, was once given clothes that he could sell for only 20 taka. That money only bought him a kilo of rice. Liki sustains her family in all their daily necessities through migration. She earns about 2000 taka during her six months of migration when she works as a maidservant and supplements this with seeking alms.

To give yet another example, in 2005, after eight days away, Ajj sent 600 taka through a bus helper. Of this money, his wife paid 200 taka to repay a loan, purchased fertilizer with 300 taka and she spent the rest on household necessities which included a small amount of rice, salt and oil.

Investing in Agriculture for Crop Production: Once household expenditures had been covered money earned was often invested in crop production by those who had some land to cultivate.

For example, Ansar could not do any transplanting during the season for transplanting rice seedlings as he had no money. Then he migrated to Feni for rickshaw pulling. In 20 days there he earned about 1500 taka, which he sent home. His mother and sister used this to transplant rice seedlings hiring in daily labour. And after returning home, Ansar he did some further work on his plot.

Investing in Agriculture for Sharecropping: People who do not have their own land lease some in for share-cropping. Salim cultivated onions by leasing in 13 decimals of land on a share-cropped basis. Shortly before planting the onions he went to Dhaka to pull a rickshaw for 15 days, the earnings from which were invested in the plot. In addition Salim took 17 decimals of land on rent in a neighbouring village to cultivate a high yielding variety of rice. He borrowed money from other villagers to get the rent for that plot which, in turn, he repaid through his earnings from migration.

Rasheed cultivates three bighas of land on a share-cropped basis where he transplants rice seedlings, which yields about 12 maunds (400 kilos) of paddy which covers his household for six months. The other six months he has to purchase rice from the market, which he finances through his migration to Dhaka. In addition to household expenditure, Rasheed's wife spends the money on six day labourers, working for two days in Rasheed's share-cropped land, paid at 35 taka per day and one meal per person.

Investing in Purchasing Livestock: To secure their livelihoods with a disposable asset for later eventualities, migrants often purchase livestock when they are able to save some money. For example, Rasheed has three cows. He bought two of the calves at 3,000 taka (£23) from his migratory income. By 2005, the value of these three cows had gone up to 14,000 taka (£100). He used these animals to plough his share-cropped land. In addition, he also bought some security because he could sell the animals in the event of a crisis.

It was the carpenters who seemed to be more likely to buy livestock and land. This may have been because some of them migrated for prolonged periods and were not home for long enough to cultivate land themselves. Mobin, a carpenter, started by purchasing two cows with 9000 taka (£69). By the end of 2005, he had five cows, out of which he had given three cows to others for rearing on a shared basis (a mutually beneficial arrangement as in return for providing care to the animal the person looking after the animal also shares any offspring as well as the milk and dung).

Investing in Making Houses and Purchasing Land: Some migrants invested their income for purchasing livestock as a step towards purchasing land. Some purchased a calf, reared it and sold it (for a higher price). With that money they built a house or purchased a homestead plot or cultivable land. For example, Samsuddin purchased two cows and took one calf on a shared basis from his migratory income. When that calf was sold he was able to buy corrugated iron sheets to make the roof of his house.

With his migratory income, Shuvra gradually made a corrugated iron house for himself. Their old house, made of thatch, had leaked. Now with a 'tin' roof house he solved that problem. He purchased cows with the migratory income. He had sold one cow for his daughter's treatment. He has two cows to cover his daughters' marriages. He has also taken two goats on a shared basis and has one lamb for rearing on his own.

Israil said that he spent 16,000 taka (£120) to make a larger house. First, he purchased nine sheets of corrugated iron and made a roof. Then he purchased more sheets and completed the house. He further took a loan from BRAC and Agrani bank, and sold onions, using the proceeds to make a smaller house consisting of one room. Altogether, he spent 9,000 taka making the smaller structure. Now he also has a cow, a goat and a sheep, all of which were taken by his wife from others on a share basis, so they expect to get some income from them.

Ahmed purchased 10 hens from his migratory income. He sold the hens and eggs to buy a goat. Now from that one goat, he has been able to increase up to seven goats. Out of these seven goats, he kept two and gave the rest to others on a shared basis. Again, by selling five goats as well as adding some money from the income of migration, he purchased a cow. He sold the cow after rearing it for five months and then by adding some money from his migration income as well, he and his brother rented one bigha of land at the cost of 15,000 taka (£115). The production of paddy from this land supports Ahmed's family for five months.

Utpal purchased six decimals of land worth 4200 taka and has been living there for the last 15 years. The total cost of the land including registration was 5000 taka (£38). Utpal sold his cow, which he bought from his income from migration, to pay for the land. Moreover, he had to take a loan of 1000 taka, which he repaid from the income from his migration.

Rasheed put together 8000 taka from his migratory income to purchase, with his brother, seven decimals of land for his homestead area.

NGO Loan Repayment<sup>18</sup>: In the Badalpara village there are six NGOs providing different social and economic services. Most of them have microcredit programmes. Migrant families take loans from these NGOs and repay the loans from their migratory income. Loans are often used for business or building houses. For example, the wife of Samsed has been a member of ASA for three years, and has borrowed from them thrice. The last time, she took a loan 5,000 taka for repairing the house and investing in a business. She was still repaying the instalments in 2005. Every week, she has to pay 150 taka as repayment and 25 taka as savings. She was repaying the loan from Samsed's earnings from migration.

Deepak took a loan from the Grameen Bank and TMSS samity and had to repay 300 taka every week as instalments. Israil was a member of BRAC and TMSS. He repaid BRAC a loan instalment of 100 taka and TMSS a loan instalment of 65 taka every week, again from his income from migration.

Investing in Food Stocks: In one case it was observed that whatever money the migrant could save after household expenses from the income from migration was used to purchase paddy. Samsuddin earned 500 taka from migration which he used to purchase and store paddy. When there was employment in the village, he worked in the village. But when there was no work in the village and he could not migrate (during the month of Bhadra), he consumed the stored paddy.

Repaying Loans from Relatives, Neighbours and Bazaar Samities: As noted above, migrants took loans from NGOs, which was used for making new houses, starting a business and paying for marriages. But several conditions have to be met before a person becomes eligible for an NGO loan. These might include having sufficient savings, regular repayment of previous loans

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<sup>18</sup> See next chapter for a more detailed discussion of forms of social provisioning, governmental and non-governmental.

etc. Migrants always need some cash before migration for travelling and for leaving behind and it was not possible to take a loan from NGOs directly for those costs. For that they took loans either from relatives and friends or from bazaar samities (which charged interest). These loans they later repaid from their migration income. For example, Iqbal took a loan of 700 taka from the bazaar samity on an interest of 10 percent per month. After his arrival at the destination he borrowed 1000 taka from his boarding house owner and sent this to his wife through a villager he knew. From the money Iqbal's wife repaid the loan of and spent the rest on household expenditure.

Loans from relatives and neighbours can be more flexible than NGO loans in terms of repayments. Samsed migrates to Dhaka. Three years ago he faced a loss of 20,000 taka (£150) when his business in the village failed. Then he started migrating and started repaying the loans he had taken for his business in instalments. He also started share-cropping and took some loans from NGOs for this purpose. Unfortunately he lost his crops in a hailstorm. Three years on, he still has an outstanding loan of 15,000 taka (£115). Of this, 10,000 taka are loans from other villagers. He is using his income from migration to repay the loans. Samsed's aim is to continue to migrate until the loans are paid off and then re-establish his business.

Sometimes the pressure of repaying a loan can keep people away in their destinations longer. Liki, for instance, in 2005 had a loan of about 20,000 taka to repay other villagers. She had managed to repay 5,000 taka, but was not being able to save much in Feni, where she had migrated to, after paying for rent and maintenance there. As a consequence she was late in sending the money to her daughter to make the repayment, and all the while her daughter was harassed by the creditors for the time it was taking.

It was also quite easy for the amounts borrowed to grow. Deepak migrated to Feni for a month and a half to be able to make enough money to repay a loan of 2,200 taka he had taken to treat his wife and child when they fell ill. He had just finished paying back a loan of 14,000 taka, which consisted of several sums borrowed at different times, including a fairly large borrowing when he decided to set up a household separately from his father's family.

### *Use for Reproductive Purposes*

As well as investing money in business and land, migrants also used their income for reproductive purposes – for treating sickness, children's education and payment of dowry, for example.

Children's Education: Income from migration was often invested in children's education; indeed, it was often prioritised. In government schools, girls' education up to HSC was free, while tuition fees had to be paid for boys' secondary education. But because the quality of education was poor, those who could afford it tried to arrange private tuitions for their children. Even where the migrant himself was not keen on education, other members of the family prioritised it. For example, Ajinul did not want to continue his children's education but his wife was insistent, putting aside something from her household budget for it. Private tutors cost 100 taka per child per month, and it took another 100 taka to educate the children in Arabic.

Utpal was always cited as an example of someone who had done well out of migration. He had been migrating to Feni to pull a rickshaw for 15 years, and most of that income he had put into the education of his children. Two of his sons study received private tuitions. The tuition fee for his elder son is 150 taka and for his younger son, 100 taka. Together with the cost of school

fees, this itself came to 400 taka per month. Utpal's elder son was to appear for the SSC examination in 2006, and in preparation he required morning and evening tuitions that have raised the costs even higher.

Dowry Payments: For those migrants who had daughters and sisters their accumulation of assets, including land and livestock, would be used up for the girls' marriages. Others purposely used their migratory income to finance dowry payments. Salim, for example, arranged the marriages of his three sisters with income from his migration. He spent 30,000 taka (£230) on the marriage of his youngest sister, of which 14,000 went towards her dowry. For the marriage of the two older sisters, a total of sum of 20,000 taka was expended as dowry.

Salim said that he could not improve the economic condition of his family although he worked hard. As the eldest son of his parents, he has had to shoulder the responsibilities of the family. With the help of his migratory income, he could arrange the marriage of his sisters, but could not create any assets for his family. Salim said sadly: 'I had three large bags of money (three sisters), which I could give away. Now God has given me another three large bags of money (three daughters). I have spent everything on my sisters. In this world, none can pay back a parent's contribution. But in my case, my parents could not pay their contribution.'<sup>19</sup>

A, a female migrant, purchased cattle and goats from her migratory income and by selling two cows and one goat, plus 2000 taka from her migratory income and 5000 from a loan from BRAC (which had been for a different purpose) she got together 10,000 taka (£76) to give her son-in-law, Ajj, as dowry. A's daughter used to accompany her mother when she migrated. A first married her off with 4,000 taka when she was ten years old. At that time A could not pay a dowry, so the man divorced her daughter and sent her back to her parents after four years, and with a one-year-old daughter. Liki arranged her daughter's marriage for the second time three months after this divorce. The new husband demanded 20,000 taka as dowry. As Liki could not pay that amount of dowry, the husband started living with her in her house until she had paid 10,000 taka, when he established a separate kitchen for his wife and himself.

Meeting the Costs of Social, Cultural and Religious Events: Like other expenses, migrants meet the costs of different socio-cultural and religious festivals from their migratory income. Often just staying in the village between trips can be expensive for migrants because their friends expect to be entertained each evening. This expense is seldom resented because maintaining a network of friends is important for themselves and their families.

Festival time is expensive and migrants, like other people, often have to borrow money to cover costs as well as try and do extra work to cover costs. During the Durga Puja festival Deepak, for example, was short of money. He tried to borrow 1000 taka from a rich man in the village but received only 500. However, Deepak's younger brother came back from working in Feni and gave him 2000 taka, as a result of which the family could enjoy the festival and support visiting relatives.

Smarajit, who had the highest wealth rank of our case study households, said that he went for migration only before the main 'Durga puja' festival so he could earn some extra money, and never stayed more than 10-12 days. This money was used to buy new clothing and other items for the festival.

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<sup>19</sup> His parents are poor. They lost their land to river erosion.

Three days before Eid, Jamal returned from Dhaka with 1500 taka out of which he first repaid a 1200 taka loan he had taken to buy rice for his family. He used the remainder of the money to buy Eid specialities like vermicelli, sugar and meat, after which he was not left with enough to buy new clothes. He was saved any embarrassment, however, as his sister-in-law gave Jamal's daughters new dresses.

Medical Costs: One of the major uses of migrants' income is the medical treatment of family members. There is a government health centre but migrants and their families prefer private doctors as treatment from government hospitals was not deemed effective enough, and did not include medicines. For example, when Salim was sick he consulted a private doctor in Mirganj bazaar and purchased medicines worth 70 taka. His wife received treatment for anaemia for 40 taka, and Salim met both these costs from his 200-taka income from migration.

To maximize their income, migrants often overworked themselves at the destination, leading to ill health. Frequent sickness meant that they often just wanted to rest when they came back. In late 2005, Rasheed for instance developed a viral infection in his eyes, rendering him unable to pull his rickshaw for more than three days. He had to return with his meagre earnings of 400 taka from the three days, and bear the additional cost of 100 taka for a consultation with a doctor.

## **Summary**

In this chapter we have described the different levels of income that migrants from different occupations earn as well as the variations between migrants doing the same work because of experience and the intensity of work. We looked at the ways in which they send their earnings back to their families -- through trusted friends, bus helpers as well as carrying it themselves -- and the uses the earnings were put to. So-called productive uses included paying for household necessities as well as investing in crops and land. Repayment of loans to NGOs and individuals, as well as buying assets (such as livestock and grain) to serve as 'reserves' for the future, were also important. Equally important were what might be termed 'reproductive uses', which included investment in children's as well as payment of dowry and marriage costs. Money also has to be spent on the not inconsiderable costs of medical treatment. Earnings from a month or so of employment, therefore, have to stretch in many different ways in each household. Few had the opportunity to accumulate assets; most were just about meeting day to day living expenses.

## Chapter 5: Migration and Those Who Stay Behind

The people of Kurigram as well as six upazilas of Nilphamari became landless and homeless by frequent floods, drought and river erosion. They are migrating to the cities by night coach and by motorized boat, as there is no work at local level. A migrant named Kashem said that he left his wife and three children without anything and told his wife to take loan. He will repay it after his earnings at destination areas. Another migrant Habil told that he tried to take loan for his wife and two children, but failed. So he left them with nothing and they are fasting (sic) (*The Daily Ittefaq*, 17 November 2004).

In the chapters above we have focused mostly on the migrants, what they do, where and how and how much they earn. However, an important part of our study was to examine the situation of families left behind. Most of the migrants from Badalpara were men and most of those who were left at home to manage the family were women. Before we describe the ways in which these women and their families managed in the absence of the migrant it is useful to reflect on women's position in Bangladeshi society.

### Women in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal social system. Descent and place of residence are determined by the male line. Authority rests with men and Bangladeshi women 'are not only supposed to be dependent on men to provide for them materially but they should also depend on male protection. Throughout their lives it is expected that women will be under the protection of a male guardian, a father, a brother, a husband, or a son. A woman without male protection is open to various forms of male harassment as well as women's disapproval' (Seeley *et al.* 2006: 172).

While *purdah* (female seclusion; *purdah* literally means veil or curtain) was not strictly observed among the Muslims in Badalpara, social norms did restrict women's movement. Cain *et al.* (1979) describe one of the normative obligations of men towards women in Bangladesh as being the practice that still persists in many rural and urban settings, of bazaar shopping being the domain of men. In Seeley and Khan (2005: 214) we talk of disadvantaged 'child-managed households' where a minor child, usually male, is responsible for marketing and negotiations with external agents on behalf of their mother who observes *purdah* or is unable to access services because of her sex and social status. While none of the households in Badalpara seemed to fit into this category we found that a number of women relied on their boy children to go to the *bazaar* for them to buy household necessities, a task their husbands would have done had they been present. Those without children requested male neighbours or kin to buy them their daily necessities. Thus, when thinking about the impact of migration on those left behind we need to consider not only increased work loads but also diminished access to services and markets, which can have a significant impact on the well-being of the family.

Women's economic participation in rural areas covers a multitude of roles for those in families with land and livestock. This work takes them outside the confines of the home to include activities like taking care of animals, processing crops (threshing, husking, boiling rice, for example) and processing and preserving food. These tasks complement the work of men who are involved in ploughing, weeding and tending the crops as well as livestock. Sultana and Karim (2005: 78) talk of 'women in Bangladesh [...] breaking taboos and stepping outside the social norms to explore the market economy'. In Badalpara we did not find much evidence of this. Those women who were 'breaking out' did so because of economic desperation rather

than choice as they sought work cleaning houses or husking rice to try and make enough money to feed their families. The majority of women were occupied with the maintenance of the home, family and land under the guidance of, or in some cases in partnership with, a male household head. There were no women who had ventured out of the village to work in garment factories or other industries in the big cities. Migration was viewed as a male undertaking. This attitude influenced the views of some in the village towards migration and its impact on the family.

### **The Impact of Migration on the Family**

There were negative feelings in Badalpara about the impact of migration on those left behind despite the potential benefits such families derived from the income. Concerns about the impact of migration on families were fuelled by stories in the village of those for whom migration had been a negative experience.

We recounted above how Rohan, a non-migrant, and his wife explained their dislike of migration by telling the story of Rohan's younger sister who was married to a man who went to Dhaka for work. He had a job driving a car, so his salary was regular and the work good. However the man did not send money back to his wife, nor did he bring money when he came home. Rohan's sister earned money working in other people's houses to feed her two children. She wanted to know what was happening in Dhaka and once managed to persuade her husband to take her with him. They stayed in poor conditions in a slum area and the man mistreated Rohan's sister beating her everyday. She fled back to the village. Four months later her husband died in a car accident.

Others told similar horror stories of how migration ruined marriages. One day we witnessed the following incident:

S migrates regularly to Feni and Dhaka for rickshaw pulling. He does not bring back much of his earnings because whatever he earns he spends gambling. The villagers said that S's father was also a gambler and S has inherited the quality. S cannot pay the cost of food to his wife. Thus his wife, R, stays most of the time in her mother's house and S comes to stay there with her when he is home. One day in July we found S demanding 500 taka from his mother-in-law so that he could travel to Dhaka, but his mother-in-law is a beggar so she could not pay the money. Then S said he would take his wife, R to Dhaka. He said that in Dhaka, he would put his wife in a garment factory while he pulled a rickshaw. But R's elder sister refused this, saying that they had not arranged the marriage of R in Dhaka. The two started quarrelling. S threatened R's elder sister saying that if she continues to abuse him he would take her to Dhaka and make her work too! R's sister was angry when he said this and threw a stool at S. S then started hitting her in return. As S was beating his wife's elder sister, is a social offence, one villager, slapped S. At this stage another neighbour, the brother-in-law of S, intervened told him to cool down.

The fighting continued for two days until eventually the village elders sent S's wife R to stay with her mother-in-law. This calmed the situation but did not resolve the lack of trust between the couple as S continued to travel to Dhaka, and continued to gamble his earnings away.

It was clear from the case study households that while migration could occasionally fuel disharmony in marriage, for many the impact was more mundane as families managed the home and household assets such as land in the absence of one or more adult members.

### *The Effect of Family Structure on Those Staying Behind*

Only two out of our 20 case study households were living in joint households (where parents and married children live in the same compound and share food). However, in both cases (Shuvra and Salim) the elderly parents maintained a 'separate kitchen', which meant that they did not usually eat with their married children and their families. The other 18 households were all nuclear although there was great variation in composition as well as proximity to other kin. The mothers of Mobin and Utpal lived with them and their wives and contributed to reproductive tasks in the household. Indeed, Mobin's mother ran the household overseeing the work of his young wife. Ajjij's mother-in-law Alima lived with him and his wife and, as we have already seen in the chapters above, was an important earner for that household through her own migration. Debashish and Snehashish are single and live with their parents. Ansar lives with his mother and sister but, unlike Debashish/Snehashish, he is the sole earner. While it is difficult to judge exactly how much support families received, it appears that the families of Utpal, Zubair, Iqbal, Rasheed, Ajinul, Samsuddin and Jamal were perhaps the worst off in terms of family support because they did not have family nearby or those who were nearby were very poor or they were on bad terms with them. However, in each case migrants listed neighbours or richer villagers that they or their families looked to for help when they had problems. Often such support was given on a reciprocal basis. They knew that when they returned with money from their time working away they would be expected not only to repay their loans but also provide loans in their turn.

Maintaining good relationships with neighbours and family was important for the sustenance of the family when the migrant was away and when he or she needed money for the journey to their work place. For instance, in August 2005 Ajinul did not have any cash when he was getting ready to go to Rangpur. His wife borrowed 20 taka from one of Ajinul's cousins who lived close to their house to facilitate Ajinul's migration. Ajinul could not leave any money with his wife so he told her to manage, on loans if necessary, for three days until he could send some money back. On the day he left his wife borrowed a kilo of rice from one of her distant relatives and borrowed 100 taka from a cousin of her husband. Out of this money, she repaid a loan of 80 taka taken from a neighbour, gave a loan of 10 taka to one of her sisters-in-law and kept the rest of the money for household costs.

### *Concerns About Leaving the Family Behind*

A number of the migrants were worried about their families' ability to get enough food to eat and their safety as well as their ability to manage the care of crops and livestock. For instance, in the absence of Samsed, his wife remained gloomy and his children wept for him. When Samsed came to know this over mobile phone, he also became anguished and told his wife that his coming home early would jeopardise his ability to pay for the family's food and sustenance. His wife is well aware of the combined burden of debt and scarcity in the family though she wishes her husband would not have to migrate. Indeed, she sometimes feels it is better to die rather than live such a precarious life.

When a man's wife was pregnant or a child sick, a trip away for work was likely to be postponed or cancelled; such events put a severe strain on families on low incomes because of the shortage of work in the village which such men could do in times of ill health in the family to supplement their income. Another story from our field notes following a visit to the home of Ajinul illustrates this.

Ajinul returned home on 22/09/05 but he could not bring any money. His wife said that Ajinul's younger sister had had surgery on her stomach, which had worried Ajinul and hastened his return. However, after staying in the village for three days he had to migrate to Rangpur again. The family had no money and his wife had to maintain the household expenditure by borrowing from others. Until today Ajinul has not sent any money, though he was supposed to have sent some with the bus helper a couple of days ago.

Shuvra, who has been migrating for 20 years, told us that no one likes migration because of the separation it entailed from the family.<sup>20</sup> He says that his family is anxious about him when he migrates and he is anxious about them. Apart from worries about food and safety, there are also worries about harassment over loans. If a migrant borrows money from a neighbour or another villager before he or she migrates and fails to repay that money in the agreed time it may be the family members who have to deal with the angry creditor. Liki, for example, takes a loan to cover household expenses while she is away. When she does not send money back in time to pay the instalments on the loan, the creditor harasses her elderly husband. She said the lender once even threatened to take the corrugated iron sheets off the roof to recoup the money he was owed. Their daughter helps her father in these situations but because Liki is often away for extended periods the situation can become difficult.

Shuvra and Liki are not unusual. Only young migrants who had no family responsibilities seemed to travel without too many worries. We often heard of a migrant who came back earlier than expected from a trip because he or she was worried about what was happening at home or because something had happened at home that needed their attention.

#### *Increased Women's Workload*

In this section we look at some of the examples of how the absence of a migrant increases the burden on women left behind in the household.

The notes on the wives of Samsuddin, Ramjan, Zubair and Israil provide a picture of some of the extra work these women had to do in the absence of their husbands. Samsuddin's wife had to take care of the cattle while he was away, which included walking some distance to collect grass from the char land. She was pregnant in 2005 and Samsuddin had to stay home for five months because she could not manage the cattle, child care and the housework without him and there was no one else to help, particularly after a quarrel between Samsuddin's wife and her sister-in-law which had forced them to move in November 2005 and seek refuge on the land of a friend in the village where they could rebuild their house. Some women, like Zubair's wife, took on a considerable amount of work in the absence of their husbands in an effort to sustain their families. Zubair is away ten months of the year, so his wife has developed various coping mechanisms that involve her labour.

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<sup>20</sup> When asked who the poorest were in the 16 villages in Bangladesh included in the 'Livelihoods of the Extreme Poor Project' some people said that migrants were the poorest because they had to leave their families behind and go to strange places. Poverty was seen not in terms of financial wealth but in the wealth of social relationships (Seeley and Khan 2005).

Zubair does not have any land of his own. In March 2005 his wife had taken 22 decimals of land from her father-in-law on a share-crop basis for rice cultivation. She was then four months pregnant but she worked the land by herself, transplanting, weeding and watering. She engaged two daily wage labourers to help her harvest and she herself boiled and husked the paddy. She got nine maunds of paddy, 50 percent of which she paid her father-in-law as his share. Zubair sent 400 taka so that she could pay the labourers though she had done all the hardest bits herself.

It is not only wives who shoulder the burden of caring for cattle. Mobin's mother looks after his cows while he is away, despite suffering from rheumatism, which makes carrying the grass home for the cows difficult for her. By the end of 2005 she could not cope any more and had given one of Mobin's three cows to his brother to rear.

Ansar's mother and sister took care of the cattle in Ansar's absence. In August 2005 when we visited their house we found Ansar's teenage sister at home alone. She said that her mother had gone to the char land in the scorching afternoon heat to get grass for the cows. When Ansar was home, he did not allow his mother or sister to go to the char land. In her childhood, the sister used to go to the char land with her mother and brother, but now that she is grown up, it is no longer socially acceptable for her to venture outside the house alone.

The final comment by Ansar's sister about people's disapproval of her going to the char land reminds us of the restrictions on women's movement, particularly for young women. Kabir (2005: 202) describes the insecurity of young women working outside the home. They may be propositioned by men while away from the safety of the home, which may be detrimental to the family honour. And this is an issue not just for unmarried young women; Iqbal's wife told us that his cousins criticised her for working as a day labourer while her husband was away. So she did not tell people what she was doing; if someone did ask, she merely said she was going to the char to collect grass for the cow. It is easier for boys to assist their families outside the home than girls or even older women.

Ramjan's sons do what they can to help their mother. The eldest son is a carpenter and when his father is away he takes on the responsibility of providing money so that his mother can buy food. When his father returns, he stops giving his mother money, and saves as much as he can. In September 2005, when Ramjan was away, their eldest son could not get a job for two days so he had no money to give his mother, so on the Friday his mother managed to get 17 taka and half a seer of rice by begging from door to door. They purchased another seer of low quality rice with that money. The boy then took some old clothes to the market, which his father had brought back from a previous begging trip and sold these to get some more money, thus managing somehow until the boy could find work again.

Israil's wife takes care of the rice crop while he is away. She told us how every day in the morning she goes to the char land to weed and tend the crop during the growing season. While she is there she also collects grass for their cows. She returns only after sunset, and then has to tend to the children and other household requirements. Other women also complained about the extra work cultivating crops entailed.

Even for those who are better off and have a sizeable amount of land under cash crops and employ labourers, like Rasheed's family, the absence of the male migrant puts a burden on his wife. Rasheed's wife waits anxiously for money that Rasheed sends home soon after reaching

Dhaka. In addition to household expenditure, this money is used to repay loan instalments and will pay for the day labourers. During busy periods they employ six day-labourers to work on the cropland for short periods of time at 35 taka a day plus a meal per person per day. It is Rasheed's wife who cooks the rice and carries the meals for the labourers to the char land. This, however, is a task she would perform even if Rasheed were around. If money to pay the workers does not arrive in time, the wife has no alternative but to borrow some. In November 2005, for instance, Ajjinul's wife had to send her eldest son to her sister-in-law's to borrow money to pay the labourers' wages.

It is not surprising that the loss of an adult member of the household increases the workload for those left behind, but as is apparent from the stories above the impact on those left behind is rather different depending on the relative prosperity of the family. Ramjan's wife and children worry where their next meal is coming from but for Israil and Rasheed's wives, their worries revolve around protecting their family assets and realising the investment their husband has made with their income from migration; an investment that depends very much on their own time and effort.

#### *Decision-Making for Everyday Household Requirements*

The widespread use of mobile phones has helped family members stay in touch with each other (there is a shop with a mobile phone in the village for those who cannot use a personal phone). It has also provided a way for decisions to be discussed and resolved. However, as will be apparent from the stories above, many wives (in particular) and children have to take decisions about the household and the land on a day-to-day basis with little consultation with the absent migrant. Ramjan's wife and children often have to resolve crises over what they are to survive on while Ramjan is away. For instance, in November 2005 the following situation occurred:

The oldest boy sold a home-grown bottle gourd in the market at 10 taka so that he could buy half a kilo of rice. His mother, he and his two siblings ate that rice for supper but they were still hungry because it was still very little. However, Ramjan's wife said it was better than the previous day when there had been no food at all and they had to starve. She said she had wept the whole night. Today she said she would purchase two kilos of rice because she had made some money cutting earth. That would last them two days. Last week she had gone begging in the village and had been given some rice, but she could not do that often because people had little to give.

While few of the other case study households faced such difficult conditions as often as Ramjan's family did, in every family those left behind were faced with decisions about who to ask for help and what to ask for when food was low or money was needed. A shortage of food was particularly taxing for women, like Ansar's mother, who fasted during Ramadan because when there was no nutritious food in the house with which to break their fast, nothing could sustain them through the long hours of daylight when they could take neither food nor water.

Some younger men, like Mobin, have dependents, and their families find different ways of coping when money is short. For instance, in December 2005 Mobin's mother was expecting Mobin to return before Eid-ul-Azha. However, Mobin did not return, nor did he send any money or did he contact his mother. Mobin's other brothers, however, stepped in to look after the mother as otherwise she would starve. And Mobin's wife went to her father's house because there was nothing in the house.

A delay in returning from migration often had serious consequences for those left behind, like Mobin's mother. Israil's wife was faced with a similar situation when he did not return as usual from his trip. While he had been working in a nearby town, as was the case in September and October 2005, he generally came home every week bringing money for the family. In the first week of October, however, he had not been home for two weeks and his wife was concerned because he had not sent her a message. His wife had little rice left and took to cooking only one meal a day. It was a situation where she would be forced to borrow from neighbours. Furthermore, she had two instalments to repay – a TMSS instalment, to repay which she had had to borrow money, and a BRAC instalment, which she could not pay until Israil returned.

Stretching the available food by watering down the rice and serving less food at meals, in expectation of the migrant's return (or the receipt of money via a bus helper or friend) was a common practice in nearly all the households. Indeed, cooking times in many households changed while husbands were away. A number of women said they just cooked in the late afternoon so that they could save food for the next day. If they cooked early in the morning the children ate all the food leaving nothing for the next morning. Other women said they simply ate less food themselves in time of scarcity to save food for the children. They also collected edible leaves to use as vegetable until they had money to buy food once more.

Many women took the decision to buy less expensive and lower quality food while their husbands were away. The absence of one adult mouth to feed also meant that less had to be bought. For instance, *Salim's wife said that when Salim was away, what was bought for seven days lasted them ten. Salim also had other requirements, like fish and other good food. Moreover, the cost of cigarettes and betel leaf increased and the children demanded sweets when he was at home.*

#### *Health Care in the Absence of Migrants*

All the families experienced health problems when the migrants were away and had to find different ways of tackling the challenge of getting adequate treatment and care. The case of Jamal's wife illustrates some of the dilemmas faced by women left behind when they had to deal with sickness. Their daughter had acute ear ache while Jamal was away.

The girl was crying because of severe pain. Jamal's wife carried her to the doctor at the government health post and the doctor prescribed medicines, which Jamal's wife struggled to buy. The medicines had no impact. Jamal's wife did not have money to consult another good doctor or buy more medicine. She informed Jamal about all these problems over the mobile phone but it only angered him. He said he would not be able to send money for another 15 days. He instructed his wife to manage somehow. Jamal returned after another ten days and then took the daughter to a good doctor in Sundarganj upazila though this did not cure her either.

The biggest problem for those left behind was finding cash to pay for treatment, often resulting in people going to traditionally trained doctors who were willing to treat people on credit, although not always successfully.

#### *Managing Education in the Absence of Migrants*

As noted above, paying for the education of children was one of the main uses to which money made through migration was used, as in the cases of migrants like Shuvra, Ajinul, Utpal and Israil, or Ansar, who was financing his own education. There were, of course, others for whom

education was not a priority, like Ramjan. Even Zubair, who is an SSC leaver himself, seemed uninterested in investing in his children's education, but that was perhaps because his own education had failed to get him the office job that he had hoped for when he left school.

In order to help their children succeed, the better-off migrants paid for private tuition for their children, as noted above. Unfortunately, many of the tutors are themselves children who are a few classes ahead, and are trying to fund their own education. Ansar, for instance, attempted to finance his education through tutoring for a while, but could not earn enough. These tutors are, however, relatively cheap, which makes their services slightly more affordable to the less poor households in the village, though this affordability too is precarious, as the following example illustrates.

Ajinul has a private tutor for both his older son and daughter at 200 taka a month, and the children study Arabic with a 'Hujur' (religious man) for 300 taka a month. In October 2005, Ajinul could not pay either of the tuition fees. Only after harvesting and selling the paddy did they manage to pay the arrears. The boy has an examination to do for his private tutor on 18 November but there is no space left in his exercise book, so his mother has arranged to take a loan of 20 taka from a neighbour to buy a new pen and exercise book for him.

Other mothers also did what they could to ensure that the education of their children was not disrupted for want of books or equipment. Iqbal's wife worked while Iqbal was away for eight and ten days respectively in October and November 2005, weeding someone's land. The 25 taka she earned per day doing this was used to buy not only food for the home when Iqbal failed to send her money, but also a pen, pencil and exercise book for her daughter who was in class IV. She could not however manage the 25 taka a session needed to pay the tutor they had engaged for their son, and that instruction had to stop.

#### *Child Labour/ Child Work at Home*

We have already mentioned above some of the ways in which children contributed to the family income. Some successfully combined helping their parents with school attendance. However, some children could not combine work and school and they had to stop going to school in order to earn money to support the family. It is not just the oldest either; younger children too are sometimes obliged to contribute to their family's livelihood, helping their parents.

Samsuddin's oldest son is 11 years old. The boy looks after the cattle for his parents. He is also learning to be a carpenter. Samsuddin's children do not study in school. Samsuddin said that he was a poor man and could not send the children to school because he did not have the money to buy the books and other items they need for school.

In October food was short so Samsuddin sent his seven-year-old daughter to work as a maid in Sunderganj. She returned after no more than a month on the plea that she was lonely there. Now this seven-year-old is looking after the newborn baby and helping her mother. Samsuddin's eldest son is helping the carpenters of the village for which he gets about 10 taka per day.

#### *Repaying Loans While the Migrant is Away*

Migrants often struggle to repay loans when they return from working outside the village, but for their families left behind, as noted above, the pressure to repay money or goods that have been borrowed can be intense, particularly if the repayment is delayed. While the membership of multiple NGOs may provide access to different funds, allowing a family to borrow from one to

pay off the other (in a way similar to that used by some people in developed settings who use one credit card to pay the balance of another!) does not exist, and the need to keep up the payments can be a considerable burden.

Problems with repayment are cited as one of the main reasons why people do not take loans from NGOs, or leave NGO groups.

For the last three years Ajj's wife has been a member of BRAC. Every week she manages to save about 5 taka. She borrowed 3,000 taka from BRAC to buy land. After repaying 28 instalments, she has stopped repayment due to scarcity of funds. For the last three months she has been defaulting on the weekly repayment instalment of 75 taka because Ajj has not given her money to do so. She says she will leave the group.

A few months later the situation was much worse. Ajj had been sick and they had had to borrow 11,000 taka from a money lender. In an effort to repay that loan Ajj took down part of his house and sold the corrugated iron sheets for 9000 taka. But still the family owed money.

After Ajj migrated to Feni, the moneylenders started putting pressure on his wife to repay the loan. While we were visiting her, one lender came and put pressure on her to repay 350 taka. Ajj had rented a power tiller for tillage at 550 taka of which he had repaid only 200 and the lender wanted the remaining amount. His wife requested that the lender delay for few more days. But the lender was not willing to wait at which Ajj's wife angrily told him to take her children with him. Soon after, a woman lender, who had given the family milk on credit when Ajj was sick, came and pressured her for 12 taka. Women labourers who had weeded their crops also came and put pressure on her for payment of wages.

In order to pay off the loans Ajj and his mother-in-law Alima stayed in Feni throughout Eid so that they could earn extra money. When he returned, Ajj rented out his house to GUK to use as a school room. The rental thus obtained, together with the money he and Alima had earned, allowed them to pay off the loans. They constructed a small hut to live in until they could afford to build something bigger. Ajj's story illustrates how easily illness of one of the breadwinners can undermine the lives of the whole family and put everyone under pressure. By December that year, the family had re-established their NGO membership and Ajj's wife was busy attending regular NGO meetings to maintain their association with BRAC, Grameen Bank, SKS (which she joined in December) as well as GUK. Paying regular instalments on loans continued to be a problem and Ajj's wife told us that even if she does not have money with her, she has to borrow from others to repay the instalments.

Ajj's household was not the only one affected in this way. The amounts of money borrowed by the family of Ansar, described in the extract from our notes below, and their inability to repay those sums, reminds us just how low the incomes of many of the families in Badalpara are:

Before migrating for work, Ansar borrowed 200 taka from his brother and 100 taka from his older sister towards his travelling costs, of which he gave 20 to his mother for the immediate needs of the family. His youngest sister purchased one seer of rice with that money, which lasted them two days. They had earlier borrowed nine seers of rice for which they were still to make a repayment, so they could not borrow any more once the seer ran out. To compound their problems Ansar had bought rice from the market on credit and owed the rice seller 300 taka. After Ansar had gone to Feni the rice seller came twice to his house to collect the money and harassed his mother.

Because the family were already in debt to Ansar's older siblings, no one helped them and they had to persuade the rice seller to wait for Ansar to send money. During that period they had little to eat. After seven days away, Ansar sent 600 taka with his cousin, which his mother used to pay off their loans and buy some rice.

### **Communication with Migrants**

Maintaining contact with migrants is important to all the families, as has been indicated above. Regular communication with migrants is one of the means of security for the family left behind. Sometimes they got news about migrants from co-migrants or villagers returning to the village.

The mobile phone has played a significant role in helping communication. Families can contact migrants over the phone, leaving a message with the owner of the phone if the contact number is with an employer or another worker. They help notify migrants of the state of their family. At the same time male migrants are able to offer advice to wives or other women in the family on household matters regarding repayment of loans, when they will be sending money or how to use remittances. However, the telephone is not available to everyone all of the time:

In September 2005, Mobin's mother said that she did not have a single penny to send a message to Mobin over the mobile phone. Mobile phone shop owners do not deal in credit. Moreover, she said she could not ask her other sons for money because they were already providing her with food and their financial condition was also not good.

While the existence of the mobile phone network throughout rural Bangladesh has revolutionised communication, for those who are dependent on booths, the lack of money to pay for calls can still be a significant barrier to communication.

### **Summary**

Migration contributes to increased vulnerability of families who stay behind in the village. The activities of families in accessing support from others, earning money and making resources stretch while the migrant is away all enable the migrant to spend extended periods outside the village. For some households, migration over a long period of time has a significant impact on their income and long-term well-being, despite the travails it might entail in the short term. It is also apparent, however, that the resourcefulness of wives, mothers and daughters, as well as sons left behind makes a contribution to the success of migration and they demonstrate considerable ingenuity in keeping the household going. It is ironic that in the cases of ex-migrants, or successful migrants among present migrants, people mentioned the visible outcome of migration and it was the migrant who was generally given all the credit for the success of his accumulation; the role his partner played went unacknowledged.

## Chapter 6: Migration and Formal and Informal Forms of Social Protection

Researchers, led by Dr. AMM Shawkat Ali, former agriculture secretary, [...] said, food insecurity and seasonal joblessness during September and October when the hard-hit ultra-poor are forced to migrate to other districts for jobs or fall back on money lenders is known as Monga. He said the surprising thing is that 93% of the respondents do not have the access to credit from the government or NGOs when Bangladesh is believed to be the inventor of micro credit. The researchers observed, the migratory nature of the char people could be the reason for which the NGOs do not come up with credit programmes. They recommended, the ultra poor people who consume food around 1600 kilo calorie per day and left out of the poverty alleviation net, need special government and non-government attention with access to micro credit and skill development to combat seasonal famine monga in the northern districts. Setting up of agro-based industries and small and medium enterprises (SME) to create employment opportunities along with the introduction of quick high yielding varieties (HYV) of crops are also important factors to face the crisis (*sic*) (*The Daily Star*, 14 July 2005)

As is apparent from the material presented above, women play a crucial role in family maintenance in the absence of the migrant. In order to cope with their often difficult circumstances, they seek help from a variety of sources as the case material has illustrated -- family, neighbours, better-off people in the village. Here, we summarise some of the different forms of social protection used by those left behind.

### Kin and Social Networks

Family members, neighbours and rich/influential householders are essential providers of support to migrant households. Residing close to the households of kin can be an important source of support in the absence of the migrant. All the male migrants' households except those of Samsuddin, Ramjan and Utpal, had the migrant's paternal kin close by. Often the wife's kin lived far away (four wives came from outside the district, and thirteen had family in the same upazila, but not the same village). One of the two female migrants, lived on her own land close to her sister, Ramjan's wife, who lived with her husband on the land she had inherited. However, proximity to kin did not always guarantee help, since not all were on good terms and some family members were very poor. However, for some like Ansar, who was in dispute with his brothers about land, the siblings did help out when the family was in desperate need.

Samsuddin's family suffered from the absence of close kin living nearby. During his wife's pregnancy, for instance, he could not migrate because there was no one to look after his family. They lived on his wife's brother's land but prior to the birth of the child the relationship with that family deteriorated and they had to move off that land. Once the baby was born Samsuddin's wife had no help and she had to do all the household work including cooking and husking paddy. Contrast that with Zubair, who was in a very different situation and had no problem migrating for work while his wife was pregnant as his parents and in-laws looked after his wife and children.

Maintaining good relations with kin is an important means of protection both socially and economically for the family. Kin can play an essential role in terms of decision-making, providing health care or sharing responsibilities in migrants' households.

Rasheed's parents and brother live separately from him but close by. Rasheed's wife's home is in another village in the union, but it is far from Badalpara and she cannot travel there alone. When Rasheed migrates his parents and brother look after his wife and two children. In September 2005 Rasheed had gone to Dhaka and had not left any food for his wife. Rasheed's father bought two seers of rice on credit from the market for her so that she could manage until Rasheed sent money.

Residing close to kin give many families some sense of security as well as moral support. When Ansar migrates for work, for example, his elder sister watches over the safety of their mother and sister, though she cannot help them financially.

#### *Borrowing or Taking Loan in Cash or Kind from Relatives and Neighbours*

Kinship and social networks also help by providing loans in an emergency, as we have already illustrated above. The loan of a small amount of money from relatives or neighbours can often help tide over a difficult situation. It is also very common for migrant's families to borrow rice, vegetables or other necessities from neighbouring households when they are short.

#### *Moving to Wife's Parents' Household*

Mobin had married in May 2005. We found that his young wife was frequently away, staying in her father's household elsewhere in the upazila. The reason given was the shortage of food in Mobin's home, but she may well have preferred to stay with her own family than stay with her mother-in-law who she barely knew. However, her actions were not so unusual; other women sometimes moved to their parents' house with their children when their husbands were away; this was one way of reducing household expenditure.

Sometimes when Zubair is away his wife goes to her parents' home with her two daughters. Her parents live on the char land in the same union. One of her brothers usually comes to accompany her to their father's home. During Eid she always takes the children to her family. Often this is a busy harvest time for her father, so she can help her family with the agricultural work. She often brings food home with her after staying with them. Even when his wife stays in their own home her father or brothers send vegetables and other daily necessities for her when Zubair is away.

#### *Relationships with Rich/ Influential Households*

Maintaining good relationships with rich or influential people in the village is another way of coping during bad times. In order to keep on good terms, we found that during religious or social occasions, some women of migrants' families provided labour in richer households. Utpal, for instance, has a good relationship with some rich and influential households of the village and gets support during his migration from them.

Utpal and his wife have no relatives close by who can help them. However, Utpal has developed a good relationship with an ex-government official at the Upazila health complex who also has a business in motor parts. When Utpal migrates to Feni this family and his neighbours take care of his family. After marriage when Utpal migrated for the first time the daughters of the ex-government official stayed with Utpal's wife at night. Utpal also gets financial support from them. Utpal generally borrows money from the ex-union parishad official before migration. And Utpal's wife always helps these families whenever they call her on social or religious festivals.

### Non-Governmental Organisation Services

Six NGOs have active programmes in the village. BRAC, ASA, Grameen Bank, Samokal and TMSS provide micro-credit. GUK focuses on social development, flood-protection and the promotion of savings. In addition to micro-credit BRAC has a school and provides some health care for villagers. A few of the villagers are participants in BRAC's 'Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction' (CFPR) programme which provides assets, training and on-going support to very poor women and their families.

Some people are involved from time to time with a savings group (or *samity*) run from the local market. They save 10-20 taka per week so that they can take a loan from this group if they face a financial crisis. In addition, 15 people have formed their own village group that has been running for five years helping people save money so that they can take a loan when they face a crisis.

**Table 18: NGO Involvement in the Village**

NGO involvement of one or more household members	Wealth Ranking				Total Households
	1	2	3	4	
Involved	6	31	93	5	135
Not involved	10	43	201	53	307
Total Households	16	74	294	58	442*

\* Information not available for two households.

For 108 (80 percent) out of the 135 households involved with NGOs, it was a female member of the household who was the NGO member.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 19: NGO Involvement in 20 Case Study Households**

Status of Involved with NGO	Wealth Ranking				Total
	1	2	3	4	
Involved	-	-	12	1	13
Not involved	-	1	5	1	7
Total Households	-	1	17	2	20

Of the 20 case study households, seven households out of the 12 involved with NGOs were involved with more than one NGO.

<sup>21</sup> Many NGOs have established groups specifically for women, so this bias in membership is not surprising.

BRAC, the largest NGO in Bangladesh, has been working in the village for the last 10 years. BRAC works with different types of programmes to improve people's economic status. Micro-credit/savings is BRAC's major programme in the village. Through this programme BRAC disburses loans for agriculture, small businesses, and housing.

There are also a few families who have received support through BRAC's asset transfer programme 'Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction'. This programme focuses on poor women in households that have very little land and do not receive assistance from the government. This project provides assets (livestock and land on lease for vegetable production or as a tree nursery, for example), plus regular visits to provide advice and support to help the recipient establish a means of livelihood.<sup>22</sup> In the year 2005 BRAC disbursed livestock among 21 households in the village under this programme. Under the BRAC's Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) programme the NGO runs a school for children who have dropped-out from the government primary in the village. There is also health provision for the poorest people from BRAC.

Grameen Bank, another large micro finance organisation, has been working in the village for 12 years. It has only micro-credit and savings programmes. ASA also has a micro-credit programme in the village. TMSS has two programme interventions in the village -- a Social Assistance Programme and a micro-credit programme. It has been providing the micro-credit programme since 2004. The Social Assistance Programme started in 2003. One of the major activities under this programme is to make people aware of their legal rights and to provide legal support for people to resist early marriage, dowry and violence against women. Last year TMSS gave legal support in three cases, one on dowry-related violence and the other two relating to verbal divorce.<sup>23</sup> In the same year TMSS also disbursed 4000 taka (£30) among 18 extremely poor families for livestock rearing and tailoring under the Social Assistance Programme.

TMSS organises meetings to make people aware of family planning, birth, death and marriage registration, actions against child labour, vaccination, and safe drinking water and sanitation. TMSS also has a programme for strengthening local government institutions, like the Union Parishad and people's participation in those institutions through awareness building. It has formed a village development centre to implement its programmes in the village. Every week its social workers are available to discuss different social issues with villagers. TMSS provides training to its group members on health and sanitation, women's empowerment, and other social issues.

Gono Unnayan Kendra (GUK) has been working in the village since 2002. It has no credit programme. It has been implementing social development programmes like water and sanitation and health awareness. GUK has recently initiated a new programme, 'homestead land reinforcement' to help people to raise their homesteads to protect against natural disasters like flood. This programme started in six households in this village. Every labourer gets 60 taka a day as a wage under this programme for raising the level of the land in his/her own homestead. GUK does promote savings (although it does not provide credit). Two groups, with a total of 25 members, have been formed to promote savings. GUK also began setting up a

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<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.brac.net/cfpr.htm> (accessed 11/01/07) for more information on this programme.

<sup>23</sup> This is where a man tells his wife three times that he divorces her ('using the word `talaq'). This customary Islamic practice was declared to not be legally binding in a landmark case in Bangladesh in 2001 (see <http://www.banglariights.net/HTML/significantcases.htm> accessed 11/01/07).

school in the village in 2005 (they rented the home of one of our case study households for this school).



*A rickshaw puller engaged his wife to work with him on the 'homestead land reinforcement' programme of GUK. In most cases they worked for neighbouring households.*

Up until 2003 Proshika, another large national NGO in Bangladesh, had a social and economic programme of interventions in this village. Due to lack of funds the Proshika programme has stopped and the savings and credit groups have disbanded.

Samajik Kollayan Sogostha (SKS), a local NGO, recently entered the village to start their own credit and social programme. At the time of our study they had completed a baseline survey and had initiated the formation of groups.

Some people, mainly men, in the village are involved with a *bazaar samity*. This is a group they have formed themselves, saving 10 to 20 taka per week. There is also a small village *samity*, which was formed by 15-20 persons five years ago. Both groups allow members to take small loans when they face a financial crisis.

### **Government Support in a Crisis**

Poorer people of the village are given Vulnerable Group Development cards (VGD), Vulnerable Group Fund cards (VGF), old age allowances and relief for crises periods through the union parishad. Villagers can also take a loan from the Krishi Bank, a government bank which provides credit facilities to farmers for the development of agriculture and 'entrepreneurs' engaged in agro-based small businesses. There is a branch of this bank in Sundarganj.

### **Vulnerable Group Development (VGD)**

Objectives: To increase beneficiaries self-reliance instead of dependency on relief.

Activities:

i. 18 months training and awareness building on social and health issues

-functional literacy and numeracy

-income generating activities

ii. Access to credit

-provision of one or more months of food rations to a selected number of households during periods of distress e.g. floods

Target Group: Exclusively for the benefit of poor, disadvantaged women. A minimum of 30 women are selected as recommended by local committees. These women should be landless or on an extremely low family income, be day labourers or lacking any productive assets.

Amount of food: 30 kg wheat per month

### **Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)**

Objectives: To assist poor people affected by disaster

Target Group: Thanas affected by disaster. A list of beneficiaries is prepared by the Union Parishad chairman. At least half of those recommended must be female.

Amount of food: Ration cards are issued so that people can receive food. Duration of the aid depends on the nature of the disaster.

As noted above the government provides various forms of social protection such as the VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding Fund), VGD (Vulnerable Group Development) and ration cards, old-age allowance, widow allowance and other relief programmes. Through the Union Parishad, these are distributed among villagers, and the benefits do help beneficiaries cope during crisis periods. However not everyone receives these benefits. Indeed, women often are not able to avail these benefits when their husband or son is away as they lack the right connections to influential people to access these types of support.

Two households receive old age allowances -- the mother of Ansar and the father of Shuvra. While this money was a welcome supplement it was not an entirely reliable source of support:

For the last seven months, Ansar's mother has received an old age allowance. The first time she received 1,980 taka, a lump sum payment for the previous year. Then after three months she received 540 taka. Ansar said that she is supposed to get 165 per month, but by November she had still not received any payment since the money she received in July.

Below is the list of the 20 case study households showing their involvement with different NGOs and the support they received from the different government relief programmes.

**Table 20: Case Study Household Involvement with Government and Non-Government Programmes**

Hh no.	Name of Hh. Head	WR	NGO involvement	Support from Govt. services
1	Mobin	3		Vulnerable Group Fund (VGF)*
2	Ahmed	3		
3	Smarajit	2		VGF*
4	Shuvra	3	Grameen Bank, TMSS	VGD, VGF*, father's old age pension
5	Deepak	3	Grameen bank, TMSS	
6	Jamal	3	BRAC	VGF*
7	Samsed	3	ASA	
8	Rasheed	3	BRAC, GUK	
9	Ajij/Alima	3	Grameen Bank, GUK, BRAC	
10	Ramjan	4		
11	Liki	4	BRAC	VGF*
12	Samsuddin	3	GUK	VGF*
13	Ajinul	3	BRAC, SKS, ASA, Grameen	VGF*
14	Utpal	3	BRAC	VGF*
15	Debashish	3	BRAC, TMSS	
16	Israil	3	BRAC, TMSS	
17	Zubair	3		
18	Iqbal	3	TMSS, Grameen Bank	VGF*
19	Ansar	3		VGF*, mother's old age pension
20	Salim	3	BRAC	VGF

\* In most cases these cards allowed for a single purchase of a modest amount of rice at reduced rate at festival time in the Autumn of 2005.

## Other Forms of Relief

### *Social Institutions: Shalish Committee*

The *shalish* (informal social judiciary system) plays a crucial role in maintaining order in the village and resolving conflicts. The main members of the *shalish* committee are rich and influential men, but both Hindus and Muslims are included in that committee. Most people said that the committee was the first place they would go if they had a problem or conflict to resolve.

The *Shalish* has a role in protecting families left behind when a temporary worker migrates and, for example, defaults on sending money home. During fieldwork we learnt of cases where the *shalish* had set a minimum amount of monthly payment to migrants for their families left behind because of failures to pay in the past.

### *During Festivals*

However, before Eid the local authorities gave 20 kg of rice under VGF cards to some people. Some other people got ration cards with which they could buy six kg rice at the cost of 24/- (18 pence). However, many people got neither ration card nor VGF card, so they had difficulty celebrating Eid. Many people could not afford to buy new clothes for the family and one kilogram of *semai* (one kind of sweets which is cooked for festivals) at 60/- to 70/- (50 pence). Some people had no choice but to migrate looking for work over the festival because they had so little to eat.

### *Monga*

As noted above, during the months of September and October 2005 there is often a scarcity of employment opportunities for day-labourers all over the northwest of the country, the NGO GUK initiated a programme in the village titled '*vitabari uchakoron prokolpa*' (homestead plot stretched out programme) to cope with natural disaster. This programme started in six households and every labourer got 60 taka per day as wage under this programme which aimed to raise the level of homesteads to protect them from flooding.

### *Support from the Informal Sector*

Different informal institutions like the village court also take steps to reduce the vulnerability of families left behind, particularly if the male migrant defaults on sending remittances or takes another wife at the destination and withdraws support to the wife in Badalpara.

### **Summary**

In this chapter we have looked at the familial or kin and other support networks people turn to in times of need. We have also explained the types of formal provision that exist in the village in terms of 'social protection' that people may access on a regular basis (savings and credit, old age allowances) or at times of need (VGF cards) if they are fortunate enough to gain access to these schemes, as well provided some broad brush strokes of the non-governmental provisioning of social protection. We have also presented the list of our case study households and introduced the variation among those households in terms of wealth and access to NGO and government services.

The existence of core labour laws like the Industrial Relations Ordinance (1969), Workers Compensation Act (1923), Payment and Wages Act (1936), Factory Act (1965), and the Shops and Establishment Act (1965) has had little impact on the lives of workers in the informal sector like rickshaw pullers and agricultural labourers. Even some migrant workers in formal employment, like those in the ready-made garments industry, are unaware of their rights and entitlements (Absar 2004). It is not, therefore, surprising that the responsibility for safety and security falls almost entirely upon the individual migrant.

For both migrants and for their families who stayed behind, their main security came from friends and family, as well as trusted employers and mess owners. Working in the informal sector, migrants had little knowledge of formal systems of protection or the regulation of wage rates or conditions of work. The existence of legislation to protect workers has little meaning in their lives. The only contact they do have is with officials like the police and that contact is seldom positive or helpful.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

It is the time of boro<sup>24</sup> cultivation. Now land is being prepared for cultivation in northern areas. Poorer people from Rangpur, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat are rushing to the 'majur haat' (labour market) in Bogra, Natore, Nowga, Rajshahi to be engaged in agricultural work. They are coming from remote villages ignoring deep fog and severe cold and waiting at the haat to be called by employers. Most of the labourers are agreeing to wage rates without bargaining, because there is no work at home and their family is starving. These agricultural workers get 30-40 taka with two times meal as wage. They say they have migrated here only for earnings to survive (*sic*) (*The Daily Ittefaq*, 2 January 2006).

As we explained in the first chapter of this report the objectives of this research were:

- To understand the changing causes and consequences of seasonal/temporary migration for individuals and households in the study area;
- To examine vulnerability (and security) of those staying behind in the work migrants' households;
- To investigate the practices and measures taken for social protection by those who stay behind;
- To examine the role of public action in providing social protection for migrants and their households during the migration process.

Through the case material from the 20 households that we studied in depth we have sought to meet these objectives and answer our research questions set out in Chapter 1, by explaining how the migrants and their families organise their lives around migration and cope with the challenges that the prolonged absence of an adult from the household brings. What will be apparent from the material that we have presented is the importance of family, friends and other neighbours in helping people get by, both those who stay behind and those who travel. Without the provision of small loans of cash and food, help with accessing medical care and the friendship that these people often bring to migrants and their families, the ability of many of these people to sustain a migration dependent livelihood would be greatly reduced if not rendered impossible.

The formal systems of social protection afforded by the government plays a very small role in the lives of the people we talked to. People are certainly grateful for subsidised purchases of rice through ration cards and VGF or VGD cards, but such payments are often one-off or infrequent. Even old-age allowances were not a reliable supplement in the two families where members received them. Payments are not paid on time, if at all.

The NGO savings schemes and support for improvements against flooding and natural disaster provide opportunities for some families to save money, but even for migrant workers who have a regular income the pressure to keep up payments can prove too much. Where people have managed to save modestly but successfully, like Shuvra, Israil and Salim, they have used these loans for the purchase of land and the payment of dowry. Some, like Israil and Salim, have used NGO group loans to access larger sums from banks and have accumulated assets in that way. Indeed, when one looks at the examples of Utpal, Israil and Salim and the former migrants Umer and Rafique it is clear that earnings from migration afford the best security for the future for those who can invest in land and education. Unfortunately, the pressure for dowry

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<sup>24</sup> Winter-sown rice crop.

disadvantages families with many daughters and few sons, and the savings of the ex-migrant Nazir, as well as much of the earnings of Shuvra, were 'lost' in their daughters' marriages. The role of dowry in impoverishing already poor families in Bangladesh is now well documented (Suran *et al.* 2004, Sultana 2005), and the families of the migrants of Badalpara have not escaped this trap.

While the family of a migrant in the village may be able to access some support from NGOs and the government, however meagre, the situation for the migrant working in Dhaka, Feni, Comilla, Bogra or Chittagong, or indeed anywhere outside their home place, is rather different, with no formal protection at all. The so-called unskilled and semi-skilled workers, faced with competition for scarce jobs, have little choice than to put up with cramped living conditions, long hours and insecurity. Even those with higher education, like Zubair, find no advantage when it comes to competing for jobs and getting help. The support the migrants receive comes from the people they know, the contacts they have and the reputations of people from Badalpara for being good workers. That is where their social protection lies, in themselves and others like them. By organising themselves many migrants are not powerless -- they travel in groups, they seek and receive information on work options and they try to plan how to invest their income for a better future. Nevertheless, among our 22 migrants in the 20 case study households, there is great variation. The situation of a long-term well established rickshaw puller is very different from someone who is yet to be established or someone who lacks support for the family and cannot stay away for long. Even among this seemingly homogenous group of internal temporary migrants we must talk of 'migrations', and not one form of migration or migrant. Their demands for work vary, but so do their needs for security and social protection. And given the lack of alternative sources of employment for those with little land and few other assets, temporary work migrants will continue to fill the buses heading out of the town near Badalpara.

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## **Annex 1: Data Collection Methods Used**

### **Data Collection Prior to Sample Selection**

#### *Transect Walk*

The team used the transect walk technique to explore the whole study village during the initial visits. Walking through the village the team could begin to find out about people, their occupations, the practice of religion and culture, land use patterns, existing institutions, and other relevant issues which come out through discussions with local people. This approach allowed the research team to meet people and gain an overview about the study village before the main field research began. Secondly, this exercise provided a chance for the research team to introduce the study and share the objectives of the study with villagers.

#### *Social Map*

The team members drew a simple map of the village, noting key features in the village (like water stand pipes, rivers/streams, mosque shop etc.) and where each household lived. This map was updated from time to time during the fieldwork so that changes in the village layout and the team's understanding of it were recorded. The map is shown on page 33.

#### *Village Census*

After the introductions in the village, the research team conducted a simple census. Names, ages and sex of individuals in each household were recorded; including information on which the contact person was for the household. The members of the household were asked if they sell labour (referring to a particular reference year) people were asked how many months they sell their labour for (which may vary among individuals in the household). The information for the census was recorded on a plain sheet of paper, in a standard format agreed among the team (the agreed format, typed up for the sake of this report, is shown in Appendix 1). Any additional information on the household, which the team member thought pertinent to the census, was recorded on the same sheet. The use of a plain sheet of paper, rather than a pre-prepared form, allowed some flexibility in the space devoted to recording information on each household member but also, and more importantly, underlined for participants that this research was informal, and no questionnaire forms were being used, so informants literate in Bangla could see that nothing had previously been written on the paper used to record the details of their household.

#### *Wealth/well-being Ranking*

On the basis of the census the team was able to gain some insights into who is poor and less poor in the village. To gain more information on wealth and well-being the team conducted a simple wealth ranking exercise with a group of individuals from the village (chosen to represent different groups, including age and gender). See below pp. 35-38 for details of how this exercise was carried out, and the results.

#### *Migration Survey*

In order to select the case study households, it was necessary to conduct some key informant interviews about the patterns of migration, which kinds of migration, and which households tend to take part in it. This was followed up during the ethnographic work by an informal migration survey which kept a record of temporary work migration into and out of the village, using key informants in each para.

### *Seasonal Calendar*

To understand different seasonal patterns of migration the team conducted a seasonal calendar exercise. After identifying different occupational informant groups (based on occupation at destination) from the village census survey, three to four seasonal calendar exercises were conducted with different occupational groups. The main purpose of these exercises was to identify busy and slack seasons for migration for different occupational groups (for example, skilled/semi-skilled workers [such as carpenters], rickshaw pullers and day labourers). This also helped the team to understand which form of migration in which season provided more income and which less and seasonal variation of migration for different wealth category households etc.

## **Data Collection After Sample Selection of Case Studies**

### *Household Case Studies*

Twenty households were chosen for in-depth study. As noted above, these were households currently involved in migration and were chosen purposively to represent different forms of migration, as well as different wealth categories in the village.

The selected households were visited and the purpose of the research explained, in order to seek their consent for regular visits. If the household members agreed to participate a team member visited each week for no more than half an hour, unless invited to stay longer, for the first month and then on a fortnightly or monthly basis there after. The purpose of these regular visits was to gain an understanding of change in the household. Information was gathered on changing household composition and assets as well as significant events in the household, including sickness and what was done to cope with the event. Simple kinship diagrams were constructed for each household (an example for which is shown below).

A checklist was used to guide the visits so that some data were collected systematically (household composition, information on migration, sickness, for example). The checklists for the village overall and for each case study household are shown in Annexes 4 and 5). The checklist was memorised by the team member undertaking the visit, and was not used like a questionnaire. The same team member was the regular visitor to one particular household, although another team member, of the opposite sex, visited occasionally to conduct interviews with men or women not easily accessed by the regular team visitor.

Aside from these regular visits the team members interacted with the study households and others as they went about their daily chores or work in the village, and learnt more about their livelihoods through those informal interactions.

### *Life Histories*

In each study household one individual was selected to record their life history. The aim was to collect 20 migrant life histories (10 men and 10 women). Ten life histories were collected from men but only one woman migrant told her life history (because there were very few women migrants in the village). Information on the lives of those left behind was also collected; this was relatively straightforward because it was often the male migrant's wife and children we met on our visits because the migrant was away from home. The wives of a number of the male migrants told us their life stories.

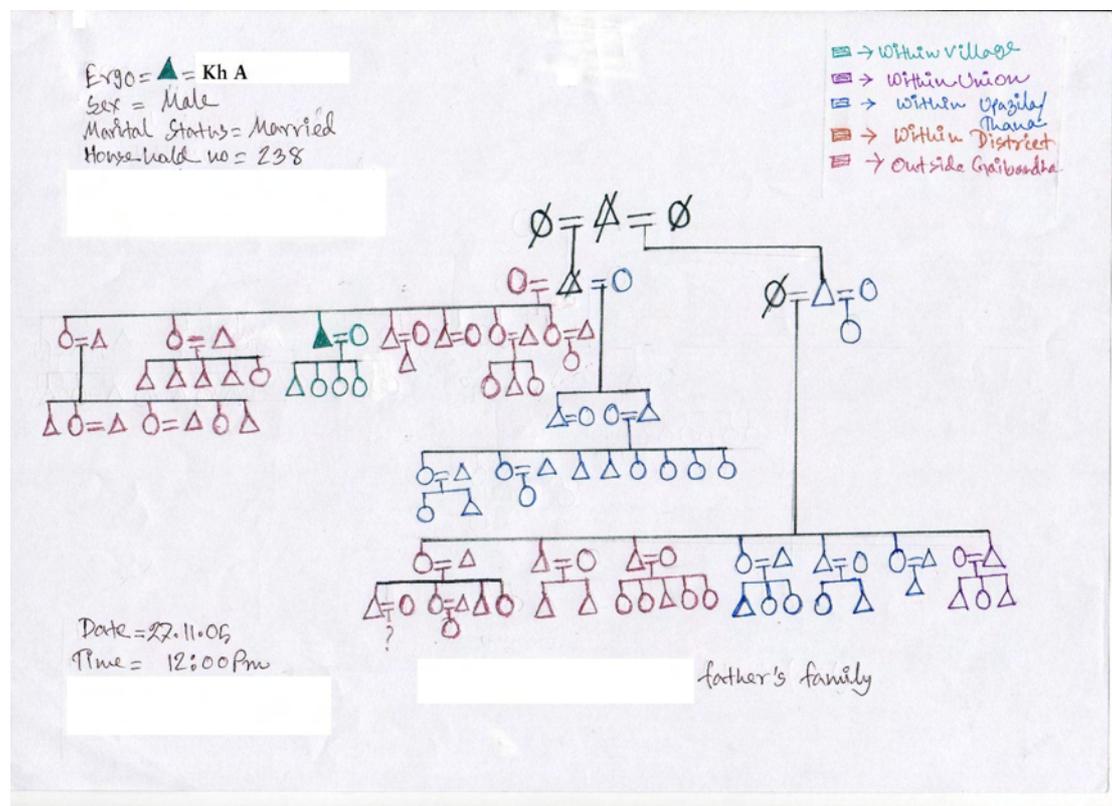
### Key Informant Interviews

In addition to the household visits, the team interacted with key-informants in the village and outside the village (at the bus stand and in the upazila headquarters and a mess<sup>25</sup> owner in Feni, for example) to gather information on forms of social protection and different types of migration.

### Secondary Data

The team continued to gather secondary data throughout the research period looking for material provided by NGOs and Government on schemes that are available to villagers, as well as where possible consulting village lists (such as household lists or attendance registers at school, if possible). Relevant newspaper clippings from local papers as well as national papers were also collected.

### An Example of a Kinship Diagram



### Travelling with Migrants and Gathering Information at their Place of Destination

Occasionally data were gathered from individual migrants (case study households and others) as they journeyed to negotiate employment then moved onto their place of work and at their destination. A visit was made to Feni to see where some of the migrants worked and stayed and we also gathered information on migrants in Dhaka.

### Data Recording

Each team member carried a small note pad for the recording of information during the day. In the evening, or next morning, each team member wrote up their field notes in as much detail as

<sup>25</sup> A mess is a place that migrants often lodge in. It is often just a single room where a number of migrants sleep.

possible, using separate pages for different interviews or observations. All pages were numbered and dated, with a title for the subject of the notes given at the top of the page.

These notes were copied (using carbon paper) so that one set of notes could be kept in chronological order and the other filed in broad subject categories. One set of notes (the chronological set) was taken back to Dhaka for safe keeping on a monthly basis by the team members. Where possible and when likely to be of interest for the research questions, exact quotes were recorded in the notes in Bangla.

During the monthly break from the field the team member checked through their notes so that they could reflect on emerging themes and issues, and on the ongoing quality of interviews.

#### *Paper Clippings*

The migration team scanned newspaper for data on internal labour migration in Bangladesh from 1 October 2004 until February 2006. Everyday the team scanned two national newspapers -- a national English daily, *The Daily Star*, and a national Bangla daily, *The Daily Ittefaq*, and three other national Bangla newspapers, *The Daily Janakantha*, *The Daily Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Bhorer Kagoj* are looked at occasionally. The purpose of newspaper clippings was to know the current situation of internal labour migration in Bangladesh. We also realized, given the paucity of literature on internal migration in Bangladesh, that newspaper articles would help us gain the best available overview of the present situation in the country.

## Annex 2: The Case Study Households

Here we describe the background to each person and his or her household:

### 1. Mobin – Wealth Rank (WR) 3

Mobin, a carpenter, was aged 24 when the study began. He was married in early 2005. His family consists of his wife and his mother. He is a permanent resident of the village. His four brothers stay nearby but each has a separate kitchen. Mobin has four decimals of land including his homestead area. He does not cultivate any land on a sharecropped basis. He has two cows, the value of which was approximately 9000 taka (£70) to 10,000 taka (£77) in 2005.

Mobin is not associated with any NGO. However, he is the member of Mirganj bazar samity and another savings group in his village. In the Mirganj samity, Mobin aims to save 5/- every day and in the village group he aims to save 10 taka a week. His savings in the Mirganj samity has increased to 2000 taka (£15) and in the village samity, it increased to 3000 taka (£23) by the end of 2005. In addition, Mobin has savings of about one lakh taka (£765) in the Krishi (Government) bank.

Mobin started migrating 7-8 years ago. He stays at the destination for nine months in a year. He has read up to class VII; he could not go any further as his parents could not afford it. However, Mobin is satisfied with the education he received. He says that even if he had studied more he could not have got a better job. He is happy with the work he does. He has done well for his age – he has been a head carpenter for four years, and has two, sometimes four, assistants working for him.

Mobin migrates to different places in Dinajpur district. During the study period he was working at a place where his food and lodging were free. Mobin says that the advantage of being a carpenter is that every time he can take three or four assistants with him so he has people with him he knows. He brings back 3500/- to 4000/- (£30) as earnings. He comes home every month and pays all the dues of both samities he belongs to and also for the expenses of his wife and mother. He rings his wife once or twice a month while he is away using a mobile phone (which he pays to use at the destination). Mobin says that he has become economically solvent through migration. He is saving money to start a business. He plans to start a furniture shop of his own at Sundarganj, for which he needs to save about three lakh taka (£2300).

Mobin's mother runs the household while he is away. His young wife spent much of the seven months we spent in the village visiting her father's home in another village. This was said to be because of the lack of resources in Mobin's home, but as a new wife she may have felt more comfortable there than staying on her own with her mother-in-law.

### 2. Ahmed -- WR 3

Ahmed, also a carpenter, was aged about 23 when the study began. He has a wife and a five-year-old son. His father works as a *muezzin* in a mosque in Sundarganj upazila. His mother died of an epileptic fit about 15 years ago. His father then remarried and moved to Mirganj, near Sundarganj where he lives with his second wife and their children: two daughters and one son. Ahmed's elder brother, his uncle, and cousins are all in Badalpara. Ahmed's father-in-law also resides in the village. His wife has three sisters and two brothers. All three sisters are married and stay in the same ward as Ahmed's family. The advantage of having so many

family members around is that they help each other when there is a problem. Ahmed's father has not yet divided the land among his sons.

Ahmed has worked as a carpenter for about eight years but he has only migrated for work for the last five years. He migrates to Dhaka and works in a furniture store on the Ring Road in the Mohammadpur area. He stays in Dhaka for four to five months a year. Whenever he stays at the village, he works as a carpenter in Sundarganj. If there is no work or less work at Sundarganj, he finds work as an agricultural labourer.

Ahmed checks on the availability of work in Dhaka by using a mobile phone, starting with opportunities in the shop in Dhaka where he usually works. If there is work, he travels to Dhaka with two or three other carpenters.

Ahmed leaves money for food for the family with his wife, usually about 1000 taka (£8) for one month. To arrange this, he sometimes borrows on interest and sometimes he takes an advance on wages from those who hire him, making repayments later from the proceeds of his carpentry work. Ahmed brings home 1500 to 2000 taka (£15) after each migration. In his absence, if his wife needs money, she takes a loan from Ahmed's elder brother or she borrows from the neighbours (some of whom are relatives). If she cannot get help from these sources she goes to stay in her father's home. Occasionally she takes a loan from the village samity at a 10-15 percent monthly interest rate. Ahmed does not like taking loans from his father, uncle or cousins because this can create difficulties if there is a delay in paying them back. In his absence, his elder brother purchases the daily necessities from the market for Ahmed's wife. Ahmed and his wife have never been a member of an NGO or a village samity.

### *3. Smarajit -- WR 2*

Smarajit is 28 years old and is an agricultural labourer. His family consists of his wife and a five-year-old daughter. His father came to this village in 1965, married, and settled here, inheriting his father-in-law's property and adding to that himself.

Although Smarajit's father is now dead, the property has not been formally divided among Smarajit and his five brothers, all of whom live in Badalpara. They have, however, distributed the land amongst themselves informally. Smarajit 'inherited' 20 decimal of land (800 sq metres) under this informal arrangement, which he cultivates himself. Moreover, he cultivates one bigha (1335.4 sq metres) of someone else's land on a sharecropped basis. Apart from this there is a homestead area of six decimal (240 sq metres) which has not been distributed and is of common use for all the brothers.

Smarajit's father-in-law resides in a village in another part of Sundarganj upazila. None of his father-in-law's relatives stay in his village. However, because his own brothers, along with their families, all stay in the same house (although each of them has a separate kitchen) they can help him (and his family) out if there is any problem.

Smarajit started migrating three years ago. He works as an agricultural labourer as well as a rickshaw puller. He migrates only twice a year and each time stays for just one month at the destination. During the winter season when the irrigated rice is planted he migrates to work on that. During the other seasons he cultivates his own land. He depends on the income from the vegetables he produces during the months he is working in the village. He also shares ownership of a cow.

Smarajit migrates in a group, which is what he prefers as he enjoys the company and the security of being with others. He provides for daily necessities in his household before migrating. If the provisions run short, his wife purchases these on credit from the shop in the village with which they have an arrangement. Smarajit repays the loan on his return. In case of emergency, his brothers support his household by providing a loan. They also help if his wife or their daughter is sick whilst Smarajit is away.

Sometimes Smarajit borrows from his neighbours or from the Mirganj samity (group) on interest. Smarajit says he has not had problems migrating yet, although the first time he travelled on the top of the bus he was hurt when a tree branch banged his head.

#### 4. Shuvra -- WR 3

Shuvra, an agricultural labourer, was aged about 50 when the fieldwork began in 2005. His father, who is said to be 100 years old, and his mother, about 70, are dependent on him. Shuvra and his wife have three daughters and a son. Their eldest daughter is married and the other daughters and son are aged 14, 12, and 10 and are all studying in the school. Shuvra's wife is a member of the Grameen Bank samity. For the last one year, she has saved 20 taka per week in that group.

Shuvra is a permanent resident of the village where his father has a homestead plot of eight decimals (323 sq metres) on which they live. Shuvra does not have any other land of his own. Shuvra has been living with his parents here for the last 30 years. Earlier, his father lived in ward number 9 on char land but due to river erosion, the land went under the water and Shuvra's father sold the remaining land to settle in the present place after the liberation of Bangladesh.

Shuvra has been migrating to Bogra and Dinajpur for the last 20 years. Every year he stays there for six or seven months. He used to go mainly to Dinajpur but now he migrates mostly to Bogra. In the village, he works as a labourer on other people's crop land. He lacks capital so he does not cultivate other people's land on a share cropping basis. Shuvra used to go by train to his place of work but in recent years the bus services have improved so he takes the bus now. He says that the bus services have started up specifically to help the many temporary migrants who travel from Gaibandha district.

Shuvra used to have three cows and an additional bigha of cultivated land. At the time of his eldest daughter's marriage he sold one cow and borrowed money for the marriage by mortgaging out his one bigha of land. At his daughter's marriage ceremony, the total expenditure was 22,000 taka (£170), out of which 15,000 (£115) was taken by his son-in-law as dowry. Now Shuvra has two cows, but he could not repay the loan and buy back his land. These two cows will now go towards the marriages of his two remaining daughters. It was his migration for work that enabled Shuvra to purchase the two cows and repair his house.

Shuvra says that the reason migrant workers cannot improve their positions very much is because when they return with money in their pocket they then sit idle until it is time to migrate again, exhausting their earnings while back in the village. Often migrants can get some work in the village during the jute harvest but in 2005, when the study was undertaken, the jute crop was destroyed in a hailstorm so there was nothing left to harvest.

In the rainy season there is the opportunity to fish in the river. But, as a Hindu Shuvra cannot sell fish in the market. His family would be shunned, he says, because fishing is associated with the lowest caste Hindus, not higher castes like Shuvra and his family.

According to Shuvra, that no one likes migration as families tend to be anxious, worrying about road accidents, for instance. A few years back a number of members of the group Shuvra was travelling with died in a road accident.

#### 5. Deepak -- WR 3

Deepak is aged about 32 years and is a married rickshaw puller. His father is a school teacher. He lives separately from his father but his unmarried brother lives with him.<sup>26</sup> Deepak and his brother are the children by their father's first wife. Deepak himself married about six years ago, when he still lived with his father and stepmother. His wife was worked very hard in the family and Deepak says she did not eat properly. After two years of marriage his wife had a still-born, and the doctor put it down to her being malnourished. Deepak decided then to live separately so he could take better care of his wife and his brother (who was always sick in their father's home). Though they are within the same homestead, they now have a separate kitchen.

Deepak's father did not give them any land, so they really struggled. Then, a year ago, he gave them a bigha (1335 sq metres) of unproductive land. In addition, Deepak sharecrops 70 decimal of land with another man in the village; it is this land Deepak works on when he is in the village between migratory spells.

The village is Deepak's father's ancestral home so his uncles, cousins and other relatives reside in this village and they help each other if problems arise. His wife's family live far away in Kurigram district. Deepak has taken loans from Grameen bank, TMSS and the village savings samity.

Deepak and his brother migrate together to Feni and Dhaka, where they find work pulling rickshaws. They began migrating in order to support themselves after moving out of their father's home. Deepak migrates to Feni more than to Dhaka. Both of the brothers migrate for three months every year, particularly in the months of Srabon (14 July-15 August), Kartik (14 October-15 November) and Poush (14 December-15 January).

During the period of study Deepak's wife gave birth to a boy which the family was very happy about, although the costs incurred around the time of the birth pushed Deepak into financial crisis.

#### 6. Jamal -- WR 3

Jamal is a 40-year-old rickshaw puller. He and his wife have two daughters and a son. Jamal's mother also lives with them. Jamal came to the village in about 1997 and moved close to where his uncle lived when his land in a nearby thana was eroded by the river. The land on which he settled was also taken by the river so he moved again, this time to higher ground in the same village. Initially he stayed on someone else's land but he has now bought 25 decimals (1000 sq metres) of land and looks to staying here permanently. This includes 19

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<sup>26</sup> His home is close to Shuvras home, in an area mainly settled by Hindu families, but they are not close relatives.

decimals (800 sq metres) of land for vegetable production, and one bigha of char land, though he gets only a very small quantity of crop from this land.

Jamal does not have any relatives of his own living in this village now (his uncle has died). However, his father-in-law's house is adjacent to his own.

Jamal is the member of various NGO groups. He has taken a loan of 7,000 taka (£54) from BRAC samity and 5000 taka (£38) from Mirganj samity at 10 percent interest. Jamal used to work as a carpenter and he had his own business in a shop at Mirganj bazaar. He started that business with a loan from the Grameen bank and ran it for seven years but eventually had to give up because people were defaulting on payments for furniture and he was seriously in debt.

Three years ago Jamal started migrating to Dhaka to pull a rickshaw. Though he found pulling the rickshaw quite hard on his body, he is now used to it. In Dhaka he always stays in a mess belonging to someone from the village. He earns 3000 taka per month (£23). He is on good terms with both the owner of the rickshaw and the mess owner and so does not face any problem getting work and shelter. He also found work pulling a rickshaw in Feni briefly when he went there looking for his 16-year-old son who went away without informing anyone.

When Jamal migrates, he does not like taking a loan from other villagers because of the possibility of tensions if repayments are delayed or the embarrassment of not being able to reciprocate. So he borrows from moneylenders in Mirganj. He always leaves some money, and sometimes rice, with his wife before leaving. There are occasions when his wife has to borrow 50-60 taka or rice from the neighbours or her relatives. Jamal repays the loan when he returns to the village, or sends the money through other migrants from the village.

In times of ill-health, the local doctor tries to provide all treatment on credit until Jamal returns. If it is serious, Jamal is informed through the mobile phone and either he comes himself or he sends money. If Jamal falls sick in Dhaka, he buys himself medicine or seeks the help of the mess owner who is a traditional doctor. He often seems to suffer from low blood pressure which means he finds it hard to pull the rickshaw without frequent breaks.

When he returns from Dhaka, Jamal normally does not work but spends the money he has earned. If there is a demand for agricultural labourers though, he does join up to earn some extra money.

### *7. Samsed -- WR 3*

Samsed was aged 36 years old when the fieldwork began in 2005. His parental home is in Ward 8 but their land was lost to river erosion so he moved to ward 7. He moved to his present location 10 years ago and bought three and a half decimal (140 sq metres) of land. The move involved his whole family, including his parents. Two brothers now live next door to him. Two other brothers and a sister live in other parts of the village. His wife is from Rangpur district. They have one son, aged nine, and a daughter, aged four.

Samsed used to have a flourishing greengrocery selling rice, onion, chilli and other vegetables. He also cultivated vegetables on his land and on a share-cropped basis. Five years ago a hail storm destroyed all his crops. In addition, a number of people had taken his produce on credit so Samsed had no money to make good his losses. It was in these dire circumstances that he started migrating, working as a rickshaw puller. Just over a year ago he gave up his

greengrocer's business completely and decided to focus wholly on raising his income from migrating and cultivating his land. He still owes money to people he borrowed from when his business failed. He migrates to Dhaka and Feni for seven months in a year, staying away for as many as 20 days.

He grows jute on the land he share-crops. But in 2005 another hailstorm destroyed that crop, which he was to have used to repay an outstanding loan of 20,000 taka (£153), a loan he had secured to restart his business. Samsed's wife, a member of ASA, had already taken three loans from ASA in the three years she had been a member, and has an outstanding loan of 5000 taka (£40). She had hoped this would help fund repairs on the house as well as provide capital for restarting of the business. She manages to repay at the rate of about 150 taka per week. She used to be a member of BRAC but discontinued that two years ago when she found it difficult to make regular savings and repay loans.

Samsed migrates with a group of eight to ten people comprising of his cousins, nephew and other villagers. In his opinion, migration in a group is good because they help each other in case of problems. He tries to ensure at least a week's provisions when he migrates. He either remits money back to his wife when he is away, sends it with someone or uses a money-order, which he has pay a charge on.

At the destination, Samsed spends 35 taka per day for food and another 35 taka per day to rent his rickshaw. His room rent is 70 taka per month. Samsed frequently suffers from sickness while he is away, so they spend a lot of money on medical expenses. In his absence, his family is looked after by his brothers and neighbours.

Samsed would like to stop migrating for work, but for that to happen he needs his business situation to improve and to pay off his debts.

#### *8. Rasheed -- WR 3*

Rasheed is about 30 years old. He used to live in ward 9 with his parents, but they lost their land, about 13 bigha or four acres, to river erosion. The family moved to the present location five years ago. His father purchased nine decimal of land (360 sq metres) and made a new house. Now Rasheed and his brother live separately from their parents. Rasheed's wife is from another village in the Upazila, and she has no relatives in the village. Rasheed and his wife have a four-year-old daughter and a son just over two years old.

Rasheed does not have any land of his own. He and his brother jointly purchased seven decimals of land on which to build a homestead. Their father has seven bighas of land in the chars, but it is not cultivable as it is water-logged. Rasheed cultivates three bighas of land on a share-cropped basis. The rice he plants can sustain his family for six months.

Rasheed started migrating for work 10 years ago to Chittagong, Dhaka and Feni, pulling the rickshaw after the cultivation season. He always goes with a group of friends, all of whom are rickshaw pullers. Rasheed needs 250 taka for his fare to his work place. He leaves about seven kilos of rice with his wife when he goes and 100 taka in cash. He keeps in touch with his wife through the public mobile phone booth. While he is away he needs 60 taka a day, about half for the hire of the rickshaw and half for food. Accommodation costs 80 taka a month. He can usually save 1000 taka after eight days work.

Rasheed has taken a number of loans from BRAC, which is what he has used to purchase land. ASA have also invited him to join them but he has not as yet. His wife is a member of GUK and saves 5 taka a week. Their homestead was raised in 2005 under the special programme GUK had put in place to promote flood control.

### *9. Ajj / Alima -- WR 3*

Ajj is 40 years old and lives with his wife, five children and his mother-in-law Alima (who is 55 and also a migrant worker). Ajj's ancestral home is at Pabna but his father came to stay with his grown-up sister as a child because of acute poverty at home. Ajj's father did not have any land but he and his four brothers have managed to purchase some land in the village. Ajj has seven decimals (280 sq metres) of land in the village and 12 decimals of land in the char (about 500 sq metres) which is now under water. Ajj attended class I in primary school but he could not study further because the family was very poor. Ajj and his wife have five daughters and a son.

Ajj's wife is from another village in the upazila. Her father separated from her mother, and his second wife, Alima, leaving Alima to bring up her daughter alone. That is when Alima started finding different ways to make a living -- by cleaning other people's houses and migrating for various types of domestic work.

Ajj is a rickshaw puller and sometimes he works as an agricultural labourer. He migrates for about six months a year, with five or six other people, to Feni, and sometimes to Dhaka, for rickshaw pulling. It costs him 200 taka for the fare to Feni; he pays less if he travels on the roof. His mother-in-law often migrates to Feni too to do domestic work. Ajj prefers to migrate to Feni rather than to Dhaka. He finds many insecurities and problems in Dhaka, including lack of clean water, air pollution, theft etc. At Feni his costs include 35 taka per day to hire a rickshaw, 80 taka for accommodation and 35 taka for food. When Ajj and Alima are in Feni at the same time, Alima cooks for Ajj. Alima either works as a domestic worker or she begs. She earns about 500 taka a month and uses that to help her son-in-law and daughter. During the months she is in the village, she makes a living by begging.

The family are members of BRAC, GUK and Grameen Bank. Ajj has been using loans from BRAC for the purchase of seeds and other inputs for cultivation. The family decided to give up their house to GUK for use as a school. They built a small structure on the same compound to house them. GUK pays them rent (200 taka a month, although GUK paid an advance of 5000 taka for converting the house into a school, so Ajj has to pay off that debt first). Ajj thinks this is a good arrangement because it gives them a regular income. Ajj's wife worked on the GUK 'raising the homestead' programme and earned 60 taka a day for the work she did on other people's homesteads.

Ajj says that he can never ask his family for help when he is short of money because they are all poor. If Ajj needs a loan he takes a small amount from people in the same wealth category as he is. He borrows small amounts and then when those people need help he gives them a loan. He leaves his wife with about 10 days worth of rice when he leaves and 100 taka cash for buying other items. He does not ask his brothers for loans, because they are poor but he does ask them to take care of his wife and children when he is away. If the children become sick while he is away, his wife goes to the local doctor who is prepared to provide treatment on credit.

In late 2005 Ajij returned early from Feni complaining of police harassment. A bomb had been found in a rickshaw in Feni so all rickshaws were searched and the drivers' questioned. Ajij's contacts in Feni suggested he should return home until the situation improved. They promised to telephone him when it was safe to return.

#### 10. Ramjan -- WR 4

Ramjan is a 40-year-old beggar. His original home is in another village in the upazila, but he now lives on his wife's family's land because his wife was given three decimals of land (120 sq metres) by her mother. Two of his wife's sisters and two of her seven brothers live nearby and cultivate the land that they inherited (one of these sisters is H, in #189, one of our case study households). Ramjan's mother and brother live in the village where Ramjan was brought up. His brother is a rickshaw puller.

Ramjan's wife has difficulty speaking. Because of this impediment her parents found it difficult to find a husband for her. When she was seven they married her to an old man who died two months after the marriage. She returned to her parent's home and met Ramjan when she was nine years old when he came to their village begging. Ramjan is mentally unstable (he sometimes does irrational things<sup>27</sup>) but her brothers agreed to the marriage because they feared they would find no one else to marry her if they waited. Ramjan did not ask for a dowry. When they were first married they went to live with Ramjan's mother and brothers, but Ramjan quarrelled with his brothers and decided to move to his wife's land. Ramjan and his wife have four sons. Their eldest son is 14 years old and is learning carpentry, earning 10 to 20 taka a day.

Ramjan has been begging from his childhood. His wife also begs, sometimes even accompanying her husband when he migrates to Rangpur. Ramjan goes to Dinajpur and Bonarpara, as well as Rangpur, for begging. He is away for ten months in a year. He used to take his eldest son with him but now the boy is working, so another son, usually the second son, accompanies him. The sons say they do not like begging because people tease them. Ramjan's second son has started visiting his uncle who has a rickshaw and is learning how to pull it. He is not paid, but his uncle gives him his meals. The boy prefers this to going with his father.

When Ramjan migrates he 'camps' at the local railway station and begs from there. He stays away for 15 to 20 days and returns home with about 60 taka and about 20kg of rice. He also gets old clothes which he brings back for family use and for sale.

The family has few people to help them. Now that the eldest son is working he takes responsibility for helping his mother when his father is away. When there is a serious problem, Ramjan's wife's brother may help. When Ramjan's sons fall sick, his wife's family helps. Ramjan's wife got some assistance from GUK in 2005 by working on their homestead raising project. Ramjan's sister-in-law, H, in household 189, also helps when she can.

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<sup>27</sup> He was once forced by a relative to marry a second wife while away begging. His sons fetched him from the place he was staying with this second wife. Another time he demanded that his wife give him a rickshaw. He refused to stay with her until she bought him a rickshaw. He returned home when he fell ill because he needed his wife to take care of him.

### 11. Liki-- WR 4

Liki, aged about 40, is a permanent resident of the village. She, like her sister Ramjan's wife, inherited three decimals (120 sq metres) of land from her mother. She lives on that land with her husband. Her husband's parental home is in another part of Sundarganj. Her 60-year-old husband is disabled and cannot do any work. They married 20 years ago. He had five wives before her. Their daughter, who is married, stays next door. H's brothers and sister also stay nearby (as noted above for Ramjan's wife's family). Liki has been in dispute with her uncles who seized her father's land when he died. She has not succeeded in getting any of that land back from them.

Liki's husband used to be a rickshaw puller in Rangpur, which is where he married his earlier wives. But because he could not provide for his wives properly, each one left him. He met Liki when she was husking rice in Sunderganj when he was visiting his family home. Nowadays he earns some money by begging but for most things he depends on Liki.

Liki is a member of BRAC and saves 10 taka every week. Her membership of BRAC secures her a loan when she needs one. However, during the study period Liki took a loan of 5000 taka (£40) at 10 percent interest from a villager, with which she bought two more decimals of land. She thought that that loan was more flexible than NGO loans.

Liki earns her living husking rice, and migrating to Feni for domestic labour seven months of the year. She started seasonal migration six years ago. She goes to Feni when there is no work in the husking mill. Having become a regular visitor to Feni, she has no problem arranging for work there. Liki travels with a group of three or four women. She often returns alone. Before going to Feni, Liki leaves some cash or food for her husband. As her husband is old, their daughter as well as other neighbouring relatives look after him. Occasionally her husband comes to Feni too and begs there while Liki works.

Sometimes Liki takes a loan from a local person to cover household expenses while she is away. The problem is that if she fails to repay within the scheduled time, the lender may threaten to take away the corrugated iron sheet roof or cattle or other valuable assets. Her daughter often has to mediate, persuading the lender to wait until her mother returns from Feni to repay the debt.

### 12. Samsuddin -- WR 3

Samsuddin is between 35 and 40 years old, and an agricultural labourer. He used to live in Ward 9 where he has nine decimals (360 sq metres) of land in the char area, which is now submerged under water. He was forced to move four years ago because of river erosion. So now he works on other people's land as a day labourer. He does agricultural work in the village and then for six months of the year he goes to Bogra, Feni and Joypurhat for agricultural work. He has been migrating for work since he was 10 years old (his father died when he was eight, so the children had to help make a living). He migrates in a group of men all doing the same work. The group of about 10 get work with the same employer (unless there is a shortage of work; then they split up). They usually live at the employer's house. Some employers give them a room to stay but others expect them to sleep in the cowshed which is uncomfortable and provides no protection from mosquitoes. The daily wage is usually 70 taka a day, but when

labour is short the wage can go up to 100 taka.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes the group is offered a lump sum payment for a piece of work, but usually they get a daily wage. In Feni they are given a wage with two meals and in Bogra they are given a wage and three meals.

Samsuddin lived on his brother-in-law's land for most of the study period. He had lived on that land since he lost his homestead to river erosion. When he first lost his land he moved to the side of the embankment, but the river encroached there so he moved again to higher ground to stay with his wife's relatives. Samsuddin and his wife have two sons and two daughters. Their eldest child, a son, is eleven years old.

Samsuddin takes a loan of 500 taka to 1000 taka from other villagers at 5 to 10 percent interest before he migrates. With this, he gives his wife money for food and household expenses. While he is away he tries to send money back with a trusted person, but the money is often late so his wife borrows from her relatives or resorts to begging. Sometimes she finds no help and all she can do is reduce the meals she gives the children.

Samsuddin is a member of GUK and saves 5 taka a month with them. He received a VGF card at Eid in 2005 which entitled the family to some rice, but he has not received any other help.

### *13. Ajinul -- WR 3*

Ajinul was about 40 and a rickshaw puller when the study began. He and his wife have one son and three daughters. His son is 12 years old and his daughters are aged 10, eight and five years. All the children are at school. He has been married for 17 years.

Ajinul's parental home was on the char land in the village. They lost their land because of river erosion so they became homeless and had to live on someone else's land. Ajinul, along with his two brothers, jointly purchased 22 decimals (about 900 sq metres) of land in the village and have been residing here for last 10 years. One of his uncles also resides on this land with his family. Ajinul's mother resides with Ajinul's two brothers in Rangpur. Two step-brothers live in a neighbouring union. His father-in-law's home is also in another union of Sundarganj upazila. None of his in-laws' relatives resides in the same village as Ajinul and his wife.

Ajinul has about ten bighas cultivable land which he shares with his two brothers and two step-brothers. However, crops can be grown on only three bighas as seven bighas are non-productive. Ajinul cultivates the three productive bighas (one acre) on a share-cropped basis with his brothers.

Ajinul has been migrating for work for about 20 years to Rangpur, Feni and Dhaka. He migrates more to Feni and Rangpur and less often to Dhaka. When he was first married he stayed in Dinajpur with his wife for three years. Then they came back to the village and stayed for six years on the embankment at the edge of the village. After the birth of their first two children, they shifted back inside the village.

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<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that the minimum wage in the garment industry was set at 930 taka a month in 1994. The lowest wage band for garment workers was 930 to 1320 taka in 2005. Garment workers have been agitating for a minimum monthly wage of 3000 taka. Few rickshaw pullers, and certainly no agricultural labourers, could ever hope to earn so much during a month. Even in a good month DA can earn no more than 1500, because the harvesting or planting never lasts a full month.

Ajinul migrates for six to seven months in a year. The rest of the year he cultivates his land. When he migrates to Rangpur or Feni, he stays in a mess. He does not like to stay with his brothers, because he feels it may create unnecessary quarrels with them.

Before migration Ajinul gives money to cover the cost of food for a week or so to his wife. If necessary, he sends money from the place he has migrated to through a bus driver or bus helper. He makes regular contact with his wife from wherever he is through a mobile phone.

Ajinul says that he has improved his economic condition through migration. He has a plan to cultivate his own land with the help of agricultural casual labourers in the village and he says that he can manage the entire cost from the income of migration.

Ajinul is a member of the Mirganj bazaar samity and has been saving 10 taka per week for the last ten months, and he has not taken any loans from the samity yet. According to Ajinul's wife, the family would take a loan to pay the dowry for their daughters' wedding when the time came. For an agricultural labourer as son-in-law they would give 20,000 taka (£150), and a considerably greater 80,000 taka if the bridegroom held a permanent job with the government or some other organisation. They hope to recoup some of these costs for their three daughters through the dowry they would get at the marriage of their son.

Ajinul's wife makes some extra money by making quilts. Each month she sews up to five quilts for each of which she gets 100 to 120 taka. In the past, the family have borrowed money from SKS, ASA and Grameen bank in 2005 to finance land purchases and land development.

#### *14. Utpal -- WR 3*

Utpal is aged about 40 years old and is a rickshaw puller. His father was a wealthy man, but when he died (before the liberation war) the family quickly lost their wealth. Some of the land was lost to the government, which had requisitioned it for road building. During the liberation war they wanted to go to India (because they are Hindus) but an influential village leader persuaded them that they would be safe if they stayed, so they did and survived during that time by selling their remaining cattle. Utpal's parental home was in the char land which was completely eroded by the 1980s. Utpal then moved inland, buying up 12 decimals (480 sq metres) of land. He sold six decimals to the Hindu community in the village for a temple and kept six for cultivation. He purchased another decimal on which he built a house. The family has lived on this land for the last 15 years.

Utpal has two brothers and two sisters. One brother lives in a neighbouring village, and another lives in Mirganj bazaar, running a rice husking business. One of his sisters has died and the other one is a widow. Utpal's mother lives with him although she has a separate kitchen. Utpal and his wife have two sons and a daughter. The eldest son is 16 years old and is in class X, the younger son in class VIII while their daughter is in class I. Utpal pays 400 taka for a private tutor to help his children study.

Utpal has been migrating for work for 15 years. He goes to Feni for eight months in a year. Each time he stays one and a half to two months. He returns for about 15-20 days and then migrates again. Even when he is in the village he does not rest; he finds work as an agricultural labourer when he is at home.

At Feni, Utpal stays with a Hindu family, paying a rent of 300 taka. He eats his meals in a hotel, the cost of which comes to about 50 taka a day. He pulls a rickshaw from morning until quite late in the evening (2300 hrs) and renting the rickshaw costs him 40 taka per day. His net income is about 100 to 120 taka per day, and even less during very hot or rainy days.

He parks his rickshaw at the house where he rents rather than at the rickshaw garage. While this is convenient, it carries risks. For instance, his rickshaw was once stolen from the house, and he had to pay the rickshaw owner 2000 taka (£15) towards its cost. By early 2005 he had paid 900 taka in two instalments, and he planned to pay the rest in monthly instalments of 200 taka. If the rickshaw had been at the garage, he would not have had any liability for it.

According to Utpal, he is known to be a hard-working man in Feni and his reputation has paved the way for work there for others from his village. He is trusted by other migrant workers and is often the one who carries money back for others at the end of his time in Feni. Utpal keeps in touch with his wife on the mobile phone.

Utpal was not always a rickshaw puller though. Earlier, about 25 years ago, he worked for a rich man in the village running a shallow tube well. He had trained as a mechanic for that job. The pay was very low so he left that work and traded in spare parts for shallow tube wells for a time and then rice before he became a migrant. The man he worked for 25 years ago continues to provide help to Utpal and his family when they need it. The family did get a VGF card to help them with the purchase of rice towards the end of 2005, but they do not get any other support from the Government.

Utpal or his wife had not been associated with any NGO or samity but in mid-2005 Utpal's wife decided they had enough resources to join a savings scheme, so she joined BRAC. Utpal invests in livestock as a way of saving for the future. They have goats, sheep and a cow. His wife takes these animals to the char land each day for grazing. Utpal used his income from migration to purchase the cow.

#### *15. Debashish/Snehashish -- WR 3*

Debashish and Snehashish, aged 22 and 16 years respectively, are the children of KB (aged 55) and his wife (aged 45) who are cultivators. Debashish and Snehashish have a 14-year-old sister and an 11-year-old brother who are still at home and an older brother who is married and lives separately. Their parents were both born and brought up in the village. KB has 70 decimals (2800 sq metres) of land including homestead and cultivated land. He has also got 16 decimals of cultivatable land in the char land. KB and his wife are associated with both BRAC and TMSS.

Debashish and Snehashish migrate for four months in a year. Debashish has been migrating for five years and Snehashish for two. They work as rickshaw pullers or agricultural labourers, depending upon what work is available. They travel to their place of work together with their older brother, who is also a migrant worker, but often return separately because they finish work at different times. They travel with a larger group of about 10 or 12 men, both Hindus and Muslims. Debashish and Snehashish are Hindus so they eat with Hindus at their destination but they stay in a mixed mess. They migrate to Comilla, Bogra, Dinajpur and Feni for work and stay at the place of work for 20 to 25 days at a stretch. They each earn between 1500 and 2000 taka during that time. In Feni they pull rickshaws and in Comilla, Bogra, and Dinajpur they perform agricultural work. Back at home they also help their parents with agricultural work. The

two boys have their own cow. They also have a calf, which they share with another person in the village.

Debashish and Snehashish use their savings to finance the trips or they take a loan from one of their relatives. Sometimes one of them, or their older brother, has to stay back in the village to help their father because he is getting older and cannot manage heavy work any more. If a family member falls ill while they are away, a neighbour contacts them using the mobile phone in a local shop.

The brothers once had a problem with a broker who tried to force them to go to Chittagong to work in the shipyard. They managed to escape and since then they have travelled with their older brother in a large group. Apart from that incident they have not faced any problems migrating. Snehashish wants to work in a textile mill in Dhaka but Debashish has no plans to change his working pattern.

#### 16. *Israil -- WR 3*

Israil is aged about 40 and is a carpenter. He and his wife are cross cousins. They have two children: a daughter aged 14 and a son aged 11. Israil's mother also lives with them. The family used to have extensive lands on the char on the edge of ward 7, but it succumbed to river erosion and the family had to shift to the other side of the village. They had to build their house on Israil's brother-in-law's land (his sister's husband). Israil did not study long in school; neither he nor his father thought that education was necessary because he was the only son of his father and expected to inherit his father's land. However, even before his father died ten years ago, the river had begun to claim the land. Israil learnt to be a carpenter when he realised he would not be able to make a living from farming. Israil has been migrating to find work for the last 20 years.

Israil's wife recalls their life before they lost their land -- they had bullocks for ploughing and cows for milk but when the land was submerged the livestock had to be sold. Their house was also lost. The house that they stay in now has just two rooms: a small room that Israil's mother stays in and a larger room that Israil, his wife and children share. The family has 88 decimals (3500 sq metres), most of which Israil has purchased (he still owes 5000 taka to a bank for a loan he took for the purchase of land). He produces jute, rice and other crops. So the family is not badly off compared to many other families in the village but they are much poorer than they used to be in Israil's father's time. In 2005, the jute crop was damaged by hail. This was another blow for the family because Israil had hoped the proceeds of the sale of jute would have allowed him to pay off his loan to the bank.

None of his wife's close family lives near them. His father-in-law's home is at Mirganj. When the family needs help Israil's elder sister and a cousin who lives in the village help them. Other relatives also live in the district and some of those relatives, as well as friends, provide support from time to time. The family have saved with, and taken loans from, BRAC and TMSS. Israil's wife works hard for the family; she tends livestock for other villagers and makes quilts to sell.

Israil migrates to Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Shapnapuri, Fulbari and many other places. He stays five months in his destination. He moves with a group of four or five people because most carpentry jobs demand a small team.

Israil does not face any problem in getting work. A prosperous person from his own village, who happens to be his distant relative, has opened up a carpentry shop in Dinajpur. This person uses the mobile phone in the village to call for carpenters to come and help him when a big order comes through. Israil often gets work from this man. Israil is able to have meals three times a day in the house where he works and he also resides there.

Israil leaves money with his wife for the maintenance of the family while he is away, taking a loan if he does not have enough cash with him. He calculates the expenditure at 1500 taka per month or 50 taka per day. His sister's family next door look after Israil's family in the event of any eventuality. Israil also makes regular contact with his family through the mobile phone in the village. Now that their son is grown up, he is the one who purchases daily necessities from the market when Israil is away.

Israil has not faced any problem in Dinajpur. He keeps his wages with the house owner in the house where he works in Dinajpur, who is a distant relative. He informs the owner one day before he leaves for home and takes the wages before starting for home. Normally he travels by bicycle or by train, spending about 50 taka on the journey. Back home he cultivates his own land, or share crops on someone else's land.

### 17. Zubair -- WR 3

Zubair is a 38-year-old rickshaw puller. His parents, brothers and sisters all stay in this village. His father-in-law's home is in the same union, although not in this village. Zubair has been married two times. He divorced his first wife when he discovered that she had been having a relationship with another man while he was away on migration. Zubair's first wife and her lover were fined 30,000 taka by the *Shalish* village court. Zubair had a son by his first wife, who had been staying with Zubair until shortly before this study started, but moved to live with his mother in 2005. Six months after his divorce Zubair remarried. Zubair has a daughter with his second wife and a second child, a daughter, was born during the course of the fieldwork. Zubair does not have any land of his own. He resides on his father's land. His father was a religious leader and the family has a good reputation in the village.

Zubair is the most educated of all the present migrants in the village. He passed his Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and then tried for his Higher Secondary [School] Certificate (HSC) in 1991. However, he was unsuccessful in that examination and very disappointed as his family had high expectations for his future. Indeed, the first time we met him he told us he had left home after his SSC to look for an office job, but he had failed to find one; he did not tell us about failing his HSC until we knew him better. Clearly, even 15 years later, he was still upset and perhaps ashamed of his failure. Zubair had then moved to work in a readymade garment factory. Unfortunately for him the factory had problems and closed within a month of his joining. Zubair then started pulling a rickshaw.

Zubair migrates for 10 months in a year to Feni. He says that because he is educated he would not want to pull a rickshaw near his home, but Feni is far from the village. However, he does travel with other men from the village. He returns for 10 to 12 days, but does not work while back home, living off his Feni earnings instead.

Although Zubair frequently migrates, he does not seem to be able to improve the family's economic position. He often falls sick in Feni and is unable to work. Even if he spends two to three months in Feni he cannot bring back more than 1000 taka. Before going to Feni Zubair

has to take a loan of about 2-300 taka with which he purchases (rice, oil and vegetables) to last the family for about 15 days. He cannot leave any cash with his wife. Indeed, he often has to travel to Feni on credit, paying for the bus journey by then taking a loan from the rickshaw owner. Sometimes he also takes a loan from the rickshaw owner or the mess owner (where he stays in Feni) on his return trip, so that he can bring sufficient money to his family.

Zubair cannot get support from his father or brothers or his neighbours. He once took a loan from his brother-in-law (wife's sister's husband), which he had failed to repay, and this had caused much tension in the family. Zubair finally sent money back from Feni at the end of 2005, which his wife used to pay off the loan. When Zubair is away his wife sometimes takes a loan from her father in cash as well as in kind of (such as rice or vegetables). Sometimes she gets support from her mother, grandmother and aunt. She often goes to stay with her father when supplies have run out at home. Zubair and his wife used to be members of BRAC, TMSS and ASA but they failed to repay their loans and so they had to leave these groups. For instance, Zubair borrowed 3000 taka from ASA in 2004 and used that money to pay off debts to various villagers, and he is still to repay that loan. Zubair is always in debt.

#### *18. Iqbal -- WR 3*

Iqbal is aged about 44 and is a rickshaw puller. He and his wife have two sons and a daughter. Their eldest son is also a rickshaw puller. Iqbal and his family have been living in the village for 10 years, before which they had had a home on the char land, which they lost to river erosion. The family moved to Dinajpur when they lost their land and Iqbal and his brothers bought land there. Iqbal was married before the family moved but his wife refused to go with him to Dinajpur so they divorced. Iqbal then married his present wife, a woman whose family had also migrated to Dinajpur because of river erosion. They stayed in Dinajpur for 15 years and their children were born there. Iqbal's wife did agricultural labour when they lived in Dinajpur.

Iqbal decided to return to this village about 10 years ago and sold his land in Dinajpur to his brothers. He made a home on the char land at first and then on the embankment but lost both homes to river erosion. Six years ago Iqbal bought land in the village. He sold the rickshaw he had owned in Dinajpur in order to buy the land but that sale only contributed 2000 taka to the purchase and he is still paying off the loan of 19,000 taka (£150) that he borrowed from a bank. He borrowed more money from a bank in 2005 in order to buy some more land and register the deeds of 80 decimals of his father's land, which had started to rise out of the river. The process of land registration took him a lot of time and prevented him from migrating for work for about two months. Iqbal had about 32 decimals of land including the homestead area. He has now augmented this with the purchase of 23 more decimals and the registration of the emerging land.

Iqbal supported a man in the local elections in 2005 and had been expecting help in return. He was given a VGF card, which entitled the family to rice at a reduced rate at Eid but Iqbal had hoped for a VGD card. However, no further help was forthcoming – the man wanted between 500 and 1,000 taka for the card and Iqbal did not have the requisite cash.

His father-in-law's home is in a neighbouring union. None of Iqbal's wife's relatives stays nearby but he has a sister and some cousins who reside close to his house. His wife is a member of TMSS. She says that they could not survive without the loans they get from NGOs. Iqbal's wife took a loan of 3,000 taka from TMSS in 2005. She earns money by sharing the care of a cow.

Iqbal does nothing to support the household when he is back in the village. The family sharecrops their land and they earn some money from the sale of the harvest. Iqbal also came into some money recently when his eldest son married with a 15,000 taka dowry.

Iqbal started migrating ten years ago. He goes to Dhaka and Feni, and is away for about seven months each year. He prefers to migrate with a group of four or five people as they then mutually support each other. He leaves some money and food with his wife for which he usually has to take a small loan from a neighbour or friend. He has to pay interest on this unless the loan amount is small (100 to 300 taka). The money he leaves lasts only a few days, after which Iqbal has to send money, taken on loan from the mess owner at the destination, back with a trusted person. He then gradually repays the loan from rickshaw pulling. He maintains his contacts with his family through the mobile phone.

Iqbal's daughter-in-law gave birth to a son in 2005 but had to have treatment after the birth, for which Iqbal had to borrow from his neighbours. Iqbal has also bought a rickshaw on loan for his son, which the son rides in Sunderganj. But the son earns very little and anything he does earn goes to paying off the loan.

#### *19. Ansar -- WR 3*

Ansar, aged 16, is a student who appeared for his SSC final examination in 2005. Unfortunately he failed and as the research period ended, was preparing to sit for the exam again. He lives with his mother (55) and a sister (13). His father is dead. The family are from the village and Ansar has three brothers who live nearby with their families but those brothers do nothing to help their mother, brother and sister. The brothers have also refused to share the land they inherited with their mother.

Ansar inherited 44 decimals of land, which he and his sister cultivate. His brothers lend a hand if there is an emergency and Ansar's sister's husband also helps sometimes, but if Ansar needs a loan he takes that from neighbours, not from his relatives.

While Ansar was in primary school, he did not take any money from his father. By selling eggs, bananas and other home produce he managed the cost of his study. When he was in class VI, his father died. At that time he used to coach the students in lower classes in the village in groups and he earned the money for his education that way. After his father died he migrated to Dhaka for about 15 days, without telling anyone, to try and earn some money. He worked there in an iron factory and then returned to restart his schooling. He also worked as a day labourer for others, while working on his own land. Then, about six years ago, his brothers fell out, and Ansar found he had sole responsibility for his mother and sister, which is when he started migrating to Dhaka, Feni, and Bogra during term breaks. He pulls a rickshaw as well as works as a day labourer. He stays for four months at the destination, and also goes to Bogra for the paddy harvest when there is less pressure on him from the school.

He migrates to Feni and Dhaka along with his cousin who is also a rickshaw puller. He earns about 4000 taka per month, of which spends about half on rickshaw rent, food and lodging. He wants to study further and do his HSC, but first he must resit his SSC.

He and his mother are not members of any NGO group. However his mother did receive two cows from the BRAC 'Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty' project. One of the cows died.

They have not received any further help from BRAC. His mother also received a VGF card during Eid which allowed them to get rice at a subsidised rate. His mother is also entitled to an old age allowance but she does not get that money regularly.

While Ansar is away, his mother and sister are looked after by a cousin who lives next door. His elder sister, who resides in an adjacent house, also helps if there is a problem.

Ansar says that he is often sick when he migrates because of the quality of the food he eats and the place he stays.

#### 20. *Salim* -- WR 3

Salim is about 35 years old and lives on the embankment of the village, where he has lived for the past 10 years. His parental home was in ward no. 9 on the char land but his father moved the family to the embankment when they lost their land to river erosion. Salim stays with his parents and brothers under the same roof, but they have their separate kitchens. He and his wife have three daughters (aged ten, six and two). Salim's father-in-law resides in a nearby union. Salim's father lost his land when Salim was ten, and shortly after that his father found him work in Dinajpur as an agricultural labourer. He worked there for about 12 years before returning to the village

Salim does not have any land of his own. His father had some remaining char land but that was sold. Salim is a rickshaw puller by profession. He migrates for about 10 months in a year to Dhaka and Feni and each time stays there for between 15 days to a month. He has been migrating for work for the last 20 years. He also pulls a rickshaw in Sundarganj, Mirganj and nearby areas when they need money. He usually migrates with a group, often having take a loan before leaving from others who are as poor as himself. For small amounts, he does not have to pay interest, and he returns the favour when he can.

When Salim leaves for Dhaka or Feni, he ensures his family has some food, including rice, pulses and vegetables. He also gives his wife 10 or 20 taka for emergencies. Any cash he has left over he uses on the bus fare. If he has none, he takes a loan from the rickshaw owner and pays the fare on arrival. His parents and brothers take care of his wife and children when he is away. In Dhaka, after paying for rickshaw rent, food and lodging, he cannot save much.

Salim's wife has been a member of a BRAC savings group for the last six years. Through a BRAC loan the family managed to repair their house. They have also borrowed to finance Salim's sister's marriage. Salim took a 10,000-taka loan from the Krishi bank in 2005, ostensibly to start rearing livestock. However, he used this money to repay outstanding loans and to rent 12 decimals of land on which he intended to cultivate rice.

### **Ex-migrants' Households**

#### 21. *Rafique* <sup>29</sup>

Rafique, 50, is a farmer. He and his wife have four sons. The eldest son (aged 25) is a migrant in Dhaka. He has been working in Padma Textile Mill for six years. The next two sons in line

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<sup>29</sup> This household illustrates the challenge of defining 'ex-migrant' and 'present migrant' households. The son who migrates for work has a separate household, but his wife stays with his father when he is away. The family benefits from the eldest son's income from migration.

help their father in farming. The fourth son, aged 15, is working as a carpenter. The eldest son is married. His wife lives in Rafique's household when he is away.

Like many other people in the village, Rafique lost land in the char to river erosion and he and his family moved to the village 20 years ago. They came to live on his brother-in-law's land. At that time Rafique was a migrant worker travelling to Bogra, Dinajpur, Birol, Thakurgaon, and Moradhar as an agricultural worker and a wood-cutter. He used to stay away for three months when he was working on the rice harvest. His wife worked as a maidservant to earn some extra money. She did not go out of the village and often worked for relatives to earn food for the children. When they lost their land and had to move to the village and re-establish their home, they faced a lot of hardship.

Over the last five years Rafique has gradually bought land in the village. He now has three bighas (4006 sq metres or one acre) of cultivatable land. He also bought 18 decimals of land on which he built their home seven years ago. He bought all the land from the same person and paid for the land in instalments. He used his income from migration for the purchases. Recently he bought a further 44 decimals of cultivatable land and two cows. He sold the cows and bought more land and three new cows. He used a loan of 4,000 taka that his wife had obtained from TMSS to buy the land. As his land acquisition progressed, he stopped migrating. He has not worked outside the village for seven years. His eldest son is now able to provide extra income for the family from his migrant work. Rafique says they are benefiting from the two to three thousand taka he sends back each month. They use the money to pay for agricultural labour or rent more land.

Rafique says he is now in a position to supply his family with rice for ten months of the year. The family's economic position has improved greatly over the last five years. Rafique says it was not only the income from the migrant work that helped; the fact that his wife earned enough to feed the family meant that his income could be invested in buying land and re-establishing a home for them in the village.

## 22. Umer

Umer is aged about 60 and is a farmer. He is a permanent resident of the village. He and his wife have three sons and a daughter. Their oldest son, who has a permanent job, stays in Dhaka along with his wife and two daughters. Their second son is doing his SSC. He earns some extra money by working as a private tutor for a few village children. The third son lives in with Umesh along with his wife and a child of three months. He cultivates with his father and pulls a rickshaw in the village to earn some money. The youngest and only daughter is studying in class VIII.

Umer has ten bigha of land including homestead area. He is the member of the Grameen Bank group and saves 20 taka per week, mainly in order to provide for their daughter's marriage.

Umer has been working from the age of six. He worked as a servant in a farmer's house in another part of Sundarganj. He met his wife there and stayed there for a while after marrying her before bringing her to the study village to settle after a few years. He continued to migrate for domestic work, earning money to buy land. He also worked as an agricultural labourer until his own land became productive. He bought poor quality land by the river but gradually they

managed to improve their financial position. He and his wife worked hard to cultivate the poor soil.

### *23. Nazir*

Nazir is about 60 and has been living in his present home in the village for ten years. He has had to move about eight times in his life because of river erosion. Ten years ago he managed to buy four decimal of land. Nazir's father abandoned his mother shortly before his birth. He had a difficult upbringing because his mother struggled to look after him and his siblings. He was born in this village because his father and mother had settled in the village when they lost their land to erosion. Nazir's wife is from this village and they stay close to her relatives. His mother lived with them until she died.

Nazir has three daughters and a son. His son is married and lives with Nazir. The two daughters are also married, which cost the parents about 17,000 taka in dowry, which they secured through a loan from BRAC, and by begging people to help them. They got no dowry when their son married. The son married a widow's daughter and although a dowry was promised the widow was never able to pay it.

Nazir used to be a sawyer. For 25 years he migrated to Dhaka, Feni, Thakurgaon, and Lalmonirhat, staying away for a month at a time, leaving food for the first few days with his wife. After 10 to 15 days away he would send money back with a trusted person. He says that he faced many problems during the years he migrated due to poor accommodation and food and unscrupulous people who tried to cheat him.

Now Nazir's son has been migrating for two years. He goes to Feni and Dinajpur as a carpenter and stays there for two or three months in a year. Both he and his wife are sickly so they are largely dependent on Nazir. Nazir is the main earner for his family. They have little land so he earns money by working as an agricultural labourer.

### *24. Hamidul*

Hamidul is 38 and is a carpenter by profession. He and his wife have two sons aged 15 and 12, and a daughter. The sons study in the government school. Their six-year-old daughter studies in the BRAC school. Hamidul was an only child and was born in this village. His father was from a neighbouring village but did not have land there so when he married he moved to work the land belonging to his wife. However, when Hamidul's father died one of his mother's brothers took the land from Hamidul's mother and Hamidul had to appeal to the village court to get his mother's land back. He managed to claim back 30 decimals, which is what they now live on and cultivate.

Until five years ago Hamidul used to migrate to Dhaka, Dinajpur and Rajshahi as a carpenter. He migrated for three to four months in a year. He stopped migrating as his family were often sick when he was away. Hamidul believes that if his mother were alive, he would still be able to migrate as she would have helped his wife at home. Now he works in the local area and earns enough to maintain his family as well as pay for the education of his children.

Hamidul's wife has been a member of ASA for the last four years. She has taken a loan four times from the ASA group. The first time she took a loan of 2000 taka and spent it on crop cultivation; then 3000 taka for purchasing a hand tube well and repairing the house. The third

time she took out a loan of 7000 taka which she used to purchase a cow and taking land on a rental basis. This year she took a loan of 8000 taka, of which she gave 4000 to her sister and the rest she spent on family consumption. Her sister is paying back the instalments on the amount which was given to her.

### **Non-migrant Households**

#### *25. Zulfique*

Zulfique is about 64 and seldom works now. He used to sell green vegetables in the village but he complains that he is too weak to do that every day now. However, he still does some business and earns enough for some household necessities. He and his wife have seven daughters and three sons; six daughters and two sons are married. The eldest son and his family live separately, having purchased their own land, but the second son and his wife still lives with Zulfique. The second and third sons work as carpenters. The family depends on the income of these two sons.

Zulfique has only 10 decimals of land including homestead area. He also has nine decimals that is under water. He inherited 55 decimals of land from his father, but that land had to be sold so he would have dowries for his daughters. He plans to give the 19 decimals of land to his two oldest sons so that they can arrange the marriage of his remaining daughter. He is sad that he has so little left for his sons to inherit.

Zulfique has never migrated for work and he has forbidden his sons to migrate. He believes that it is too risky and the amount earned does not make the disruption worthwhile. He repeatedly said that he was not in favour of migration. He is worried that his sons will abandon him and his wife because they have nothing left to inherit.

#### *26. Suliman*

Suliman is a 40-year-old farmer. He and his wife have four sons. Suliman's mother also lives with them. Their eldest son, who is 17, passed his SSC last year and is continuing to study. Their other sons, aged 15, 12 and 7 are all studying.

Suliman was born in the village and has lived there all his life. He has 15 bighas of land including the homestead area. His eldest son helps him in farming. They are able to grow enough rice for six months. The rest of the year they may sell land or cattle, or rent land out, so they get money for food.

None of Suliman's sons migrates. Suliman and his wife are keen that the children finish their education and then, if they migrate, they can get a well-paid professional job and not manual work. Suliman has never wanted to migrate even though from time to time they have been very short of money. Three years ago they lost their crops in a hailstorm and their eldest son went to Dinajpur and worked as a labourer. Suliman did not like this and he travelled to Dinajpur to bring him back. Suliman and his wife argue that only those persons migrate who cannot get any work in the village.

### *27. Rohan*

Rohan is about 45 years and has a retail business in puffed rice. He and his wife have three sons and a daughter. Their eldest son (aged 19); third son (aged 15) and daughter (aged 9) are studying in school. Their second son (aged 17) assists him in the business in Sundarganj.

Rohan has lived in the village for four years. They had to move from their land in the char because it became water logged. Rohan has no cultivatable land although he has rented 19 decimals of land from one of his wife's uncles so that they can cultivate.

Rohan and his wife are opposed to migration. They argue that it is too disruptive to families. The reason for their opinion is based on the experience of Rohan's sister, whose husband was a migrant worker to Dhaka. Initially he refused to take her with him but when he did he used to beat her up regularly and she suffered living in a slum. She returned to the village. Four months ago her husband died in an accident in Dhaka.

Rohan has a cow and two goats. He has been a member of Grameen bank for the last nine years. He said that loans from Grameen bank helped improve his assets; he used one of the loans to buy the corrugated iron sheets with which he built their house.

### **Profile of Female Migrants**

We found very few female migrants in the village. In other parts of Bangladesh younger women have been migrating to Dhaka and other cities to work in the readymade garments industry. We found no women involved in the readymade garments industry in the village, so we decided to look at the female migrants in more detail and explore how they differed from the male migrants.

We found four women who had migrated in the past and one woman, in addition to those in our case study households, who are present migrants. A brief description of the ex and present female migrants is given below to provide some background on the type of women who have been involved in migration and to provide some insights into why these women are unusual in the village.

### **Female Ex-migrants**

#### *28. Nasrin*

Nasrin is the only member in her household. Ten years ago she migrated for begging and used to go to different areas of Sundarganj upazila.

#### *29. Habiba*

Habiba is about 26 and she used to be a regular migrant. She migrated to Dhaka, Rangpur, Gopalganj for about ten years to work as a housemaid. She is divorced. Now she stays at home and cares for her eight-year-old son.

30. *Shakila*

Shakila is a day labourer and is about 35 years old. She lives with her nine-year-old son. She divorced about nine years ago. Six years ago she went to Feni as a housemaid for the first time but she could not continue on that job because of her child-care responsibilities.

31. *Sultana*

Sultana is 70 and used to work as a maid servant in Dinajpur when her husband went to work as a day labourer. Now she begs in the village if she needs help.

**Present Female Migrants**

32. *Shamima*

Shamima is 26 and works as a housemaid in Sundarganj. She used to work in Rangpur district. She had been working as a housemaid for 15 years now. She has been married twice but her present husband, a man she used to work for in the village, does not support her. As the study ended Shamima was trying, unsuccessfully, to get a job as a garment factory worker.

## Annex 3 – Census Form for Initial Data Collection on All Households in the Village

### Social Protection by and for Temporary Work Migrants Project

Development Research Centre (DRC) on Migration, Globalization and Poverty

University of Sussex, UK and Refugee and Migrants Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), Bangladesh

#### Village Census Form

Household Number:.....

Name of Hh Head: ..... Father's/Husband's Name: .....

Wife's Name: .....Mother's Name: .....

#### 1. Household Composition

Sl. No.	Name	Relationship with Hh Head	Sex M=1; F=2	Age (In Year)	Marital Status	Occupation (5 Years above)	Education (5 Years above)	Involved with any NGO? Yes=1; No=2	If 'Yes', Name of the NGO
1.		Hh Head							
2.									
3.									
4.									
5.									
6.									
7.									
8.									
9.									
10.									

*Marital Status (applicable only for 12+ years old Hh members): Unmarried=1, Married=2, Widow=3, Separated=4, Abundant=5*

2. Religion: Muslim  Hindu  Others

3. Total amount of land (in decimal):



## **Annex 4: Checklist Used for Collection of Information on the Village**

This checklist will be used to collect data about the village through observation and conversation during the first month. It is not a questionnaire -- it provides a reminder of the major points of information need to be collected about the village. During data collection it will not be taken to the field, the topics will have been memorized. On return from the field the team will record the information in their notes point by point and by date so that there is a systematic record of data from the village. It is a guideline, which will be updated every month.

Name of village, Union, Upazila, District

No of HH

Population (no. of male/female)

Type/Mean of production (river, land, canals/bodies of fresh water, trees)

Land patterns

Housing pattern

Establishments (Schools, colleges, health centre, mosque/ *madrasha*, bridges/ culverts, roads, transports, market places, shops)

Financial transitions (wages, investments, savings, loan attitudes and remittances)

Religion

Socio-cultural programme (festival, marriage)

History of settlement

History of migration

Current pattern of migration, its extent and which households are involved

Environmental disaster/hazards (historical+)

Social network (mobility, migration)

Political environment

Programme of GOs, and NGOs in the village in terms of social protection (historical perspective)

Number of household getting access to these programmes and how

Map of the village

## Annex 5: Checklist Used to Guide Visits to the 20 Case Study Households

This checklist will be used to collect information from 20 migrant households. It is a general guideline for all the households but the actual topics covered may vary by the characteristics of the households such as demographic composition, land ownership, educational status, access to formal and informal institutions etc. There are some sensitive issues like wage rate, amount of land ownership that are not easy to gather information on, so those topics will not be asked about directly, but gathered from conversations over time. During the initial weekly visits, and then the less frequent visits later in the research period, the team member will cover the everyday events, significant problems of the households during presence of the migrant members and their social protection mechanism as well as the particular constraints faced by the household in the absence of migrants and how they cope. Thus household level information will be accumulated overtime.

- Name of contact person (including age and sex) (collect once unless situation changes)
- Names, ages and educational status of household members (collect once)
- Type of family (single/extended/joint) (collect once unless situation changes)
- Total number of household members (male/female) present on day of visit
  - Household member (at present)
  - Household member (not present)
- What are different household members doing to earn a living?
- Observations on land ownership (quantity, landless) (record from observations initially, later in the research see if information can be obtained from household members)
- Do kin live nearby? What form do daily and other regular interactions with kin take? Which kin are involved? Do they help out in times of crisis? Who else might help? (collect during first visit)
- Different problems faced by the HH at the time of visit and during the period since the last visit (social, political, cultural in intra/inter HH level, sickness) and what was done about the problem.
- Interactions with social network within the community since last visit (kin, friend, neighbour, mohajan, shalish committee, religious leader, village leader)
- Access to GOs, NGOs, CBOs since last visit - involvement and role of political parties
- Information on the migrant(s) in the household (from other household members if migrant not present)
- Characteristics of migrants (age, sex, skill)
- Frequency of migration
- Places of migration
- How did they get the work or the idea of migrating?

- What kind of work do they do at the destination?
- Which months of the year did they migrate in? Seasons?
- What kinds of work are required in the source area homestead during the particular time of the migrant's absence?
- Process of migration (single/group)
- Any issues or opportunities (e.g. greater autonomy) faced by the HH in the absence of migrant (young female's security, food insecurity, diseases, cultural constraints, pressure from formal and informal sector) (if not mentioned already under general problems)
- Organisation of the migration journey - how do migrants prepare themselves and their spouses, children, parents etc for their absence? How do they get by on the journey?

**Information to be recorded about migrant's destination**

- Social network (how they get work, living place, cope with the destination place)
- Occupation at destination
- Wage of destination
- Working environment
- Living conditions
- Relations with people in destination areas
- (Means of sending money home, Suffering from disease, Robbery and mugging, Physical assault/harassment, Bereavement/ death, cultural barrier)
- Coping mechanism at destination areas
- Opportunities in the destination area