

## Strategies of Landless Farmers to Cope with Poverty

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### Abstract

The main objective of the study was to find out the strategies followed by the landless farmers to cope with poverty. The study was conducted at a village of Adamdighi Upazilla in Bogra district. Data were collected from a sample of randomly selected 120 landless farmers out of 500 landless farm households through personal interview by using a pre-tested structured interview schedule during September to October, 2010. Strategies used by the landless farmers to cope with poverty were measured by 20 statements under four aspects using 4-point rating scale. Among the four selected aspects of strategies, the landless farmers were more dependent on the farming activities. They followed those strategies where they can utilize physical labour or where there needed small capital but the returns were quick. Most of the landless farmers led their livelihood through growing vegetables/crops on others' land as share cropping/lease and rearing cows, goats or scavenging birds. Some of the landless farmers were potter, blacksmith and barber to earn their livelihood using indigenous knowledge based professions. The major constraints faced by the landless farmers to cope with poverty were lack of education and skill to perform new jobs and unavailability of the labour market in all the seasons of the year.

**Keywords:** *Coping strategies, landless farmers, poverty.*

### Introduction

Landless farmers were characterized by lack of land, working capital and even basic literacy. Physical labour is the primary means of income for living. But inadequate employment opportunities in rural areas do not enable them to earn minimum income for subsistent living. The slow growth of resource poor economy combined with an alarming growth rate of population which is continually disturbing all efforts of planned development. An increasing level of economic inequality, particularly in terms of landholding and incomes, exacerbates the extent of poverty in Bangladesh. Land is the main productive asset in rural areas and mostly concentrated in the hands of a minority. Less than 10 percent of rural households control over half of the agricultural land, while more than 50 percent

of the rural households are practically landless (Abdullah and Murshid, 1986). Landlessness in Bangladesh is quiet a distressing feature that constitutes both the cause and consequence of poverty. Landlessness has increased at almost the same rate of growth as the population in Bangladesh in the recent past (Farid, 1993). The Government of Bangladesh has adopted a number of policies and measures to improve the status of landless farmers. The Government has followed four approaches viz. maximizing GNP through savings, redirecting investment to poverty groups, distributing income through fiscal system and transfer of assets to poverty groups as in land reform (Hye, 1996). Different non-government organizations (NGOs), after the independence of Bangladesh, have taken

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various programmes like micro-credit, agro-forestry, adult education, nursery raising, fisheries, poultry birds production, rearing of milking cows etc. The NGO's are significant development partners working hand in hand with government agencies in the nation's poverty alleviation programmes. Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendra, Swanirvar Bangladesh, Grameen Bank and Association for Social Advancement (ASA) are among some of those organizations which claim to have success stories in the field of poverty alleviation. But most of them end in vein. This is due to most of them were unstructured or in other words. It is strongly felt that available information is not adequate for proper planning, execution and evaluation

of development programmes for the landless farmers. It is a policy requirement that landless farmers should play a more critical and important role in the modernization of society and economic changes of the nation. There is a danger that this emphasis may restrict policy and actions to households that have some assets on which they can build and neglect the poorest and the destitute, who may be effectively assetless (Rakodi, 2002). Appropriate strategies are essential to reduce the problem of landlessness and to achieve development. Keeping these facts on mind, the present study had been undertaken to fulfill the objectives: to determine the strategies of landless farmers to cope with poverty and to ascertain the problems faced by the landless farmers to cope with poverty.

### **Methodology**

The study area was Kundagram village of Adamdighi upazilla in Bogra district. The area was selected due to the reason that a lot of landless farmers of the area always struggle with poverty. In total there were 500 landless farm households (one farmer from each household) in Kundagram which were considered as population of the study. Twenty percent of the population (total 120 landless farmers) was randomly selected by using a Table of Random Numbers as sample of the study.

The extents of use of strategies by landless farmers to cope with poverty were measured on the basis of their responses to the statements in the interview schedule. The statements were made on the four aspects viz. crop production, livestock and poultry rearing, fisheries and non-farming activities. Twenty strategies in different aspects (five in each) were selected through focus group discussion with landless farmers for the present study. A 4-point rating scale was

used to obtain the score of the landless farmers opinion (Munna, 2009). Score 3, 2, 1 and 0 was assigned for "frequently", "occasionally", "rarely" or "not at all", respectively. Thereby, total score of strategies to cope with poverty of a landless farmer could range from 0 to 60.

To find out the problems faced by the landless farmers to cope with poverty a 4-point rating scale was used for computing the extent of problems. The weight of responses of all the selected problems (15) was taken together to obtain problem score. Thus, the problem score of a respondent could range from 0 to 45. Scored Causal Diagrams (SCDs) of Participatory Farm Management (PFM) were also used to examine in detail the causes and effects of problems, and to identify the 'root' causes which need to be addressed, and to analyze the relative importance of the problems and prioritize them (Biswas, 2009).

## Findings and Discussion

### Landless farmers' extent of use of coping strategies

Table 1 showed that almost all the landless farmers (95 percent) fell in the low category except only 5 percent who were in medium category to use the coping strategies. This was probably due to the reason that the landless farmers used different strategies to cope with the adverse situations i.e. during the farming season they were involved in the field and non-farming activities, but during off season they went for rickshaw pulling, working in rice boiler etc. Similar result also found by Hossain (2005).

Again some of them followed limited number of strategies in limited period of time in a year regularly (medium category) viz. small business, small poultry farm or rickshaw pulling all the year with smallscale home gardening. There were no respondents who were in the high category.

Table 1 Categories of landless farmers according to the extent of use of coping strategies (N= 120)

Category (Score)	Extent of use		Mean	SD
	Frequency	Percent		
Low ( $\leq 20$ )	114	95	13.64	4.78
Medium ( $>20-40$ )	6	5		
High ( $>40$ )	-	-		

The respondents were categorized into not at all, low, medium and high depending on the observed score of different aspects. Table 2 revealed that the observed mean score of the different aspects ranged from 1.33 to 5.27. Observed mean score of the coping strategies in respect of crop production was relatively higher than that of other aspects and obtained the first position in rank.

Table 2 Extent of use of various aspects of strategies to cope with poverty

Aspects of coping strategies	Score range		Extent of use			Mean	SD	Rank
	Poss.	Obs.	Category	Frequency (N=120)	Percent			
Crop production	0-15	0-12	Not at all (0)	6	5.0	5.27	2.55	1
			Low (1-5)	59	49.2			
			Medium (6-10)	51	42.5			
			High ( $>10$ )	4	3.3			
			Not at all (0)	31	25.8			
Livestock and poultry rearing	0-15	0-9	Low (1-5)	77	64.2	2.61	2.04	3
			Medium (6-10)	12	10.0			
			High ( $>10$ )	-	-			
			Not at all (0)	60	50.0			
			Low (1-5)	56	46.7			
Fisheries	0-15	0-8	Medium (6-10)	4	3.3	1.33	1.62	4
			High ( $>10$ )	-	-			
			Not at all (0)	7	5.8			
			Low (1-5)	76	63.3			
			Medium (6-10)	37	30.8			
Non-farming activities	0-15	0-10	High ( $>10$ )	-	-	4.43	2.21	2
			Not at all (0)	7	5.8			
			Low (1-5)	76	63.3			
			Medium (6-10)	37	30.8			
			High ( $>10$ )	-	-			

It was found that highest 49.2 percent of the landless farmers fell in low category, 42.5 percent medium and 3.3 percent high extent of use of strategies related with crop production any time of the year. Rana (2009) also found that majority of the respondents had medium management ability in crop production aspect. Majority of the respondents fell in the lower category in all aspects as they followed different strategies in different seasons of the year.

### Strategies Used by the Landless Farmers to Cope with Poverty

Landless farmers' strategies to cope with poverty were different from one another. Growing vegetables/crops on others' land as share cropping/lease" obtained the first ranked position (Table 3). During the cropping season there was a large crisis of

labour and the wage rate increased. So, landless farmers of all ages, including woman of the family were involved in the farming activities. The landless farmers did not have enough cash but that they had other material or non-material assets - their health, knowledge and skills, friends and family, and the natural resources around them which could be utilized by them to earn livelihood (Rakodi, 2002). The landless farmers were cultivating different kinds of vegetables on others land and around the households to meet daily needs of the family. They also sold them in the local market to earn some money to buy other necessities for family. Data also revealed that 75.5 percent of the landless farmers were engaged in growing vegetables and crops on others land as share cropping or lease.

Table 3 Different strategies used by the landless farmers to cope with poverty

Strategies	Practicing respondents (%)	Observed score	Rank
<b>Regularly used strategies</b>			
Growing vegetables/crops on others' land as share cropping/ in lease	75.8	243	1
Smallscale poultry, goat and cows rearing	70.2	241	2
<b>Occasionally used strategies</b>			
Serving as day labour on others' farm	72.8	230	3
Smallscale home gardening	55.8	225	4
Indigenous knowledge based profession	59.2	195	5
<b>Rarely used strategies</b>			
Savings through community based organizations like cooperatives	48.3	118	6
Earning livelihood by van-rickshaw pulling	29.2	87	7
Using HYV of crops	39.2	81	8
Using family planning measure to keep family small	44.2	79	9
Earning money by fishing in river or canal	32.5	74	10
Fish farming on others' water body /own	18.3	58	11
Rearing share cow/goat	11.7	34	12
Taking micro-credit for crop farming	10.8	32	13

Strategies	Practicing respondents (%)	Observed score	Rank
Collecting straw, green grass, fuel wood etc. and their selling	17.5	30	14
Rice business	7.5	19	15
Serving as day labour on others' fish farm	5.0	11	16
Taking micro-credit for dairy farm	5.0	10	17
Taking micro-credit for fish farming	2.5	9	18
Taking micro-credit for poultry	2.5	8	19
Cooperative fish farming with rural youth	2.5	8	19

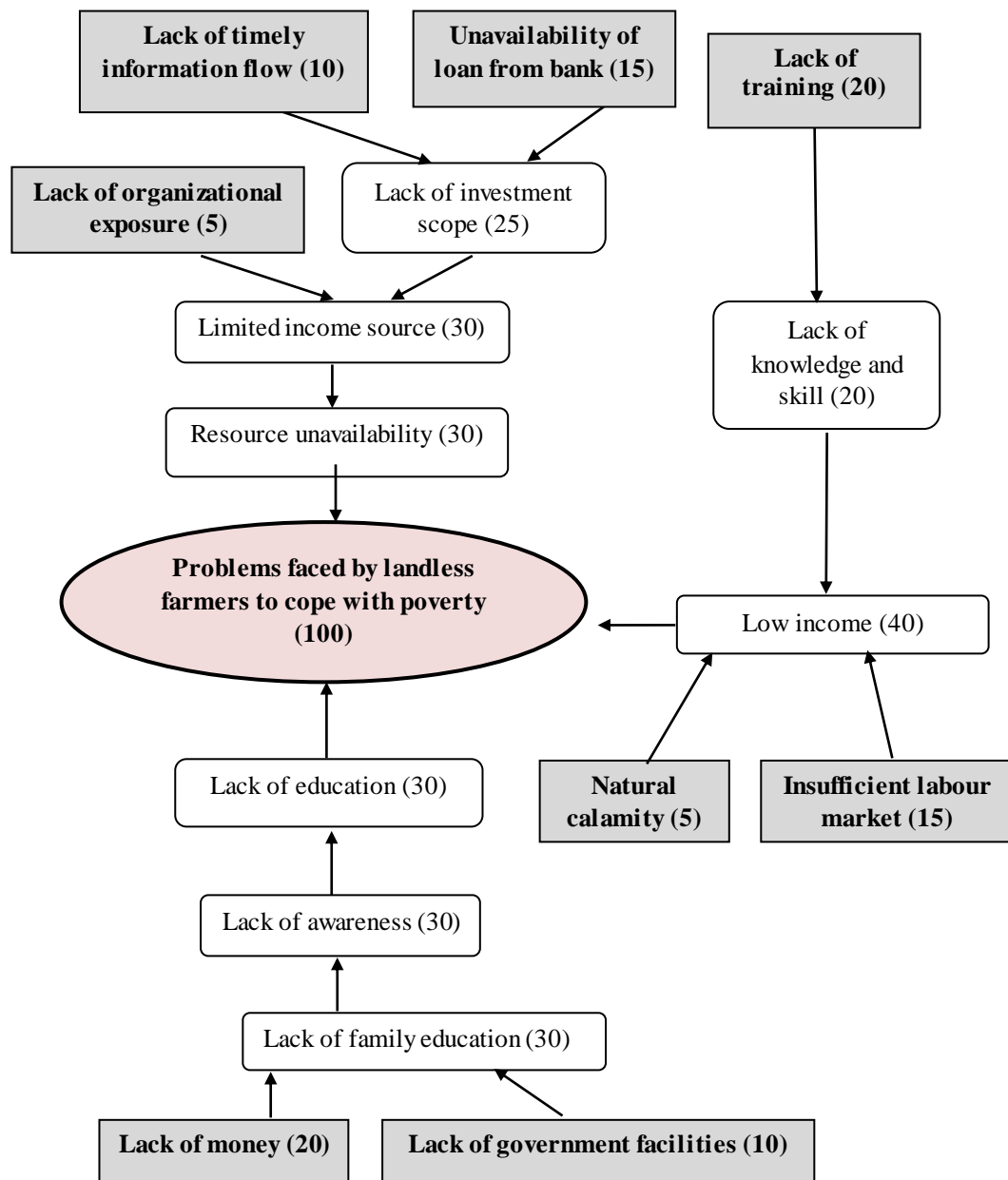
Small scale poultry, goat and cow rearing" obtained the second position in ranking (Table 3). Landless farmers of the study area were rearing cows, goats or scavenging birds to cope with poverty because they gave ready money when needed or in problem. Most of the respondents were found having at least one or two cows or goats and scavenging birds which were sold during the problems. Landless farmers of the study area were unable to make profitable business situation in the livestock and poultry sector due to their limited access to the resources. Some landless farmers were rearing their livestock and poultry on their own living place and feed them through giving straw, kitchen byproducts, leaves of bamboo or banana and food residues as fodder when grass was not available. In the study area, the woman of the landless family was involved in the poultry and livestock rearing at household level to cope with poverty. Similar result was also found by Rashid (2004). It was important to note that almost all families of the landless farmers had scavenging birds, one or two cows, goats or duck which helped them in crisis period. During the off season, a large number of the respondents were involved in indigenous knowledge based profession. Some of the respondents migrated to town

for van-rickshaw pulling.

#### **Problem Faced by the Landless Farmers to Cope with Poverty**

Table 4 indicated that the statement "lack of education and skill to perform new job" of the respondents obtained the first position in ranking the problems. Most of the landless farmers had the primary level education as a result they were not aware of the improved farming technologies to increase the production. Unavailability of the labour market in all the seasons of the year obtained the second position in rank. This was because the landless farmers lead their life through farming activities but during the off seasons they tried to earn the livelihood through other off-farm activities. As a result they worked with low labour market price and the problem obtained the third position.

To triangulate the findings, the problems were also found out also through preparing Scored Causal Diagrams (SCDs). The problems mentioned by the respondents were listed and then diagrams were drawn by them on a large paper on the ground to show causal relationships between the problems and finally scoring of selected problems was performed again by them. In this way SCDs were prepared by the farmers (Figure 1).



Key:   'End' problem,   = Intermediary problem/cause,   = 'Root' cause,   
 —→ = Causal relationship between problems; and Number in the parenthesis indicates score of the concerned problem

Figure 1. Scored Causal Diagrams showing problems faced by landless farmers to cope with poverty

## Conclusion

Landless farmers used those strategies mainly related to farming aspects (crop production, livestock and poultry rearing) to cope with poverty. Majority (75 percent) of the landless farmers earn their livelihood through growing vegetables on others land as share cropping or in lease and rearing the cows or poultry in smallscale. So, there is a great scope to update their knowledge and introduce modern farming technologies for development to get maximum return from small land area. Government may undertake sufficient common poverty reduction strategies all over the country with technical and financial support, so that they can keep their strategies in a sustainable way. This may facilitate proper utilization of labour force from own family. Landless farmers followed those strategies where they can utilize physical labour or where there needed

small capital but quick returns for livelihoods. Most of the landless farmers faced moderate to high problems. They didn't have enough income and resources. Lack of knowledge and skill and insufficient information flow were major problems in selecting the strategies. So it is concluded that poor education stands as the root problem to cope with poverty by the landless farmers. This is highly logical because the coping strategies are largely affected by education and skill of the farmers. Need-based actions on the part of policy-makers by government, international agencies and NGOs are required for solutions of the entire problem after identification and prioritization. Probable actions may include training to increase their knowledge, creation of employment opportunities round the year, micro-credit with low interest etc.

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