

## VULNERABILITY OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS – NEEDED SOCIAL PROTECTION IN WEST BENGAL

**Rathindra Nath Pramanik\***

*The original concept of social security which covered only contingencies is not sufficient for agricultural labourers as they are not able to fulfill their minimum basic needs such as food, cloths, shelters, education, health and sanitation etc. The vulnerability of agricultural labourers requires social protection measures to cover both basic needs and economic security. In this paper, the concept of social protection and the causes of insecurities faced by agricultural labourers, the core needs of social protection and developing instruments that can address the core needs has been discussed in the paper.*

**Keywords:** Social Insecurity, Agriculture Labour

### INTRODUCTION

Agricultural labourers are the most vulnerable section of the society. Low wages, unemployment and poverty forced them to live a life of misery. It is a known fact that this segment of labour force is highly unorganized thereby not covered by the plethora of labour legislations enforce in India. Agricultural workers constitute the largest segment of workers in the unorganized sector. According to the NSSO estimates for the year 2004-05, 52 per cent of the total workers are found in agriculture (Economic Survey: 2007-08). Many small and marginal farmers, because of their small and uneconomical holdings and low yield, also work on the land of others and hence qualify as agricultural laborers. The workers in the organized sector constitute about 7 per cent of the country's total work force and the rest (93 per cent) comprises of small and marginal farmers, landless agricultural labourers, share croppers, fishermen and those engaged in animal husbandry, beedi rolling, labeling and packing, building and construction workers, leather workers, weavers, artisans, salt workers, workers in brick kilns and stone quarries, workers in saw mills, oil mills etc. are grouped under unorganized sector. The term 'unorganised labour' has been defined as those workers who have not been able to organise themselves to pursuit of their common interests due to certain constraints like casual nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, small and scattered size of establishments, etc. The prominent features of the sector are lower real wages and poor working/living conditions. Further, this sector is characterized by excessive seasonality of employment (especially in the farm sector), preponderance of casual and contractual employment, atypical production organizations and work relations, absence of social security measures and welfare legislations, negation of social standards and worker rights, denial of minimum wages and so on.

### CONCEPT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

Social protection is defined by the ILO as the set of public measures that a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social distress that would be caused by the absence or a substantial reduction of income from work as a result of various contingencies (sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age, and death of the breadwinner); the provision of health care; and, the provision of benefits for families with children

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\*Assistant Professor – II, Palli Charcha Kendra, Visva-Bharati, Sriniketan, West Bengal

(ILO Report, 1998). By definition, social protection is broader and more inclusive than social security since it incorporates non-statutory or private measures for providing social security, but still encompasses traditional social security measures such as social assistance and social insurance.

The ILO's new strategy of "Decent Work for All" promotes the value of social justice and humane conditions of work. The key feature of the decent work strategy is that everyone is entitled to basic social protection, and therefore the decent work strategy aims at universality of coverage. Orthodox measures for social protection are by nature aimed at coping with risks arising from various contingencies, and fail to address the fundamental causes of insecurity and vulnerability. The approach towards social protection for workers in the informal sector should be comprehensive, designed not only to protect against contingencies, but also to promote income security through elimination of risks. A comprehensive social protection policy should include three broad categories: promotional measures that aim at improving endowments, exchange entitlements, real incomes and social consumption; preventive measures that seek to avert deprivation; and protective measures to provide relief from deprivation (Guhan, 1994). The ILO's new goal and concept of 'decent work' match this broad concept of social security.

Workers in the informal sector need protection from risks and the resulting insecurities that arises due to the existence of unregulated environments with unsafe working conditions in the informal sector. When this need is not satisfied for the individual and for households, the adverse effects are many and various. A growing body of evidence indicates reduced well-being, increased exposure to poverty, higher exclusion from access to health and education, low access to productive activities, increased prevalence of child labour and so on. These issues are addressed by authors including: Baeza and Packard (2006); Beegle et al. (2006); Dercon (2002 and 2007); Fafchamps and Minten (2009). The core needs for social protection can be separated into basic and economic. The basic needs relate to food, shelter, health, education and income. Economic needs are employment, access to capital, markets or demand, and legal recognition. While basic needs are citizen-based and universal, economic needs are work-based. Instruments of social protection need to be visualized to meet all these core needs of the people.

## CAUSES OF INSECURITIES

Agricultural labourers have to face various insecurities due to the nature of work in agriculture. For the purpose of study, we have taken interview of 180 agricultural labour households (total numbers of agricultural labourers - 406) in six selected villages of Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal during 2004-05. 30 agricultural labour households have been selected from each village from the categories of landless agricultural labourers and marginal farmers cum agricultural labourers. Agriculture is one of the most hazardous and insecure work sector. Work is arduous, hours are long and people are exposed to a wide range of risks including difficult climatic conditions. Thirty percent of the total agricultural labourers reported in the study areas that they are seriously injured in workplace accidents by agricultural machinery or poisoned by pesticides and other agrochemicals. Generally, poor agricultural labourer will have received, at best, only a very rudimentary level of vocational training, and this intensifies the risk of invalidity or physical injury, which can be especially serious for such workers and, moreover, represents a serious impediment undermining any attempt they might make to move from the agricultural sector to a less physically demanding sector. They are also suffering from various diseases and environmental hazards. Infectious diseases with high prevalence in rural areas include tetanus and tuberculosis, as well as parasitic infections carried by water or insects, such as malaria. At the same time, rural

areas generally suffer from a lack of health services. Hospitals and health centres are few and far between, often short of both staff and supplies of drugs.

As the agricultural sector suffers from cycles of excessive seasonality of employment, agricultural labourers do not have stable and durable avenues of employment. They got the maximum days of employment during *Kharif* and *boro* seasons and they remain under employed or unemployed in the remaining period of the year. Even those who appear to be visibly employed are not gainfully and substantially employed, indicating the existence of disguised unemployment. The workplace is scattered and fragmented. There is no formal employer-employee relationship between employers or farmers and agricultural labourers as they work together in situations which may be marginally favourable to employers. They are exploited by the employers in various ways. They receive poor working conditions, especially wages much below the minimum wage rates. The work status is of inferior quality of work and inferior terms of employment, both remuneration and employment. They do not receive sufficient attention from the trade unions.

## **INSTRUMENTS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION**

The contribution of agricultural labourers in agricultural production is very significant but the social security for the agricultural labourers is almost nil. Either there are no legal provisions for the social security of these workers or the provisions are only on paper. Instruments of social protection need to be devised taking into account the nature and the cause of the insecurities. As the labourers are not permanently attached to any employer, the task of providing social security to a worker is indeed a complex one. Therefore the responsibility has to be borne by the state. Given the basic and economic insecurities faced by the agricultural labourers, certain core needs for social protection arise, which can also be separated into basic and economic. The basic needs relate to food, shelter, health, education and income. Economic needs are employment, access to capital, markets or demand, and legal recognition. Instruments of social protection need to be visualized to meet all these core needs of the agricultural labourers. In this context, it is worthwhile to list out the major security needs of the agricultural labourers and find out the instruments to meet the needs of the labourers. They are:

### **Food Security**

Food security is considered as an important component of social security. The rural workers and weaker sections of the community are badly affected during times of drought, flood and famine, and due to similar natural calamities. Food security has been defined as the ability to assure, on a long term basis, that the food system provides the total population with access to a timely, reliable and nutritionally adequate supply of food (Dutt, 1999). This general definition includes availability of food grains in the country and measures food security at the macro level. The micro concept of food security implies that a household has the necessary purchasing power to buy food grains, and access to the required amount of it. Improving food security at the household level is an issue of great importance for a developing country like India where millions of poor suffer from persistent hunger and malnutrition and some others are at the risk of doing so in the future.

The Indian National Sample Survey (NSS) provides data on the distribution of households at the national level in terms of the availability of two square meals a day. In 1983, 81 per cent of households in rural India reported having adequate food throughout the year. By the end of 1993, this proportion had risen to 93 per cent. In other words, only 7 per cent of households reported that they did not have enough to eat. Of course, there were considerable regional disparities in the

proportion of households going hungry (Dev, 1999). In the agricultural labour household survey in Uttar Dinajpur district of West Bengal, we asked whether the household had gone hungry during the last twelve months. About 10 per cent of the household members reported that they did not get two squares meals during two to three months of a year when they remained unemployed or underemployed. Deprivation of food among poor households is a common feature in developing countries.

The Public Distribution System (PDS) is the key component in the overall food security arrangements in the country. Over the years, the PDS has played an important role in moderating open market prices and ensuring food security at the household level by providing food grains and other essential items at lower prices. Nevertheless, in the past few decades, the mounting burden of food subsidies coupled with the limited effectiveness in targeting the poor households, led the government to streamline the system. As a result of these efforts, from 1997 onwards the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) is being implemented in the country. The main objective of the TPDS is to improve the PDS consumption of the 'identified poor' by offering a specific quantum of cereals at highly subsidised prices. The current systems involved in the distribution of the programme is vehemently criticised by commentators on account of issues such as inefficiency in targeting, increased per unit cost of transfer of benefits, leakages, unequal and skewed distribution of benefits to higher income classes (among the poor), regional disparities in performances and so on (Ramesh and Satpathy, et.al, 2006). Notwithstanding all these comments there are evidences to suggest that the TPDS has improved coverage of poor households residing in rural areas of poor states, thereby ensuring food subsidy reaching them effectively (Kundu and Srivastava, 2004). Despite the functioning of TPDS, along with other food transfer schemes introduced subsequently (namely The Annapurna Scheme; Antyodaya Anna Yojana), it is widely reviewed that the overall improvement in nutritional status of the population due to these schemes are rather low, which highlights the need for further strengthening the existing food transfer measures (Ramesh, 2009).

The other two major food security programmes are the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) and the Integrated Child Care Development Scheme (ICDS). When PDS provides indirect nutritional support (by improving the physical and economic access to staple food), the MDMS and ICDS imply direct, targeted nutritional intervention involving provision of cooked food to the vulnerable among poor, especially children (by self selection) (Kannan and Pillai, 2007).

In the study area, we found that about 90 percent of the agricultural labour households surveyed were purchasing from the PDS system. This clearly contributes to the food security of the poor to some extent in spite of the limitations of the system. The state's role in assuring such security cannot be ignored.

### **Shelter Security**

Housing is one of the basic needs of every individual and family, along with food and clothing. Housing is a serious problem especially for the rural poor. Houses of agricultural labourers are not much effective to them because they do not give protection completely against wind, rain and cold; they have inadequate lighting and ventilation, no separate arrangement for keeping animals and lack of basic sanitation facilities. Most of the houses are *kutcha* houses with mud walls and thatched roofs. Table 1 shows that 50 percent of the total houses of agricultural labourers in the study area of Uttar Dinajpur district are *Kutcha* houses with mud walls and 68.80 percent roofs of the houses are thatched roofs. The labourers were further asked about the number of rooms they

have at their houses. It has been revealed that a large number of labourers (55.56 percent) live in a one-room house in all villages of the district.

The respondents were further asked about the facilities like kitchen, bathroom, toilet, ventilation, electricity etc. in their houses. Only 40 percent of labourers have the facilities of separate kitchen in their houses in the district. Only 5 percent of labourers of the district have toilet facilities provided by the government under Rural Sanitation Programme. But these toilets are not properly maintained and as a result these toilets have become unfit for use after some times. Most of the labourers are habituated to use open field for toilet purposes. At village - *Malon*, animals and their some landless owners lived together in the same shark. Some of the huts had bamboo doors and others did not. No labour households have electricity facilities.

**Table 1**

**Nature and Availability of Facilities in the Houses Owned by Agricultural Labour Households Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District**

	Delwalpur	Malon	Tilna	Nakol	Dharampur	Jagatagaon	All Vil- lages
1. Nature of Walls							
a. Earth/Mud	20 (66.67)	18 (0.00)	19 (63.33)	15 (50.00)	12 (40.00)	6 (20.00)	90 (50.00)
b. Bamboo Slips	8 (26.67)	11 (36.67)	10 (33.33)	13 (43.33)	17 (56.67)	22 (73.33)	81 (45.00)
c. Concrete	2 (6.67)	1 (3.33)	1 (3.33)	2 (6.67)	1 (3.39)	2 (6.67)	9 (5.00)
2. Nature of Roofs							
a. Tin	5 (16.67)	4 (13.33)	3 (10.00)	5 (16.67)	4 (26.67)	6 (20.00)	27 (15.00)
b. Thatch	25 (83.33)	26 (86.67)	27 (90.00)	25 (76.67)	26 (86.67)	24 (80.00)	153 (85.00)
c. Concrete	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
3. Number of Rooms Per Households							
a. One Rooms	12 (40.00)	13 (43.33)	17 (56.67)	14 (46.67)	23 (76.67)	21 (70.00)	100 (55.55)
b. Two Rooms	13 (53.33)	12 (40.00)	12 (40.00)	12 (40.00)	5 (16.67)	9 (30.00)	63 (35.00)
c. Three Rooms	4 (23.33)	3 (10.00)	1 (3.33)	12 (40.00)	2 (6.67)	-----	13 (7.22)
d. Four Rooms	1 (3.33)	2 (6.67)	-----	3 (10.00)	-----	-----	4 (2.22)
3. Facilities Available Per Households							
a. Separate Kitchen	14 (46.67)	12 (40.00)	10 (33.33)	11 (36.67)	12 (40.00)	13 (43.33)	72 (40.00)
b. Bath Rooms	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
c. Toilet	2 (6.67)	1 (3.33)	2 (6.67)	-----	2 (6.67)	1 (3.33)	9 (5.00)
d. Windows	22 (73.33)	20 (66.67)	18 (60.00)	1 (3.33)	14 (46.67)	16 (53.33)	107 (59.44)
e. Doors	20 (66.67)	18 (60.00)	15 (50.00)	17 (56.67)	11 (36.67)	12 (40.00)	92 (51.11)
f. Electricity	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

Data Source: Field Survey

The Central Government introduced the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) in 1985-86 to provide housing to the scheduled castes, tribes and freed bonded labourers in rural areas. From 1993-94 this scheme was extended to non-SC/ST families, with the basis of identification being the poverty criteria. This scheme envisaged provision of house-sites and the development of common facilities like approach roads, drainage, water and sanitation. The responsibility of construction was to be with the beneficiaries. In the study area, only 8 agricultural labourers households out of 180 agricultural labour households received funds for construction of houses under the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) and 5 agricultural labour households received funds for repairing houses..

### **Health Security**

Health security should be made available to all citizens. Health security can be described as ensuring low exposure to risk and providing access to health care services along with the ability to pay for medical care and medicine. But in rural areas, public health care facilities are highly inadequate, which in turn forced them to depend on rural untrained quack doctors. In the study areas, agricultural labourers are suffering from various diseases like tetanus, tuberculosis, headaches or malaria fever, stomach pain, aches in their bodies etc. But seasonal migrant agricultural labourers are suffering more in different acute diseases as compared to non-migrant agricultural labourers. Poor and inhuman living conditions are responsible for generation of these acute diseases among agricultural labourers at the migrated places. Some migrated labourers reported that they are bound to return at home due to their severe illness. The poor do not treat for common illness and sometimes to major diseases that are unidentified by them, causing higher level of untreated morbidity. Similarly, the cost and burden of treatments are ever increasing and leading to difficulty for the poor and weaker sections of the community. They are forced to take loan from money lenders at high rate of interest for their treatment. The failure to provide adequate health security seems to be one of the major development failures.

### **Employment Security**

The problem of under-employment and unemployment persist to a large extent among agricultural labourers. As they are not protected against the risk of unemployment, their survival strategy is to accept any work they can find, even if it means being underpaid, underemployed or exposed to hazardous work conditions. This not only impedes their ability to climb out of poverty, but also has a negative effect on the productivity and growth of the economy as a whole, and on sustainable development. Table 2 shows that the majority of agricultural labourers were under-employed since an average agricultural labourer got annual employment (farm and non-farm) of 240.60 days, which is less than full employment (305 days). Among the agricultural labourers, male agricultural labourers were employed 260.24 days, which is (24.87 percent) higher than the female employment. Agricultural Labourers are also greatly affected by the seasonal nature of the employment in agriculture.

Agricultural labourers constituted the most insecure and vulnerable sections of the workforce. They were faced with irregularity of work, easily transferrable skills and low levels of income, for which they tried to compensate by undertaking a multiplicity of activities. According to the survey, about 73 per cent of the workers engaged in multiple activities in the study areas (see Table 3). The higher proportion of them engaged in multiple activities during the year was related to the seasonal nature of agriculture. It is our argument that the structural causes of vulnerability of these groups of workers must be addressed directly in any programme of social protection. Employment

security at the micro level can be defined as security from arbitrary loss of employment. The state has made some effort to address the problem of employment security of the agricultural labourers. There are several schemes such as Swarnajayanti Gram Swaeozgar Yojna (SGSY), Pradhan Manntri Gran Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Sampoorana Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), National Food For Work Programme(NFFWP), Indra Awass Yojna (JAY), Integrated Wastelands (IWDP), Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and Desert Development Programme (DDP) initiated to generate employment opportunities in rural India. The limitations of these programmes include little involvement of the local community in selection and implementation, their centralized character, absence of social monitoring pilferage of resources, leakages and corruption, inadequate employment generation because of limited outreach of the programmes, inability to provide minimum livelihood security, cheating and delay of wage payment, lack of amenities for workers, low participation of women, and employment opportunities that are inflexible to worker's demand. Notwithstanding these limitations, these programmes have made a significant contribution to the smoothening of income flows and tightening of rural labour markets. The existence of large scale programmes of this kind helped in mitigating, to some extent, the adverse impacts of liberalization during the early years of its implementation (Sharma, 2004 as cited by Kabeer, 2009). Further, the Government has recently enacted the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act to provide 100 days guaranteed employment to rural households. Though these initiatives have contributed in reducing the rural unemployment problem, the problem of employment insecurity needs to be addressed in a wider context and solved at.

**Table 2**

**Number of Employment Days Available to Per Agricultural Labourer in Agriculture of All Surveyed Villages / Blocks of Uttar Dinajpur District (Annual in Days)**

Nature of Employment	Male	Female	Total
1. Crop Farming			
a. Self-Employment	28.35 (10.89)	17.38 (8.34)	23.51 (9.77)
b. Wage Employment	137.06 (52.67)	118.70 (56.96)	127.88 (53.15)
2. Employment in Agriculture Allied Activities	15.57 (5.98)	21.07 (10.11)	18.32 (7.61)
Sub-Total	180.98 (69.54)	157.15 (75.40)	169.71 (70.54)
3. Non-Agricultural Employment	79.26 (30.46)	51.26 (24.60)	70.89 (29.46)
Total	260.24 (100)	208.41 (100)	240.60 (100)

Data Source: Field Survey

### Minimum Wages

Another state policy geared towards ensuring employment and income security to the agricultural labourers is the enforcement of Minimum Wages Act, 1948. This Act is primarily applicable to unorganized sector and empowers both Central and State Governments to fix/revise the minimum rates of wages in respect of scheduled employments under their respective jurisdiction. The minimum wages have been fixed at different levels by the different State Governments. However,

there is no institutional machinery for the implementation of minimum wage legislation in the agricultural sector. Government of West Bengal has fixed Rs. 64 per day as the minimum wage rate of labourer in the agricultural sector in the year 2005. The minimum wages fixed by the West Bengal Government are not actually paid to labourer in the agricultural sector in different villages of Uttar Dinajpur district (Table 4). It may be noted that the implementation of minimum wages in the agricultural sector is difficult. In the peak seasons, wages remain high due to local shortage of labour. But this is only for short periods. In the slack season of agricultural activity, wages tend to be too low. Seasonal variation of wages in agriculture makes more problems regarding implementation of minimum wages in agriculture. To overcome these problems and to ensure higher wages in agriculture, it is necessary to create certain conditions in agriculture. Firstly, formation of trade union among agricultural labourers is essential to enhance bargaining power among them. Secondly, the public employment programme like National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 should provide alternative adequate employment opportunities in rural areas during slack season in agriculture. Other policies such as improved access of consumption credit for the labour during slack season, and reduced institutional credit for labour saving technology (with no land augmenting effects) provides additional support to the maintenance of minimum wages.

Table 3

**Proportion of Agricultural Labourer without and With Subsidiary Sources of Income  
Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District**

Blocks / Villages / District	Number and Percentage of Agricultural Laboures Without Subsidiary Sources of Income			Number and Percentage of Agricultural Labourers With Subsidiary Sources of Income		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Villages under Highly Developed						
Blocks	8 (10.96)	9 (12.33)	17 (23.29)	36 (49.32)	20 (27.40)	56 (76.72)
<i>Delwalpur</i>	9 (4.84)	9 (11.84)	18 (23.68)	30 (39.47)	28 (36.84)	58 (76.31)
<i>Malon</i>						
Villages under Moderately Developed Blocks						
<i>Nakol</i>	11 (15.28)	7 (9.72)	18 (25)	30 (41.67)	24 (33.33)	54 (75.00)
<i>Tilna</i>	11 (13.92)	12 (15.19)	23 (29.11)	29 (36.71)	27 (34.18)	56 (70.89)
Villages under Least Developed						
Blocks	14 (20.90)	12 (17.91)	26 (38.81)	26 (38.81)	15 (22.39)	41 (61.12)
<i>Jagatagaon</i>	7 (11.67)	8 (13.33)	15 (25.00)	30 (50)	15 (25)	45 (75)
<i>Dharampur</i>						
District	60 (14.05)	57 (13.35)	117 (27.40)	181 (42.39)	129 (30.21)	310 (72.60)

Data Source: Field Survey

## Social Assistances

National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) is a social security programme for the development of poor households, initiated in 1995, which has three components such as National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS), National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) and National Maternity

**Table 4**

**Particulars of Average Daily Wages of Casual Day Agricultural Labourers in Different Agricultural Operations Across Surveyed Villages of Uttar Dinajpur District**

Operations	Villages under Highly Developed Blocks		Villages under Moderately Developed Blocks		Villages under Least Developed Blocks		All Villages/ District
	Delwalpur	Malon	Tilna	Nakol	Jagatagaon	Dharampur	
Ploughing							
Males	43.25	41	41	38.50	44	40.25	41
Females	----	----	----	----	----	----	----
Sowing							
Males	42.5	39.25	39.5	38.00	43.75	39	39.83
Females	41	36.75	37.25	37.50	40.75	37.75	38.08
Transplantations							
Males	43.38	43.75	43	39.63	49.25	40.75	43.21
Females	43.38	41.50	41	39.63	46.75	40.75	42.13
Weeding							
Males	39.50	38.00	38.00	36.25	43.25	37.25	38.50
Females	39.50	35.75	35.5	36.25	39.5	37.25	37.08
Harvesting							
Males	45	44	46.25	43	50	44.25	44.96
Females	42	41.5	43.75	41	47	41.75	42.43
Others							
Males	41.50	39.25	41.25	38.90	45	39.25	40.42
Females	38.75	36.50	39.00	35.25	42.25	36.5	37.63
All Operations							
Males	41.48	40.88	40.67	38.81	45.88	40.13	41.32
Females	39.68	38.40	38.70	37.93	43.25	38.80	39.47
Discrimination Coefficient Between Males and Females	.05	.06	.05	.02	.06	.03	.05

Data Source: Field Survey during 2004-05

Benefit Scheme (NMBS). Out of these three schemes, some beneficiaries under National Old Age Pension Scheme are found in the study areas. However, the amount of pension for NOAPS has been abysmally low and beneficiaries also reported that they did not receive their pension at regular

interval of time. Generally beneficiaries who have strong political background and familiarities in the village are able to manage their names in the beneficiary list. This indicates that some eligible beneficiaries in the study areas have not been covered under this scheme. Very recently, the government modified the NAOPS and NMBS to improve their efficacy and coverage. Recasting the NAOPS from November 2007 onwards a new scheme called “Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme”

(IGNOAPS) came into existence. Similarly, the National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NBMS) got replaced by a modified scheme called “Janani Suraksha Yojana” (JSY). The Government of West Bengal has also introduced contributory provident fund scheme for unorganized sector workers by excluding agricultural labourers during 2000. Each subscriber to the scheme is required to contribute Rs. 20/-per month. An equal amount is credited to his account by the State Government as matching contributions. Interests are paid by the State Govt. The existing literature and assessments in the subject suggest that the standard criticisms against government sponsored schemes in terms of poor design, inadequate allocation, improper implementation and weak beneficiary participation also hold true in the case of the above cash transfer programmes.

In 2004, the Government set up a National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) to review, *inter alia*, the “social security system available for labour in the informal sector and make recommendations for expanding their converge”. The NCEUS submitted its recommendations on social security enhancement in May 2006 to the Prime Minister of India and drafted a bill [The Unorganised Sector Workers’ Social Security (Draft) Bill, 2006], which was formulated after detailed review and examination of all the hitherto similar exercises in the country. It is widely acknowledged that Draft Bill proposed by the NCEUS is a substantive step towards provision of social security to informal sector workers (EPW, 2006). As per the plan of NCEUS, three forms of social security would be provided to about 300 million workers in the unorganised sector. These are health insurance, life insurance and old age security – involving joint financing by the workers, employers and the central and state governments. This commission has proposed two draft bills regarding the conditions of work and livelihood promotion in 2007. These two bills are ‘Unorganised Agriculture Sector workers (Conditions of Work and Livelihood Promotion) Bill, 2007’ and ‘Unorganised Non- Agriculture Sector workers (Conditions of Work and Livelihood Promotion) Bill, 2007’. The Bill regarding agricultural workers would provide basic minimum standard on hours of work, payment of minimum wages and adherence to Bonded Labour Abolition Act and Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act. It also recognizes a set of minimum entitlement of workers comprising the right to organize, nondiscrimination on payment of wages and conditions of work, safety at workplace and absence of sexual harassment. For dispute resolution between wage earners and employers in the unorganized sector, the draft bill has proposed creation of at least one dispute resolution council in every district to be constituted by state governments.

Then, this draft Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in September, 2007 and in turn, referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour. Crucial recommendations of the standing committee were discarded and the bill was further referred to a Group of Ministers. Finally, this draft Bill received the Assent of the President of India on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 2008 and has now become an Act. The original name of the Bill was changed. The word “Sector” was dropped and the Unorganised Sector Workers Social Security Bill 2007 was changed to Unorganised Workers Social Security Bill 2008. It is also becoming clear that agricultural labourers will also be excluded. The Parliament rejected the amendments for clarification while the Labour Minister claims to have included agricultural labourers as well. Replying to the debates, Oscar Fernandes said, “I would

like to clarify that ‘unorganised worker’ means every worker in this country who is not in the organized sector. I have referred to 94 per cent of our people and this includes every agriculturist. Specifically, I would like to say that the migrant worker is one who does 150 days of agricultural work and then goes to the cities and works there as a mason or unorganized worker. So, the Bill covers totally the unorganized sector workers. Agricultural workers are also getting the benefit.” If this is what the government means to be the coverage of agricultural labourers, it is obvious that all those who are engaged in agricultural work have been effectively excluded. Hence, the claim that the Act covered rural agricultural labour is an utter lie (Ghosh, 2009).

## CONCLUSION

In the above discussion, an attempt has been made to understand the concept of social protection, security needs of the agricultural labourers and the initiatives of the state to implement the instruments of social protection for agricultural labourers. The major security needs of the agricultural labourers are food security, health security, housing security, employment security, income security and old age security. But the initiatives of the state to implement the instruments of social protection for agricultural labourers are disappointing to us. So the state will have to play greater roles in implementing the instruments of social protection for agricultural labourers as compared to other workers of unorganized sector as there is no formal relation between employer and employee in agriculture and employment is casual in nature. However, it needs to be mentioned here that the increasing globalization of the last decade is modifying the role of the state through various market mechanisms. A welcome aspect of these new initiatives is the visible efforts of the government towards designing and implementing right-based social security systems, along with enabling governance structures, which *inter alia* seek more participation from all other stakeholders, including the targeted beneficiaries themselves

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