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DRAFT: NOT FOR QUOTATION

**From Heroines to Beneficiaries, to ‘Good Women’ Entrepreneurs?
Findings of three village studies in a comparative-historical
perspective in Jalpaiguri District, West-Bengal, India.**

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1. Introduction

In the following the main findings will be presented of three anthropological field studies¹ conducted in the beginning of 2016 in the framework of the WLE project, named: 'Poverty squares and gender circles: unravelling agriculture gaps, challenges and opportunities in the Eastern Gangetic Plains' (Bangladesh, India, Nepal), 2015-2017.² The catchy title of the project can be explained as follows: The Eastern Gangetic Plains (Basin), which encompass the Nepal Terai, India Terai and the adjacent Bangladesh area, is known as South Asia's poverty square, an area where abject poverty is persisting. Gender circles stands for the view that despite many development interventions pretending to promote gender inequality, this was not really addressed.

In the conceptualization of the project it was assumed that globalization and climate change have triggered a negative process of 'feminization of agriculture' in the Eastern Gangetic Plains, mainly because of the out-migration of men leaving behind the women with "restricted access to services, infrastructure, institutions and markets to manage productive [as well as reproductive] responsibilities" (Sugden, a.o. 2014, Kelkar 2006, 2007; Ganguly 2003).

The main research questions of the WLE project were as follows:

1. How do the material dimensions of inequality (i.e. land ownership and access to complementary resources, such as irrigation) shape gendered access to resources and opportunities? And how do these material dimensions determine the ability or agency of diverse groups of poor women and men to negotiate with key actors and stake-holders in access to agricultural infrastructure and services?
2. To what extent does ecosystem change and sustainability impact agricultural productivity or more generally livelihood security for the poorest - who rely both on farming systems as well as other natural resources and assets?
3. How do changes in agrarian economies such as out-migration, commercialisation of agriculture as well as changing policies and practices re-arrange land, labour and consumption relations between women and men in different local situations? How do these changes restructure gendered responsibilities, opportunities and challenges?

As the WLE project is also focused on interventions, which might reduce poverty in the research location, it was decided to analyse two Government development projects in

¹ Three Master students in sociology/economy/development studies of the North Bengal University and three Master students in anthropology/development studies of the University of Amsterdam conducted anthropological research for three month (Jan-March 2016) in three selected villages in Jalpaiguri District, West-Bengal, supervised by me. The teams were: Merel van Andel and Tanay Chandra in village Salbari (Matelli block); Wessel Kok and Ambika Rai in village Uttar Khalpara (Mal block) and Lianne Oosterbaan and Gunjan Rana in village Madhya Khuttimari (Dhupguri block).

² The titles of the final WLE reports were as follows: Merel van Andel, 2016. *An Insight in Salbari in Times of Change: An Anthropological Study on Livelihoods, Agriculture and Gender Inequality*. Lianne Oosterbaan, 2016. *Water, Land and Ecology: Agricultural lives, gender inequality and poverty in Madhya Khuttimari*. Wessel Kok, 2016. *Village Life in Rural West-Bengal: Progress, Power and Poverty in Uttar Khalpara*.

the Terai-India area with a gender component. The Anandadhara micro-credit/Self-Help Group Program and the Accelerated Development of Minor Irrigation Project (ADMI) were selected as case studies for the North Bengal Terai project area³.

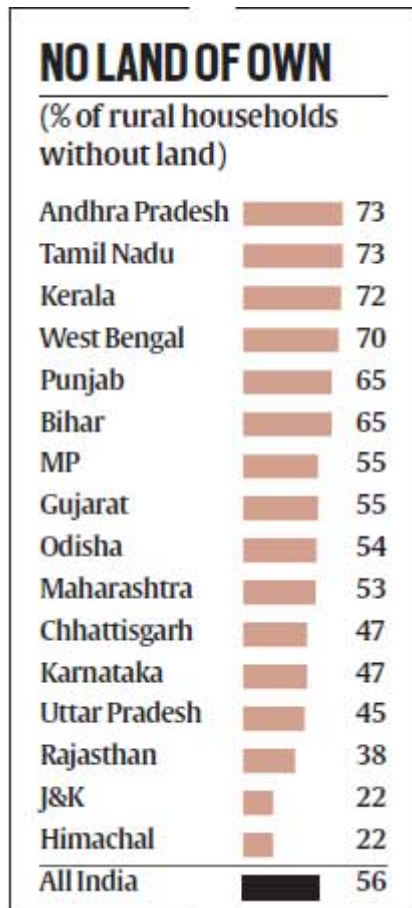
As I participated from 1987 till 1994 as the sociologist/anthropologist/gender specialist in the impact study of the Indo-Dutch 'North Bengal Terai Small-scale Irrigation Development Project' (NBTDP) a historical perspective covering a period of 25 years will be added at certain relevant themes (Schenk-Sandbergen 1991; Schenk-Sandbergen & Choudhury 2003; Schenk-Sandbergen 2015). To revisit the Terai area for the WLR project gave me an unique opportunity to compare, analyse and to reflect in time on dramatic rural and social transformation processes with grave implications on poverty and gender inequality.

The content of this paper is as follows: Firstly the rural transformation processes of the past decades will be briefly outlined, followed by the gender history of the project area and an analysis of the implications of religious nationalism on gender, to frame the context of the village studies. It will be shown that rural is not agricultural anymore. In the next paragraph the basic findings on caste/class/community, poverty and gender as reflected from the anthropological village studies will be presented. The outcomes on differences and similarities in access to, and control over land, labour, money, division of labour and decision making of landowning- and landless women will be shown. The implications of the revival of the 'good women' ideology on these themes will be analysed. Changes in the eco-system from food to cash, agri-business and the trend of masculinization of agriculture are key issues in paragraph seven. In the following it will be shown that young men migrate and that there is no process of feminization of agricultural (wage) labour, or management, or more workload for women. In the Anandadhara paragraph, the contradiction between the imaginary 'female entrepreneur' and the 'good woman' will be shown, followed by the virtual impossibility of ADMI to reach out to the real marginal farmers and farmwomen. In the last paragraph some practical recommendations and suggestions will be presented.

2. Rural, is not agricultural anymore!

Terai has a long historical record of peasant movements, revolts and land reforms in which women played an important role (Ghose 1986, 1991; Roy 1992; Lieten 1992; EPW 1981; Dasgupta 1986; Schenk-Sandbergen & Choudhury 2003, chapter 2). Moreover, *Zamindari* (big landowners) relations have been whipped out by the natural fragmentation of land due to inheritance, immigration, in-flow of many refugees from Bangladesh and of course by land reforms (Operation *Bargha*). Many other 'conditions and mechanisms' as globalization, neo-liberal policies, climate change, population increase, in-migration, have triggered dramatic changes in the villages in Jalpaiguri, but the question relevant for our research is, if, and how much these changes have triggered reduction of poverty and gender inequality.

³ In the three selected villages are Self-Help Groups (SHGs) now under Anandadhara (West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission-WBSRLM), earlier formed under SGSY scheme of the central government operationalized by District Rural Development Agency (DRDC), Jalpaiguri (Launched 2013-14). Project 2 is the West Bengal Accelerated Development of Minor Irrigation Project. World Bank Funded (Jan 2012-Dec 2017).



The condition in Jalpaiguri District in the Terai area, where our three research villages are located, cannot be isolated from the wider processes of change in West-Bengal and rural India as a whole. The socio-economic and caste census (SECC) 2011 paints a picture of rural India weighed down by landlessness and lack of non-farm jobs. It is stated that, “**while India is overwhelmingly rural, rural isn’t as much agricultural** (Damodaran, 2015).

The SECC census (2015) states that out of India’s million households, nearly three-fourths are living in rural areas. However, only 30 per cent of rural households depend nowadays on cultivation as their ‘main’ source of income. For West-Bengal this figure is even less and hardly 20 per cent. Of this 20 per cent, 88 per cent consists of marginal- and small farmers and farmwomen (Agrarian plan, Nabard, 2009). Moreover, it is our upsetting finding that over time the land size of the land holding came down in 25 years from *one acre* to *one bigha* for marginal farmer households. The shrinking size and distribution of landholdings will be discussed in paragraph 4.3 below.

In India, as the above figure shows, 56 per cent of households don’t own any land. In West-Bengal landlessness is almost 70% (see figure: *Indian Express*, No land of Own, 2015). Damodaran (2015) suggest that a reason for the very high figure in West-Bengal of landlessness could be that the SECC data looks only at agricultural land and not homestead land. Quite a bit of farmlands were redistributed to erstwhile tenant-cultivators after imposition of land ceilings. Over time, the small plots of land have got converted to pure homesteads and as we will see later many agricultural households have forcefully exited farming altogether.

In line with this finding I found, during my first revisit, after 25 years, to a former project village, the shocking fact that the majority of landless women (in this case Muslim women), 70 % in the village, has to survive on casual, agricultural labour, which is almost not available any more (See: Schenk-Sandbergen, 2016). According to the 1985/1986 Agricultural Census 20% of the land was owned by marginal farmers and 25% by small farmers (North Bengal Terai Development Project, Phase II, final report, p.7). That means that broadly the ratio between the landowning and landless households was 25 years ago 50%-50%. Now it has come down to 20%-70% with 10% working in non-farm occupations.

More than 60 per cent of the rural households covered under the SECC census (2015) qualified as deprived on 14 parameters. The SECC data points to the main earner in 74.49 per cent of all rural households drawing a monthly income below ₹ 5,000. This ratio is even more for West Bengal (82.47 per cent). It shows the immense poverty that is generated by dramatic, old and new rural transformation processes. From the eye of the people (see: Schenk-Sandbergen, February, 2016) the following reasons were mentioned for the deepening of their poverty: Fragmentation of land, loss of agricultural

yields because of climate change, loss of land because of dowries, higher investment for seeds, pesticides, chemical fertilisers, decline of prices for agricultural products, more debts, more suicides, more greed for consumption articles, tea gardens are closed.⁴ Coping survival strategies have to be found outside agriculture as seasonal migration of young (un)married men to work in construction work in big cities and change in livelihood systems (more non-farm work, small teagardens and vegetable growing).

Caste/class/gender and relevance of research questions

The above data imply that when we consider the caste/class/community and gender relevance of the three WLE research questions, we should be aware of the limited number of landowning women for whom themes as material dimensions of inequality, access to infrastructure and services, entitlements, etc. are relevant. This might sharpen our class-awareness of the character of the concept of 'feminization of agriculture' and other WLE research questions. They tacitly imply a class-, caste-, and intervention perspective that might be more relevant for the category of landowning women in the North Bengal Terai villages, in particular for small- and middle farmer's households, as the women of those households might be in a position to take over the agricultural work and related irrigation work in case their husbands migrate. For the poorest women of landless- and marginal farm households such a scenario is unthinkable. There is no (or hardly) land, or agricultural work or management, to take over. Moreover gender restrictions and gender gaps are less in poorer household.

There is a kind of paradox, or contradiction in the standard assumptions of the WLE research questions on 'gender and agriculture' and the poverty lens. The poorest women have no land and hardly access to land and access to wage-labour is shrinking. Therefore an approach in which the concepts of 'feminization of agriculture', entitlements, opportunities, access and control over (natural) resources, decision making, negotiations with stakeholders etc. are central themes, runs the danger to have a caste/class/community bias to the 'haves'. It might eclipse a perspective on the majority of the 'have-nots', women of landless- and marginal farm households who should get priority in our research, and should be state/project-supported and empowered the most.

Moreover an empirical observation from our study is, that in general landowning women did not participate in agriculture separately from men, and it was almost impossible to disaggregate the contribution of men and women either in terms of labour supplied, or in terms of output. Therefore, it is e.g. very tricky to state that women are responsible for food production. Brauw (2008, 331) shows in his article how difficult it is to measure feminization of agriculture. "To measure feminization, measures are needed over time (or need to be thought of as time varying) and, in many cases, trends of participation and hour measures among women should be interpreted relative to trends among men (Brauw, a.o., 2008, p.332)". He differentiates two types of feminization: the feminization of labour and the feminization of farm management. In

⁴ A correspondent had visited Bundapani and other closed tea estates in February 2014 and met families living in famine-like conditions. Most of the tea estate workers now depend on a dry river, sieving stones, earning between Rs 40 to 70 a day. While distress migration was common even before the estate closed down (due to pitifully low wages of Rs 95 per day), trafficking of girl children and women were rampant, said residents. Driven by penury, many families had taken to eating dried tea flowers tossed in salt. For all this, workers blame mismanagement of the estate and state's apathy. (Down to Earth, Monday 24 March 2014)

our studies we have put emphasis on the first type but also kept an eye on the last one.

3.From 'heroine' to 'beneficiary' to imaginary 'good woman entrepreneur?' Gender historical context in the Terai.

Heroic past and development projects.

Before coming to the findings of the basic facts of the villages and changes in status and position of women in the three villages, it is unavoidable to sketch some basic historical gender facts. In Jalpaiguri district the Tebagha peasant revolt flamed up in 1946-47 and nearby areas as Phansidewa, Naxalbari and Kharibari were the cradle areas of the vigorous Naxalite struggle of 1967. The Tebhaga movement demanded reduction in the share of the landlords from one-half of the crops to one-third. The peasant struggles in 1967, 1969, 1970, were, broadly speaking, 'tenants' struggles for the occupation of *benami* land (i.e. land transferred by landowners to fictive persons in order to evade the ceiling law).

These locations were, twenty years later, the project areas of the NBTDP where irrigation devices and hand-pumps for women were installed in 1989-1994 of marginal farmers households having less than one acre of land. This is broadly the same area where we conducted the village studies of the WLE research 25 years later with counterparts of the North Bengal University. It is noteworthy to remember that on the campus of the North Bengal Terai University radical students became important cadres of the Naxalbari peasant movement (Sen 1985, 60).

The fearless and dynamic role of peasant and tribal women in these protest movements is fortunately documented (Sunil Sen,1985; Ghosh, 1991;Roy, 1992; Sarkar, 2014). In his preface, Sen ingenuously confesses that it is his objective to tell the story of the working women in Bengal who have remained invisible in history, as the professional historians have generally ignored or underestimated the role played by the labouring women in the popular movements. And, he has really written a book out of his heart, making a fist for the women's movement and women's development in Bengal. From the historical role of women in the Terai peasant protest movements we can learn much about the autonomy of women, gender relations and gender ideology of the years after independence. Sunil Sen writes about a very interesting and important observation on the position of peasant women during the Tebhaga movement in 1946 (p.41),

‘The agrarian struggle made a deep impact on the peasant women, notably Rajbansi and tribal women. Partly this can be explained by the fact that they enjoyed greater freedom than Hindu and Muslim women. The Rajbansi women moved freely in the hats (markets), selling vegetables and rice: widow-remarriage was allowed; the man marrying a Rajbansi girl had to pay bride price.’”

This quote awakens us to explore the hypothesis more in detail that the gender position and status of (rural) women in main lines has deteriorated in the Terai region over time (Sarkar, 2014). It urges us to search for the historical dynamics that transformed ‘the heroines of the past’ into 'handpump women-beneficiaries' in an Indo-Dutch small-scale irrigation project 25 years ago, and as imaginary ‘good-women entrepreneurs’ nowadays. Global economic and religious policies play a crucial role as we will see in

the following. 25 years ago I wrote already that women's status in the Terai was relatively high in the past, but has been deteriorated by the introduction of the structure and ideology of male dominance, as corollaries of the integration in the mainstream of upper-caste Hindu gender ideology and capitalist transformation processes. At that time I stated also that this finding is not a new perspective. In particular the anthropologist Eleanor Leacock has collected substantial cross-cultural evidence to demask the myth of male-dominance in traditional Third World societies (Etienne 1980, Leacock 1981). In this context we can also refer to studies which have documented the destruction and undermining of matrilineal and matrilocal societies in India and Laos (Gough 1961, Agarwal 1994; Schenk-Sandbergen 1995, 2003, 2012, 2014).

Religious nationalism and gender.

The overall findings of the research in the three villages now in 2016 show a very clear outcome, pointing towards the further regression of position and situation of rural women of landowning, and to a lesser degree for women of poor landless, households. Main reason can be located in the revived gender ideology of the 'good woman' as a upshot of nationalist policies, and as a complementary image the ideology of the 'good man'. Berglund (2011) writes,

“The Indian women's movement has for the last two decades been engaged in a struggle against an aggressive Hindu nationalism. Based on the idea of Hindu supremacy and a revival of traditional Hindu culture, the Hindu nationalist movement has grown as a political force in an era of rapid modernization and globalization. Met with strong resistance from secular forces, this Hindu nationalist challenge has tried to turn civil society into a battlefield challenging feminist liberal and socialist ideas on gender relations, advocating a definition of gender roles based on a traditional Hindu culture (p.83).”

Berglund argues in his articles that despite their significant political success, the Hindu nationalist forces have largely failed to gain any ground within the Indian women's movement and remain relatively isolated. Although it is true that the impact of the BJP as a political party is very limited in Jalpaiguri district, our findings give reason for concern. We found indications that the dominant religious image of gender identity, propagated in numerous social media, is silently intruding in the mind of people.

Burlet (1999, p42)) writes in her interesting article on the role of NGO's to challenge right-wing nationalism,

“ Indian women of all social strata have been affected by the nationalist ideology which permeates political debates and by escalating levels of Hindu-Muslim violence. Nationalists have developed effective strategies for 'tapping' women as an electoral resource. These include holding women's prayer meetings, celebrating religious imagery in which female power is celebrated as the source of India's greatness, and promoting female politicians (see Llewellyn 1998).”

This means that gender problems and gender inequality is neglected and marginalised unless gender identity can be linked with religious identities. This is exactly what we observed during the 'Sun Festival' (*Surya Shashti, Chathh puja*) in November 2015 in



Jalpaiguri. The *puja* was celebrated at a large scale; promoted with big posters showing prominent political leaders. The festival asks extreme sacrifices of women: standing for hours in dirty water and fasting, all to ensure good life for husband and children. In the posters it can be seen that the Chief minister of Trinamool Congres (TMC), Mamata Banerjee, in power since 2011, is depicted in the festival posters in exactly the way that represents dominant policies in India.

All the dramatic changes of the past decades as intensification and diversification of agriculture, climate change, political change, population growth, migration and all its related side effects seem to be overruled by the power of the revitalisation of the old-age notions regarding the cultural and religious construction of gender. This entails a gender determined value systems of stereotypes, gender symbolism with all its features as -prejudices, -associations, -attitudes and -behaviour, concepts as family status and male shame, imago's of femininity and masculinity. All these features seem to be an overshadowing cover to explain the persistence of gender inequality as it stands in the 21st century in the three villages where the research was conducted.

Name it, land rights for women, division of labour between women and men, wage discrimination of landless- and poor women, allocation of domestic work, restricted mobility of women, less decision making power, shift from bride-price to dowry, increasing dowries, domestic violence, etc., all these themes are related with the emphasized 'good woman' gender ideology. This is the reality, despite the fact that we have to keep in mind that, compared to other states in India, the gender ideology in West Bengal is smoothened by the absence of Brahmin dominance, the melting pot population with many tribal communities having more gender equal ideologies, the history of revolt and peasant uprising and more than 40 years of Left Front rule. Unequal gender access and control over material dimensions as land and water are broadly derived attributes of the mainstream gender attitudes.

At the same time it cannot be denied that for some rural women more opportunities have opened up to enhance their status and agency. Moreover, key findings of the three villages also show that the gender relations in poor households and in some tribal communities are more equal than in better-off households: *purdah* or being a 'good woman' is a luxury that they cannot afford. The better status of tribal women is reflected in the convincing fact that our research in the three villages shows that **dowry is not demanded** in their communities (Santal and some Rajbongsi lineages): only bride price is known.

But, as Oosterbaan (2016) shows in her study, poor landless and tribal women also face the restrictions of access to the labour markets and wage discrimination because of the 'good women' norms, imposed on them. Unfortunately, this ideology is not only reinforced by the richer male farmers and tea garden company owners, but to a certain degree also by the class of better-off farmwomen itself, adhering to notions and restrictions which might protect them ('we cannot do hard labour', 'we don't know what

chemicals to spray') but undermine and constrain the life and work of their poorest sisters.

The concept of being a 'good woman' was often brought up in all the three villages in interviews and focus group discussions. That is an alarming signal. It looked as a kind of revival of traditional *purdah* norms adopted through *sanskritization*, emphasizing that decent women stay at home, being a housewife, mother, not doing manly tasks, not going to markets or other public places, serving husband and children.

In the villages men of Rajbongsi and Muslim expressed that women should not go outside and in particular not go to markets. In Madhya Khuttimari, where women look very active and working in the fields, the men stated that, 'women are the goddesses of the house and therefore most respected when staying inside.' Even a very charismatic, active woman SHG leader in the village told that after a lot of struggle with her husband she had to adhere to the subordinated role of housewife and mother and to consider her identity as farm- or professional women as secondary. Kok remarks that:

"In a religious sense both Hindu's and Muslims share the notion that the man is closer to God. This means in practice that he is the one whose will is more important than that of female members of his household. All men and women which have been asked about this agreed, although there are large variations in the degree to which this is translated into practices of segregation, gendered control and access to means of production, capital, and decision-making."

However, this view that men are more important than women was not shared by the Christian and Hindu Santhal tribal community.

But, protests, counterpoints and awareness of 'women's rights', to break out of the 'good woman' confines, are also emerging. A discussion with a group of young Rajbongsi girls, teen-agers, showed that they think the 'good woman' ideology is outdated, and they don't accept any longer such restrictions. We also observed a contradiction in what women say on their ideal of 'being a good wife' and the actual situation. We observed husbands cooking, while the women stated that men never cook. It is observed that women of landless households and de-facto female headed household do their grocery shopping themselves. and go on bicycle to the market.

In the following the above finding will be the 'red thread' to compare the similarities and differences in the three villages. Hopefully our outcomes might contribute to ways and means which will reduce the patriarchal set-up which subordinates women, in particular from poor and landless households. An effort to specify the scope for change will be made and possible ways and means for further intervention will be indicated. But before we have to show some basic facts on population and social stratification.

4. Basic facts of three villages

4.1. Population

In particular since the partition in 1947, the three villages of our study have become a melting pot of various refugees and migrant communities and groups and a large number of Nepalis, and groups from Bhutan. In particular the groups of Bangladesi who lost everything in the past, and had to work hard for their survival, have developed tough livelihood strategies. The continuous shift in the village population after 1947

and thereafter at interval periods - especially after the Indo-Pakistan wars in 1965 and 1971 - could be briefly illustrated with data we collected in one of our survey villages 25 years ago (Schenk-Sandbergen 2003, p.67). It is our impression of the current research that in-flow of migrants is still continuing and causing even more acute demand on cultivable land leading to a gradual break-up in the size of holdings (see more details below).

In table 1. the basic population data of the villages are shown. Behind these data are processes of in- and out migration and replacement of refugees which have influenced not only the demographic/caste/class composition but also the economy and politics in the villages.

Table 1. Basic population data, average household size and total area in hectares of the three villages (population census 2011)

| | Salbari | Madhya Khuttimari | Uttar Khalpara |
|------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Total population | 9115 | 5276 | 4117 |
| Male population | 6002* (66%) | 2740 (52%) | 2152 (52%) |
| Female population | 3113* (34%) | 2536 (48%) | 1965 (48%) |
| Number of households | 1580 | 1189 | 914 |
| Average hh size | 5.7 | 4.4 | 4.5 |
| Total area in hectares | 830 | 652 | 547 |

*These figures seem unlikely, but during the period of fieldwork no clarification could be obtained.

The data in table 1 shows that families are small. The average household sizes are: Salbari 5.7 people, Madhya Khuttimari 4.4 and Uttar Khalpara 4.5. This means that families have only 2 to 3 children. In some villages families live in three generation compound households with patrilineal parents and brothers together.

In all the villages the sex-ratios are skewed: 52% men and 48% women. There is reason for concern as this figures reflect the alarming gender imbalance as reported for overall India. In a women's focus group we conducted the women stated that, 'killing of girls is nowadays less, but son-preference (better health-care and education) is prevalent.'⁵

4.2 Caste/Class, Community

The social hierarchy and socio-political climate of the Terai area is unusual by the notorious absence of Brahmin and Ksatria dominance and other twice-born castes. Caste hierarchy and the related oppression are diffuse and scattered. The majority of the population is landless or marginal and small farmer." (Schenk-Sandbergen 1991, 2003, 2016) Therefore caste based patron-client relations are not marked (known in

⁵ Census data 2011 states: In Madhya Khuttimari village population of children with age 0-6 is 709 which makes up 13.44 % of total population of village. Average Sex Ratio of Madhya Khuttimari village is 926 which is lower than West Bengal state average of 950. Child Sex Ratio for the Madhya Khuttimari as per census is 969, higher than West Bengal average of 956.

Bengal as the *Jhodhari* system): class relations cut through caste divisions. Although the Brahmin caste dominance in Terai is not so sharp (Brahmins and 'normal' Hindus are few) there is a clear rural social stratification based on caste and class. Highest status and largest landownership is found in Hindu households, followed by the Schedules Caste, mostly Rajbongsi. They are for the majority small landowners, but some are middle farmers. The Muslim community (local and migrants/refugees from Bangladesh, the Namashudra's) consists broadly of small and marginal farmers, but we also met members of landless Muslim household of which the women did already daily labour in agriculture 25 years ago. Nowadays landless Muslim women work as stone crusher in the riverbed.

Jalpaiguri District, the selected district for our WLE study, is special as it has a relatively large majority of almost 50% Schedules Castes and Schedules Tribes. Together with the Other Backward Castes they are considered as backward in the Government Classifications, and are entitled to numerous schemes aiming to enhance their quality of life. (ADMI 2010). Following the Indian Constitutional provision (Article 342), in West Bengal, as many as 40 groups have been categorized Scheduled Tribes. Out of 40 Scheduled Tribe Communities, there are 10 communities, whose population jointly shares a little more than 90% of the total ST population of the State. These 10 communities are: Santal, Oraon, Munda, Bhumij, Kora, Mahali, Lodha /Kheria, Bhutia and Malpahariya. The Santhal community alone contributes more than 54% of the total Scheduled Tribe population of the State. Of the 40 groups, 3 are declared as Primitive Tribal Groups (Adivasi?).

Very laudable, and a fantastic achievement, is that in West Bengal, also because of the Left Front struggles of land- and tenancy reforms⁶ untouchability has been crushed. Therefore it is not clear why the Rajbongsi, by far the largest rural community in Jalpaiguri district, are still classified as Scheduled Castes.⁷

As said before, the population of Jalpaiguri has become a melting pot of local- and migrant ethnic minorities (Bodos, Mech, Bhagat, Santals, Munda, Oraon, etc) The Scheduled Tribe minorities in West Bengal are known to be more gender-egalitarian within the household, and that is reflected in the social environment and their highest sex-ratio's in the state. Some communities of the scheduled tribes have a very low status: the far majority is landless. But, we also came across a tribal landlady in village Madhya Kuttimari with more than 65 *bigha* of land and teagardens in her in-law's family with four brothers.

The village studies showed a smooth class differentiation on the basis of caste: There are more scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and, to an extent, Muslims amongst agricultural workers and less amongst land owners. Broadly spoken, the class based rural social stratification, and related inequality in the villages, is still differentiated on caste, landownership and size of land: the more land, the more political power, and the higher the status.

⁶ The class struggle related to the land reforms was between big landowners, *zamindars*, belonging to the Hindu castes and the sharecroppers and tenants, *bargadars*, belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes.

⁷ There are 60 groups classified as Scheduled Caste in West-Bengal.

Table 2. Caste/community data (population census 2011) of three villages in % of total population

| | Salbari | Madhya Khuttimari | Uttar Khalpara |
|------------------------|---------|-------------------|----------------|
| Scheduled Castes | 20 | 66 | 60 |
| Scheduled Tribes | 10 | 10 | 14 |
| Various: Muslim, Hindu | 70 | 24 | 26 |
| total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Table 2. shows that caste/class-, and community wise, Salbari is the most heterogeneous of the three villages: there is not a clear dominance of a caste/community majority. Van Andel writes:

“From my own experience I can tell that the Muslims are the largest community in Salbari followed by the Rajbangsi’s, the Adivasi’s are the smallest community. Considering the household interviews 38% belong to Rajbangsi households, 35% to Muslim households and 25% to Adivasi households.”

Madhya Khuttimari is the most homogeneous in caste perspective (67% from SC Rajbangsi community and 10% Scheduled Tribes from communities as Bhagat, Santhal, Oraon) followed by Uttar Khalpara having 60% SC, Rajbangsi community and because of the tea gardens a high ST population (Christian and Hindu Santals).

4.3 Class differences, classification of categories of farmers: distribution of land, from one hectare to one bigha?.

The findings show an overall similarity that besides caste/community, inequality in the village is mainly shaped by class differences based on landownership and size of land. It is widely stated in documents that almost 84 per cent of the farmers belong to the category marginal and small farmers in West Bengal (State Agricultural Plan for West Bengal 2009, p.iii, *NSS Report No. 515: Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 2004-05*). This is a standard fact based on the official Government classification of land holdings since decades. But, it was already found in 1987 that the Government landholding classification does not reflect the reality of the agrarian Terai land distribution. The sample survey and the in-depth study 25 years ago showed that the average cultivable landholding for marginal farmers amounts only to 1 acre for marginal farmers, instead of one hectare as defined by the government classification, 3 acres for small farmers and not two hectares, 5.5 acres for medium farmers and not 2 to 4 hectares, and 10 acres for large farmers and not more than 4 hectares. I wrote in 1991 “ the identification of the marginal target groups could be dramatically enhanced, if, instead of one hectare as the optimum land holding for a marginal farmer, the selection criterion could be changed to one acre. “ (Schenk-Sandbergen 2003, 152/153)

25 years later I found that the official Government classification of marginal farmer is still based on the very unrealistic ‘up to one hectare’ criteria. In many discussions with farmers in the three villages they mentioned clearly the following size of landholding for marginal, small, middle and big farmers: marginal farmer households owns not

more than one *bigha*, a small farmer owns 1-3 *bigha* of land, and a middle farmer up to five *bigha*. A farmer with 5 *bigha* of land with access to irrigation is able to survive from his/her income/food from agriculture. However, the government is still using in all its statistics and (census) reports the very unrealistic classification of marginal farmer up to one hectare (7.5 *bigha*), small farmer up to two hectares (15 *bigha*), middle farmer above 5 hectares (37 *bigha*) (Schenk-Sandbergen 2003, 133). In line with this the ADMI project classifies all farmers with less than 7 *bigha* under the category marginal and small farmer with the result that they do not identify and reach the poorest households.

Table 3. Overview in time of Classification of farmer categories according to size of landholding by the Government, research findings in the North Bengal Terai Development Project and 25 years later in three research villages.

| Classification landholding | Government of India/Bengal/ADMI | North Bengal Terai, Phase II, 1989-1994 | Village studies 2016 |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Marginal farmer | Up to one hect. 7.5 <i>bigha</i> | Up to 1 acre, 2.5 <i>bigha</i> | Up to one <i>bigha</i> |
| Small farmer | Up to 2 hect. Up to 15 <i>bigha</i> | 1 to 3 acres, 2.5 to 7.5 <i>bigha</i> | 1-3 <i>bigha</i> |
| Middle farmer | Above 5 hect. 37 <i>bigha</i> | 3 to 5 acres | 3 to 5 <i>bigha</i> |
| Big farmer | | Above 5 acres | Above 5 <i>bigha</i> |
| Average landholding | 0.82 hect. Around 6 <i>bigha</i> | | |

Another surprising official figure is that the average holding size in West Bengal is 0.82 ha. This means almost 6 *bigha* per cultivator. In view of our data, collected in three villages, this average is very unrealistic: it is much less. In the three villages we came across two or three big farmers with landholdings of 20 to 25 *bigha* but it is impossible that proportionally they increase the average land holding figure to 0.82 hect.

Unfortunately, we could not collect the distribution of land holdings per caste/class/category of farmer per village which is of course a crucial indicator for the social and economic inequality in the village.

The relation between caste and landownership is that the 'normal Hindu' population are the big landowners and the tribal population the most deprived of land. In Salbari we came across a landowner, who migrated from Andhra Pradesh, owning 25 *bigha* (around 3 ha.). He is a big landowner in the local context, and employed three women daily labourers for cutting rice. He speaks some English and drives a big motor cycle making lot of noise. He checks regularly his smart phone (G2) but does not know of an app. to see the market prices of his agricultural products.

4.4 Fair representation of respondents

In view of the above caste/class/community context the three teams in the villages collected as much as possible data of various respondents representing the diversity, variation and relevance in the locations. Van Andel and Chanda conducted 49 semi-

structured household interviews with people from different communities living geographically spread over Salbari. Surprisingly Van Andel shows that the Adivasi in Salbari have on average larger landholdings in her sample than the other communities. May be, because they were the first to settlers in Salbari they are on average the largest landowners. She states that landlessness is most common in the Rajbangsi community in Salbari and that the majority of the Muslims are marginal farmers. They have the smallest average land size. Only 12% of the households interviewed in Salbari make a living from solely their own land, the other households have to rely on agricultural wage labour or non-farm work activities.

Oosterbaan and Rana interviewed 25 women of the communities represented in Madhya Khuttimari (4 tribal, 18 SC, and 3 Muslim) and 18 men (1 tribal, 15 SC, and 2 Muslim): class wise 22 were landowners (3 tribal, 16 SC, and 3 Muslim) and 11 were landless households (1 tribal, 9 SC, and 1 Muslim). According to class of the households who cultivated their own (temporary) land, 7 are marginal farmers (1 tribal and 6 SC), 6 small farmers (5 SC, and 1 Muslim), 4 middle farmers (3 SC and 1 Muslim), and 9 large farmers (3 tribal, 5 SC, and 1 Muslim). Two households owned 13 *bigha* of land, the two biggest landowners interviewed, one of these landowners is a woman.

Kok indicates for Uttar Khalpara that, in terms of communities and land, the caste/class and community wise characteristics of his respondents seem to very loosely correspond to the perceived distribution of the total population in the village. He presents the following interesting table 4.

Table 4. Uttar Khalpara, communities and classification of land holdings

| | Landless | Marginal | Small | Middle | Large | Total | Male | Female |
|----------------------|----------|----------|-------|--------|-------|-------|------|--------|
| Muslim | 2 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 12 | 6 | 6 |
| Rajbangsi | 14 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 21 | 12 | 9 |
| Santhal Christian | 2 | - | 1 | - | - | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| Santhal Hindu | 2 | - | 2 | - | 1 | 5 | 4 | 1 |
| Other Hindu | 3 | - | - | - | - | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 23 | 3 | 12 | 2 | 4 | 44 | 23 | 21 |

In total 23 landless families and 21 cultivators were interviewed, slightly more men than women. Often both husband and wife would be present during the interviews, but the husband did most of the talking and has thus been designated as the primary respondent. Kok and Rai interviewed 21 women in household interviews, and an additional 16 women through Focus Group Discussions with SHG members, and one discussion with 3 teen-aged girls.

4.5 Poverty: Government Classification, 100-days employment- and other poverty reduction schemes.

In the above it is indicated that the identification of poor marginal farmers can be dramatically enhanced when realistic criteria will be used. The same counts for the Government classification to identify the poor, entitled for benefits, using the: 'above and below' the poverty line (APL and BPL). There is much criticisms in all the villages

regarding the criteria used⁸. In Uttar Khalpara of all interviewed families only 9 out of 44 were APL. As expected, it was found that the categorization in some cases does not fully represent the real conditions of the families. Of the 9 APL families, only 3 families were considered as very well-off: one large Muslim farmer with 14 *bigha*, one large Santhal Hindu farmer and teagarden owner with 6 *bigha*, and one 'Other Backward Class' Hindu with a good construction supervisor job. The other people all at some point complained that they should in fact be BPL, and effectively missed out on food rations and other entitlements

In Salbari 50 percent of the inhabitants are BPL (according to the Panchayat). Considering the household interviews of this research, 57% of the households are BPL, 35% are APL, 4% of the households did not know their own categorization and another 4% of the households were confused about their categorization. This confusion arose from the fact that these households were registered in the GP as BPL but they had a ration card stating they are APL.

In Madhya Khuttimari it was stated by Oosterbaan that there were extra benefits from the government schemes such as a free hand pump, financial help with for housing, and special rates for cooking-ingredients from the ration shops when people have a BPL card (where people can buy subsidised food and fuel). In order to classify a household in the BPL or APL category a door-to-door survey was conducted, the last dating from 2002. Also in Khuttimari there are some households with a lot of land and are doing pretty well economically, but are still categorized as BPL. There are also some households who do not own anything, but are listed as APL. One farmer said more specifically that people who have 8-10 *bigha* cannot be called poor, people who have only 3-4 *bigha* can be categorized as poor/BPL. Everyone was of the opinion that BPL should definitely be those households where the main income is through agricultural wage labourer: the landless households. It was noted that among the tribal community there were more poor and vulnerable households.

In the blocks Manayguri, Dhupguri, Mal and Mateali half the population lives under the poverty line (Debnath 2014) There are several poverty alleviation schemes which are relevant for the inhabitants of all the three villages: the MGNREGS⁹ (the 100 days-work programme will be discussed below), the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) and the ration card. Moreover there are widow- , widowers- and unemployment pensions. Villagers told that problems to access these facilities are mainly due to extreme complicated bureaucratic procedures but as far as we know hardly based on gender, caste/class, community or patronage and political affiliations.

The landscape in Madhya Khuttimari is particular as many vegetables are grown on lifted bamboo constructions in the rice fields. On the excellent asphalted road, without potholes, flocks of young girls in school-uniform cycle relaxed to the secondary school. A very hopeful view. A promise for the future to break the walls of gender confines? For girls living in 193 tea plantations of Class VIII to XII there is the very successful bicycle programme launched in 2011 (*Kanyashree Prakalpa* program). The drop-out

⁸ The categorization is based on: size of landholding, type of house, pieces of clothing, amounts of meal, sanitation, ownership of consumer goods, literacy, status of household labour force, type of payment, status of children, type of indebtedness and migration

⁹ "Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme"

of school has come down in a considerable way and helped the girls very much as they often have to cycle 8 to 10 km. to reach their school.

The ICDS stands for Integrated Child Development Centre which is a welfare programme from the Indian government. The ICDS provides food, preschool education and primary healthcare to children under 6 years old, their mothers and pregnant women. ICDS Rooms in the villages look gloomy and desolate. Play toys are absent and facilities for cooking are minimal. When rice porridge is served almost no toddlers are attending the crèche. In Salbari a meal made from roasted chick peas was prepared once a week to girls aged between 14 and 18. Every week ICDS workers are supposed to check the weight and height of the girls to prevent underweight. The agricultural loans which can be accessed will be discussed below.

What is the role of political party affiliations to be entitled for these programmes? We have little proof of favouritism, patronage, primordial attachments. In general it is a survival strategy to turn political colour depending on the powers that be. That shows the political history of the state where the Left Front was replaced by the TMC with Mamata Banerjee as chief Minister: a woman in a state where the 'good woman' ideology is constraining the empowerment of the majority of women.

5. Farm Women: Land, labour, 'good woman ideology' and money.

Research Question 1. How do the material dimensions of inequality shape gendered access to resources and opportunities? And how do these material dimensions determine the ability or agency of diverse groups of poor women and men to negotiate with key actors and stakeholders in access to agricultural infrastructure and services?

5.1 Gender and land rights: 'So what?'

In all the three villages the overall pattern is that women of landowning families of various caste/class and communities broadly do not inherit land and therefore do not own land in their name¹⁰. Main causes are the patrilineal kinship- and inheritance rights, and the patrilocal post marriage residence pattern. The report of Van Andel shows that in Salbari patrilineal inheritance is associated with patrilocal marriage. Women move to the household of their groom after marriage which makes it illogical to inherit land to women since they live too far away to take care of it. All women come from places within West Bengal, but commonly outside Matiali Block and occasionally even outside Jalpaiguri District. Only 6% of the women in Salbari own land in their name. Kok states:

“The social system in Uttar Khalpara is principally patriarchal, and so women are excluded from property ownership in both Hindu, Muslim and Tribal custom. Ownership of land through a joint *patta* (land title document, LSS), inheritance by daughters is a rare occurrence in the village; the practical need for it is bypassed by rooted notions and practices such as men's primary responsibility over productive and market-related work, and patrilocal residence after marriage. This practice renders women dependent on men for economic and social security. Through such ideology the agency of women to demand equal

¹⁰ In my research 25 years ago 7% of the land *patta*'s were in the name of women, mainly widows and families with only daughters.

shares is limited. This leads to women who are dependent on husbands and sons, and in some encountered cases are abandoned when they are widowed. Having a joint land title and awareness of rights can certainly support women and improve their bargaining position in the household and enhance livelihood security.”

Women of landowning families in Salbari did not express a great desire to own land. Similar findings were reflected in a focus group discussion in Madhya Khuttimari, conducted in August 2015. Women from landowning households did not bother about not having land rights. They stated in a very pragmatic way: “*so what? We work in the land and that resource is the livelihood of the family.*”¹¹ This shows that these women think in terms of their family, households or collective, and don’t see households as an arena of men and woman with different needs, interests, rights and entitlements. We could not notice any disinterest in cultivating the land, or reluctance or less motivation to participate in the agricultural work because of non-ownership.¹²

Also Oosterbaan mentions that women said nothing would change for them if they owned land. One woman told that even though all the land they have is in her husband’s name, he is not doing anything for himself with that land. Everything he does and all the money he invests is to take care of his family. So, she does not think that having the land (partly) on her own name will make any difference, nor give her any personal benefits.

Might we conclude that the small and marginal farm women just work in the land of their husbands, and say ‘so what’ that the husbands own the land? Are they happy to have only access to the land ? Is land ownership an abstraction for them? May be, their life experience of arranged marriage, going as a bride to the village and house of the in-laws, facing dowry problems, taught them that in a patriarchal society it is hardly possible to demand own, or joint, land rights as the following outcomes reveal.

The study in Madhya Khuttimari shows that the interviewed villagers are aware of the formal government inheritance law that land should be inherited equally between sons and daughters. Most families do not agree with this equal inheritance. Not only the men, but also more educated women. One female college student said, that she does not want to receive any land from her father after his death, rather she will give the land to her brother because he can use it better. Furthermore, her father will need to spend a lot of money on her marriage and on her education. She said already having received so much she does not want to give her father and brother the extra burden of also demanding part of the land. This logic was the perception of other fathers too. They spend a lot of money on their daughters marriages for the dowry, which often involves selling or leasing out parts of their lands, which is the equivalent of the amount of land their daughters would have inherited. Thus giving their daughters land also after their deaths will eventually mean that their daughters would have received more than their sons. Because there is more money spent on daughters than on sons, fathers said that it is only fair that the son will inherit most, if not all, of the land because the son will take care of his parents when they are old. Dividing land over sons and

¹¹ May be it is superfluous to state that women have in India since 1967 the legal right to inherit land, but very few will insist on it for reasons described in many studies (Sharma 1980, Agarwal 1994, 2003, 2010) . See for an excellent field study on women and land rights in West Bengal, Brown, J. & Chowdhury, S.D. (2002).

¹² This findings are the opposite of studies conducted in other districts where women were keen to have joined *patta* or landrights (Gupta 2002)

daughters will result in even smaller sizes of land, thus it is better if only the son will inherit the land. Few fathers transferred their land to their sons, or, when they buy new land, they will not put the land on their own name but on their son's name. so the son will in the end own more land than the daughters, who will only receive their share of land which was still on the father's name after his death.

The opinion that land owned by women should be inherited by daughters only, while land inherited by men will be inherited by all his children is also used why it is not preferable for women to own land. Matrilineal customary inheritance right seemed to exist in the past among certain lineages of the Rajbongsi and certainly in the adjacent village of Madhya Khuttimari, a matriloal Rabha village (see WLE paper Schenk-Sandbergen, 2016). We also came across a poor family with 2 *bigha* of land with only daughters. They invited the bridegroom (an orphan) of the elder daughters to live with them (matriocal). The young couple works in the land but when the parents die, the adopted husband of the daughter will inherit the land. That shows that even in case of matrilocality the inheritance rights are patrilineal.

However, opposite perceptions are also reported. Both men and women stated that owning land is good and necessary for everyone, not especially for women. Others said that owning land is important for women. Especially the importance of owning land in old age was stressed by different people. Villagers told that it happened that none of the children wanted to take care of their old, widowed mother because she did not possess anything. If she had owned land, the children want to take care of her. More illustrations show that love, affection, loyalty and empathy in family relations seem not to be self-evident without material rewarding. If someone does not have any assets, there is a chance of abandonment. This harsh attitude is surprising as it against the usual image in the West of caring children for old parents in Indian culture. Obviously a class bias has intruded in this ideal image.

No one was critical about women owning land in general, but when male landowners in Madhya Kuttimari were asked about their opinions of shared landownership between husband and wife, they were not very positive. The land title is in the name of the men. Joint *patta* land rights are hardly known in the research villages and opposed by men. They did not see the use of co-ownership. The promoting of joined *patta* rights might be an important theme to consider in our options for change.¹³

5.2 Labour participation of farm women: The implications of the 'good woman' ideology'.

The labour participation of farm women is restricted by conflicting roles. In all studies it is confirmed that in the division of labour women are fully responsible for the

¹³ Less than 15% of land recorded to physical persons is recorded in the name of women either individually or jointly. This is despite the range of policies in place to enhance women's access to land. WB Government policy is to issue *patta* (deed of title) in the name of women or joint *patta* (both in the name of wife and husband) for distribution homestead plot, although joint *patta* records are not maintained individually. More than 90% of *pattas* were issued in the name of women between 2011-2014. West Bengal policy is to use public land for allocation of homestead plots to absolute landless and homeless through legislation and government schemes giving preference to women, ST and SC. Government scheme Nijo-Griho-Nijo-Bhumi Prakalpa in Oct 2011 (My Home My Land scheme) to settle 5.5 lac landless poor and provide up to 0.05 acre (Improving land Governance in West Bengal, State Report 2014, Landesa /Rural Development Institute West-Bengal, p 19-20).

domestic, household labour. Therefore the question can be asked: “how much time is left for productive labour and other ‘public space’ activities as the gender norms compel women to be fully responsible for all domestic labour and childcare?” The almost from ‘god given’ socialization that domestic work is women’s work almost diminishes a question on labour participation in agriculture (productive/irrigation), markets and wage labour and other opportunities. This the more relevant as the cooking on firewood, leaves, bio-mass and cowdung sticks and the type of *chula* is as primitive as 25 years ago. The image of poor women along the roadside with the heavy dirty sacks with leaves and firewood on their bended back, like slaves, was degrading. Only in Uttar Khalpara one household is reported cooking on gas bottle. Fetching water was also the same heavy and strenuous work from the deep *guha*’s. In villages where handpumps are available like Kuttikamari it seemed that women had more time and were more involved in working in the fields, but that means in practice vegetable growing as cucumber and large green beans.

A constraint in labour participation of farm women might be that their ‘traditional’, or former knowledge of how to grow crops diminished with the wide use of new hybrid seeds, pesticides and chemicals. As women are not supposed to buy HYV seeds in the market and not allowed to spray pesticides, chemicals etc. agriculture has become more the male domain. From this perspective it would be logic to expect a masculinization of agriculture, instead of a feminization of agriculture because of migrating men. We did not hear any protest of women that their knowledge and skills in preserving e.g. traditional seeds is vanishing. We also did not come across concerned women pursuing to preserve traditional seeds in order not to be dependent each year from the big agro-business companies. The consciousness, of what Vandana Shiva labelled as the “stolen harvest” of farm women did not reflect in the studies. Issues famous in eco-feminism, or feminist political ecology, were not brought up by the villagers in our focus group discussion and interviews. On the contrary, the women showed excitement about the high production of the new seeds and higher income in vegetable growing and seemed to accept gladly the negative impact, which will be revealed below in the eco-system paragraph 7.

Oosterbaan states that the division of labour in landowning households is the same in any household. Women do the household, cattle and light agricultural work. Men do the more heavy jobs and don’t do household work. The dominant perception is, that women cannot do heavy work and men cannot do any household work. She notices that it is considered shameful for women to do ‘manly’ jobs. Not so much shameful for the woman herself, but more for the men in her household. Other villagers will gossip about the male household members. One woman said she can do the ploughing, but she simply will not do it. She was very much convinced that it is a kind of task women should not do.

It is noted in all three villages that the labour relations between men and women have over time not shifted in significant ways – they are still characterized by sharp distinctions in traditional male and female tasks and responsibilities. Some tasks are specifically associated with women, although now and in the past men also do them. These are sowing, weeding and harvesting in the agricultural field, and weeding and plucking leaves in the private teagardens. The assumption that the cultivation of vegetables would lead to a shift of men visiting the markets more often, and women getting a larger work-load and responsibility on the land, has not happened in Uttar Khalpara. The selling of vegetables is done via middle-men by families who can afford

the slightly lower returns – or cannot afford to be away for lack of time. The men of marginal land-owning families go to the markets themselves, but the women experience no rise in responsibilities because of this reason.

The findings of the three studies show similarities in the contradiction between the gender ideology, restricting landowning women to work outside the house, and the very visible reality and practice of working on their land (nearby?). As in my earlier research the perceptions on the type and duration of work of men and women (more and less) differ considerably. Landowning women stated to work mostly in the morning in their fields, as far as the drudgery of the household work allows, and that nobody bothers about it. They say that they do all the agricultural operations, except ploughing, spraying and marketing. Their husbands with larger landholdings have a different opinion and consider their wives working in the field more as their 'helpers'. In Madhya Kuttimari land-owners often, though not always, expressed that the women in their households only do some of the 'light' or 'menial' jobs such as polishing and sorting tomatoes, picking vegetables, weeding, picking and cleaning plants from extra leaves. Men say, to do the heavy work, although there are many jobs that are shared by men and women such as picking tomatoes, planting paddy and harvesting jute.

Kok writes, that throughout the fieldwork he and his counterpart encountered a prevailing gender ideology in which it is shameful for a woman to engage in wage labour, and to a lesser extent labour on one's own land. This ideology is linked with notions of femininity and guardianship, and gendered access to the public sphere. He points to the ongoing discourse on women and 'weakness'. "This discourse sees them as both incapable of performing work as well as men, and renders them objects of protection against the 'outside world'." The sermon on women's relative weakness is shared by all castes and communities, and can be seen as pillar of the dominant gender ideology resulting in discriminatory labour arrangements. Therefore, women are also excluded from driving a car or tractor, which has also to do with notions on mobility and capabilities. Access to transportation is unequally distributed along lines of class and gender. The motorcycle highly enhances the macho image of men, and has priority in the bucket list of demand for dowry's between relatively well-off families.

Van Andel writes, that the division of labour within agriculture complicates the access of women to resources such as irrigation. Irrigation is considered an exclusive male activity and women are perceived incapable of irrigating agricultural land. Consequently, women are not valued as members in Water Users Associations (WUA's) which restraints them from real participation in decision making.

In Uttar Khalpara Irrigation services are relatively easily accessible in the village. The canal irrigation is free, and only few people whose land is placed unfavourably cannot access this. Wessel Kok found that class plays no significant limitation for accessing the canal irrigation, it is free and does not rely on the use of a motor pump to get it. There seem to be women who manage irrigation by themselves but they are restricted because of the time that it demands to irrigate the fields.

Access to the WUA is restricted for people who do have a land title, although a joint title is not necessary for women to join. Those without a land title can lease the motor pump from the WUA at 100 ₹ an hour, which can be expensive for small-scale cultivators. Not all WUA's lease out their pump out of fear for damages. Women are at

a disadvantage for using the motor pump because of the muscle strength that is needed to operate it. Women friendly irrigation technology will be useful. Women, without male family member to help them, have to hire additional wage labour, so access is surely more limited for them.

In Uttar Khalpara the Kisan Credit Card is an individual loan for farmers which they can apply for with the KPS (extension worker of the Department Of Agriculture). The rest of the loan is handled at either the Cooperative Bank or the Gramin Shatriv Bank. Every year a maximum of 70-80 people can get the loan in the whole Gram Panchayat. Most farmers use the loan to produce potato, because they can get a higher loan and higher returns. In the bank in Kraanti, the nearest town, 835 people are registered who have taken a KCC loan. What is relevant here, is, that there is no distinction made between men and women, the only thing one needs to apply are the land documents in his/her name. When a woman is widowed, without having the land in her name, or a joint *patta*, the Pradhan will give a death certificate for the husband which will enable her to receive the loan. The KPS/GP cannot put the land documents in her name, which she must do herself. This shows that women in Uttar Khalpara have access to agricultural services.

5.3 Who decides what in landowning families?

In Madhya Khuttimari the decision 'what to cultivate' is made differently in different households. In some households the men decide, but most often husband and wife discuss what to cultivate and decide together. There are rarely disputes between household members about what to cultivate. The food and livelihood calendar follow the routine in seasons (*pre-kharif, Kharif and Rabi*) and, there are not much options to change cropping patterns.

In Salbari the decision-making power within the household shows variations within every community. Women seem to have most decision-making power in Adivasi households, and least decision-making power in Muslim households. Muslim men and women frequently refer to their religion as justification of the power of men within the household. Men are closer to God than women and consequently women have to follow decisions made by men. In case the women are stubborn, it is allowed for men to use violence. This is not the case for women, if their husbands do something wrong they can try to make them understand their mistakes.. Women from Adivasi and Rajbongsi communities more often claim that both husband and wife are consulted considering household decisions and that even though the man is the household head he cannot ignore his wife in the household decision-making.

In Uttar Khalpara domestic violence was witnessed at first hand by the researchers. Various illustrations are given of punishment to women for overstepping gender boundaries by criticizing behaviour of men. The 'women should know their place' was a well-known discourse. Examples of women being severely beaten for addressing their husbands on their drinking habits are reported. The husband is not accountable for behaviour, either sexual-, spending- or other decisions in a way that the woman is.

Kok asks, "who controls the household budget?" His main findings are as follows. The women that don't work have little control over the expenditures. The legitimizing idea is, that husbands go to the market, so there is no need for women to keep money for themselves. It is rare for men to give their wives some pocket money. The other way round it is revealed that most of the women who work give their income to their

husbands, although some do not. I found that Santhal Christian women, who are all wage labourers, very decidedly keep their own income. When the husband needs some of it, he can ask for pocket money which shows their relative equality within the household. Some women wage labourers give their earnings to their husband, but secretly keep some of it for themselves. They use this to pay for their children's school materials, small consumables for unexpected guests, and contributions for religious *puja*. They say that the men have different spending priorities, and will forget about such things. In Salbari similar findings are revealed. The household expenses are predominantly done by men, consequently women depend on their husbands for their own personal spending.

6. Landless women. Access to land, labour and money

6.1 Access to land: Land is status. Leasing-in land, sharecropping and mortgaging of land

Kok describes for Uttar Khalpara that access to land has become increasingly costly because of: a rising population; increase in landless and marginal farmers who depend on leasing agricultural land for additional income where there are little alternative livelihoods; outside investors who have bought up land for teagardens; equal share inheritance by male descendants; increased land value due to asymmetrical access to irrigation facilities; and increased land value due to access to good roads. This increased cost deprives the poorest from permanently securing land when they have no access to high-wage migrant labour. Access to land is to a larger degree a problem for the Rajbangsi community in his village, as they have the largest share of landless and marginal and small landowners. Other communities have either already sold their lands to the company teagarden, or are still able to live from agriculture.

Oosterbaan worded the opinion of poor women on what it means for a woman to be landless:

“Being landless and having land makes a difference, everything you do or say is weightless when you don't have any assets. Only when you have assets, such as land, people will listen and take you serious.” and “Land is status, and right to speak. If you have no land and no assets, your opinion is not taken seriously.”

Women should have assets, gold is also an option, according to landless women.

For landless- and marginal poor farm men and women there are a few options open to have access to land and water. In all the three villages farmers can obtain temporary land from other farmers. There are different ways to do this, the most common is that the land will be given for a longer period, usually between 3 and 5 years for a large sum of money which will be returned again after the land is returned to the landowner. Oosterbaan gives an interesting case of a farm woman and her husband who own 12 *bigha* of land but they do not cultivate any of it. Instead they have given it for lease to different families, and the money they received from leasing-out they have invested in taking tea-plantations in *bandhok* (mortgage) and all the tea leaves they pick are their profit. There are also small and marginal farmers who were forced to give land in

bandhok because they needed a lot of money fast to pay for a wedding, for hospital bills, or to pay for the compulsory rites after a family member's death.

Another possibility for landless women is to lease-in land for a season to grow for instance potato. Findings indicate that elderly, self-confident poor landless women use loans of the Self-Help Group, in combination with other loans, to lease-in land. Sharecropping, *adhi*, is an option, but not for the poorest as it requires high investments, while the landowner will get at least half of the profit. Religion, community, or gender does hardly matter when deciding whom to give land for using temporarily: the person should be reliable and should have a good family reputation.

What about access to homestead land in the three villages for landless women by the existing Government programs? Government of West Bengal launched the homestead allocation program in 2006 (amended in 2009 and renamed Nijo Griha, Nijo Bhumi in 2011) to provide land for the poorest landless and homestead-less agricultural laborer households. The NGNB program is mainly implemented by the Department of Land and Land Reforms, with major roles for the Block Development Office and Panchayati Raj Institutions. In the three villages this programme was not known but in villages in the neighbouring district Darjeeling I visited earlier, the programme was implemented.

6.2 Access to wage labour for landless women

In 1991 landless households derived a major proportion of their income from wage labour (75 % according to the sample survey), mainly as agricultural wage labourer. Other sources of income were of less importance and concerned agricultural production (17 per cent) and self-employment in for instance dairy and fuel trade, in brokerage or in stone quarrying. On average, landless men were employed in the sample survey for 200 days (in-depth study 234 days) in a year and landless women for 80 (in depth study 109) days. There was a clear seasonality in labour demand in the area, with peaks in the *pre-kharif* season (during the cultivation of *boro* rice) and the *rabi* season (in potato cultivation). It became apparent that the agricultural labourers did not get work for about 5 1/2 months for a male workers, and nine months for a female worker. About 70 per cent of the respondents said that August to October are the most lean months. It is because transplantation of paddy seedlings and jute harvest have been completed by August/September and the harvesting of paddy starts only in November. Some respondents (40 per cent) said they have difficulty in finding work in the months of January-February. The gap in the wage income and expenditure was partially met by securing small loans from villagers, to buy goods on credit from grocers shop, selling of livestock, trees, milk and advance sale of labour. What are the changes and opportunities in access to wage labour for landless women 25 years later?

In general there are new technological processes, negative and positive, influencing the availability of daily wage work for poor women. The negative ones are: the small tractor has removed buffalos and less care for animals is necessary. The making of puffed rice, *muri*, which was made by poor women is reduced as modern chips are more in demand. Rice transplanting is replaced by SRI and cash crops (banana/tree plantation) which require less female daily wage labour. As a result female rural skills and knowledge on traditional ways of cultivating paddy are lost and taking over by

machines. On the other side it is stated that the 'revolution' in HYV vegetable growing generates more wage labour employment for landless women.

In Salbari daily labourers are mainly required for the rice and jute cultivation, especially during the planting and harvesting phase. Adivasi do the hard and dirty labour of soaking and stripping the jute sticks in the water. In the past a patron-client work relationship was common where large farmers had permanent agricultural labourers working on their land. Van Andel writes that there has been a widespread casualization of agriculture and the majority of the agricultural labourers are casual labourers now who get paid per day.

Wage labour in the river bed

An important safety net for the poorest in Salbari is the wage work in the riverbed which is accessible to men, women and children. The riverbed offers two work opportunities: loading of large boulders and chipping of small stones. Stone chipping is almost exclusively done by women and children, while the loading of boulders is done by both men and women. Women earn ₹50 for each pile of small stones they make, on one day it is possible to make two or maximum three piles and women thus earn around ₹100 – ₹150 a day. The work is available six days a week – only in case of heavy rain the work cannot be continued. Women from each community can be found at the riverbed, however the majority of the workers are Muslim and Rajbongsi for the reason that Adivasi women prefer tea plucking which is not accessible for the Muslim and Rajbongsi women. It was very remarkable that even the wife of the very wise, landless Muslim Panchayat leader works in the river bed and chips stones. Her small income, and the remittances of his migrated son are the survival of the household.

Wage labour in the tea garden

In Uttar Khalpara the availability of wage-labour in the tea gardens has very dramatic and historical roots. Many Adivasi, mostly Santhals, and some Muslim families were more or less forced to sell their land to the tea companies as they were desperately trying to survive as their harvests were destroyed completely by natural disasters. Kok writes,

“There are three major company teagardens in the village, some exceeding village boundaries. The biggest garden is the Rajabagan company, which is owned by an Assamese company. Access to the work in this garden is reserved to those who sold 3 *bigha* or more land to the company, or by paying the company for a permanent job. Each permanent job is accompanied by a casual one, which means work for half a year. Men hold the permanent jobs more often than women, so they have to work as agricultural or private teagarden wage labourers in the other months. There is a power imbalance in both the Union and in the teagarden work itself in terms of gender and community. The Rajabagan has only one Labour Union, which is connected to the TMC. Only two of the twelve members are women (who need to have a permanent job to become member), as opposed to four women in the previous CPM Union). A woman who was elected to become secretary of the Union had to step down for a male relative who wanted the position. The garden has 9 supervisors, all men. Women can, and want to become supervisor, but are scolded and belittled when they voice this, the men ridicule their low education. Adivasi's are also surprisingly disempowered. While most of the workers are highly experienced Adivasi's, permanent and casual alike, none of them is supervisor. As a result

both women Adivasi workers may feel misrepresented by the supervisors and afraid to voice complaints.”

For women it is difficult to express complaints about labour conditions as there are no female supervisors, and the female members of the Union perceive their voice to be treated with contempt. The biggest difficulties for women are in bargaining for different working hours that better fit with their household chores and childcare duties.

Wage labour and vegetable growing

In Madhya Khuttimari, even though agricultural wage labour is the most prevalent form of employment, not everyone has sufficient work throughout the entire year. This despite the fact that earlier there were no beans, tomatoes, and cabbage grown in Madhya Khuttimari. There used to be paddy only, and women wage-labourers were only asked to cut the paddy and it was thus very temporary work. Now land is being cultivated throughout the **entire year**. The informants of Oosterbaan agreed that there are **more** women looking for wage labour in agriculture compared to men, but there is also **more** opportunity for women to get work. The wage difference and difference in number of meals that need to be provided has an effect on the hiring of women. When there is work that does not involve heavy work, women are more likely to be hired than men. At the same time there are a lot of women wanting wage labour so there is a lot of competition since there are more women willing to work than there is work available.



When men do not get enough work they migrate to another state to work there, while women do not have this possibility.

It was shown that in Madhya Khuttimari other than gender, hiring of labourers is not discriminative. Labourers are not hired based on caste, ethnicity, or community. Everyone said that all people have the same chances of being hired. In November we met a group of people in the field busy to pluck large green

beans. It seemed that a marginal SC farmer had leased-in land to grow the beans. He hired women daily labourers from the tribal community to pluck the beans. They were supervised by his daughter.

Usually people are hired by landowners who live close to their own home, so this does influence the diversity of labourers in one field since the Muslim community lives in one particular area of the village. Multiple farmers said they rarely hire Muslims because they live a little bit further and there are enough workers available in the immediate surroundings. One Muslim widow said that she gets hired by non-Muslim also, but she only goes to work in that part of the village when there is no work in her own part of the village (which consists mainly of Muslim households).

Wage labour in Government poverty alleviation schemes

Last, but not least, there are several poverty alleviation schemes which are relevant for the poor members of landless and marginal farmers households of the three villages. They are: the MGNREGS (100 days' work), the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan (NBA) and the ration card.

The MGNREGS, the 100 days' work scheme, is the most important for the poor. Due to the temporary character of wage labour there will be many days that people can be

without an income, so the MNREGS is much needed, especially by landless wage labourers

One of the Gram Panchayat's main responsibilities is managing the MNREGA, (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). It has been introduced in 2005 and aims to guarantee 100 days of unskilled labour per rural household. In Uttar Khalpara this labour force is generally used for public works, but also for private beneficiaries as there is often not enough public work to provide the target number of hours. Widening the scope of permissible works under the MNREGS is meant to alleviate scarcity of work-days. In Uttar Khalpara drain cutting/weeding on private teagardens has been included in the works for the first time this year. The general works consist of the following: construction of CC road (concrete) and *pukka* (asphalt); drain cutting; pond digging; land levelling; jungle cutting; forest planting (roadside); well digging. The scheme is 'rights based', and as such both people classified as BPL and as APL can apply, once they have applied for a Job-card. One family can get one card, under the condition that the card holder is above 18 years. The work is done by both men and women and they get paid relatively high wages, a 174 ₹ a day. One programme supervisor estimates that some 40-60 people from Uttar Khalpara are participating. Because the tasks that are given are mostly hard labour there are some limitations by physically less fit people to participate; some women chose not to participate in the pond-digging for example because they found the work too heavy. Another major flaw is that the Gram Panchayat is not able to offer enough works to provide the full 100 days. Participants get their payments not directly as with most wage labour, but at monthly intervals and sometimes even several months. This is because the payments arrive via the post-office instead of the bank. The low-class landless villagers need to have cash in hand at a regular basis rather than at monthly intervals. Kok and Rai spoke a landless widow who stopped participating because of this reason. Those who really have no other choice do the work, but the young men usually discard the option. The young and able men prefer to work as migrant wage labourers.

In Salbari it is shown that in the end, due to the low amount of employment days the people from Salbari actually receive, the MGNREGS does not provide livelihood security. Just 28 days of employment is not enough to substantially uplift the socio-economic condition of a household. In Madhya Kuttimari there are many people who want to participate in the 100 days' work scheme, and not everyone can be employed at once, so the work is given in shifts. Even still, often there are no 100 days of work for everyone who applies, usually it is 35 days or so. If you do not get some work within 50 days, you are entitled for an unemployment allowance, but there are only very few people who actually receive this. The Gram Panchayat gives the work, but the payment is done straight into the bank account of the labourer by a different agency. All the landless women in Khuttimari complained that the Panchayat is not working for the benefit of the poor people. Women said they applied for the 100 days' work scheme, but when there was work, they were not given any job even though they thought they were entitled for it.

6.3 Wage discrimination and the impact of the 'good woman'

In Madhya Kuttimari farmers who hire labourers say, "they would not hire women to do the heavier work, which includes spraying chemicals, ploughing the fields and carrying heavy bags with the harvested crops." Male farmers believe that strength is a

must for certain kinds of work, otherwise the work will not be completed. Oosterbaan and Rana did not encounter any woman who gets paid to do any of these jobs. When she asked, if there was a farmer who does hire women for spraying, ploughing or carrying bags, everyone, men and women, said no women ever gets hired for these jobs. Even if a woman says she can do these jobs, she will not be given the job. Women were convinced they could also do the jobs which were now only done by men (such as spraying and ploughing), but were simply not allowed to do so.

Women doing wage labour get paid lower wages than men in all types of informal wage-labour, which in practice comes down to agricultural- and horticultural work. Wages differ per task and crop, but on average women earn between 100-150 ₹ against 200-250 ₹ for men (wages can in some cases be paid in kind, i.e. a bag of potatoes). This difference is rationalized through the additional work that men can supposedly do, and the fact that women are excluded from such tasks that are man-gendered as they require muscle strength, such as ploughing and heavy lifting, or spraying pesticides in the teagardens and on the land. Even, if men and women do the exact same work there is this difference in wage. It depends on the employer whether a lunch will be provided for the daily labourers. Again, the sermon behind the wage difference given is, that men are physically stronger and can do heavier work and women are weak. Usually men and women work the same amount of hours, however if extra work is needed men will have to do this work, while women can go home because they need to do the cooking and the household work.

In Khuttimari landless women told Oosterbaan and Rana that they never really think about the fairness of their pay because they cannot do anything about it. They do not ask for higher wage because they fear not getting hired at all, and it is better to receive some payment than no payment at all. There is no collective group or organisation of women's agricultural labourers which can demand, and struggle, for getting equal wage. If woman would make a fist to get equal wage, there would always be another group of women who are willing to work for the lower wage and thus they will get the jobs instead. Female workers enough while there is not enough work, and women are forced to compete amongst each other for the jobs. So instead of sisters, they become enemies. Furthermore, it is said that when a woman's husband is also working, she has less need to work for high wage, and thus she should not have a problem working for the current lower wage. When women who are the sole earner of the household demand more wage, they will not get any jobs and thus not earn anything.

Our finding is that the revived socialization to be a 'good man' or a 'good woman' perpetuates gender inequality in the villages in times of religious nationalism, globalization and dramatic changes in agriculture.

7. Eco-system changes

Research Question 2. To what extent does ecosystem change and sustainability impact agricultural productivity or more generally livelihood security for the poorest - who rely both on farming systems as well as other natural resources and assets?

7.1 From food to cash, agribusiness and the masculinization of agriculture

When one enters Salbari, the largest of the villages, it is remarkable to spot shining solar panels next to a grey dug well for irrigation in the very green rice fields. Unmistakable this alternative, green technology, implemented by the West Bengal Accelerated Development of Minor Irrigation Project, ADMI project, evokes an unexpected modern and confusing flavor to the timeless rural landscape. So do the round white TV transceivers on the shaky bamboo huts. Most striking is that the integrity of the landscape seems to be affected by the replacement of handcrafted bamboo roofs and walls and cowdung/mud walls of houses by a sea of shining and rusted corrugated iron- or aluminum sheets for house walls, roofs, sheds, toilet doors, schools and temples. Eco-friendly, local material is replaced by the hot, noisy in monsoon time, but cheaper construction material in maintenance. Is this progress? Modernization? Are this the dialectics of the lead? No, this is the indication that the raw materials from the jungle and forest as wood and bamboo are disappearing and converted to agricultural land or privatized. The increasing population needs more forest products but the result is less jungle, less bamboo and the price for wood going up. The poorest live in *kuccha* houses which become more expensive to maintain. They allocate precious time and resources to build better houses with iron sheets, a long-term investment. Less jungle also leads to less forms of traditional mat and basket weaving as the raw materials are no longer available. The 'dying crafts' have been already reported 40 years ago by Anil Agarwal (1997).

But....., it is even more perplexing that the village scene with the lovely mix of colours, smells, funny small goats, chicks, beautiful cows, haystacks, bamboo bushes, small temples, ponds, drying cow dung sticks, heaps of rubbish remains unchanged compared with the images of village life 25 years ago (Schenk-Sandbergen 1991). Behind the remaining private bamboo bushes a wide breath taking landscape of white sand, green patches of grazing land and tons of stones unfold to frame the water of the river Neowra. Children and poor women are chipping the stones in the riverbed for a miserable wage: it is their safety net to have a meal that day. Winds of continuity and change have obviously blown here in the past decades. Van Andel and Chanda report that In general people are positive about the changes in the village, they see an improvement in wealth, in facilities within the village (the road, markets, shops and services), in job opportunities and in education.

All the field studies confirm that the commercialization, diversification and intensification of agriculture (System of Rice Intensification, SRI, and new High Yielding Varieties, HYV, vegetables) can be regarded as a major ecological change in the past decades. In Salbari the vast majority of the farmers uses HYV seeds nowadays, only 4% of the informants of this research still use traditional rice seeds. In Madhya Khuttimari there is not one farmer who did not use hybrid seeds. Practically all farmers in the village have changed their crops from traditional crops to hybrid cash crops. According to an old farmer there is no point of return anymore to traditional vegetables. Manuring the land with cow dung is no longer possible: the fertility capacity of the land is too much damaged by all the chemicals. What are the serious consequences of this intensification?

Oosterbaan describes three important changes in Madhya Khuttimari:

1. First change is that before the cash crops people would cultivate for subsistence. In particular for women, responsible for food-security for the children this is a real shift in mode of production. Now, farmers (the males?) are more concerned with growing profitable crops than with growing crops for own

food and subsistence. Some farmers decided not to grow paddy anymore, but rather grow profitable vegetables, chilies, potato and buy the rice from the market.

2. The second change is that with the traditional crops farmers could keep the seeds from last year's harvest, and use them for sowing in the new season. With hybrid crops, however, they have to buy new seeds every season. They are dependent on the agri-business companies. Their self-reliance on preserving own seeds, a skill and task of the women is eroded.
3. A third change is, that with the traditional crops they did not need to use as much pesticides and insecticides compared with hybrid seeds. A farmer has to spray at least once a week to protect the crops from pests and insects. The original crops did not require this much chemicals, but the productivity was much less, so farmers consider it worth the effort.

With the hybrid seeds, they need to use these chemicals otherwise it will be a disaster and the crops will fail. Spraying chemicals is a men's business, the male farmer decides which chemicals, pesticides and insecticides to go with. A number of farmer mentioned they could really use some expert advice about chemical use. A couple years ago farmers could call the KPS, a local agricultural advisor assigned by the government, for advice about anything related to agriculture, but there is no longer such a helpline. **In fact as mentioned earlier the masculinization of agriculture is more likely than the feminization.**

In Uttar Khalpana a specific change in eco-system is visible: an increasing amount of land has been converted to teagarden, either private or corporate owned. One of the villages tea gardens alone accounts for 96 acre – 288 *bigha*. The majority of respondents say they did this to cope with low productivity related to bad land quality, and decreasing rainfall. Some isolated cases speak of direct and indirect coercion. This shift has contributed to increased land prices which affects the poorest the most. The use of pesticides on teagardens has endangered livestock that freely grazes, goats in particular. Households close to (large) teagardens have to be more careful with livestock; one respondent family stopped keeping them altogether after losing 8 goats. Several respondents assume that the teagardens have introduced species of pests that endanger rice- and other crops, and as such have led to a dependency on pesticides and higher cost of production (this causality cannot be verified).

Kok brings up a very relevant ecological effect of the common use of chemicals and HYV land and the increasing practice of leasing land out. That means that the poorest lease-in the land and rely on high production to be able to pay the lease amount. So, they use huge quantities of chemicals and don't care of the long-term effects of exhausting the soil. There is no control over the damaged leased-in land quality.

Kok states, that only recently criticisms on the lack of agricultural policy by advocates of sustainable agriculture become more mainstream, (Sustainable Development Goals). It is now better understood that when such methods are applied excessively, and without proper instruction, the effect on soil quality and the wider ecosystem can be dramatic. West Bengal has tried to realign its policies accordingly, as can be seen with the publication of the West Bengal Action Plan on Climate Change in 2010. The call for a conservationist agriculture is locally acknowledged through the awareness-building efforts of the KPS and the Agriculture Departments. At the same time aims to

'achieve sustainable livelihood opportunities' for rural people, acknowledging that local needs and maximizing outputs need to be developed in a sustainable way.

In Salbari farmers are positive about the increase in harvest they experienced due to the use of HYVs, fertilizers and pesticides. Besides these positive effect of HYVs, farmers experience the negative consequences of the dependency on the seed companies. The 4% of the households who use traditional rice seeds do this because they cannot afford the investments needed for the use of HYVs. There is some awareness among farmers as well as consumers on the negative health effects chemicals can have. Van Andel writes:

“the inclusion of farmers in the global market, and commercialization of agriculture, together with the switch in use of traditional seeds to HYVs, and increased use of chemicals in agriculture had a great impact on agricultural productivity as well as on livelihood security. The influence on agricultural productivity is positive; farmers experienced an increase in their harvest. Unfortunately the influence on livelihood security is negative; farmers themselves see the insecurity of agriculture as their biggest thread in the future. The poorest farmers are the losers as they are drawn in a downward spiral in agriculture while richer farmers have the power to manoeuvre themselves to a relative favourable position in the process of integration with the global markets. In principal, farmers agree, the increase in harvest equipoises the increased investment. However, when the prices decrease too much or when the demand for the farmers' products temporarily disappears, an increased harvest is worthless and the farmers are just left with the increased investment. Due to the insecurity of the agricultural sector, the increased costs of production and fluctuating prices of the agricultural produce some households do not want to invest their time and labour in agriculture; these households prefer to leave their land fallow during the *rabi* season and continue their non-farm work activities.”

7.2 The tragedy of the commons?

It is only one or two generation ago that many villagers in Salbari and Madhya Khuttimari can remember that their grandfather cut the jungle and forest to create space for agricultural fields. In particular Madhya Khuttimari is located at the forest fringe. Wild elephants destroy the harvests in villages nearby. An old Rajbongsi woman told that her father was a kind of Maharajah and owned 100 acres of forest land and rivers. The British Government bestowed him even with the honorable title of 'knight'. They had a nice tourist lodge where people from Kolkata came to cool down from the scorching summer heat. Her father divided the land between her brothers. She inherited 1.5 *bight* land from her mother which was in her mother's name. She had to give the land to her brother as he was asking for it. It is not done to ignore a claim of the brother. She is very poor now and has no pension and lives on the mercy of one younger son.

The basic agrarian cycle in which the cattle, mainly cows and goats, is brought immediately after the rice harvest to the field to eat the remaining rice sticks, could be observed everywhere in the villages. In this way the natural fertilizing of the land sustains the universal agrarian cycle that have been practiced by the farmers for so many centuries. In November and partly December the care for the cattle is reduced

for the landowning families. For the landless the care for the cattle is the same. They have to forage or buy fodder and feed the animals. The cow dung is used for making cow dung sticks: the cooking fuel for the poor as they have no wood from trees on their own land or cannot afford to buy it. Some landless, poor tribal families (*Bhagat*) keep cattle, cows, in their compound and even in the house in Madhya Khuttimari. The cows are eating fodder from big baskets and look beautiful. The daughter-in-law makes very skilled cow dung sticks (from jute), more than 70 in a time: for three days cooking. The cow owner is the father of the house. The women complain that they have to spend more hours a day than in the past getting weeds from elsewhere and bring that back to the home to feed the cattle.

In Uttar Khalpara, it was stated that for smaller landowners and landless the loss of pasturelands because of the expansion of the teagardens has made keeping cattle impossible. To feed the cows hay has to be bought at steep prices. This change is disadvantageous to the poorest, who rely on livestock as a means to 'save' for difficult times, and to get additional income through the sale of milk or renting out bullocks for the ploughing. The decrease in bullocks has been responded to with the availability of tractors, which have now become the cheaper and faster way of ploughing. Additionally there is less wage-work for men to plough the fields.

In Madhya Khuttimari are a number of types of wild green vegetables that are available without cultivation. About the availability there are different opinions. Some say these kinds of vegetables are plenty, and others say it has decreased because more and more land is being converted into agricultural land. and then these types of wild vegetables do not get the space to grow. Also, more land (also forest areas) is now private land, and thus limits foraging of weeds. Although many villagers eat these forest, edible weeds, everyone said they cannot rely any more on these weeds as vegetables. In the past the vegetables/weeds, available without cultivation, are just something extra they have every once in a while.

No experienced loss of *saag* (*wild greens/vegetable*) and fruits are reported from Uttar Khalpara. But less rainfall was mentioned often, and farmers were concerned about the decrease of agricultural productivity. The rainfed areas are endangered. With the irrigation under the WBADMIP and TC they hope to enhance the production. Intensified agriculture has also resulted in less pasturelands, which means less cows which is hitting the poor most. To make cow-dung sticks for cooking in monsoon time becomes more difficult for those women, who don't own a cow. To pick up cowdung droppings along the road side becomes almost impossible. To use cow-dung for fertilizing the little land is also not possible anymore. Dependency on chemical fertilizer is increasing and costly. There are almost no bulls left in the village. They are more expensive than tractors and need to be fed every day with bought hay.

Main finding in all the studies is that the methods for fishing has changed lately. Even unscrupulous people use electricity to kills all the fish, also the small ones, causing a severe decrease in fish population. It was noted that certain types of fish completely disappear from the river. Because of use of chemicals in the agricultural land surrounding the river, the fish population also decreases because the chemicals end up in the river water after rainfall. Fishing was an important survival strategy for additional income during the rainy season. In the villages it is still possible, though it

requires expert knowledge and that is not for everyone. It was also stated that the trucks, for decades already driving in the riverbed fetching the chipped stones, have destroyed with their heavy load the retention capacity of the soil and that therefore floods are occurring more often.

7.3 Water for drinking and irrigation

Van Andel concludes that at the moment farmers as well as the other households in Salbari do not face any problems related to water. Drinking water and irrigation water is provided by dug wells. There is a hard layer of stones in the ground of Salbari which makes it unsuitable for the construction of tube wells therefore there is no public drinking water facility. Women fetch water from private dug wells for the water provision of the household with buckets, while men fetch water from the regular, or solar pumped, dug wells (PDW) for the irrigation of the agricultural fields. Although the work is tough and time consuming for women to fetching water from their private dug wells, they did not face any problems considering water availability. There are some regular PDWs however which are not deep enough. During the irrigation the well dries out and farmers have to wait for the well to replenish before they can continue to irrigate their land. This has been a problem since the construction of the well, the main cause of this problem is the fact that the contractors who were responsible to dig the well did not dig it with sufficient depth

Similar findings count for Madhya Kuttimari. So far no one has noticed any decrease in the availability of water, neither for irrigation nor for household use. One women suggested there was a lower groundwater level in comparison to some years back because with one time pumping with the handpump there now comes less water that there used to come. But this can also be explained by the age of the pump. Only household that rely on the public time-tap have water shortages sometimes. The time-tap does provide plenty of water, only the time that the water flows is often overlapping with the time the women (who is head of the household) works in other villager's fields.

How has the changes in availability and hence access to water resources for irrigation impacted agricultural productivity? The canal irrigation and the ADMI irrigation has improved livelihoods considerably, many people stated not to be as poor as before. Not many crops are possible because of bad land quality. There is much competition in selling vegetables, resulting in low prices. According to the KPS in Uttar Khalpara the biggest problem for the local farmers not having land in the command area of the canal irrigation, is irrigation. Some areas have no handpumps or shallow pumps, and many people are still dependent on rainfall. He says that the rainfall got less over the years, earlier in this month it used to rain for at least three-four days, but it has not come (we experienced one shower). Also the intensity and duration of rainfall is less.

It also happens that groundwater is affected by the chemicals in fertilizer and pesticides, making the water drawn from hand pumps slightly poisonous. The chemicals from fertilizers and pesticides seep into the ground and are stored there. Over the years this builds up and affects the quality of the groundwater and the soil. Both farmers/ villagers as animals will be affected by this. "We can cook the food, but animals will eat the poisoned grasses."

8. Migration and feminization of agriculture?

Research Question 3. How do changes in agrarian economies such as out-migration, commercialization of agriculture as well as changing policies and practices re-arrange land, labour and consumption relations between women and men in different local situations? How do these changes restructure gendered responsibilities, opportunities and challenges?

8.1 Who is migrating?

Feminization of agriculture is not a new concept. Henriette Moore warned already in 1988 that the feminization of agriculture thesis was a familiar one for Africa and Latin America, but could not be generalized for the rest of the world.¹⁴ 30 years later an in-depth study on feminization of agriculture in China shows that in general the concept is a myth (Brauw, 2008) and only occurring among middle aged women. Is feminization of agricultural (wage) labour and more work load a reality in villages in district Jalpaiguri in North Bengal Terai area?

In all the villages it is found that all migrants are men¹⁵, most of them are very young, even boys of 12 or 14 years, and unmarried. These young man who migrate often quit school even before graduating 10th class and started working as underage agricultural labourers. A category of young men, which tasks can be easily looked after by someone else in the family. They migrate – often to Kerala or Assam - to provide an income for their parents or family, or save for the construction of a house, or to repay a huge debt, medicines, or to contribute to the dowry of their sisters. They usually expect to remain in their village after marriage, but because of their limited education they won't have much working opportunities other than working in the fields or in local construction. Women are not supposed, and allowed, to work as migrant labourers – nor do they aspire to be a migrant worker. As it is hard labour women are deemed to be unfit for the work, and they also have to manage the household in the village.

The much higher wages in Kerala are very attractive compared with the local wages; wage rates of Rs 400 or 500 per day are mentioned. All migrants mainly work in construction as unskilled labourers. In Madhya Khuttimari the study shows that from the 33 interviewed households, 14 household members are migrating for work now, or have migrated in the past. In landless families there is almost always a family member who migrated for work, while migration is much less occurring in landowning families. Bhutan (where they can only get a work permit for six months at the time) is the only foreign place some villagers have migrated to, but Bhutan is also closer to home

¹⁴ Perhaps one reason that facts about agricultural feminization and its impact are ambiguous and possibly contradictory is that the literature often fails to offer a clear definition of agricultural feminization. Alan de Brauw, Qiang Li, Chengfang Liu, Scott Rozelle and Linxiu Zhang* *Feminization of Agriculture in China? Myths Surrounding Women's Participation in Farming*. In: *The China Quarterly*, 194, June 2008, pp. 327–348

¹⁵ Mukherjee (2001) found in her research women migrants from Jalpaiguri district in the slums of Delhi. She writes (p.2337): "The migration in increasing numbers to affluent cities like Delhi of poor, landless women from several West Bengal districts has important implications for policy-making at central and state levels. While on one hand, it points to the failure of development and reform activity in the state; on the other it illustrates the absence of relevant support mechanisms, especially offering financial assistance."

compared to Kerala. Work opportunities are more in these states and the salary is higher as well.

Van Andel confirms the alarming process that young boys leaving the elementary school at a very young age to migrate and to earn money for the family: 34% of the sons left school before class 10 and thus before obtaining any certificate. The main reason for discontinuing education is to contribute to the household income. Households who have difficulties to make ends meet need the extra income of their sons to meet the household expenses. 11% of the daughters left school before reaching class 10 mostly for marriages. This is much reason for concern as many men will be uneducated in future which has of course an impact on the overall potential for intellectual skills and development.

In Salbari 23% of the households have one or more members who migrate mainly to Kerala or Gangtok but also to Coochbehar, Kolkata and Bangalore. All migrants send remittances home to contribute to the household income. Two-third of the migrants are young unmarried men, only one-third of the migrants thus have a wife and children themselves to look after. Although men from each community migrate, 58% of the migrants of this research are Muslim. Several factors contributed to increase in migration in Salbari. Firstly, the improved transport facilities enables the Salbari people to travel further distances and find work outside the village, outside the Matiali block and even outside West Bengal. A second factor are the improved communication facilities, migrants can keep in touch with their families in Salbari by phone. Due to this contact the social network of the households staying in Salbari extends and as a result new job seekers can broaden their search for work and migrate as well.

In Madhya Khuttimari out of the 44 families interviewed, 18 have at least one migrant wage labourer in the family. Out of these families 11 are landless, as may be expected. For these families wage labour has been a primary source of income since a long time, and they benefit from the increasing ease of travelling long distances. This also shows that families who do have land are similarly engaging in migrant wage labour: 1 was a marginal farmer family, 4 were small farmers and 2 were middle farmers. Most families had one or more sons working as migrant wage labourers, 12 of 18 families. Only three families were interviewed where the husband migrated, an important category for assessing the 'feminization of agriculture'. Two families had both husband and son migrating in alternating turns.

8.2 No feminization of agricultural labour and more workload

Literature suggest that the outmigration of adult men can lead to a process of feminization of agriculture (Shiva & Jalees 2005: 14, Sudgen et al. 2014: 12 & Jost et al. 2014: 4). Because of the absence of men, women have to take over their responsibilities in the field. This is **not** the case in the three villages involved. The migration of the adult men is a seasonal migration, all landowning adult migrants come home to cultivate during the pre-*kharif* and *kharif* season. As explained before, women do not take over the tasks of ploughing, irrigation, spraying of pesticides and marketing which are assigned to men. In case the adult migrant cannot make it home in time to perform these tasks, male daily labourers will be hired. Other responsibilities, opportunities and challenges are not structurally changed either. In all the households where married adult men migrate, male family members or neighbours take over the male activities such as buying household needs at the market. These women are not

forced into public spaces dominated by men. No change is visible in decision-making either, for all large expenses women consult their migrant husbands over the phone. The position of these women in the Salbari society does thus not substantially change, all tasks and responsibilities of the husband are taken over by other men or directed from a distance by the husband over the phone.

The same is observed in Uttar Khalpara. Men do not migrate when there is no one to take care of the women, and if they own land the migration will be outside the *kharif* and *rabi* cultivation seasons. Going to the market and doing heavy tasks on the land if is then performed by a 'guardian', a brother or cousin of the husband or a father or elderly mother. Families strive to maintain the gendered divisions of tasks and responsibilities as much as possible, so the patriarchal socio-economic structure practically stays the same.

In general women did not mention an increase in workload in agricultural labour (including more vegetable growing and teagardens) because of male out-migration. However, there are some landless and marginal farm-women having an increase in workload in agriculture not as a result of migration of men, but as a result of the investment of the loan of the self-help group to lease in land, or to grow potatoes or vegetables, or they buy in consultation with husband a bag of fertilizer, or spray container to improve their agricultural production, or they buy small livestock.

8.3 Conclusion

Our main conclusion is that women are not taking over the labour of migrated males in agriculture, or take over the management of the farming systems , i.e. there is no feminization of agriculture. Migration is not leading to reshaping of new gender inequalities.

Our findings indicate that the migration in Nepal might be different from the India Terai migration. In India the young, unmarried men from landless and marginal farmers households migrate short term, seasonal and to places that can be reached by bus or train. In Nepal there seems to be more long-distance, international migration that makes it difficult to come home for agricultural season work.

We come back to our key finding in the beginning of this paper and conclude that the power of the revived 'good woman' gender ideology is very forceful as shown in the dominance of guardianship. Women become not responsible for spraying pesticides, irrigation, ploughing and marketing because of migration of men. Landless women are also not hired and paid for these 'male' tasks at lower wages. The workload of women remains more or less the same. Workload is going up for women leaders and some members in the SHGroups as they take up not more productive roles but community roles as modern citizens to strengthen civil society institutions.

Oosterbaan has a very interesting thought. She concludes that there is no feminization of agriculture, but:

“ may be the village is socially not yet ready for that. Perhaps in a couple of years the image of women spraying and ploughing is more common

and then the women can take over some of the tasks that are now only being done by men.”

Van Andel is also prelude on this interesting thought. She shows already that the counter point households are already there which are extremely gender equal, and ignore the prescribed behaviour of the good woman and good man ideology. She gives examples of a Rajbongsi household where the husband daily helps in the household activities of fetching water, cooking, washing and cleaning. The neighbourhood does gossip about this, but the progressive household members do not care. Another example is a Muslim household where mutual household decisions are made. In an Adivasi household the husband cooks while the woman sells rice wine at the market. Again they risk gossiping of other households and damage to their reputation. The more gender equal households have to act against the norms of society of the good woman and good man. Van Andel states, that to cope with this a strong personal character is needed, critical against society, going against the mainstream and fighting against oppression.

9. Anandadhara means ‘from where happiness flows’.

Research Question 4. What do the two case study projects in North Bengal aim to do [objectives in general] and how and where is gender considered in the projects? How do key stakeholders and - actors in the projects understand gender, and what are the plans/ strategies/interventions to achieve their gender goals/ objectives?

9.1 Aims: women in the financial flow.

In May 2012 the Government of India has launched The National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) under the Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD). The Mission aims at creating efficient and effective institutional platforms of the rural poor, enabling them to increase their household income through sustainable livelihood enhancements and improved access to financial and public services. To reduce poverty by enabling the poor households to access gainful self-employment and skilled wage employment opportunities, resulting in appreciable improvement in their livelihoods on a sustainable basis, through building strong grassroots institutions of the poor is the overall ambitious aim of the program. DRDC has traditionally been the principal organ at the district level to manage the implementation of anti-poverty programmes of the Ministry of Rural Development. This agency was created originally to implement the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP). Subsequently the DRDCs were entrusted with a number of programmes of both State and Central Government. Anandadhara aims to ensure that at least one member from each of the identified poor rural household is brought under the Self Help Group (SHG) network.

The agenda is to mobilize the rural poor and vulnerable people into self- managed federated institutions and support them for livelihood collectives. In addition, the poor would be facilitated to achieve increased access to their rights, entitlements and public services, diversified risk and better social indicators of empowerment. The Department of Tribal Development has its own Self Help Groups under the name LAMPS ((Largesize Agricultural Multipurpose Corporative Society Limited). The difference

seems to be that only tribal women can be in the Lamps group and that the interest rate for loans is subsidized.

The implicit gender ideology of the Anadadhara project is that social empowerment will emerge from economic empowerment. Credit is seen as an instrument of social change as is shown in the following rationale: The agenda is to mobilize the rural poor and vulnerable people into self- managed federated institutions and support them for livelihood collectives. In addition, the poor would be facilitated to achieve increased access to their rights, entitlements and public services, diversified risk and better social indicators of empowerment. Do the SHG loans help or burden? Can women really decide how to spend the money? Does taking a loan enhance social empowerment?

In 59 per cent of the households in Salbari women are involved in SHGs of Anandadhara or Lamps. In Madhya Khuttimari there are 15 SHG's and several LAMPS SHG groups. In Uttar Khalpara only 20 per cent of the women are member. There are several reasons why women are not members. Poverty is the most obvious: landless women know they cannot repay the loan and also pay for interest and save money. One Santhal woman without land said, "what we earn today, we spend today".

9.2 Institutional set-up and caste/class relations in SHG's

All the studies show that a SHG group has somewhere between 9 and 14 members with three important positions; the group leader, the cashier, and the secretary. Mostly the SHG is a neighbourhood group. Caste/class wise the groups are heterogeneous. Moreover, we found mother-daughter/sisters relations in the groups. Sometimes, strategically, female members of the same household join different SHGs instead of the same SHG.

The BPL-APL rule of forming a SHG acts as a safety net and allocates more benefits to the BPL members and comparatively fewer benefits to the APL category members. In Salbari 80% of the group should consist of BPL members, consequently APL women face difficulties to be included in the group formation and form their own saving and loan groups without subsidy of the Government. They put the money in a box and give the key to a trustworthy person. In Uttar Khalpara the same rule is followed: Out of 10 members 8 have to be BPL for the group to be eligible for the Revolving Fund. Although we lack detailed information we are told that the Revolving Fund allotted by the Government is highest for ST, below them SC, then OBC. On the remaining amount the bank asks 13 percent interest. The Central and State government pay 9 percent of this interest, the SHG members have to pay 4 percent. It seems that banks are eager to have more SHG's as client as they are assured of the money flows guaranteed by the Government.

What about the class differences between the leaders and the members in the SHG's? The assumed dominance of richer and more powerful leaders could not be verified. The very charismatic, prominent and capable group leader in Madhya Khuttimari is a marginal farm women herself, works in her own land and has a small house. She is also cluster leader and member of the Federation. In her group are even landless, abandoned, and tribal women members. Mostly the composition of the groups are very heterogeneous caste and class wise. We found that cashiers of SHG groups and

clusters are more educated, minimum till Standard 11 (failed, and above) and come of somewhat richer households, mostly APL.¹⁶

The cashier in Madhya Khuttimari is the wife of a rich farmer, but has not any elite behaviour or appearance. She is also a prominent member of one of the sub-committees of the Water User Committee. This double role of SHG and WUG leader was also found in more groups which is a potential chance to link activities¹⁷. In another SHG group, the leader from a Bhagat tribal community is the wife of the biggest landowner. She has formed a group with very poor landless tribal women out of idealism to improve the quality of their life. She is very disappointment as the members did not repay the loan and spent it on drinking alcohol, and now the SHG is stuck and other members cannot be reloaned.

The leaders have the responsibility to guarantee repayment, and therefore have to create an environment of 'peer pressure' and empathy for the poorest members, so that defaulting members are made to repay the loans. The other way round also happens: one leader took the full loan for the dowry of her daughter and did not repay. The other members are angry as they cannot be re-loaned. Another problem to be handled by the leaders is that monthly instalments are badly suited to the irregularity and seasonality of harvests. After the potato harvest women can repay, but then the SHG members might be already tagged as defaulters.

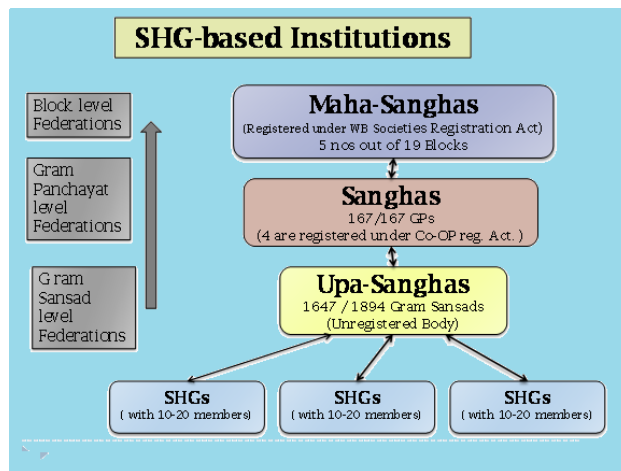
Discussions with SHG leaders and members showed in general an atmosphere of very good caste-class/community relations. However, the most challenging task for some group leaders in Madhya Khuttimari appears to keep the peace between the group members. Even the Government policy to implement special SHG's for tribal women (Adivasi) under the LAMPS project does not seem to segregate, or to discriminate women at the grassroots.

It was observed that there is no culture of showing-off wealth, or conspicuous consumption. Jewellery is very modestly used by the richer women. In theory the group leader has the most responsibilities varying from organizing the meetings and to making her group members aware of economic empowerment. The first year all the members have to save money: mostly 30, 40, 50 ₹ per month. After one year saving they can get a loan 4 (in theory even 8) times the amount they saved it the bank. They can decide in the group how to distribute the collective loan. Mostly they just divide the loan in equal parts which means that women individually get a loan the first year dependent of their saving of at average around 2000 ₹, 3000 ₹ (€ 43). The cashier is mostly responsible for all the monetary transactions and visits to the bank. When money needs to be deposited in the bank anybody of the group members can go. If they need to withdraw money then the cashier and group leader need to go to the bank. In Madhya Kuttimari the women usually give the money to their husband who will go and deposit it at the bank. The secretary does not have specific tasks but usually fills in the registers during the group meetings.

¹⁶ (see for handbook for bank *sakhi*, cashiers of SHG groups: http://aajeevika.gov.in/sites/default/files/nrlp_repository/MORD_Hand_Book.pdf accessed at 30-6-2016)

¹⁷ The ADMI former agricultural woman specialist has trained SHG groups in vermi-compost making.

All the SHGs in the village are connected through the cluster, to which one person from each SHG has to go. Most often this is the leader or cashier. From the cluster 5 women are chosen for the block-level or *maha-sangha*. The highest regional level of the organisation is the Federation at district level.¹⁸



The SHG leader of Madhya Kuttimari was invited last year to Kolkota to celebrate in the stadium that they have been awarded for the best Federation in Jalpaiguri District. She got a bag with information sheets, umbrella, cap, sash, and a promise that she can get loan up to 2.5 lakhs in the so-called Area SH cluster. This seems to be a scheme under the CRDC, which furnishes larger loans for women who have proved to be successful entrepreneurs and belong to the top SHG women.

From a class/caste perspective the social background of the Community Resource Person (CRP), now mostly referred to as the Community Service Provider (CSP) appointed by the Gram Panchayat, is in all villages worrisome. The idea is that CSP's have a similar socio-economic background as the women who are to join a SHG, which makes them more mobilizing and motivating. However, they were often of APL higher and richer caste/class. The role of the CRP is crucial to 'train the poor', i.e. to inform women of all the ins and outs of joining a SHG and taking a loan with the Anandadhara programme. She is supposed to assist the women with forming a group and electing a president, secretary and cashier and to give women training in how to manage these tasks and maintain the Resolution Book, containing the intents of the group before taking a loan; a cash/credit Book; and a Meeting Book. In one village the CSP does not live in the village, and if the women want to meet her they have to walk an hour to her house. She is rich and her husband has a business selling cars and motorcycles and they live in a good house in a semi-urbanized area. In a group discussion it was noticed that the women SHG's did not dare to give any criticism on decisions made by the CSP.

9.3 The paradox of the female entrepreneur and the 'good woman'

The microcredit movement relies heavily on the idea that every poor woman has the potential to become a successful entrepreneur. By helping the poor to access credit, their untapped entrepreneurial spirit is expected to emerge, and economic development to follow. From this rather narrow perspective, the ability to start a business is mainly a matter of skills, financial resources, managerial capacity and access to basic infrastructure. Some scholars, however, express concerns about this 'entrepreneurial capability' of the poor (Guerin a.o., 2015, 1294). In Salbari the restrictions on working for wages and mobility have been a factor more often for Muslim respondents than for *Rajbongsi* to decide not to join a SHG group. The Anandadhara

¹⁸ (see: <http://birbhum.gov.in/DRDCBZP/anandashara.htm> accessed at 30-6-2016)

goals to get women in the financial flow are promoted in a patriarchal structure of society in which men are considered more capable to start a business as men dominate public spaces and women face restrictions considering their mobility. *All in all female entrepreneurship goes against the social norm.* To expect women to become entrepreneurs runs against the prevailing notions and expectations of the behaviour of 'good men' and 'good women': women should be good at household work, should adapt to the family of their husbands and should not quarrel but be tolerant. Women cannot do marketing or bargaining. This is the main problem why it is difficult for women to be self-employed. Women are capable to make a certain product, but in the dominant gender-ideology they need men for the supply of raw materials and the marketing of the end product.

In Madhya Khuttimari it was revealed that **lack of time** is an important factor that prohibits women from joining a SHG. So even for the regular members meeting once a month can be difficult. Because of all the household work and childcare the involvement in the SHG is often minimal: women just give the money before or after the meeting. This counts the more as women have the aspirations to be active as a leader on cluster, block and district level. Especially the three main positions in the SHG and the posts on higher levels are very time-consuming and some women had to resign from their position because of their responsibilities at home. One of the best, capable and charismatic leaders, a jewel in the crown of Anandadhara, had to withdraw from all her higher positions as her husband was fighting with her every day that she neglected her duties as mother of a daughter and as wife to prepare food for him. May be we see here how the personal is political. The husband might feel supported by the signals of the dominant images of religious nationalism in which traditional roles of women are emphasized. After a long struggle she gave up her leadership roles in Anandadhara to restore harmony in the family. As a result, female leaders have to be cautious to shape their behaviour and preferences around local notions of femininity, female morality and expertise.

This is exactly what we found at the level of even the most active, smart, and capable SHG women leaders. They move around, are independent and take decisions at all levels but their view and perceptions on what is a 'good wife' remain traditional. A woman should listen to her parents (father), obey her husband, take care of restrictions, work hard, sacrifice herself for the family, do the household work etc. So, SHG's so far have hardly eroded the perceptions and notions regarding conventional gender roles. Oosterbaan thinks that when women leaders will get some financial compensation the attitude of the husbands might change.

9.4 Poverty and limited (self)employment options

Our research shows that economic empowerment is hardly realized in the SHG groups studied. Main problem is that women hardly invest loans in productive assets, but use the loans for consumption, improvement of the house, to repay debts, dowry, to make alcohol, for husband's business, and only sometimes invest in agriculture to buy a bag of fertilizer, to lease-in a handkerchief piece of land, or to sharecrop a goat or a calf. As in rural areas the options for income generating activities are limited, and almost no substantial training is given in possible feasible and viable (collective) activities, it is no wonder that the loans are spent on non-productive investments. As there are no returns of selling something, the men have to repay the installment and interest, making women even more dependent on husbands, or sons.

In the Salbari study, where the non-farm economic possibilities are more than in the two other villages, house construction is the most popular investment, followed by agriculture and the business of the husband. About 50% of the investments are productive – such as the investments in agriculture, businesses and education. The other 50% of the investments are unproductive – such as the investments in house construction, basic household needs and marriage. Officially, it is not allowed to spend the loan on these issues and on the investment-plan women state a different reason for their loan. The CSP is aware of this, but it is not considered as a problem since nobody ever visits Salbari to check if the resolution matches the reality practises.

SHG members in Salbari ascribe several reasons to the fact that none of them started an own business.

- Firstly, the money required to start a new business cannot be obtained through the SHG, the loans are too small. 41% of the loans are, of ,or below ₹5.000 and 47% are between ₹5.000 and ₹10.000 while a business requires more start-up capital.
- Secondly – as mentioned in the previous chapter – women are burdened with household work, consequently women express that they do not have sufficient time to start a new business either individually or collectively. It is even difficult for women to join all the meetings due to their household responsibilities.
- Thirdly the women did not develop any new skills they could utilize in starting a business. Skill development trainings, which are an integral part of the Anandadhara scheme, are almost absent in Salbari. Only after the formation of the group women receive a financial training, none of the women involved in this research received any other type of skill development training.

Since the introduction of SHGs in Salbari there has been one training on mushroom cultivation which has not been put in practise due to a lack of demand for mushrooms. Several women had trainings from Rajarhat Prasari, an NGO working in Salbari, approaching their trainees via the SHG's, mainly women with leading functions. Some women applied the new knowledge while others did not. One educated woman in Salbari, with a college degree is planning to start a cosmetic shop which she will do without the help of her husband. Education might have resulted in the fact that she – in contrast to other women – considers herself capable of running a shop on her own.

In Uttar Khalpara the two main productive investments possible are buying livestock and leasing land for agricultural production. Both are risky. The returns are minimal. Moreover, taking livestock is difficult because there is no grassland and goats will be poisoned when they graze around the teagardens. Training in collective stable fed livestock-care as goat chains might help.

Leasing land is the second major productive investment. In the majority of cases this was done to cultivate rice or potato. The biggest complaint about this investment was that the size of the loan does not cover the cost of leasing the land, and covering the cost of production, additional loans have to be taken with Bandhan bank or other credit providers to overcome the high production cost. The women say that you need good knowledge of farming to make it work. A crop can fail because of the weather, and the market can also be bad for a certain crop. For getting a good price for potato, you need access to the cold store and hire a place. Then you have to wait till the rains come to get a good price, and all the time you have to pay for the storage in the cooled

place. That is expensive. Training in market-skills and farm-skills might improve the outcomes.

In Madhya Khuttimari there are 15 active groups in the village at the moment. The first SHG started already 25 years ago and is still active. This SHG is the only group who is still interested in doing a collective business rather than dividing the loan individually. For collective investments the support of the Gram Panchayat is indispensable. For example leasing in a pond for collective fishing, cooking mid-day meals for children, building nurseries require co-operation of the Gram Panchayat. Women SHG groups are engaged in this way in preparing meals for the ICD's and Anganwadi programs or run canteen in block offices.

What is the relation between SHG's and political participation? As far as the political participation in the Gram Panchayat is concerned, we found in one village that it has 14 members out of whom 7 are women members hence a fair representation of women. 4 of the 7 women are STs, 2 from SCs and 1 from Muslim community. It was found that 3 of the 7 women are also leaders of SHGs (1 SC, 1 ST, 1 Muslim).

9.5 Social empowerment of SHG's?

The three studies show that in particular empowerment of women leaders is achieved, like: gaining knowledge on how to take loans, developing the skill to talk to officials, increase in social network and increase in visits to places women had never been before. Women leaders, cashiers and secretaries of SHG's could build an impressive network of institutional relations from the village, GP, to the block, and district level. Monthly meetings are normal. Women leaders participated in Government programs, training, and special ST, SC, CDS, etc. schemes. This has highly contributed in the enhancement of their mobility. But, again, so far this does not mean that their notions of femininity, female morality, gender roles, and labour-based ideas of division of labour have changed. Automatic economic or social empower of women through their SHG membership does not happen and the existing gender norms are so far not sufficiently challenged to change gender norms.

The access to loans resulted for some older women or female headed households in little economic empowerment by giving women control over money. The majority of the women experience the decision considering the investment of the SHG loan at the best as a mutual decision, but mostly it is the husband who tells his wife what loan to take for what purpose. Access to money does not necessarily give women control over money. Some women told that they bought a calf but the animal died. For repayment they are dependent on the income of their husbands which makes them more independent. Even one researcher was present at a SHG meeting where the husband of a SHG member requested a loan. She did not participate at all during the meeting, she either sat quietly behind her husband, or she was out of sight preparing tea in the kitchen.

The development of skills and confidence is a form of social empowerment. Many presidents and cashiers share these experiences, but unfortunately many regular members cannot identify with them. Without explicitly discussing this topic this is already visible during the focus group discussions where leaders and cashiers are most vocal while it is a struggle to let the other members speak and open up. So while some women experience forms of social empowerment, in particularly men in Madhya

Khuttimari perceive their SHG membership solely as an access to finances but not at all as a form of economic empowerment.

Van Andel writes rightly that in SHGs the meetings are primarily used to discuss loan related matters. During meetings of the SHG's women sometimes even do not discuss anything, they give their signature and leave. Occasionally family matters are discussed, and in MK not discussed at all. None of the groups discussed matters related to social inequality.

Considering the involvement in the public sphere women now go to urban areas to visit the bank, but apart from that the public sphere still remains dominated by men. The meetings of the SHG do encourage women to leave the private space of the homestead, but the meeting is like a new form of private space. It is a space where women gather and this gathering does not challenge the existing dominance of men in the public space. The floor of the public space belongs to men, and restricts women from selling vegetables in markets and even from visiting *haats*. In the North Bengal Terai Development Project we arranged 25 years ago a women's place in the market with good water and latrine facilities and shade and we arranged for transport of the vegetables to the market. This was accepted by men, and several farm women were allowed to sell their produces. I remember the big white reddish, in this women's market corner. We considered it as a first step to torn down the wall of restricted mobility. It was a success and we should consider to repeat our 'best practice'. In 2015 nothing has been left from our efforts of 25 years ago. The invisible 'good woman' sermon was even more dominant and restricted women from landowning households from participating in agriculture on equal footing with men, but even worse is that it restricts the work opportunities of women from various poorer and landless households to the village level. True, the labour opportunities for men stretch all the way to Kerala but the social costs are high: labour relations and conditions are hard, inhuman and unacceptable.

All in all it can be concluded that the SHG does not challenge the existing and reinforced social gender norms. More strategies, ways and means and tools for social empowerment are urgently required. Even the women who experienced certain economic empowerment are not necessarily critical about other gender issues like the gendered division of labour, or wage differences. Is it possible that men can do some more household work in order that women have more time to work outside the house? In all studies similar findings show that this is not possible. If the workload of women increases, men will not do any household work. A good wife should do the tedious, heavy and time-consuming household work and it is shameful to ask the husband for any help. The patriarchal notions about what it means to be a 'good husband' or a 'good wife' are thus not challenged due to the participation in the SHG.

Concluding we can state that the SHG's have the potential to contribute to mobilization and even social empowerment, but gender awareness should be enhanced in a considerable way to realise real emancipation. The practical and strategic needs and interests of women are so far not addressed. The SHG's might have the potential to be an important formal institution to enhance the social empowerment 'from within' and 'with'. For a few women increase in self-esteem, social skills, capacities and co-operation for collective action (fight against alcoholism) was observed. Moreover, the economic empowerment should be supported in many ways. Marketing and

professional/ job training are needed. Study tours to other places to get more ideas of alternative and new activities for income generating should be opened up.

Women may use microcredit groups as a 'space of socialization' to avoid rather than fight patriarchal norms. However, for the poorest women the SHG's are no option. They know they cannot repay. One woman said: 'Where is the work in the SHG? I only see talking on money.' That hits the nail on the head. The poor landless women, the far majority of women in the rural areas who desperately need support are largely bypassed by the Self-Help Groups. The ultimate challenge will be to empower them by generating lucrative work.

10. Gender and the ADMI project.

10.1 Context and Aims of ADMI

Context

The Government of West Bengal has been constructing minor irrigation works in the Terai for a long time (Choudhury and Mukhopadhaya, 1988). In terms of people, water and soil fertility the potential of the area is substantial, but marketing and transport infrastructure (bridges, roads) remain important bottlenecks.

An impact gender study of 25 years ago of the North-Bengal Terai small-scale irrigation project showed many positive effects on marginal- and small farm women, in particular as a result of the implementation of hand pumps. They have gained a lot in terms of nutrition, health, saving of energy, increase in income, more freedom of movement, consultation in decision making and more self-esteem (Schenk-Sandbergen, 1991, 2003). The success of the project was mainly due to the institutional setting and social and political commitment of the implementers. The implementation and management of the project was wholly carried out by the regular governmental line departments, and the local political institutions of the State of West-Bengal (*panchayats*).¹⁹ This institutional set-up gave the project an autonomous character which was a strong point in the sustainability of the project. However the binding force in this interplay was the commonly adhered political and social ideology prevalent in the area. The Terai was mainly dominated by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Forward Block which was a coalition between various left parties. It is unmistakable that in their ideology 'social justice' and 'support for the poor' ranked high. These values, notions and awareness were tacitly shared by the implementing line-department staff and other

¹⁹ The selection, design, construction, operation and maintenance of a scheme was executed by the Department of Agriculture (DOA), and the Department of Minor Irrigation, subdivided in the Agri-Irrigation (DTW) and the Agri-Mechanical (RLI) wing. On Block level, the most important level of implementation, the Department of Home Affairs was represented by the Block Development Officer (BDO). Both the operator and assistant operator were employed (and paid) by Home Affairs but worked under the command of Agri Mechanical (in case of RLI) or Agri-Irrigation (in case of a DTW).

involved people. The social commitment brought clarity of perspective and gave direction to the tasks to be implemented.²⁰

The Left Front ruled till 2011 when there was a turn over to the Trinamool Congress, TMC, and Mamata Banerjee became the Chief Minister.²¹ Neo-liberal policies intruded in new water management ideologies and drastically changed policies. Participatory Irrigation Management and Mainstreaming of women became the new magic solutions (Schenk-Sandbergen 2013, 271). One of the consequences is that the practical needs of women, as implementing handpumps for free as an irrigation device for kitchen gardens, are not any longer included of the ADMI irrigation program. 25 years ago the project regulation that women would get priority as handpump beneficiary when the land is in their name, has resulted in an unforeseen spin-off, but very positive side effect. 95% of the land was at that time also in the name of the head of the household: the men. But many men transferred land into the name of their wives, since they had a greater chance of being selected as a handpump beneficiary. The transfer of the *patta* (land right document) costed only 10 ₹. The practical need turned in a strategic need as unexpected side effect. The irony is that nowadays while the most practical water technology for women is lacking in village Salbari, as public drinking water provision, the strategic goal, as a token 1/3 of membership for women in WUA's, has priority.

Aims

The District Project Management Unit of the West Bengal Accelerated Development of Minor Irrigation Project (ADMI), funded by World Bank is housed in the Water Resources Investigation and Rural Development Department. The aim of the ADMI project is to enhance agriculture based income of small and marginal farmers through sustainable use of irrigation resources. The project has three objectives.

- First, the construction of minor irrigation schemes to improve the availability of water for agricultural purposes in areas which are currently dependent on rainfall (Department of Water Resources Investigation and Development 2015: 31).
- Secondly to increase agricultural productivity and enhance the income of small and marginal farmers by providing trainings to encouraging diversification of cropping systems and use of new technologies and by facilitating better market integration and marketing opportunities.
- The last objective is to strengthen the community based institutions' management, operation and maintenance. The community based institutions are Water User Associations (WUA), all landholders in the command area of the PDWs will form groups and several groups from different wells become one WUA. The ADMI has a specific focus on women's participation in the WUAs.

The Institute of Planning, Innovative Research, Appropriate Technology and Extension, an NGO from Kolkata, is hired in the ADMI project to look after the community participation in Jalpaiguri. They have appointed CO's to motivate, mobilize

²⁰ See, for the institutional, social, political, and technological and gender factors which have contributed to the success of the small-scale irrigation project chapter 10 of Schenk-Sandbergen & Choudhury 2003.

²¹ As a woman leader she initiated the Kanyashree Prakalpa which is a Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Scheme that concentrates on girls currently most at-risk for dropping out of school and for child marriage: adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18. The scheme seems to be successful.

and to organize the potential WUA's members. The staff, there is one woman-coordinator, of the NGO is gender aware, and tries to motivate and to include women in the Governing Body, and formation of sub-committees (sluice, bookkeeping, water distribution recording etc.). In practice it was found in all the studies that the members of the Executive Committees (usually 7 to 20 members) are almost all male. The female team leader of the NGO in charge of community participation is gender aware and thinks of the formation of an EC with only women. After identification of beneficiaries and formation of WUA's the line department has to implement the irrigation device at the local level. The newest technology is used and solar panels are placed to produce the electricity for the irrigation pumps. Unfortunately the panels are often damaged, or the battery stolen. The farmers have to replace and that does not happen.

10.2 Uttar Khalpara and ADMI

The WBADMI Program has successfully handed over 12 shallow tube wells and accompanying diesel motor pumps in the village. Two WUA's, one of 84 and one of 70 members, have been created in 2012. There are no female members in any of the offices, which is rationalized by both male and female WUA members by the consensual notion that irrigation is the responsibility of men. Women's active participation is thus not experienced as a necessity, and can add unsought responsibilities without providing direct benefits. Women who manage cultivation individually, although rare, nonetheless have a need for access to the services. This access is constrained by the physical strength needed to operate the pump-set, and as such necessitates hiring a wage laborer or depending on the goodwill of male WUA members. Several of the pumps experienced defects during the fieldwork period. Those tasked with the repairs expressed frustration with the availability of parts and uncertainty about WBADMI's responsibility for the procedure. At least one shallow tube well has dried out, and there is uncertainty among members whether the WBADMI will be helping them. Those groups with working pump sets have (in most cases) for the first time been able to cultivate during *rabi* season. None of the members have taken up the SRI method, only a few of them were instructed and it demands more time and effort than they are willing to spend.

10.3 Salbari and ADMI

ADMI increased the availability of water for agriculture by constructing 13 regular and solar PDWs in Salbari. The agricultural production of the WUA members who use the PDWs increased. However, not all WUA members make use of the PDWs. The WUA members blame the ADMI that they do not consider aspects such as market failure or the rising costs of cultivation. There are some problems considering the functioning of the WUAs as well which are mainly related to money. Not all WUA have an account or deposit money on their account. Non-cultivating households are not willing to pay the membership fees and the water users of solar PDWs consider the solar system too expensive to repair and therefore did not start saving money. The board of these WUAs does not stand up to solve these problem either. Therefore the potential of WUAs to resolve conflicts over water and pump usage and to recover costs are not always met or might become problematic in the future. Lastly, the involvement of women in WUA is so far not successful. There are female WUA members, but they do not feel involved

in the association. Due to the patriarchal perception that women are useless as members, women face difficulties to participate.

10.4 Madhya Kuttimari River Lift Irrigation

The River lift irrigation (RLI) in Madhya Khuttimari is a kind of model project for the ADMI project. In the following some findings on, how does it work? Who are members: small- and marginal farmers?

Average size of land in the command area is 7.5 *bigha*. According to ADMI norms they classify them as small and marginal farmers but farmers with this landholding are according to our findings rich farmers. Anyhow they are farmers who can take some economic risk.

Using RLI costs Rs. 130 per hour compared to Rs. 200 for renting a pump per hour. RLI used to be Rs. 100 per hour but they increased the amount because they needed to save for maintenance. Non-RLI members can also get RLI water for Rs. 160 an hour.

The introduction of RLI did not get the farmers more water since there never was a shortage of water, but they now do have easier access to water for land irrigation (150 *bigha*). Without RLI irrigation is a hassle with needing to lay pipelines from a dugwell to different areas of the field in order to irrigate the entire land. With RLI there is no wasting of time, they can give a letter stating they want water on a particular day on a particular time and from a particular outlet, then deposit the money and the water will come. Before RLI farmers would hire a pump and labourers to help spread the water all over the field. Women were never much involved in irrigation. Now, with RLI, the water gets pumped with more speed onto the land and the water spreads itself better because of that. It is now not necessary to hire labourers. With the powerful motorpumps it takes less work and labour to irrigate the entire land. A leader of the WUA stated that they have become a 'best practice' case of ADMI because of very successful operation and greater productivity compared to the yield before RLI. Many experts and visitors come to see the wonder of water management and demonstration of privatization.

Gender and ADMI

At least one third of the members of the water users groups/associations should be woman. The CO keeps telling to the board members that women should be given more tasks within the organization and be more active, but some farmers do not agree and don't see the use to involve women in the RLI management. Women are more excluded from the decisions and tasks than included. The WUA committee members need to arrange and attend the monthly meeting, during which they have to consider a request for water. Not everyone attends these monthly meetings, but some RLI members said women and men both speak at meetings and are active, although at big meetings women only speak when they are told to speak.

Although there are women who are members of RLI, their husbands are usually members also, thus having two RLI members within one household. When we asked the women none of them were really sure why herself and her husband are both members: what are the benefits of having two memberships? They did know they were just considered member because of the ADMI quota for women. Since women are nearly always busy in and around the house, they rarely attend the RLI meetings,

except for when they are explicitly told to attend, for example when someone important is visiting. When there is a meeting outside the village, women never attend. Women are welcome to come if they want to, but they rarely have the time and they are not mobile enough to attend a meeting a bit further from their home. When women's signatures are required, one of the board members will go to the women's homes after the meeting to obtain them.

ADMI Dugwell

I met Shanti Rai during a Participatory Rural Appraisal session. She seems to be the cashier of a WUA of a dug well group. Is it ADMI policy that women are cashiers? She keeps quiet. A man explains that she was not aware to be the cashier, but then came to know she is the cashier of three WUG of three dug wells, and is doing the job now.

Two years ago a WUG was formed under the ADMI project for the management of the water of a pump dug well command area: 30 to 45 *bigha*'s of land. Some farmers have 1,2 or 6 *bigha*. Membership is 10 rupees per month. One hour water pumping costs 20 rupees. The farmers noticed that after one hour pumping the dug well is empty and the motor becomes too hot. PWD has given the work to dig the dugwell to a contractor. The contractor has not consulted the local people. Not enough rings has been placed and some were already cracked. No local knowledge was used. There is a community worker for ADMI and the farmers have complained. The link from line department to local government (GP) is till now unclear and in fact non-existing. Therefore, it is not that mainly farm women from poor households have no agency in decision making, but their husbands also have no agency to complain at the key actors or stakeholders doors.

Oosterbaan writes the following conclusion: The ADMI people should realize the lack of participation by women since during one of the RLI fieldtrips we attended, there was not one single female member present. But, she also asks, "is it really necessary to require women's inclusion in this?" The women do not seem to get anything out of it other than it takes up more of their time to attend meetings. Women themselves do not seem that interested either. When a woman is member, but her husband also, it is especially useless because there is no benefit in having 2 members it is only about reaching the quota of number of members and number of female members.

11. Scope for change: ways forward.

Main finding is that there is a dramatic increase in landless families (70%) with almost no access to land and agricultural labour. Rural does not mean agricultural anymore. Size of landholding for marginal farmers came down in a time perspective of 25 years from one acre to one *bigha*. To survive, the main coping strategy is migration of young men to work in insecure, casual, risky construction work in cities in India. Landless/marginal farmer women stay behind in the villages of our research, and search desperately for wage labour in tea gardens, stone chipping, making puffed rice, etc. State policies are urgently required to support them and programs like Anandadhara should concentrate on landless women to generate income opportunities

with innovative activities, skill-, economic and professional training, marketing and social empowerment

Patrilineal kinship structure and inheritance pattern and post marriage patrilocal residence are the root causes for unequal gender relations. The patriarchal system in combination with upcoming nationalistic policies, challenging feminist liberal and socialist ideas on gender relations, advocating a definition of gender roles based on a traditional Hindu culture have obviously revived the 'good woman' ideology (Banerjee, 2003). The masculinization of culture is more or less going hand-in-hand with the masculinization of agriculture because of dominance of agri-business. In particular the applications of chemical fertilizers and spraying, the dependency of every year buying HYV seeds, bringing more produce to the markets, have a tendency of **masculinization of agriculture** as landowning and landless women are excluded and not allowed to do this activities. This is a world-wide process even stretching till the masculinization of birth (Guilmoto, 2007, 2015). A regression in emancipation was noticed in particular for landowning women over a time span of more than 25 years ago.

On the other hand there are processes of rural transformation as intensification and diversifying of vegetable growing which have generated more (wage) labour for women. Segregation of the labour market, offers some tribal communities protection to have access to certain hard types of seasonal wage labour as jute processing and plucking tea in the tea gardens.

The main response on increasing poverty is forced seasonal (survival) migration of young unmarried men, even boys of 15 years. Our findings show that **we did not notice a trend towards the feminisation of agricultural (wage) labour and -managing the land**. Women are certainly not left behind by their husbands; they only move seasonally when there is a male guardian taking over the urgent male work to be done. There was no increase in *de facto* women-headed households and more workload. Women don't do the tasks formerly done only by men, such as land preparation, spraying pesticides, and marketing of the produce. Landless women are also not hired and paid for these 'male' tasks at lower wages. There is no evidence so far for an increase in workload for landowning and landless women because of male migration. The perception of women is that the division of labour in domestic work and in agricultural work is the same.

Our findings indicate that the migration in Nepal might be different from the India Terai migration. In India the young, unmarried men from landless and marginal farmers households migrate short term, seasonal and to places that can be reached by bus or train. In Nepal there seems to be more long-distance, international migration that makes it difficult to come home for agricultural season work. In the North Bengal Terai the young men migrate as they are not willing any more to work for low wages as Rs 200 per day, while in Kerala they can get Rs 400 or Rs 500 per day. They migrate to compensate a loss because of low prices for agricultural products, to compensate failed harvests, to pay for medicines and hospital, to finance dowries and marriage of sister(s), to cope with poverty and survival.

Anandadhara: The poorest landless, often tribal, women are not reached by the project. They cannot save each month to show their trustworthiness to be entitled to a loan, and are not in a position to repay loans with interest and on top continue saving. Self-employment is hardly an option as no resources and skills are with them.

The Anandadhara goals to get women in the financial flow are promoted in a patriarchal structure of society in which men are considered more capable to start a business as men dominate public spaces and women face restrictions considering their mobility. *All in all female entrepreneurship goes against the social norm.* To expect women to become entrepreneurs runs against the prevailing notions and expectations of the behaviour of 'good men' and 'good women': women should be good at household work, should adapt to the family of their husbands and should not quarrel but be tolerant. Women cannot do marketing or bargaining. This is the main problem why it is difficult for women to be self-employed. Women are capable to make a certain product, but in the dominant gender-ideology they need men for the supply of raw materials and the marketing of the end product. There is a strong contradiction between becoming an entrepreneur and being a 'good woman'.

Loans of SHG groups have hardly a link with investment in agriculture: they are mainly used for non-farm investment. This means that repayment mainly depends on the contribution of husbands which makes women more dependent on men. Although SHG groups have not achieved economic empowerment for women, at the local level they have contributed considerably to the potential of social empowerment, and more workload, for the women leaders of SHG's. Nevertheless, despite more mobility, more opportunities and access to money resources the leaders adhere to the traditional gender norms of being a 'good woman'.

ADMI: The poorest farm households are not reached by ADMI as technological and economic considerations exclude them. Irrigation is considered as an exclusive male activity and women are perceived incapable of irrigating agricultural land. Consequently women are not valued as members in WUAs which restrains them from participating. Therefore they do facilitating work in sub-committees as book keeping, motivating people to pay their membership fee, or play a role as cashier.

The staff in the ADMI irrigation project is gender aware and tries to get a proper representation of women in their WUA's, and even to form only women WUA's. The project tries to provide women with a legal framework to take up activities outside the established gender norms. More research is necessary to know the impact.

As ways forward there are domains where scope for change can be identified. To support gender equity pathways out of poverty we suggest the following. We propose feasible and viable options as time, money and personal input are limited.

Recommendations

The State Government is recommended to:

- adjust her criteria for classification of classes of farmers. If they really want to reach the poorest they should change their definitions of marginal and small farmers. To change from one hectare to one bight will highly enhance their capacity to reach out to the real target group in need of support.
- improve their procedures and implementation for classification of BPL and APL households.
- implement projects by the regular line departments including gender components

Anandadhara:

Anandadhara should introduce innovative income generating activities, preferable outside the traditional notions of women's work. Suggestions for innovative activities might be achieved with study tours of SHG leaders/members to the Self Employed Women's Association (Ahmedabad) or Working Women's Forum (Chennai) as they have wide experience with SHG's in rural areas.

Improve marketing conditions for women. Small improvements as water and sanitation facilities, shade and organized transport might help a lot. This point can be taken up with the Director of agriculture in Jalpaiguri.

Training in vocational and professional skills can be organized with assistance of prominent NGO's in the region (CDHI, Cooch Behar, etc)

Compensate women leaders with income in particular those working at block/district level

Develop a textbook/manual on social empowerment for use at the SHG level

Issues to be covered in the textbook:

- The homestead land rights programme Nijo Griha, Nijo Bhumi (NGNB) program should be implemented.
- The joint *patta* rights laws should be promoted at all levels and in particular via the SHG. A study tour to the nearby Rabha village can be considered as a catalyst to experience the advantages for women owning land.
- Equal wages for women daily labourers
- Equal sharing of domestic work. May be with the help of the forest department collective social forestry for firewood, and demonstration and dissemination of smokeless *chulas* can be initiated.
- Why to give dowries?
- How to get rid of alcoholism through collective action? The right to speak-up. Pouring out bitterness sessions?
- The advance of cooperation and collective activities
- Etc.

Develop a textbook/manual for staff and other crucial participants (CSP's) on social empowerment/ gender awareness.

Organise TOT for trainers. Train CPS, and all other involved staff at the block/district, etc.

ADMI

The classification of farmers and definition of categories of marginal and small farmers according to size of land should be adjusted to the reality in the village (not one hect., but one *bigha*). This will highly enhance the out-reach to the poorest and most vulnerable target group.

ADMI's community participation NGO should intensify the mobilization work and appoint also female CO's in the villages.

Installation of hand pumps is strongly recommended to ease the household work of women and to promote with support of female KPS's extension work irrigated kitchen gardens.

Promote the appointment of women KPS in the regular line department.

Link the SHG's with the ADMI

- Link SHG with ADMI work (vermi composting, distribution of water, etc.)
- Women's vegetables cooperatives might be formed;
- Acquisition of land, or to collectively lease in land, for landless women and provide irrigation.

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