

Harvesting Power: Understanding the Dynamics of Agricultural Politics in Bangladesh

Navigating Neopatrimonialism, Role of Intermediaries, State Institutions, and Interest Groups for Farmer Prosperity

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Master's Thesis in Development, Environment and Cultural Change

Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM)
University of Oslo

May 2023

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2023

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<http://www.duo.uio.no/>

Print: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

Acknowledgement

As I embark on this escapade, I am compelled to express my sincerest gratitude to those who have accompanied me on this merry quest. First and foremost, my supervisor, Nil, whose guidance and insightful wit have been a beacon of light in the labyrinthine corridors of academia. I must acknowledge Gudrun, who, with her unwavering support and nurturing spirit, has been more like a mother hen, clucking her way through my highs and lows. A hearty round of applause must be accorded to the whole ensemble at the Senter for Utvikling og Miljø (SUM), my merry band of misfits. For it is because of them that in the hallowed halls of SUM, laughter echoes alongside profound discussions accompanied by bouts of hilarity.

I find myself indebted to Psyfun Madam, the muse whose mysterious ways have inspired my research. It was she who inspired me to pen my inaugural research paper - to Rafiussan Sir, for I needed to know that I know not and to Shibaji Sir for being the voice of reason that always stays with me.

I cannot overlook the profound role played by my father, whose towering presence in my academic journey and in my life as a whole has been immeasurable. His belief in my potential, coupled with his own love for learning, has been a guiding light, illuminating the path before me. His wisdom and gentle guidance have instilled within me the values of perseverance, integrity, and the pursuit of excellence. May his dream of *rashtreer shongskar* come true. And let us not forget the parental team. Their encouragement has been the fuel that propelled me through many challenging terrains. A standing ovation must be given to my brother, Turjo, the unsung hero who has made the attainment of this degree possible. Through his unwavering belief in my abilities and his support, he has been the chief architect of this achievement.

In the pages that follow, I hope to honor the collective efforts of all those who have contributed to my academic journey, especially all my participants and Dr. Mozahidul Islam.

Abstract

The present study undertakes a critical analysis of the vegetable supply chain in Bangladesh, with a specific emphasis on the intermediaries' role, the impact of neoliberal and neopatrimonial policies, and the capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to tackle the associated challenges. The study uncovers a complex system of intermediaries who guarantee the accessibility of fresh produce, yet place farmers and consumers in a disadvantaged position. The control over pricing by farmers is limited due to exploitative practices by large traders and corporations, which, among others, necessitates the involvement of intermediaries. Syndicates that possess political affiliations exert considerable sway over pricing and the supply chain, and their dominance has been reinforced by long standing agricultural policies. This research delves into the correlation between the government and agricultural producers, revealing the neopatrimonial nature of governance that is supported by patronage politics, weak state institutions, and centralized decision-making that favors political patronage. The aforementioned practice results in the marginalization of the agricultural community and imposes limitations on their resource accessibility.

The present study also offers valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of the vegetable supply chain, underscoring the necessity of adopting holistic strategies that encompass both governmental and non-governmental actors. Through an extensive understanding of the experiences of intermediaries, the political dynamics, and the potential of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), policymakers and stakeholders can formulate strategies to effectively navigate the challenges that exist within the agricultural industry. The thesis, moreover, has dealt with the role of extension services, advisory programs, and market engagement and highlighted the importance of incorporating inclusive decision-making processes and promoting governmental accountability in order to establish a vegetable supply chain in Bangladesh that is both fair and sustainable.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

As per the Agricultural Statistics Yearbook of 2017, the aggregate cultivated land amounts to 154.38 *lakh*¹ hectares, where one hectare is equivalent to 2.47 acres. Conversely, based on the agricultural census data from 2019, approximately 47% of all households in the nation, equating to 16,562,974 households, are involved in agriculture. Vegetables make up a considerable component of agricultural goods. Over the past ten years, vegetable production has increased significantly in Bangladesh. According to a FAO report, Bangladesh is the third-ranked nation in the world for growing vegetables (*Bangladesh Post*, 28 February 2022). According to figures from the ministry of agriculture, 19.7 million tons² vegetables were produced nationwide in 2021–2022 (DAE, 2022). Presently, 200 different vegetable varieties are grown by farmers. Bangladesh also tops the globe in terms of the increase in arable land, according to the FAO data and the country has seen a rise in arable land of about 5% during the past several years.

On this backdrop, the present study endeavors to demonstrate the political and economic aspects of vegetable production in Bangladesh and evaluates the state's efficacy in addressing the predicaments of farmers' entitlement to a fair remuneration for their yield through a political economy lens. The central inquiry of this undertaking is to examine the correlation between the government and its vegetable producers. The study conducts a critical examination of the factors contributing to the deprivation of fair compensation for food producers in Bangladesh, a country characterized by corruption, inadequate resources, and poor governance. Specifically, the study focuses on the framing of rural intermediaries engaged in trading with farmers. The contention posited is that the matters at hand possess a multifaceted nature that encompasses both domestic and global political spheres. The project places particular emphasis on the involvement of the state in the sector, while acknowledging the significance of intergovernmental and non-governmental agencies. This thesis delves into the neopatrimonial politics of Bangladesh and its effects on governance and resource allocation. It aims to investigate the institutional effectiveness of promoting the sustenance of the framing community and others related to vegetable production, in relation to the scope of state functions. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the state's capacity and/or governance in this regard. The literature review in this

¹ 1 lakh = 100,000

² 1 ton = 907 kilogram

chapter sheds light on the compelling reasons for selecting vegetable production as a research focus.

The primary objective of my inquiry is to examine the various obstacles that hinder vegetable cultivation in Bangladesh, encompassing the stages of policy development and implementation. The present investigation centers on the actions and reactions of the state in relation to the agricultural market, development strategies and initiatives, subsidies for both farming and non-farming activities, and the discourse surrounding intermediaries in the agricultural sector in Bangladesh. It endeavors to investigate agricultural politics within the framework of the entitlement to equitable remuneration and a self-sustaining economic evaluation.

The aim of my research is to analyze the politics in the agricultural sector in Bangladesh and shed light on several crucial issues that are currently at the forefront of the country's agriculture sector analysis. The initial objective of my analysis involves a critical examination of the narrative surrounding the intermediaries operating within the vegetable supply chain, who are often subject to numerous allegations with little recognition of their contributions. Subsequently, this thesis pertains to the theoretical constructs of neopatrimonialism, governmental analysis, civil society, and media scrutiny of trader groups, state capacity, institutional efficacy, "interest politics," and patronage politics in the formulation and execution of agricultural policies. The interconnectedness of these various concerns can be attributed, in part, to the concept of effective governance. To summarize, this study aims to investigate the supply chain of vegetables in Bangladesh, with a focus on the role of the intermediaries, the state, and NGOs in ensuring the profitability of farmers. It is to be noted here that the aspect of food security is closely intertwined with the study of agricultural politics.

The study initially aimed to probe the role of intermediaries or middlemen at various levels along the supply chain. In theory, the exchange of vegetables or other agricultural products can occur through direct transactions between producers and consumers, or indirectly through intermediaries who are economic agents with expertise in the buying and selling of such products. In developing nations, intermediaries, commonly referred to as "middlemen," facilitate transactions between producers and prospective consumers, thereby serving a crucial function in connecting farmers with traders and ultimate markets (in the cities). This phenomenon is

especially prevalent in developing nations, where market inefficiencies are widespread and supply chains of fresh produce remain multi-tiered. In cases where a transaction occurs between a producer and a consumer, both parties are entitled to a portion of the transaction's surplus. In the context of a transaction, it is common for a mediator to facilitate negotiations between the producer and consumer, resulting in a surplus that is shared between the two parties. According to the economic literature, intermediaries arise due to their ability to efficiently manage transaction costs and information asymmetry.

My initial perception was simplistic and unsophisticated, viewing intermediaries as taking advantage of farmers by inflating vegetable prices and denying them fair compensation. However, this perspective failed to consider the broader political ramifications and instead acquiesced to a stereotypical portrayal of intermediaries. During the course of my fieldwork, I conducted interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders, including farmers, middlemen, policymakers, and policy implementing officials. Through this process, I arrived at the realization that attributing the challenges faced by the agriculture sector solely to middlemen is a simplistic and problematic assertion that warrants a more nuanced and critical examination. The aforementioned realization prompted me to commence an analysis of the characteristics that define a middleman, as well as any potential distinctions that may exist between various subsets of middlemen.

During my fieldwork investigating the political landscape of the agricultural industry in Bangladesh, I acquired novel perspectives regarding the discourse surrounding intermediaries. I have landed on the realization that the inability to maintain a consistent market price for vegetables and provide equitable compensation for farmers cannot be solely attributed to the deceitful practices of rural intermediaries, as is often assumed. Rather, it is a result of the political system of patronage, which is crucial for the continuity of the governing regime. The aforementioned phenomenon presents advantages and privileges for the governing class, leading to an unavoidable deficiency in the development of suitable policies for the respective beneficiary populations. This project utilized primary data and empirical observations from field research to expand upon contemporary literature pertaining to neopatrimonialism, state capacity, state-society relations, state power, and the political economy of supply chain management. The present study, thus, endeavors to investigate the phenomenon of state weakness, encompassing

both the establishment and dismantling of a state that has been unable to effectively permeate society, execute fundamental state duties, and realize an extensive array of objectives that are often geared towards optimal performance.

1.1 Literature Review

This succinct review aims to place the study in the context of the larger body of literature in Bangladesh. A lot has been written on agricultural productivity in Bangladesh generally, but in recent years, as concerns about productivity have diminished in light of claims that government spending on the industry has increased, the topic has tended to be overlooked. In the 1970s and 1980s, the conventional emphasis on agriculture sparked a significant body of work on the Green Revolution that was primarily concerned with barriers to technological adoption (e.g., Alauddin and Tisdell 1991, Hossain 1988). With a succession of scholarly assaults against the PFDS, farmer subsidies for output and inputs, market and trade liberalization, and other reforms in food sufficiency and the food system, attention shifted to these issues later on (see Ahmed 2001, Chowdhury, Farid and Roy 2006, Dorosh and Murshid 2001). Studies on market integration that were mostly focused on rice markets (Ravallion 1986, 1987, Dawson and Dey 2002) without vegetables were a corollary to this discourse (Murshid et al, 2013).

Scholarly literature has extensively studied agricultural markets and commodity chains in the Global South. Specifically, the literature has analyzed the effects of increased integration of Global South producers and wholesalers into global commodity chains that involve overseas buyers, such as supermarkets or large-scale commodity distributors. This integration is observed in various sectors, including chocolate, coffee, fish, flowers, and vegetables. Notably, Dolan and Humphrey (2001) have significantly contributed to this body of literature. Frequently, researchers employ a global commodity chain framework (Gereffi 1994) to discern the principal agents involved in these chains who possess the ability to manipulate the movement of commodities to their benefit. However, scholars have pointed out the significance of examining the social dynamics and institutional frameworks that facilitate or impede the flow of commodity chains (Hughes 2000; Jackson 2002). The examination of the daily encounters of individual agents in the Global South who operate within the food supply chains presents a prospect to gain enhanced comprehension of the evolving prospects and limitations that influence the capacity of

individual agents to cater to retailers and consumers, while preserving sustainable livelihoods (Bestor 2001; Freidberg 2004; Cadilhon et al. 2006; Ziegler 2007; West 2012; Fabinyi 2013). In their research article titled "Flex crops or flex livelihoods? The story of a volatile commodity chain in upland northern Vietnam," Annuska Derks and Ngô Thúy Hạnh examine the dynamics of commodity chains within this specific set of literature. The authors investigate the role of these chains in the "flex narratives" of the Vietnamese state and the consequences for those participating in them, with a particular emphasis on the feasibility of this cash crop for farmers on the margins. The authors have positioned the changing paths of these commodity chains within the framework of commodity chain analysis and ongoing discussions surrounding 'flex crops'. The actors involved in these chains are subsequently introduced, thereby exposing the complex and distinctive characteristics of the chains that sustain their livelihoods. The constant renegotiation of positions among cultivators, intermediaries, wholesalers, exporters, and marketplace traders is a result of uncertain financial returns and fluctuating demand, which they must navigate in order to maintain their survival. The authors of this study have conducted a thorough analysis of the supply chain of star anise, tracing its journey from farmers to consumers. They have also explored the effects of the fluctuations in global demand for this product, and the consequent volatility of financial gains over time. The aforementioned findings expose the fragmented understanding that individuals possess regarding the entirety of these commodity chains, and raise concerns regarding the Vietnamese government's strategy, or lack thereof, in advancing the promotion of this particular commodity.

The utilization of commodity chain analyses enables us to investigate a system of labor and production procedures that culminate in a finalized commodity (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1986, 159). The study emphasizes the process of a commodity's journey from its production to its consumption, shedding light on the intricate socio-economic networks and interconnections among the involved parties throughout the process. Thus far, the primary theoretical frameworks utilized in the study of commodity chains encompass global commodity chain analysis (Gereffi, 1994), global value chains (Gereffi, Humphrey, and Sturgeon, 2005), commodity networks (Raynolds, 2002), commodity circuits (Goodman, 2002), and the systems of provision approach. I borrow some aspects of the systems of provision approach here, as it emphasizes interactions between production and consumption, focusing on the ways actors assign meaning to goods at each stage along the chain (Fine and Leopold 1993). This enables a critical look at on-the-ground

connections among actors, and the operation of specific chains at a range of scales (Leslie and Reimer 1999). The approach of systems of provision has been contended to involve a more profound involvement with cultural aspects of production and consumption in comparison to other conceptual approaches, notably global value chains (Goodman 2002; Craviotti 2016). Adopting a systems of provision framework, the movement of commodities is recognized to encompass both vertical and horizontal components. The horizontal dimension pertains to the examination of factors that are present in analogous nodes throughout commodity chains, including but not limited to gender, class, and ethnicity, and how these factors may impact particular processes that connect production and consumption. Additionally, the utilization of horizontal analysis facilitates a comprehensive evaluation of the policies, procedures, and regulations that impact the development, distribution, and commercial aspects of a given product (Glennie and Thrift 1992). The vertical dimension analysis entails scrutinizing the negotiations that occur at every node of a particular commodity chain, which facilitates the movement of a product from the producer to the ultimate consumer. This is in contrast to other forms of analysis. (Bush, 2004). It is recommended that a comprehensive and detailed study, utilizing ethnographic methods, be conducted to examine the involvement of various stakeholders at different stages of the commodity supply chain. This approach can effectively address the limitations of previous research by focusing on the intricate negotiations that occur and how they are influenced by factors such as gender, social class, and ethnicity.

Adopting a systems of provision framework, the movement of commodities is recognized to encompass both vertical and horizontal aspects. The horizontal dimension pertains to the examination of factors that are present at comparable nodes throughout commodity chains, including but not limited to gender, class, and ethnicity. This dimension aims to investigate how these factors may impact particular processes that connect production and consumption. Additionally, the utilization of horizontal analysis enables a comprehensive evaluation of the policies, procedures, and regulations that impact the development, distribution, and commercial activities of a given product (Glennie and Thrift 1992). The vertical dimension analysis entails scrutinizing the negotiations that occur at each node of a particular commodity chain, which facilitates the movement of a product from the producer to the ultimate consumer. This is in contrast to other forms of analysis. (Bush, 2004). Notwithstanding the utility of these concepts, a fundamental apprehension regarding this approach is that it accords greater importance to the

vertical dimension while overlooking the significance of labor and intrahousehold negotiations (Leslie and Reimer 1999). Furthermore, Collins (2005) observes that a persistent issue in commodity chain research is the tendency to objectify corporate entities. This is one of the reasons why I integrate Weber's neopatrimonialism into my approach. My comprehensive understanding of the role of the state and its relationship with farmers in the context of my thesis was not solely derived from my reading of Weber. Rather, I realized that the neopatrimonial state perspective of Bangladesh would be the fundamental basis of my study when critically analyzing this topic. The comprehension was acquired through pursuing Dr. Mozahidul Islam's scholarly work entitled "Why Nations Fail to Feed the Poor" (2021). Therefore, my dissertation heavily relies on the research conducted by Islam regarding the political aspects of food security. My perspective diverges from that of the author, as I aim to delve deeper into the political dynamics surrounding the producers and other stakeholders, rather than solely examining the politics of agricultural produce as a consumable commodity.

The text delves into the root causes of chronic undernourishment and malnourishment in developing nations, as investigated by Mohammad Mozahidul Islam in his publication entitled 'Why Nations Fail to Feed the Poor'. The author posits that the root cause of hunger is not solely attributable to insufficient food supply, but rather is a multifaceted issue that is influenced by a confluence of political, economic, and social factors. The author initiates his argument by contesting the widely held notion that hunger is exclusively attributable to insufficient food production. The insufficiency of food production in numerous developing nations is a widely acknowledged issue. However, according to him, this is not the primary factor contributing to the prevalence of hunger. Conversely, the author posits that the manifestation of hunger is indicative of underlying systemic factors, namely poverty, inequality, and political instability.

The neopatrimonial state is identified as a significant determinant of food insecurity in developing nations. Governments frequently exhibit a tendency to prioritize the interests of the affluent while disregarding the requirements of the underprivileged, leading to insufficient allocation of resources towards agriculture and limited availability of fundamental necessities such as uncontaminated water and healthcare. Moreover, according to Islamic perspective, the worldwide economic structure, which prioritizes financial gain over communal well-being, intensifies destitution and malnourishment in underdeveloped nations. Developed nations

frequently implement trade policies that prioritize their own economic interests, often resulting in an inequitable distribution of resources and unjust competition for developing countries. The assertion made by Islam regarding the correlation between inadequate governance and malnutrition holds significant relevance to the focus of my thesis. The governance structure of Bangladesh, characterized by patron-client relationships, has resulted in a state that is deemed weak. This has contributed to insufficient investment in the agricultural sector and limited access to resources. Consequently, the small-scale farmers in Bangladesh encounter considerable obstacles in their mere subsistence, while a considerable number of consumers confront difficulties in obtaining reasonably priced and nourishing sustenance.

Moreover, given that my thesis critically examines the function of the state, it serves to enhance my comprehension of this concept. Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson's book, "Why Nations Fail: The Origin of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty," is a valuable resource that can be used in conjunction with other influential works such as Weber (who undoubtedly remain the most influential one), Fukuyama (2004), and Migdal (1994). The literary work under consideration delves into the genesis of prosperity and adversity in countries, both in terms of their economic and political dimensions. The contention put forth by the authors is that comprehending these results is contingent upon the institutions that a given society formulates. The authors differentiate between inclusive institutions that offer equitable opportunities and enable individuals to engage in economic and political activities, and extractive institutions that centralize authority and resources within a select group of individuals. The author presents several intriguing instances, such as the cases of North and South Korea, as well as the former East and West Germany. The argument posits that Korea is highly homogeneous; however, it is noteworthy that the economic status of North Korean citizens is among the lowest globally, while their South Korean counterparts are among the wealthiest. The establishment of distinct institutions that facilitate development in South Korea can be attributed solely to political factors. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) pose an inquiry regarding the contemporary causes of national failure through the analysis of various case studies and historical narratives. According to their perspective, the solution lies in emphasizing the importance of institutions. The text utilizes both past and present instances to demonstrate the influence of institutions on economic advancement, innovation, and the mitigation of poverty. The authors' deduction is that the presence of inclusive

institutions is imperative for the continuity of economic well-being. However, they caution that dominant entities will persistently endeavor to establish and uphold extractive institutions.

Expanding upon Acemoglu and Robinson's assertion, it is crucial to note that the state plays a pivotal role in the process of development, albeit contingent upon its efficacy. Stated differently, the efficacy of state intervention is contingent upon its quality rather than its quantity. It is imperative that states and markets collaborate in order to foster economic growth, rather than engage in a competitive relationship.

Undoubtedly, the role of the state is pivotal in promoting economic and social progress, and the implementation of efficient state mechanisms can facilitate an improved standard of living for individuals. However, the effectiveness of the state needs to be seen in the context of each country's socio-political culture. This thesis aims to elucidate the constraints of the unregulated market system in Bangladesh and underscore the necessity of safeguarding the interests of consumers, small enterprises, and the underprivileged. I advocate for an increased involvement of the state, not only in promoting economic and social development, but also in safeguarding citizens and facilitating the growth of markets. The utilization of economic resources by the state is aimed at facilitating the provision of goods and services, as well as the establishment of regulations and institutions that foster the expansion of the market.

It is to be mentioned here that throughout this thesis, the term "neopatrimonial state" is utilized to denote the inherent weakness and lack of institutional capacity of the state in Bangladesh. It is crucial to bear in mind that this weakness refers to the deliberate weakness that is linked to patronage politics. It is my assertion that the state's inadequacy in effectively regulating the market and executing essential measures to enhance vegetable production is correlated with the political determination of the state's elites. The contention put forth is that any issues present are primarily linked to the practice of patronage politics, rather than any deficiencies in administrative competence or economic influence.

When discussing patronage politics, it is essential to examine the mechanisms through which patron-client relationships manifest within the system. One strategy involves the utilization of power and violence. The works of Arild Engelsen Ruud are deemed as valuable resources in this particular instance. The literary works authored by Ruud, namely 'Mafia Raj: The Rule of Bosses

in South Asia' and 'The Mohol: The Hidden Power Structures of Bangladesh Local Politics', offer valuable perspectives on the intricate power dynamics and structures that are prevalent in the realm of South Asian politics. The aforementioned themes hold significant relevance to my thesis concerning the political landscape of politics in Bangladesh. Ruud's research emphasizes the significance of neopatrimonialism, governmental examination, civil society, and media oversight of trader groups as crucial factors in comprehending the political terrain of South Asia. Through an examination of the covert power dynamics inherent in the realm of local politics in Bangladesh, a more comprehensive understanding can be gained regarding the influence of these factors on the development and implementation of agricultural policies.

The literary works of Engelsen Ruud also provide insight into the notion of proficient governance, a fundamental element of my dissertation. The impact of criminal networks and local elites in the political sphere can potentially impede efficient governance and foster corruption, thereby exerting a negative influence on the agriculture sector. Hence, it is imperative to examine and comprehend these power dynamics to advance more efficient governance in the agricultural domain. The Mohol offers a comprehensive examination of the involvement of regional elites in the political landscape of Bangladesh, with potential implications for local-level governance. The aforementioned phenomenon has the potential to exert an influence on the economic viability of smallholder farmers, as well as the accessibility and cost-effectiveness of fresh food products for end consumers.

An examination of the agriculture policy and supply chain literature pertaining to Bangladesh reveals that the prevailing initiatives and efforts concerning agriculture sector in the country exhibit the following key features:

1. A significant portion of the literature available comprises research and project reports that have been financed by various donors, including but not limited to the World Bank, USAID, and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Examples of such reports include those published by the World Bank in 1977, 1979, and 1992, as well as those authored by Ahmed et al. in 2004 and 2007, and the World Bank in 2004 and 2006. According to scholarly sources, it has been suggested that the primary instigators of agriculture policy reforms in Bangladesh are donors, specifically USAID and the World

Bank. These claims have been made by various authors, including Montgomery (1983), Shahadat Ullah (1988), IFPRI (1993), Adams (1998), and Chowdhury & Haggblade (2000).

2. The majority of studies on agriculture in Bangladesh are primarily focused on the economic perspective, with only a small number of studies deviating from this trend (Ahmed, Quisumbing & Hoddinott, 2007; Ali et al., 2008; Hossain & Deb, 2009; Chowdhury, Farid & Roy, 2010; Hossain, 200; Shahabuddin, 2010).
3. Numerous works of literature within the discipline exhibit a resemblance to the government's dissemination of its own propaganda.
4. The literature frequently exhibits a notable absence of a multidisciplinary perspective, resulting in a limited comprehension of the complexities underlying the issues that exist in this sector.

The thesis is positioned amidst a set of these features that are deemed deficient in the current body of literature. However, there is an additional aspect to consider. Intentionally, my thesis refrains from referring to marginal farmers as peasants and does not situate the study within the domain of Peasant Studies, despite the topic's typical inclusion within this field. However, my research did draw upon the insights presented in articles published in the *Journal of Peasant Studies*.

According to Henry Bernstein's perspective, the contemporary phase of globalization has effectively addressed the longstanding issue of agrarian capital accumulation (2006, 2009). The author posits that designating specific social structures in the developing world as peasant communities presents issues stemming from a sentimental desire to preserve a connection to the past. Byres' analysis of class formation in rural India highlights the variability of agricultural transformation across diverse socio-economic contexts, and the author noted that the implementation of Green Revolution techniques and the proliferation of market capitalism in the agricultural sector did not mandate a comprehensive overhaul of agrarian social classes in India (Byres, 1981). The author posited that the process of rural proletarianization is not solely contingent upon the depeasantization or proletarianization of the peasantry. The thesis of the 'demise of the peasantry' is a type of economic reductionism that posits the idea that

globalization has altered "world-historical relations" to such an extent that agrarian transformations and the dispossession of peasants are now widespread occurrences.

According to Araghi (2009), the phenomenon of 'proletarianization' is indeed a present-day reality. However, it is important to note that the contemporary form of peasant dispossession is distinct from its classical counterpart. Specifically, in the global South, peasants may still maintain legal ownership over certain 'means of production'. Nevertheless, the absence of a 'developmental state' has resulted in the loss of 'non-market access to the means of subsistence' such as public welfare support. Bernstein and McMichael devote significant effort to emphasizing the developmental state's contribution to delaying the process of peasant dispossession. However, their ultimate analyses are restricted to the unifying influence of global capital. The aforementioned generalizations offer useful conceptual frameworks, and it is evident that globalization exerts a significant influence on the configuration of national economies in the present-day global context. According to Partha Chatterjee's (2008) perspective, the present-day capitalist development observed in nations like China, India, and Bangladesh facilitates the simultaneous existence of the peasant mode of production and a capitalist economy. The author posits that the state undertakes the responsibility of mitigating certain detrimental consequences of the process of primitive accumulation executed by corporate capital in said nations.

Chatterjee's argument is not exempt from criticism, as it contains an erroneous assumption that microcredit initiatives in rural areas do not prioritize profitability. The author challenges prevailing notions that the prevalence of neoliberalism has resulted in the complete retreat of the state from the economic sphere of developing nations. Notwithstanding this inclination, Chatterjee posits that the interests of smallholders serve as a basis for the legitimacy of private property. Moreover, their persistent reproduction serves an ideological purpose for capital and its corresponding state. Postcolonial nations have successfully persuaded subordinate social groups to maintain the bourgeois framework of the state, which predominantly stems from the remnants of colonial governance. The distinct placement of the postcolonial state plays a crucial role in upholding the existing political and social order, as it enables the state machinery to provide concessional aid to non-capitalist groups, thereby facilitating the process of capital accumulation.

Instances of this nature have been observed in Bangladesh, wherein farmers have engaged in confrontations with law enforcement personnel, and demonstrators from the farming community have been subjected to gunfire by paramilitary forces. These protests were staged to oppose the authorization granted to Asia Energy, a British energy conglomerate, to commence operations of an open-pit coal mine on their arable land. The coexistence of the expansion of small-scale peasant and agricultural labor holdings alongside a capitalist restructuring aimed at depeasantizing the economy presents a challenging paradox to elucidate. The phenomenon of agricultural holdings being subdivided can be partially attributed to population growth. However, this explanation falls short in elucidating the concurrent increase in the number of peasant and overall farm households. A significant number of researchers and the World Bank have documented an elevated degree of land ownership concentration among large landholders in the rural regions of Bangladesh. This phenomenon has resulted in a division within the agrarian classes that hold land. According to Bhaduri et al. (1986, 1988), the polarization process results in a paradoxical stabilization of the small peasantry by creating additional income-generating opportunities.

In the course of conducting fieldwork, it has been observed that an increasing segment of these “peasants”, particularly those situated at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum, supplement their primary income by engaging in part-time labor on the lands of others and pursuing seasonal employment opportunities within the expanding casual non-farm and informal sectors. Notwithstanding, Bhaduri et al.’s (1986, 1988) account of the continued existence of small-scale agriculture fails to account for the significant influence of a key player - the state - when viewed through a political economy lens.

Given the aforementioned arguments, it can be contended that the classification of marginal farmers in Bangladesh as peasants is not warranted. The notion of 'peasantry' presents difficulties when applied to present-day agrarian changes in developing regions, as it assumes a degree of uniformity and permanence in the rural social class system that is becoming more disjointed and variable. In the present scenario, there has been a significant shift in the nature of peasant dispossession. Although marginal farmers in Bangladesh may possess legal ownership of some of their means of production, they do not have non-market access to the means of subsistence. This makes them susceptible to economic and social marginalization.

It is important to acknowledge that the usage of the term 'peasant' can be contingent upon the particular historical and socio-economic milieu. The term 'peasantry' has been subject to varying interpretations among scholars, and its connotation and relevance may be influenced by wider political and ideological discourses. Hence, it is imperative to conduct a nuanced examination of the distinct social, economic, and political determinants that influence the status of various groups within the wider agrarian framework before making any definitive assertions about their classification as 'peasants'.

1.2. Methodology

Here, I give a more reflective account of my fieldwork, paying particular attention to the techniques used for data gathering and analysis.

1.2.1 Field work: some methodological perspectives

My main goal was to look into the structure and operation of the chain itself in order to assess the influence of the various players along the agri-supply chain in Bangladesh. I was particularly interested in the interactions between middlemen and farmers. This study does so by utilizing both document analyses and interviews, two sets of qualitative data. The design and methodology of the study are tailored to the particular research questions. I will first go over the methods before outlining my experience in the field before presenting the theory supporting my research to explain how this research process evolved and how decisions about research methods were made in this section.

1.2.2. Research Settings

In order to collect data, interviews were conducted among farmers and middlemen in two upazilas of *Jessore*³, a district situated in the south-western part of Bangladesh, in *Sutipara*⁴ of *Dhamrai upazila*⁵ of Dhaka, and throughout Dhaka, ranging from interviews with representatives

³ Jessore is located 195km South of Dhaka

⁴ Sutipara is located 45km North-West of Dhaka

⁵ An upazila is a sub-district

of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management and offices, universities, other government and non-government offices, and residents in randomly selected places within the two districts. Special attention was paid to understanding the syndicates that dominate the whole industry, which is why ethnography and random interviews were conducted at *Karwan Bazar*, the biggest wholesale market for fresh produce in the country located in Dhaka.

A series of informal interviews were also conducted prior to the formal interviews to gain a more comprehensive understanding of people's perceptions of the supply chain's functionality, the role of middlemen, and the efficacy of government policies. These unstructured conversations were especially beneficial for creating a "question bank" that would serve as a guide for formal interviews. The study locations were also chosen based on how well they fit with the topic and my familiarity with the villages. On the other hand, a few of the main sources of the documents required for this project were the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), and the Food and Agriculture Organization Corporate Statistical Database (FAOStat).

1.2.3. Entering the field

To formulate my research questions, establish a hypothesis, and devise a meticulous plan for conducting fieldwork, I conducted an extensive review of literature from diverse disciplines that were relevant to my investigation. During August 2022, I embarked on a research fieldwork trip from Oslo to Dhaka. Over the course of the subsequent two months, I engaged in the collection of data from the field and pursued a process of education informed by novel research inquiries and an updated research framework. A fieldwork strategy was developed whereby the allotted time frame was partitioned to achieve multiple objectives. During the initial fortnight, I underwent a crucial period of development, wherein I dedicated my efforts towards acquiring the necessary skills to conduct interviews that yield significant insights. Throughout this period, I participated in various informal dialogues with a diverse group of individuals, encompassing scholars, experts, agriculturists, merchants, and additional parties. The present discussion served to refine and strengthen the assumptions, research questions, and hypotheses that were formulated through a comprehensive review of the relevant literature prior to commencing the empirical investigation. The aforementioned dialogues were of significance in providing me with

a comprehensive and refined understanding of the state of affairs in the vegetable supply chain of Bangladesh. During a six-week period, interviews were conducted in Dhaka, Jessore, and Dhamrai. The transcription and analysis of the data were intentionally deferred until I returned to Oslo in November. I deemed the fieldwork period sufficient for data collection, but did take detailed field notes and recorded observations upon returning from each field visit.

The initial data source: Individual, in-depth interviews conducted in a one-to-one setting, focused group discussions (FGD) and informal interviews.

Drawing on the research conducted by Zølner, Rasmusen, and Hansen (2007: 125–147), my approach involved acquiring an extensive comprehension of the research settings and institutional contexts prior to commencing the qualitative interviews. This was aimed at enhancing my ability to attentively listen to my informants. After conducting a comprehensive literature review for six months and engaging in extensive interview preparation in the field for a month and two weeks, I developed a robust level of confidence in conducting interviews. The implementation of this planning was deemed imperative due to various factors. Initially, it was important to ascertain any deficiencies in the existing records and literature, as this aided in elucidating the nature of the data that could reasonably be anticipated from the respondents. The process of conducting interviews with experts can pose difficulties, particularly in the context of Bangladesh, as highlighted by Meuser and Nagal (as cited in Flick, 2002:89-91). Consequently, I have arrived at the realization that there are two areas that require improvement. Firstly, the interview guide necessitates a more robust directive function to exclude unproductive topics. Secondly, I must conduct a thorough background study to appropriately establish topics for each respondent. I dedicated a minimum of one day to conducting research on diverse subjects for every interview, which encompassed examining the interviewer's professional background and area of specialization. Subsequently, I modified the "question bank" to serve as an interview guide tailored to each interviewee.

The aim of the study was to employ multiple techniques to identify interviews and ensure a comprehensive and varied sample. The methodology employed for interview selection and sample generation involved the utilization of both snowball sampling and purposeful sampling techniques, as referenced by Patton (1997: 197) and Babbie (2010: 193). Babbie (2010: 193) posits that the act of selecting a sample based on a complete comprehension of the population, its

constituents, and the objective of the study is commonly referred to as purposeful or judgmental sampling. Purposive sampling was employed in selecting a limited number of participants for the interviews and sources for the research. The initial participant in each cohort was ascertained, and the subsequent respondents were recruited via a snowball sampling technique. The objective of the "snowball" strategy is to identify a limited number of participants who meet the criteria and subsequently employ their referrals to locate additional subjects (Gobo, 2004: 449; Neuman, 2000: 199-200; Warren, 2002: 85-8). In order to initiate the snowball sampling technique, I requested that all individuals I encountered "provide the necessary details for identifying additional members of said population whom they may have acquaintance with" (Babbie, 2010: 193). The initial step involved identifying significant stakeholders and subsequently establishing communication with participants following the implementation of snowball and purposive sampling techniques. Two of my three intended demographic segments were academics and traders/farmers, both of which were relatively accessible for the purpose of conducting interviews. However, the process of conducting interviews with a significant number of high-profile participants posed a considerable challenge. One intriguing discovery from the qualitative interviews pertains to the discernible variations in the degree of impromptu responses among the decision-makers. Specifically, the politicians and officials currently holding positions of power (i.e., the incumbent government) exhibited a sense of caution towards being interviewed and were disinclined to engage in a comprehensive discussion on the matter. Conversely, ex-politicians and politicians belonging to the opposition demonstrated a greater willingness to furnish particulars. Several interviewees requested that I temporarily halt the digital recording device to allow for the insertion of forthcoming remarks or ideas.

Initially, my plan was to conduct a limited number of comprehensive individual interviews with various respondents to gain a more profound comprehension. The aim of conducting qualitative interviews was to gather precise information regarding the experiences of individuals in their respective fields, such as the policymaking process for policy makers. Additionally, the interviews were intended to provide valuable insight into the perceptions of the respondents. I formulated a set of targeted inquiries for the interviewer, prioritizing factual data, resulting in the conduction of a semi-structured interview. The aim of conducting semi-structured interviews in this research was to elicit pre-existing knowledge in a manner that can be expressed through responses, thereby enhancing accessibility (Flick, 2002: 84). The interview questions

predominantly adopted an interrogative format, employing the "how," "why," "what," "when," and "who" interrogatives, as opposed to the binary "yes" or "no" format. This approach was intended to prompt the interviewees to provide comprehensive and detailed accounts of their primary concerns. The author employed a method of inquiry that involved posing questions that were designed to elicit both descriptive and evaluative responses. My aim was to facilitate the interviews in a manner that would enable the participants to focus on the subjects they deemed significant. The fruitful interviews yielded valuable data and provided noteworthy perspectives on the personal experiences of the interviewees, which were highly motivating. Consequently, the discourse was unrestricted in its progression from one subject matter to another, rather than being limited by inflexible parameters.

During the course of my fieldwork, I undertook a total of 12 comprehensive individual interviews and facilitated several focused group discussions (FGD). These transactions involved farmers and intermediaries. It is important to note that certain question sets in the interview guide for farmers and intermediaries exhibited similarities. The decision to maintain the status quo was deliberate in order to ensure that the compiled data underwent a process of verification and validation by both parties. Additional informal interviews were conducted, involving a diverse group of participants including academic specialists in the agro supply chain sector of Bangladesh, political figures, government officials, former government officials, employees of international organizations and multinational corporations, activists, civil society members, and NGO representatives. Emphasizing the inclusion of participants within this specific category is of utmost importance, as a significant portion of the analysis presented in this thesis pertains to prevalent notions regarding middlemen in the political and civil spheres. These notions are primarily held among individuals who do not belong to the producer category or any of the five major intermediary groups. The final set of interviews were conducted in an informal manner and involved actors who are involved in the trading, storage, and handling of vegetables in some of the largest wholesale markets in Bangladesh, namely Karwan Bazar, Mirpur Bazaar, and Gulistan Bazar. This category encompassed business proprietors and merchants operating within the vegetable market towards the terminal phase of the supply chain.

The interviews conducted did not conform to a uniform fundamental interview protocol. Tailored themes were created for each interview, as previously mentioned, due to the specific preparation

required for each one. During the process of formulating my concepts, I endeavored to modify the methodology of conducting interviews. The principal themes, nonetheless, persisted consistently during the course of my field research. The majority of the interviews had a duration ranging from 30 to 50 minutes, with a few being slightly shorter. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that certain participants exhibited a greater inclination towards verbal expression and a desire for their perspectives to be acknowledged. The interviews were explicitly stated to be conducted solely for the purpose of a thesis and do not guarantee any recommendations for policy or developmental modifications. Nonetheless, it appeared that the individuals who exhibited a greater inclination towards verbal expression experienced a sense of solace or were liberated by solely recounting their adversities. Or of achieving success in certain limited instances. Individuals who exhibited a proclivity towards brevity in their responses or demonstrated a higher frequency of verbal contributions were either motivated by fear of politically influential individuals or local authorities, or were officials of the Agricultural Extension Department who were apprehensive of their superiors. Alternatively, these individuals may have already benefited from favorable circumstances and were disinclined to jeopardize their current advantageous position. Despite my repeated assurances of strict confidentiality and ethical conduct in conducting interviews, the fear expressed by the participants remained potent. Nonetheless, I endeavor to consider this apprehension while conducting my data analysis in subsequent sections. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for the purpose of my analysis. The entirety of the interviews were carried out in the Bengali language. To facilitate coding and analysis, the transcripts of each interview were translated from Bengali to English subsequent to their transcription.

1.2.4. The second source of data: document analysis

Esmark and Triantafillou (2007: 99) have categorized documents into three distinct types: (a) physical artifacts, which are non-textual and non-visual, such as buildings, dams, and weapons; (b) audio-visual materials, including radio programs and video recordings; and (c) text materials, such as reports, books, journals, and newspapers. While audio-visual materials did offer some insights, this study prioritized text-based materials due to their relevance to the research topic. In the current era of globalization, obtaining papers may not pose a significant challenge. However, exercising prudence in evaluating the quality of the documents is imperative. Scott (1990)

outlines four prerequisites for utilizing a document in social research, as expounded in his publication, *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources*.

- **Authenticity:** The authenticity of a document can be ascertained by identifying certain indicators such as internal coherence in its presentation and style, dependable antecedents, and acknowledged authorship.
- **Credibility:** The assessment of the reliability and veracity of the narrative presented in the document is commonly referred to as credibility.
- **Representativeness:** The process of assessing the conformity of a document to its genre is referred to as representativeness. In the event of a deviation, the task involves analyzing how a particular rendition of an occurrence relates to or omits others.
- **Significance:** The significance of a document refers to its level of clarity and comprehensibility, as well as its relevance within the social and political context in which it was produced. Please refer to May's (2001) work on pages 189-190 and Vromen's (2010) publication on pages 262-263.

To scrutinize the sources of documents for this research, an assessment grounded on four criteria is evaluated. The aforementioned documents were obtained from diverse sources, encompassing literature on Peasant Studies, Agrarian Change, the governance scenario in Bangladesh, the political economy of Bangladesh, facets of poverty and development in Bangladesh, in addition to reports on development and policy project work from the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and donors, expert reports, and documents from various NGO offices, such as policy briefs. The crucial components of this inquiry were meticulously assessed and amalgamated to provide appropriate context. I maintained a diverse perspective by regularly referring to scholarly works and original sources. The extensive body of scholarly literature and source reports provided valuable support in contextualizing and developing the research framework.

Furthermore, I allocated a portion of my time to visiting various offices, including those affiliated with distinct government ministries, international non-governmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations. Additionally, I had the opportunity to explore the Bangladesh National Archives and Library. This study collected data on the public discourse, political matters, and supply chain crises pertaining to fresh produce in Bangladesh by examining archived articles from Bangladeshi daily newspapers and current news pieces. Additional policy

documents were collected from various offices and ministries, with a particular emphasis on the Department of Agricultural Extension and the Directorate General (DG DAE).

1.2.5. Research Methods and Method Triangulation

The methodology employed in agricultural research is rapidly shifting towards a participatory framework that prioritizes cooperation, interpretation, and the integration of diverse forms of knowledge and data acquisition. Mendez, Bacon, and Cohen (2013) posit that this phenomenon leads to an increased level of attention being devoted to a diverse range of viewpoints. My research incorporates an ethnographic analysis as I deem it crucial to consider the significance of these values. In order to get a deeper understanding of this complex topic, I have, in addition to conducting interviews and taking part in focus groups, engaged in participant observation. In addition to this, this offers a more comprehensive background for the other (Stewart 1998). The method triangulation technique comprises several fundamental components, including ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, open and semi-structured interviews, and open-ended and closed-ended questions.

The method of participant observation has proven to be a valuable tool for my research as it has enabled me to gain insight into the nuances of my informants' production and trade practices, as well as the viewpoints of government officials and scholars. Additionally, it has enabled me to integrate myself into the community where my informants are located and establish trustworthy relationships with them. Neil Evernden posits that a comprehensive evaluation of events necessitates firsthand experience with them (Evernden, 1985, p. 59). This exhibits the experiential aspect of the methodology employed in my research. By intensive fieldwork, I was not only able to acquire insight into the roles of the producers, mediators, and authorities, but I also became a participant in these processes to some extent. This facilitated my acquisition of comprehension regarding the functions of the producers, mediators, and authorities. It is widely acknowledged that a primary criticism of participant observation as a primary research methodology is the potential for biased perception, commonly referred to as visualism. The forthcoming section will delve into the potential challenges that may emerge from this matter, specifically in the context of ethical considerations.

Aikenhead and Michell (2011) posit that Eurocentric science is predominantly representational, rather than being grounded in reality. The authors contend that the perception of truth is influenced by human subjectivity and the selection of methodological frameworks, as stated on page 89 of their publication. Consequently, a plausible inference from the statement is that the veracity of the matter will become increasingly intricate with the inclusion of supplementary perspectives and cogitations in the inquiry. Consequently, I have endeavored to amalgamate a multitude of diverse perspectives. Open, unstructured, and semi-structured formats have been employed in conducting interviews. The research methodology involved conducting open and unstructured interviews with the participants, which facilitated the elicitation of unforeseen information. Throughout the course of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted as deemed necessary to address any informational gaps that arose. This action was taken with the intention of acquiring a maximal amount of information. The author gained valuable insights into the perspectives of both participants and respondents through active engagement with the former and attentive listening and dialogue with the latter. Throughout the entirety of my research, an actor-oriented approach was employed, with a focus on the viewpoints and encounters of individuals within the local context (Aikenhead and Michell 2011, p. 70). The actor-oriented approach is based on the fundamental concept that various social forms emerge in circumstances that are either similar or identical to each other. Many actors make efforts, both cognitively and organizationally, to come to terms with the situations they are faced with in a manner that is unique to them. Therefore, an explanation of uneven patterns of social behavior must be based on the concept of "knowing active persons" (Knorr-Cetina, 1981:4) rather than simply being understood as the result of the varied influence of broad social factors. Understanding active individuals is a crucial component of social behavior, including but not limited to ecological shifts, demographic pressures, and integration into global capitalism. The primary goal of analysis is therefore to discover and characterize a variety of actor strategies and motivations, the conditions under which they emerge, how they interlock with one another, whether or not they are feasible or effective in resolving specific issues, and the broader societal ramifications of those strategies and motivations (Long, 2012). Meanwhile, I underlined the need of recognizing and valuing the value of local knowledge and understanding of the traditional traditions of trading in fresh fruit. This was done in order to avoid any potential conflicts.

It is noteworthy that the thesis and project as a whole were subject to temporal and spatial limitations, which hindered the comprehensive discussion of all twelve interviews. Consequently, a select subset of the interviews has been expounded upon in detail within the empirical chapters. The rationale behind this decision was rooted in the impracticability of providing comprehensive coverage of all the interviews. However, the aspects that may not be readily evident in the exposition of my research findings are nevertheless indispensable for attaining a more profound understanding of both the empirical data and the overarching analysis. The analytical perspective is imperative for my approach and methodologies, as explicated in the theoretical framework. The literature review is regarded as the scholarly aspect of this inquiry.

1.2.6. Data Processing and Analysis

The initial stage of my fieldwork involved active engagement in the field and conducting interviews with individuals present in the area. I availed myself of the opportunity that presented itself subsequent to the completion of the fieldwork to transcribe fieldnotes and record my reflections. Furthermore, drawing from my prior fieldwork expertise, I held the conviction that documenting verbal reflections on field observations, personal impressions, and noteworthy minutiae was of great significance. The aforementioned details proved to be valuable during the examination due to the inclusion of participant observation as a facet of my data collection methodology. The interviews were transcribed through the utilization of NVivo software subsequent to the initial auditory review of the interview recordings. Ultimately, I was accountable for programming all of the research data. The codes that were predominantly employed by the author include fair price, subsidy, loan, syndicate, bepari (denoting a cluster of intermediaries), truck cost, seed and fertilizer cost, faria (denoting a cluster of intermediaries), district agricultural extension officer, and case-specific codes. To be candid, the activities of transcription and coding primarily facilitated organizational processes rather than yielding significant benefits in other domains. Due to the fact that the majority of interviews were conducted in the native languages of the countries involved, a significant amount of information was not able to be accurately conveyed through translation. Despite the challenges, the intricate procedures involved in collecting and processing data have facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of the received data input. Moreover, the iterative process of listening to recordings for transcription purposes has been instrumental in refining my arguments.

The research chapters are categorized into three distinct sections based on empirical evidence. The paper discusses three main topics. Firstly, it examines the functions of intermediaries and their conventional perceptions. Secondly, it investigates the political aspects of vegetable provision by connecting the author's hypotheses of neopatrimonialism and neoliberalism with empirical evidence. Lastly, it presents a case study of a non-traditional approach to the vegetable supply chain. In Part 1 of my analysis, I delineated the customary functions of the five primary intermediaries and explicated the problematic nature of exclusively vilifying them. The subsequent section serves to establish a connection between my theoretical framework, thereby facilitating an elucidation of the precise challenges that exist within the vegetable supply chain. The author endeavored to conclude the analytical chapter of the thesis on a positive note by presenting an example of an alternative model in the final section. The author aims to maintain the reader's comprehension and engagement by presenting the explored concepts in a manner that is not excessively theoretical.

An investigation into a vocation with a long-standing history, coupled with potentially sensitive data (not necessarily due to the content per se, but rather the subject matter and its source), requires a written approach that can effectively convey the data with precision. Due to this rationale, I have opted to integrate unstructured writing while maintaining a neutral stance, as evidenced in the exposition of the empirical evidence.

1.2.7. Ethical considerations

This research project has been approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). The interview process adheres to the ethical principles of social research as outlined by Bryman (2016). Throughout the research process, I aimed to ensure no harm to participants, obtain informed consent from participants, ensure no invasion of privacy, and provide clarity of the intent and purpose of the research. Each instance of communication with prospective informants entailed an initial presentation of my research endeavor and a formal consent form (refer to Appendix 2 for the Information Letter and Consent Form). The present study employs semi-structured research methods, and the participants have provided their informed consent to participate in the interviews. All formal interviews were recorded, and the researcher took supporting notes during the interviews. Consistent with the data protection policy, the

aforementioned files are retained within the hard drive of my designated computer, located within the confines of the SUM academic department. All instances of recorded video, audio, or written documentation were deleted from the mobile devices utilized for the purpose of recording. No questions about ethnicity or political affiliation were asked.

I took into account the affective atmospheres in order to facilitate a comfortable environment for participants to engage in conversation. There may have been a chance that participants would not be able to speak freely, thinking that a business rival saw him/her talking to an outsider and might reveal information that would be bad for their business. Or just the fear or being found out about government officials that the participant had something negative to say about them. Privacy issues are very important to consider in these contexts. All relevant factors have been duly considered prior to initiating contact with a prospective informant. My interactions often started with an informal conversation to build trust and explain the nature of my research. It was of utmost importance for me to prioritize the respondent's agency in determining their preferred method and timing of communication, as well as their willingness to proceed.

1.2.8. Positionality

It is imperative to acknowledge that researchers possess inherent biases to varying degrees. Given my position within the qualitative paradigm, it is crucial to contemplate the process of data collection and analysis, as well as my relationship with the individuals from whom I am collecting data. The challenge at hand has been approached through the utilization of reflexivity. Seale (2018) posits that reflexivity encompasses the recognition of the researcher's specific positionality in relation to the research, which subsequently influences the approach adopted, the inquiries posed, and the analysis generated (Seale, 2018, p. 224). Throughout the research process, I have employed this approach to foster a more nuanced comprehension of intricate matters and facilitate a discerning examination of partiality, as suggested by Sultana (2007). Hence, I acknowledge the influence of my familial political background, wherein my father has been actively involved in left-wing politics and has pursued research in the realm of politics and sociology. I have assimilated a significant portion of the ideologies of my father, leading to a fundamental positioning of their ideas at the antithetical end of the spectrum in relation to the present fascist regime in Bangladesh (Center for National studies, 2015; Anik, 2018; Shihahb,

2021). Nonetheless, appropriate measures have been implemented, particularly with regards to the governing authorities of Bangladesh, to ensure that their influence does not impede the integrity of the data and analysis presented in this thesis. Achieving this has presented a certain degree of difficulty. I have personally encountered the oppressive actions of the current government and witnessed the abduction and involuntary disappearance, referred to as *goon*, of my friends and colleagues. I experience persistent apprehension regarding the safety and well-being of my family. These harrowing experiences give rise to certain notions regarding the ones responsible. However, it is noteworthy to highlight that a deliberate attempt was made to relinquish all aforementioned notions while composing this thesis.

My academic pursuits have been shaped by my prior educational experiences, which have fostered my curiosity in comprehending disparities, hegemonic systems, and mechanisms of societal transformation. My theoretical framework for data analysis has been influenced by their academic background. In addition, with more than ten years of experience as a community organizer, advocate, and manager in the non-profit industry, I acknowledge my inclination towards favoring the significance of grassroots interventions. The act of introspecting on one's own bias and positionality throughout the research process was deemed crucial in order to guarantee the incorporation of a diverse range of perspectives. The author acknowledges that complete objectivity is unattainable for researchers. However, by engaging in meta-reflection through personal fieldwork diary entries, I have attempted to mitigate the influence of their own background and biases on the research. This approach has been employed to minimize the potential for bias to affect data collection and analysis. This constitutes an additional incentive for the determination to incorporate segments of my personal annotations within the empirical sections.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

The central theme of this thesis pertains to the characterization of the state, institutional efficacy, and state capability within the context of Bangladesh, with the aim of comprehending the structural incongruity of the agro supply chain in the country. To achieve this objective, I endeavor to acquire a deeper understanding of the state's natural environment and highlight the neopatrimonial and neoliberal nature of the associations that form its foundation. This chapter comprises four primary sections. The initial two segments scrutinize the empirical substantiation concerning the customization of authority, in conjunction with the evolution of clientelism and the patronage of the neoliberal economic framework. The present study employs Mozahidul Islam's utilization of Weber's neopatrimonialization concept to explicate the politics of food security in his book *Why Nations Fail to Feed the Poor* (2022). Therefore, I am immensely grateful to him. Conversely, the utilization of the neoliberalization framework within this thesis facilitates an explanation of the effectiveness of state-provided resources aimed at supporting farmers, contingent upon their existence and sufficiency. Furthermore, the present study endeavors to illustrate the utility of neopatrimonialism and the neoliberal economic paradigm in elucidating the relationship between the state and its farmers, and the ensuing consequences in Bangladesh.

The present thesis aims to focus solely on the concepts of neopatrimonialism and neoliberalism, without delving into the political history of the state. The initial objective is to provide a comprehensive definition and explanation of these two concepts. Subsequently, the study will endeavor to present an overview of the implications of these concepts on the agro supply chain in Bangladesh. It is argued that the patron-client system in Bangladesh enables the ruling class to personalize state authority. In Bangladesh, the political elites engage in the formation of alliances and networks as a means to monopolize state power, and rely on interpersonal interactions to effectively pursue their objectives. Thus, the interactions are moderated by state elites who employ elements of the political and state systems that have a discernible effect on the agricultural supply chain. Conversely, the manner in which the state intervenes in the agricultural industry is indicative of the neoliberal perspective that an increased emphasis on market forces is the prescribed means of achieving economic advancement. The present study examines the extent to which a particular perspective lacks contextualization and is flawed in its understanding

of state and legal regulation. Subsequently, the subsequent chapters provide empirical evidence to support this argument.

1.3.1. Neopatrimonialism and its implications

The commencement of this section necessitates the clarification of patrimonialism, as it denotes the coexistent operation of the Weberian principles of "patrimonial" and "legal-rational" domination. Prior to formulating the concept of "neopatrimonialism," it is imperative to establish a clear definition of patrimonialism, as articulated by Medard (1982) and cited in Clapham (1985: 48) and Bratton and Van de Walle (1997: 62). As per Weber's (1978: 1041) definition, a patrimonial state is characterized by the explicit dependence of practically everything on personal considerations, including the attitude towards the specific applicant and their request, as well as personal connections, favors, promises, and privileges. This definition is cited in Marcus's (2010: 17) work. In this framework, wherein political authorities and their cohorts participate in the transfer of resources, policies are inclined towards a particularistic rather than a universalistic approach. As noted by Islam (2012), the "rule of man" supersedes the "rule of law," and there is a propensity among political officials to obscure the distinction between the public and private domains (Eisenstadt, 1973; Callaghy, 1984; Budd, 2004). In other words, according to Weber (1978), Theobald (1982), and Bratton & Van de Walle (1994: 458), the allocation of ruling power is attributed to an individual rather than a position, and allegiance to a leader is based on customary legitimacy and personal devotion, rather than legal-rational legitimacy. Conversely, the legal-rational authority, as identified by Weber, constitutes the basis for the establishment and validation of the post-colonial state. This holds true in principle. The establishment of patrimonial power in developing countries after colonialism is not based on conventional legitimacy, but rather on modern modes of engagement between patrons and clients. Scholars such as Eisenstadt (1973), Medard (1982, 2002), and Clapham (1982, 1985) have advanced the study of neopatrimonialism in response to the incongruity between the Weberian conception of patrimonial governance and the political realities of contemporary developing nations. Following the emergence of "democracy" in the 1990s, leaders encountered mounting challenges in establishing adequate legitimacy through patrimonial relations. According to Marcus (2010: 117), this circumstance posed a greater challenge for leaders in maintaining their authority. Given the changing circumstances, a significant number of leaders in

developing nations are endeavoring to retain their authority by employing diverse novel strategies, which can be comprehended more effectively by invoking the notion of neopatrimonialism. According to Clapham's citation of Medard (1985), neopatrimonialism is typically characterized as a mode of organization in which a political and administrative system that is formally constructed along legal-rational lines is pervaded by relationships of a broadly patrimonial nature. To clarify, the aforementioned concept refers to the amalgamation of two distinct forms of political authority, specifically patrimonial authority and legal-rational bureaucratic authority. In a neopatrimonial government, the highest-ranking official possesses unbridled and immeasurable authority to the maximum degree feasible. The act of providing a service is not necessarily motivated by a desire to benefit the public, but rather may be driven by personal interests and patronage, rather than adherence to philosophical or legal principles. According to Clapham's research, interpersonal relationships tend to follow the patrimonial model of vassal and lord, rather than the rational-legal model of inferior and superior. Consequently, individuals' conduct is often adjusted to reflect their personal status, rather than to advance an official goal (Clapham, 1985: 48, as cited in Islam, 2022). In comparison to social practice, which is often distinguished by its individualistic nature and informal structure, the prevailing public norms in such regimes are characterized by their formality and rationality. Neopatrimonial regimes exhibit a complex interdependence between informal and formal structures, with varying degrees of influence, as noted by Bratton and Van de Walle (1994) and Marcus (2010: 117).

The neopatrimonial state is characterized by the perception that the state is an extension of the leader's property, and that the leader exercises control with the aid of clients who receive compensation for their loyalty. The personalization of power is the primary characteristic that distinguishes the neopatrimonial state. Neopatrimonialism is characterized by various instances that underscore the centrality of leaders' ability to personalize their authority and circumvent responsibility. This new mode of control is highlighted by Khan (2005: 714). Merely relying on patronage may not always be adequate for a regime to achieve its objective of centralizing state power. Consequently, such regimes often resort to alternative strategies. In instances where the ruling regime perceives civil society as a threat to its authority, neopatrimonial mechanisms will be employed to weaken its influence. According to Bratton and Van de Walle (1994), such actions would not only undermine the foundation for anti-systemic change, but also eradicate any

autonomous sources of authority, thereby weakening the overall system. Bratton and Van de Walle (1994) cite Migdal's (1988) work, which illustrates how the apprehension of rivals drives despots to undermine the state's institutions that could otherwise establish their authority (p. 462). An instance of this behavior is expounded upon in the "Positionality" segment of the Methodology chapter within this thesis, specifically referencing the case of Didarul Bhuiyan and his associates.

As per Scott's (1972: 92) definition, the patron-client relationship is a distinct form of two-person ties that involves an instrumental friendship. It is characterized by an individual of higher socioeconomic status (patron) utilizing their influence and resources to provide protection or benefits, or both, to a person of lower status (client). In return, the client reciprocates by offering general support and assistance, including personal services, to the patron.

Throughout the course of its history, Bangladeshi society has been increasingly dependent on a complex and dense network of patron–client relationships among individuals. In particular, rural society is characterized by a high degree of disorganization and a hierarchical structure that is founded on very minor distinctions in rank and status (Kochanek, 1993: 44). The identities of those in the upper classes began to shift as the colonial period progressed, initially as a consequence of the "Permanent Settlement" in 1793 and subsequently as a result of the development of business, politics, and other forms of elite formation (Islam, 2022). These changes occurred as a result of the emergence of various forms of elite formation. A highly stratified society that was founded on land interests was the result of subsequent land policies implemented during the colonial period. As a direct consequence of this finding, it was discovered that the following agricultural classes and groups compose rural society with hierarchical position and prestige: landlords/capitalist farmers, rich peasants, middle-class peasants, poor/marginal peasants, and landless laborers (Islam, 2022). Because of the hierarchical nature of the social structure, a patron–client network was essentially established. Despite the changes that were mentioned above, patron–client relationships continued to be strong in rural Bangladesh throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods. This was caused by a combination of economic and political factors, such as the need for protection and the scarcity of credit, land, tenancy contracts, and employment opportunities. It is difficult to create

horizontal linkages and stronger business ties due to the strength of the patron network (Kochanek, 1993: 44).

Despite the changes that were mentioned above, patron–client relationships were maintained in rural Bangladesh throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods. This was caused by a combination of economic and political factors, such as the need for protection and the scarcity of credit, land, tenancy contracts, and employment opportunities. It is difficult to create horizontal linkages and stronger business ties due to the strength of the patron network (Kochanek, 1993: 44). Despite the fact that every home is accountable for its own affairs, there are still many types of connections in our society that are founded on a dependency dynamic. This connection is founded on the concept of mutually beneficial exchanges, in which one group of individuals serves as a patron while another group is attended to as a client. While those in higher social ranks are granted the right to coerce those in lower social ranks into providing them with labor, services, and respect, those in lower social ranks are granted the right to demand money and other kinds of assistance from those in higher social ranks. Without the assistance of the "powerful" local elite, a low-income villager cannot access even the most fundamental services provided by the state (for instance, completing a general diary entry at a police station). In this sense, the functioning of a mutual dependency that is built on a hierarchical structure may be described as follows: Kochanek (1993: 44) hypothesizes that the robustness of the patron–client network impedes the establishment of corporate units deriving from family, politics, or geography and bolsters a system of individual traditional patrimonial leadership deriving from charisma, patronage, and corruption.

Although the structure of urban society differs from that of rural society, the patron-client relationship remains a dominant aspect of urban social life in various forms. Islam (20212) highlights a local proverb, "chacha-mama chara chakri hoy na," which emphasizes the importance of having a familial connection, specifically an uncle or maternal uncle, in order to secure employment opportunities. This proverb underscores the significance of having a "connection" who can not only vouch for an individual but also provide them with opportunities, including access to justice. Sobhan (2010: 8) further notes that this proverb highlights the pervasive influence of patronage networks in urban societies. The statement that "the excluded population in South Asia continues to be subjugated by both the state and financial power, and

must rely on their oppressors for protection through a patron-client system that perpetuates existing power hierarchies," illustrates the persistence of these power structures. Despite the renewal of the democratic process following extended periods of autocratic rule, the excluded members of this social milieu are still denied sufficient access to political party offices or representation in democratic governance systems at all levels, ranging from local to national (Sobhan, 2010: 8).

The contemporary democratic system implemented in Bangladesh serves to reinforce the dominance of a select group of political elites. As Sobhan (2010: 8-9) has noted, representative structures are often controlled by those who possess significant wealth and social influence, and subsequently leverage their electoral positions to augment their financial resources, thereby prolonging their grip on power.

In Bangladesh, the patron-client relationship is characterized by the acquisition of wealth by individuals from a superior authority, as noted by Maloney (1986: 41) and Kochanek (2000: 548). The present situation is ironic in that the widely accepted implication of the term 'higher authority' pertains to the divine, whereas the aforementioned authorities amass a degree of power that resembles that of a deity over the subordinates in their respective hierarchies. According to Islam (2012), individuals in positions of power are anticipated to provide resources, including financial aid, education, and *tadbir* (which denotes support acquired through political or administrative connections) to their clients. In return, individuals in positions of power expect to be respected and obeyed. The societal structure often leads to the emergence of authoritarian leaders, and the power dynamics are highly personalized, as noted by Kochanek (2000: 548). According to Kochanek (2000: 548) citation of research, the societal structure and interpersonal relationships in Bangladesh are implicated in the issue of institutional fragility, organizational growth and efficacy, and the lack of consensus. This behavioral pattern is reflected in the political factions, governmental establishments, and the broader civil society of Bangladesh.

Hence, clientelism, a form of political participation, has permeated Bangladeshi society from the upper echelons to the lower strata. As a consequence of this, a comprehensive system of patron-client relationships has been established. The network in question exhibits a pyramidal structure and facilitates connectivity between the Prime Minister and the lowest stratum of society through a multitude of links (Islam, 2022). Every customer establishes their own network

of clients by utilizing the resources allocated to them by their superior patron in the hierarchical structure. Hence, individuals assume the dual role of customers to their superiors and patrons to their subordinates.

1.3.2. Neoliberalization in Bangladesh - Impact of Reforms on Agriculture

Following the ousting of the socialist government headed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman subsequent to the country's independence, Bangladesh initiated a series of economic reforms aimed at promoting market-oriented policies. Subsequent to that period, a comprehensive range of reform policies has been formulated, centered on three fundamental elements: demand management policies (such as curbing government spending and devaluing currency), structural adjustment policies (such as implementing trade liberalization and discontinuing subsidies), and institutional policies (such as privatizing economic activities and denationalizing). These components have been expounded upon by Rahman (1990). The direction and trend of economic growth in Bangladesh are affected by all three components of the reform package, which in turn impact the chances for both microeconomic and macroeconomic growth.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the agricultural sector underwent a number of significant changes as a result of reforms that were implemented. Reforms have significantly impacted various aspects of the agricultural industry, including the marketing and distribution of agricultural inputs, food trade and marketing, reduction of government price control, and lowering of tariff rates on agricultural imports and exports. The import and distribution of seeds, as well as the trade in fertilizer and agricultural machinery, are all controlled by private sector business people at this point, meaning that the agricultural inputs industry has been totally privatized. According to Nuruzzaman (2004), the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) had exclusive control over the procurement and dissemination of inputs. The government has authorized the private sector to directly import food grains and fertilizers from foreign countries. In addition, there has been a significant cut in the subsidies provided to the agricultural sector. As Kundu (2002:112) asserts, the private sector's endeavors remain the central point of attention for the development of agriculture, much like in the manufacturing industry. The vast variety of changes that were implemented to make it easier for the private sector to lead development in Bangladesh led to a collapse of regulatory procedures in

agriculture on a scale never seen before. Historically, the government has exercised full authority over the agricultural inputs and outputs market, as well as the public pricing of significant commodities. When compared to Bangladesh's other South Asian neighbors, the rate at which reforms were implemented in Bangladesh moved at a more rapid speed, which is one of the most notable differences. Changes in the agricultural sectors are still at a relatively low degree of intensity in India and Pakistan. Food grains are rationed out by the Indian government at rates that are considered to be reasonable, and the Indian government also intervenes in the markets for agricultural inputs. Farmers are able to obtain fertilizers and irrigation water at a minimal cost. A considerable proportion of Pakistan's available resources is allocated towards the production of fertilizers and the upkeep of irrigation systems. Bangladesh is the sole country in the region that does not conform to this regulation. There, government subsidies for food and fertilizers have been severely cut, going from 12% and 26% during the period 1977–1984 to 4% and 1%, respectively, during the period 1985–1992. According to Nuruzzaman (2004: 33-54), there was a decrease in India's food grain subsidies from 15.5% in 1975/87 to 14.0% in 1987/92. However, during the same time period, the country's fertilizer subsidies increased from 25.1% to 27.2% (Ahmed, 2002: 98-99).

In contrast to the pace of reforms, the expansion rate of Bangladesh's agricultural sector exhibited a downward trend. Agriculture contributed over half of the total real GDP in the 1970s; but, by the middle of the 1980s, that percentage had dropped to approximately 41 percent, and it continued to fall, reaching approximately 38 percent in the early 1990s. According to Ali et al. (1998), during the period of 1975 to 1994, the agriculture industry experienced a growth rate of 2% per year, which was lower than the overall economic expansion rate of 3.6%. The acceleration in the yearly expansion rate of agricultural production was not observed until the latter half of the 1990s. The agriculture sector experienced a notable increase in its yearly growth rate, rising from 0.3% during the 1993/94 period to 6.4% in 1996/97. However, the growth rate subsequently declined to 3.1% in 1997/98. The aforementioned surge occurred subsequent to a duration during which it was recorded at 0.3%. According to Kundu (2002:118). The swift growth of the agricultural industry during the latter part of the 1990s can be attributed primarily to the escalation in the cultivation of various crops, particularly rice and wheat. According to the CPD (2000: 1), the country has achieved self-sufficiency in food production for the first time, as a result of a significant increase in grain output from 10 million tonnes to 22 million tonnes in

1999. The prevalent belief is that the streamlining of regulatory protocols within the agricultural industry facilitated the emergence of novel technologies, thereby resulting in a surge in the aggregate production of food. The inquiry that necessitates examination is: which specific entities emerge as beneficiaries in the context of liberalization measures implemented within the agricultural industry? A potential resolution to the aforementioned matter could be attained expeditiously by examining the power structure within rural Bangladesh. In 1983, the World Bank conducted research titled "Bangladesh Selected Issues in Rural Employment," wherein it identified four distinct categories residing in rural Bangladesh. The initial cohort was composed of the primary landowning lineages, which constituted a mere 6% of rural households but possessed 45% of the arable land. The subsequent group of agriculturists comprised individuals who possessed land ranging from 2.5 to 5 acres. This demographic constituted roughly one-sixth of all rural households and oversaw approximately one-third of the aggregate acreage. The third classification consisted of a group of farmers who cultivated smaller parcels of land ranging from 0.5 to 2 acres in size. Approximately 30% of families residing in rural areas belonged to this particular category. The fourth classification pertained to households that lacked land ownership, specifically those with less than half an acre, and were engaged in agricultural activities as laborers for wages. According to the World Bank report of 1983, this particular demographic constituted approximately 50% of rural households, despite having authority over a mere 2-3% of arable land. The dominance of the interests of the large landowners and medium farmers in Bangladesh has contributed to the rural society being controlled by these two groups. It is unsurprising that the implementation of the new agriculture policy would prove advantageous for both of these demographic groups. This assertion was corroborated by several inquiries conducted during the mid-1980s and the late 1990s. Abul Quasem's 1986 study revealed that the privatization of agricultural inputs, specifically fertilizers, resulted in the emergence of a novel monopoly for affluent landowners. Along with the ownership of vast tracts of land, this group is also involved in a variety of commodities exchanges in the cities, towns, and other settlements found across the countryside. They were given an additional chance to increase their profits in the trade of fertilizer and insecticide. Because it takes a significant amount of capital to run a fertilizer dealership, smaller farmers and those on the edge of the industry have chosen not to participate in this market. Even more problematic was the fact that large landowners did not reinvest the profits they made from their businesses providing agricultural inputs, making the

situation even worse (Nuruzzaman, 2004:33-54). According to the findings of the survey, a sizeable proportion of input dealers (66 percent of retailers and 74 percent of wholesalers) reinvest their profits in non-agricultural enterprises such as the lending of money and the real estate sector (Quasem, 1986: 14). Another study, carried out in the years 2000 in the districts of Dhaka and Comilla by the same author, uncovered further unfavorable outcomes associated with the privatization of the agricultural inputs industry. According to the survey, almost thirty percent of farmers were unhappy with the quality of the fertilizers they were using, which led to a fifteen to twenty percent decrease in productivity per acre. Approximately sixty percent of people who use pesticides have expressed dissatisfaction with the products' poor quality and lackluster performance, which has had an impact on approximately forty percent of the cultivated land (Quasem, 2000: 96). The significant increase in the cost of fertilizer that occurs between planting and harvesting seasons is a source of special annoyance for the farmers. According to Rahman et al. (2000: 21-22), their study conducted in the Joypurhat district of northwest Bangladesh and the Barisal district of south-central Bangladesh indicates that small and marginal farmers face challenges in accessing affordable fertilizer despite their high demand for it. Despite the availability of a diverse range of fertilizers, providing farmers with a plethora of options, the costs of these fertilizers remain unpredictable and farmers often lack the necessary knowledge to effectively utilize the various types of fertilizers. In 1990, the International Fertilizer Development Corporation (IFDC) commenced a study to assess the potential impact of fertilizer privatization on agricultural production in Bangladesh, while serving as a technical consultant to the Ministry of Agriculture. (Refer to the study conducted by Samad et al in 1990.) As per the results of the investigation, the proportion of persons engaging in private participation in the allocation of urea witnessed a significant surge, escalating from 6.11 percent in March 1989 to exceeding 90 percent in January 1990. The market share of B ADC, a government-owned organization tasked with procuring and disseminating fertilizer, experienced a decline from 77% in March 1989 to below 30% by January 1990. According to the findings of the study, farm-level fertilizer prices have decreased by at least 10% compared to the previous year as a direct result of the role that the private sector plays in distribution and marketing. The study's results indicate that a reduction in price was evident throughout the entirety of Bangladesh. The conclusions of the IFDC have been disproven by government figures on agricultural production. In its 1996 edition of the Yearbook of Agricultural Statistics of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Bureau of

Statistics cites an upward trend in the pricing of urea and triple superphosphate (TSP). During the time period spanning from 1987/88 to 1991/92, the price of urea saw a significant increase of 30.44 percent, while the price of TSP rose by 12.32 percent (BBS, 1996). The implementation of trade liberalization policy had adverse effects on the expansion of agriculture in Bangladesh. The majority of the output of Bangladeshi farmers comprises food grains, such as rice and wheat. However, the prices of these commodities did not increase proportionately as a result of the policy, but instead either decreased or remained unchanged. According to Khaliqzaman (1999: 118), the cause of this phenomenon was the global price of food grains being comparatively lower than that of Bangladesh, leading to a decline in farmers' inclination towards cereal cultivation. There exist several compelling factors that contribute to the significant escalation in fertilizer prices during the various crop harvesting periods. The current author identified a few of these reasons while performing field research in the districts of Madaripur and Shariatpur in south-central Bangladesh and the district of Kushtia in northwest Bangladesh from January to mid-April 2002. The majority of the people who sell fertilizer are not farmers but rather small traders, and they are more likely to live in rural towns or major commercial hubs. Small-scale merchants are primarily motivated by profit considerations, irrespective of the ethical implications of their actions. They strategically time their operations to coincide with the cropping seasons, in order to maximize their profit margins. This dishonest band of rural businesspeople often manufactures a shortage of fertilizers in order to artificially drive up the price, which is already many times higher than the price set by the market. The powerless farmers have no choice but to pay greater costs for fertilizers in order to save their crops, since they do not have any other options. The similar situation happens with pesticides, which farmers need desperately to protect crops from the invasion of dangerous insects. Pesticides are becoming more and more expensive. Nuruzzaman (2004:33-54) reports that the regional markets have witnessed the availability of various generators and power tillers following the liberalization of irrigation equipment imports. These things all have prices that are on the lower end of the spectrum. Nevertheless, the primary beneficiaries are, yet again, the sizable and intermediate-scale agriculturalists who possess the capability to procure the constituents that will enable them to augment their production. Small and marginal farmers encounter difficulties in obtaining the necessary financial resources to reap the benefits of agricultural liberalization due to their limited access to bank loans, primarily due to the absence of collateral. This impedes

their ability to obtain and safeguard said funds. Conversely, the cessation of agricultural inputs or the imposition of limitations on their accessibility has had adverse effects on the welfare of small-scale and economically disadvantaged farmers. The current agricultural subsidies provided by the government of Bangladesh amount to approximately 3.1%, a figure significantly lower than the maximum permissible subsidy level of 10% set by the World Trade Organization. (CPD, 2000: 8). As a result of increases in the cost of fertilizers, insecticides, and seed, small and marginal farmers are either unable to afford to purchase the needed quantity or are forced to purchase less than the required amount.

1.4. Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 of the thesis delves into the intricate vegetable supply chain in Bangladesh and examines the function of intermediaries or middlemen in guaranteeing the accessibility of fresh produce to end-users. The chapter elucidates the fact that farmers are dependent on intermediaries for the sale of their agricultural produce owing to their restricted control over pricing mechanisms and market regulations. Intermediaries, such as Faria and local Beparis, undertake a range of functions that encompass the sourcing of agricultural products, the coordination of transportation and warehousing, and the distribution of goods to retailers. Nevertheless, the intermediaries function within a limited profit margin owing to elevated transportation costs, uncertain market circumstances, and fierce competition. By way of comparison, urban intermediaries who hold a dominant position tend to accumulate substantial profits and exert considerable political influence, whereas their rural counterparts possess limited political leverage. The chapter elucidates the political sway wielded by major syndicates in regulating market dominance and public policies, thereby intensifying the asymmetry in profits across the supply chain. The government's past incapacity to effectively regulate these syndicates is commonly attributed to the susceptibilities of agricultural policies and the notion of neopatrimonialization, which emphasizes the self-interested exploitation of the system.

Chapter 3 of the thesis delves into the underlying issues and dynamics between the state and agricultural producers within the context of the fresh produce supply chain. The chapter aims to analyze the neoliberal and neopatrimonial dispositions that contribute to the dysfunctionality of the supply chain and its impact on producers. The first section explores the historical chronology

of neoliberal agricultural policy reforms, questioning the origin of state policies, market regulation mechanisms, and economic management. The second section focuses on the neopatrimonial nature of policy execution, highlighting the progressive weakening of state institutions and centralized decision-making processes to consolidate power. The chapter concludes by emphasizing that despite changes in patrimonial power since the multiparty election in 1991, the authoritarian and paternalistic attitudes of governments persist. Political patronage politics and manipulation of state resources further marginalize the farming society, resulting in inadequate representation and limited access to state resources.

Chapter 4 of the thesis explores the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), specifically focusing on Nayakrishi Andolon, in addressing the challenges faced in the agricultural sector of Bangladesh. The chapter begins with an overview of agricultural extension services in Bangladesh and the obstacles encountered by current agricultural production systems, such as small-scale landholding, input supply, financial accessibility, food safety, and limited irrigation water access. The chapter then examines the involvement of NGOs in the agricultural sector, with Nayakrishi Andolon serving as a case study. The founders of *UBINIG*, the parent organization of Nayakrishi, Farhad Mazhar and Farida Akhter, provide insights through interviews. The beginning of the chapter highlights the importance of extension services and advisory programs in overcoming these challenges and emphasizes the role of NGOs in promoting governmental accountability and citizen participation in policymaking processes.

Chapter 5 of this thesis serves as the concluding section, wherein I have provided a summary of the key points discussed throughout the paper and presented specific recommendations.

Chapter 2 - Are Middlemen the Real Culprits?

The district of Jessore in Bangladesh is widely acknowledged for its high productivity in vegetable cultivation. In the year 2015, an estimated 14,105 hectares of land within the region were utilized for the cultivation of diverse vegetable crops. (The data was acquired from the Jessore Division of Agricultural Extension.) As a result of this, Jessore is acknowledged as the primary supplier of vegetables throughout Bangladesh, particularly in the major urban centers of Dhaka and Chittagong. A common practice among farmers is to transport their agricultural produce to *haats*⁶, which are regional marketplaces that primarily cater to wholesale transactions. Several significant wholesale vegetable markets are located in the Jessore area, such as *Shaatmail*, *Churamonkathi Bazar*, *Baro Bazar*, *Cougacha Bazar*, *Jhikorghacha*, and *Kajurabazaar*⁷, among others. According to the data collected through interviews conducted for this project, the distribution of the produced vegetables is as follows: approximately 60 percent of the produce is sent to Dhaka, 20 percent is dispatched⁸ to the neighboring district of *Khulna*⁹, 10 percent is allocated to *Barisal*¹⁰, 3 percent is directed towards *Pirojpur*¹¹, 3 percent is channeled to *Gopalganj*¹², 2 percent is designated for *Bagerhat*, and the remaining 2 percent is distributed to other locations. It is important to note that these figures may exhibit slight variations depending on factors such as seasonal changes, production load, and the extent of

⁶ A haat is a physical marketplace typical taking place once or twice a week

⁷ Shaatmail, Churamonkathi Bazar, Baro Bazar, Cougacha Bazar, Jhikorghacha, and Kajurabazaar are all different locations (physical marketplaces) situated within Jessore

⁸To enhance comprehension regarding the geographical positioning of the districts mentioned, please refer to the appended map labeled as Annex 1.

⁹ Khulna is the third-largest city in Bangladesh, after Dhaka and Chittagong, located 221km South-West of Dhaka

¹⁰ Barisal, officially known as Barishal, is a major city that lies on the banks of the Kirtankhola river in south-central Bangladesh. It is 183km South of Dhaka

¹¹ Pirojpur is a district in southern-western Bangladesh. It is a part of Barisal Division and located 216km from Dhaka.

¹² Gopalganj is a town in Gopalganj District in the Dhaka Division of Bangladesh. It is located 160km South-West of Dhaka

market penetration by large intermediaries in the Jessore vegetable market. The vegetable industry's supply chain comprises intermediaries at various levels, including local, divisional, regional, and retail, in addition to producers and consumers. The inclusion of intermediaries in the supply chain results in a considerable extension of the process; however, they remain a crucial component of the overall system. This section of the dissertation will primarily focus on identifying the responsibilities that are anticipated to be fulfilled by the stakeholders, who are commonly referred to as intermediaries or middlemen. Subsequently, the portrayal of these entities by authoritative bodies and governmental agencies will be explicated, followed by an analysis of the problematic nature of perceiving them as the worms in an otherwise delightful pie.

From the farms themselves to the final customer, the vegetable supply chain in Bangladesh is a convoluted web of middlemen who ensure the availability of fresh food. The producer and the middlemen split the profits - while the former get compensated for their expenses and labor on the field, the latter keep part of the profit for activities regarding delivering the vegetables to the end consumers. Their main duties involve managing the transportation of goods and fostering connections with other stakeholders in the market. The pricing of agricultural products is currently subject to significant regulation and monopolization by large traders, corporations, wholesalers, and retail syndicates, leaving farmers with limited influence over the process. These entities consider the profitability and preferences of farmers when determining pricing. As a consequence, farmers in Bangladesh are unable to sell their produce without the assistance of intermediaries. As a direct result of this, purchasers are unable to get the items at a price that is affordable to them. Producers have the option of utilizing intermediaries to market their agricultural products and remunerating them with a portion of the earnings, or they may opt to directly sell their produce to other intermediaries. Local divisional or neighborhood wholesalers provide the goods that are sold in the biggest wholesale markets in the country, situated in the capital, like *Karwan Bazar*, *Mirpur*, and *Jatrabari*¹³. Apart from vending their produce to retailers, divisional wholesalers frequently vend their products to minor wholesalers. The retailers in Dhaka city procure goods from the local wholesaler and subsequently engage in the

¹³ These three prominent locations in Dhaka is illustrated in Figure 2.1

resale of these goods to individual customers. Despite the apparent complexity of this procedure, it is in fact considerably more intricate and chaotic.

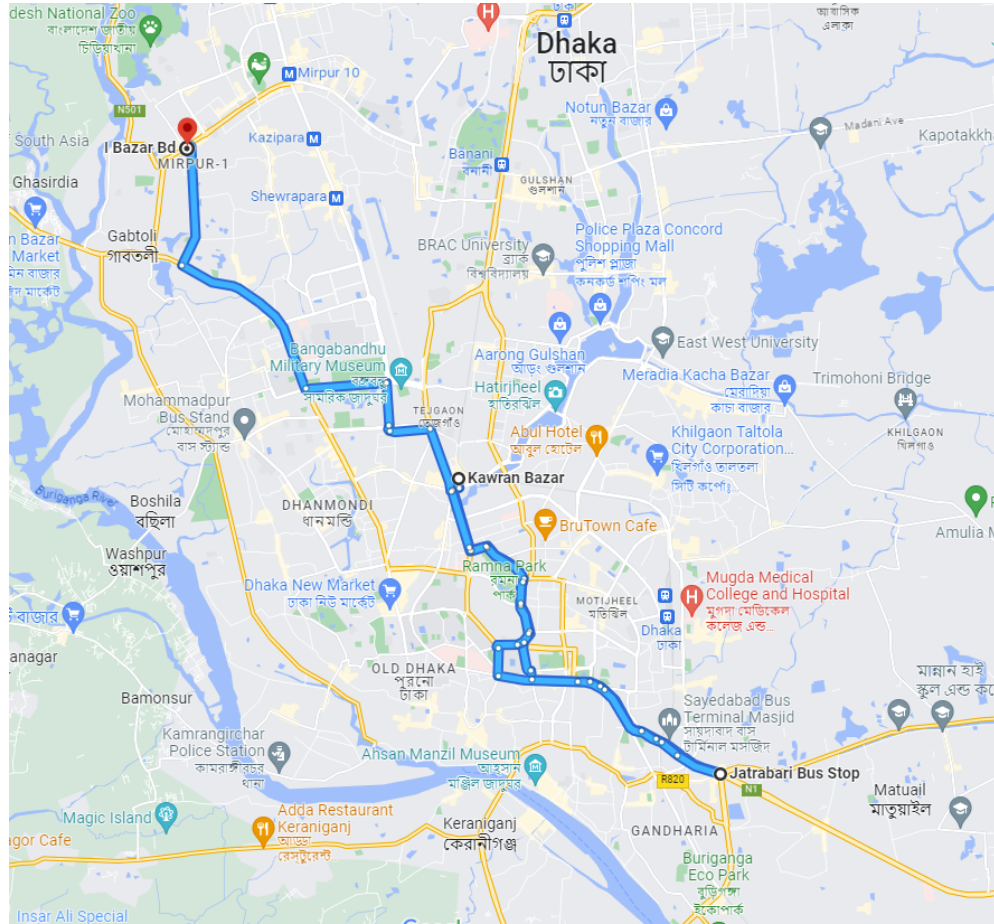


Figure 2.1: Map locating Mirpur, Karwan Bazar and Jatrabari

2. 1. The middlemen

In literature, middlemen are variously referred to as facilitators, fixers, patrons, or simply as middlemen. They are the brokers and mediators of the "mediated state" that exists in modern South Asia, and are required to act as brokers (Ruud, 2011). These men, although this does not mean that women are not present in this space, inhabit the gray region that exists between the formal institutions of the state and the chaotic quotidian of socially ingrained discussions and practices. They are quite varied when considered as a group. They may exude charm, be violent, or just serve to organize and link people (Ruud, 2020), while some achieve success via the use of

pretense, deceit, and the appearance of authority, while others achieve success as a result of a personal network and personal persuasive abilities (Alm, 2010; Krishna, 2011).

The middlemen, or in Nikita Sud's (2014) terms, the 'men in the middle' are the ones who facilitate the trading of favors and services between the powerful and the powerless. Arild Engelsen Ruud (2020) explains their role well in his article, "The Mohol: The Hidden Power Structure of Bangladesh Local Politics." Borrowing from him, the middlemen serve as intermediaries as part of a larger network of various types of intermediaries. Typically, the central figure in these networks is a political leader. The central figure is not a mediator in any meaningful sense; rather, he is the focal point around which the mediators revolve. Each of the numerous intermediaries is a component of a distinct system with its own function and set of characteristics. The political authority maintains the cohesion of the network. Without the central figure, the system is inoperable. As Ruud establishes, the political leader acts as the chief executive officer (CEO) of a heterogeneous operation that includes legal, quasi-legal, and sometimes illegal subplots that flourish in the vast, opaque borderlands that comprise South Asian democracy. Due to the nature of the transactions, a substantial component of this coordination work is hidden from the view of a large number of participants.

However, the individuals referred to as "middlemen" in the thesis are distinct from those previously mentioned. Although I concur with Ruud's elucidation of middlemen, the middlemen referred to in my thesis are comparatively more formalized 'men in the middle', who possess less conspicuous political sway and are confined to the four specific groups of businessmen as enumerated below. The individuals in question are not commonly referred to as "middlemen" by their business associates. Rather, this label is typically applied by the media, the urban middle and elite classes, and the government as a means of attributing responsibility for farmers' losses. In the subsequent chapter, I contend that this practice is indicative of systemic failure within the neopatrimonial regime. The term *moddhoshottobhogi* in Bangla refers to a middleman who is characterized by consuming goods or resources that belong to others from an intermediary position. The term is utilized in a pejorative manner, as inferred from its denotative significance. However, the intermediaries or middlemen perform various functions such as transportation, storage, grading, packing, financing, and risk management activities across the supply chain. The vegetable trade in Bangladesh lacks formal business structures, and is primarily financed through

the personal funds of intermediaries (Tasnoova and Iwamoto, 2006). According to Matin et al. (2008), in the absence of established policy insurance systems, producers and intermediaries in Bangladesh assume all risks related to the production and distribution of fresh vegetables. Small or marginal farmers who produce fresh vegetables face challenges in reaching clients due to insufficient market intelligence and limited financial resources to support the necessary logistics. The fresh vegetable supply chain downstream in Bangladesh comprises five distinct categories of intermediaries, namely *Faria*, *Bepari*, *Aratdar*, *Paiker*, and Retailer.

Farias are a group of small-scale traders who engage in the purchase of commodities from local producers in the village and primary marketplaces. These goods are subsequently sold to beparis or other merchants within the vicinity. The business is operated under a constrained budget and procures vegetables in restricted quantities. The responsibility of sorting and grading produce falls on individuals who are instrumental in reducing waste resulting from spoilage. As such, their role is critical in the market. It is common practice for farmers to sublet their vegetable fields to *faria*, *aratdar*, and/or wholesalers during the blossoming stage, in exchange for loans provided by said parties during the production process (ADB, 2020). *Faria* plays a crucial role in providing credit to farmers by purchasing their products in advance of the harvest season and offering advance payments. As a result of this phenomenon, farmers are capable of allocating resources towards inputs and enhancing their crop yields, thereby augmenting the volume of fresh produce accessible in the market. Vegetables are occasionally transported alongside other commodities, such as chicken and dairy, in transportation means that are not exclusively designated for their conveyance. Furthermore, local materials are utilized to package vegetables prior to their shipment. The majority of instances indicate that the packaging utilized is inadequate to maintain the freshness and quality of the produce.

Beparis are proficient merchants who procure substantial quantities of newly harvested vegetables from farms and growers. The initial step involves the procurement of the product from the *Farias*, followed by its subsequent sale to either the *Aratdar* or the *Paiker*. They are regular providers and proprietors of stalls at wholesale market venues. *Beparis* play a pivotal role in the dissemination of vegetables by facilitating the transportation of produce from central markets to remote and rural areas, thereby enhancing the accessibility of such commodities in local markets. In essence, they contribute to the improvement of food accessibility. *Bepari* also

helps to assure the quality of the product by negotiating with producers to acquire only products of better quality. Of greater significance, this cohort of intermediaries comprises prominent entrepreneurs who possess greater access to liquid capital in comparison to farmers or *farias*. This enables them to assume a position of providing financial assistance to producers through loans that may carry minimal or zero interest rates. The Bangladeshi society and government perceive farming as a less significant profession in the contemporary world, which results in inadequate access to loans and grants from financial institutions for farmers (Tasnoova & Iwamoto, 2006). In instances such as these, it can be advantageous for farmers to obtain financial resources in order to prepare for the upcoming season or to provide dowries for their daughters. This type of assistance is often provided by *beparis* with whom they have established long standing relationships. The subsequent chapters will delve into a comprehensive analysis of the accessibility of loans and funds for farmers.

Aratdar, who are also known as commission agents, serve as a bridge between *Bepari* and *Paikar*. They start by buying the products from *Bepari* and then sell them on to *Paikar*. *Aratdar* are crucial to the market's operation since they act as a link between local markets and merchants. To ensure that they are of high quality, they achieve this by conducting quality inspections and negotiating with *Bepari*. This makes it easier to guarantee that the produce is of higher quality. A storage facility is known as an *arat* in Bangla; an "aratdar" is someone who owns and/or manages storage facilities. They make a substantial contribution to reducing waste produced by spoilage by ensuring that the product is retained in optimal conditions. *Aratdars*, however, are more important and essential in the supply chains of other types of products, such as potatoes and rice, where it is crucial to maintain the ideal temperature in the storage facility. Vegetables must be sold off as quickly as possible to end customers, so such cold storage or temperature-controlled storage is not usually required. This means that in this industry, the amount of time it takes to convey the product is crucial. The Bangladesh Cold Storage Association (2020) reports that in 2019, the nation had 428 cold storage facilities with a potential capacity of 5.5 million metric tons. With a combined capacity of around 0.05 million metric tons, 30 of the cold storage facilities were public and run by the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation. The remaining facilities were privately owned. Private cold storage facilities are becoming more prevalent over time (ADB, 2020).

The final link in the supply chain for vegetables is **Paikars**. They purchase their fruit from Aratdar and either sell it to stores or, less frequently, directly to clients. Due to their purchases from Aratdar, Paikar plays a vital role in the market by helping to maintain an appropriate supply of fresh food in urban areas.

Fresh vegetables are mostly supplied to customers via **retailers**. In addition to selling to street vendors, the retailers also sell to customers at their retail shops. A number of supermarkets also shop at wholesale markets. Additionally, they buy straight from farmers who engage in contract farming. Supermarkets are a growing sector in Bangladesh. Their low but growing market share in fruits and vegetables. Many small-town merchants own their own supermarkets and are thinking about expanding. This group also includes some foreign business owners (ADB, 2020).



Fig. 5: Middlemen in Supply Chain of Vegetables (Source: Jahangir, 2010)

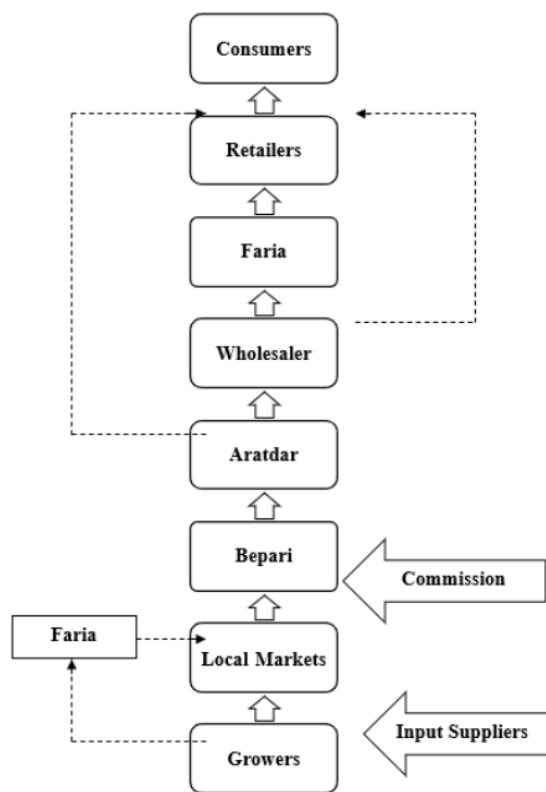


Fig. 2.2: Generalized supply chain map of vegetables at a domestic market (Source: BFTI, 2016)

2.1.1. Postharvest Loss (From Field Data)

Prior to exploring the inquiry regarding the role of intermediaries in the supply chain predicaments of vegetables in Bangladesh, it would be advantageous to examine some of the conspicuous challenges. The objective of examining postharvest loss in this chapter is, therefore, to facilitate a transition towards the fundamental underlying concerns.

There is improper management of perishables, poor transportation, inadequate storage facilities, a lack of cold storage in production areas and wholesale markets, and inadequate market infrastructure in place that results in extremely high postharvest losses in fruits and vegetables. A reduction of the current postharvest loss by approximately 75 percent would result in annual savings of approximately \$1.87 billion (valued at export premium prices) (ADB, 2019). According to my interview and the FGD participants, the following are some of the surface issues that contribute to the postharvest losses:

Inadequate Capacity for Processes to Handle

The current vegetable markets have limited facilities for food processing. Growers of vegetables do not have an advantage in negotiations due to the fact that harvested vegetables are not graded, sorted, or packaged in a standardized manner.

Lack of effective linkages

Among Stakeholders the absence of productive links between various players in Bangladesh's agricultural sector is one of the industry's most fundamental challenges. Growers often lack knowledge about the present state of the market since there are numerous parties intervening between them and the end consumers of their produce. As a consequence of this, farmers do not often get a price for their farmed vegetables that is fair. In the same vein, customers are forced to pay a premium price as a result of markups that occur at different levels of the current supply chain.

Inadequate Facilities and Equipment

The lack of a concrete (*pacca*) floor, cold storage facility, adequate drainage facility, water and sanitary facility, pack house, shed, and short-term storage facility is a major constraint, especially in the stock of vegetables. Commonly assembled vegetable markets also lack a packing house, a shed, and a short-term storage facility.

Insufficient Transport Facilities

The marketing of vegetables often faces the challenge of delays in both the transit and the sale of the produce; nevertheless, the severity of this difficulty might vary from one dealer to the next. The majority of the time, it is brought on by political turmoil, traffic bottlenecks, and issues with the ferry service. Because of the poor state of the road, the vegetable packets shake, which results in significant damage and increases the amount of vegetables that are lost after harvesting to a significant degree.

Costs of Transportation are Higher

The rising cost of transportation along the supply chain has become a significant factor leading to the increase in vegetable prices in retail marketplaces. As fuel prices continue to rise (especially since 2022 due to various international and geo-politics besides domestic politics), transportation expenses have soared, affecting the overall cost of bringing vegetables from farms to retail stores. This surge in transportation costs ultimately impacts the final price consumers pay for vegetables, making them more expensive in retail marketplaces.

Price Fluctuation

The seasonal shifts in pricing, which have become an increasingly irrelevant worry for vegetable sellers, are a source of hardship for the farmers who raise vegetables. It came about as a result of a highly complex web of syndicates, political upheaval, strikes in the transportation industry, and an imbalance in the market's supply of vegetables.

Inequilibrium in Supply and Demand of Vegetable

Because of differences in climate and other agro-ecological factors, different regions of the nation have varying levels of vegetable production. It is becoming more difficult to maintain a

consistent pricing for vegetables throughout the whole year since there is insufficient government action to guarantee that there will be a constant supply of vegetables throughout the year.

Unsatisfactory Credit for the Production of Vegetables

There is not enough policy support for institutional financing that is reserved only for the production of vegetables, despite the fact that the cultivation of vegetables is very costly and that there is a significant degree of risk and uncertainty associated with natural disasters and hazards.

Unofficial Taxes and Fees

While delivering vegetables from rural producers to urban shops, intermediaries in the current system of vegetable supply must pay a variety of unofficial "tolls" in order to continue their jobs. Transport trucks that are in the route are stopped several times so that they may submit informal tolls to various different agencies (*Financial Express*, 2023). Other significant obstacles include, but are not limited to, the prevalence of syndicates in price control, the preeminence of repair in the supply chain, higher market tolls, the absence of modern marketing tools and equipment, a lack of market information, a lack of labor, and a lack of adequate knowledge and skills, all of which must be overcome.

It is noteworthy that the aforementioned concerns represent manifestations of underlying issues, such as a malfunctioning system founded on patron-client associations and the implementation of neoliberal policy reforms. The subsequent chapter will address those topics, which have been deliberately omitted from the present discussion, as the current chapter is focused solely on the function of intermediaries.

2.1.2. Recommendations (From Field Data)

Subsequently, when asked about possible solutions for the above-mentioned issues, the following were some of the suggestions that I received from the participants of this research:

According to the results, a number of different processes need to be implemented on farms and in markets in order to decrease losses and guarantee that customers have access to vegetables that are both safe and of high quality.

Encouragement of the Use of Good Agricultural Practice (GAP)

Pre-harvest procedures are mostly responsible for the majority of farm-level post-harvest misery. Farmers need to be provided with hands-on training, disease-resistant varieties of crops, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) technologies, bio pesticides, and a premium price for organic vegetables in order to be encouraged to engage in good agricultural practices (such as using improved varieties of crops, disease-free seedlings, using less pesticides, using more organic and less chemical fertilizers, using sex pheromone traps in addition to bio-pesticides, using clean containers while harvesting, etc.

Cooperative Marketing

Farmers need to be organized via a cooperative marketing organization in order to sell their product. This may lead to appropriate bargaining strength, which is necessary in order to ensure that their produce is sold at a reasonable output price.

Sufficient Infrastructure Facilities

The condition of the actual physical infrastructure on the market premises is in a very poor state. For this reason, the government needs to establish a packed house, a well drainage facility, water, and sanitary facilities, a rest room for faraway Paris, and a concrete market floor on the grounds of the market.

Transportation Infrastructure That Works

Building new village roads or improving existing ones is a crucial step in reducing postharvest food waste, particularly with regard to vegetable crops. Because of this, the infrastructure of the transportation system in distant rural regions has to be improved.

Loans and Insurance for Crops

Crop insurance should be established, particularly in places that are disaster-prone to rescue the small and marginal farmers in such areas. Via the various state-owned banks, there should be an increase in the availability of loans for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) in the sale of agricultural goods.

Program of the Government that is Successful

In order for the government to regain control of the nation's distribution system, swift legal action should be taken against hoarders and market manipulators. The government also has the ability to provide small and marginal farmers with enhanced seeds at a price that is below market value. In addition, the public procurement system ought to be expanded to outlying regions that do not receive any assistance from the government in the process of marketing their goods, and the disadvantaged farmers ought to be the ones to ultimately benefit from the program rather than the intermediaries.

2.1.3. Why farmers prefer middlemen (from my field research)

Policymakers, the media, and end consumers have come to perceive middlemen as largely opportunistic and parasitic, despite the fact that they serve crucial roles in the marketing and distribution networks for agricultural products. This perception has led to the neglect of the functions that middlemen play in these chains. They have been described as the most significant barrier to boosting the earnings of producers, as well as the root of the problem behind rising commodity prices. See below for a few among the vast number of news articles portraying middlemen as responsible for the crisis mentioned above:

ন্যায্য মূল্য বঞ্চিত চাষি হাতবদলেই বাড়ে সবজির দাম

নরসিংদী প্রতিনিধি ১৫, ২০১৭, ০৬:৪৯ পিএম

মধ্যস্বত্বভোগীদের নিয়ে কৃষিমন্ত্রীর এই বক্তব্যের একদিন আগে কৃষি মন্ত্রণালয় গবেষণার বরাত দিয়ে জানিয়েছিল, দেশের বাজারে দীর্ঘদিন ধরে সবজির দাম উর্ধ্বমুখী থাকার পেছনে মধ্যস্বত্বভোগীর দৌরাত্ম রয়েছে।

Translation: The price of vegetable is increased only from exchange of hands (middlemen)
Source: Prothom Alo, 15 Jan, 2017, accessed: Spring, 2023

Middlemen, the biggest obstacle in Bangladesh's food chain?

Agri board eyes Thai model as farmers fight for fair price

UNB NEWS PUBLISH- NOVEMBER 17, 2021, 07:35 AM ANISUL ISLAM

UPDATE- NOVEMBER 17, 2021, 10:35 AM

Source: UNB News, 17 Nov, 2021, accessed: Spring, 2023

সবজির চড়া দামের পেছনে চাঁদাবাজ ও মধ্যস্থত্বভোগী: কৃষিমন্ত্রী

পর্যাপ্ত উৎপাদনের পরও সড়কপথে চাঁদাবাজি ও কয়েক ধাপের মধ্যস্থত্বভোগীদের কারণে সবজির দাম বেড়ে গেছে বলে মনে করেন কৃষিমন্ত্রী মো. আব্দুর রাজ্জাক।

নিজস্ব প্রতিবেদক . . . বিভিন্নউজ টোয়েন্টিফোর ডটকম

Published : 28 Feb 2022, 04:17 PM · Updated : 28 Feb 2022, 04:17 PM

Translation: Extortionists and middlemen behind high prices of vegetables: Agriculture Minister
Source: *BDNews24*, 28 Feb, 2022, accessed: Spring, 2023

Obstacles to Effective Food Chain

Middlemen, high transport cost take it all

© 17th November, 2021 12:00:00 AM Print news

The reason: The profiteering middlemen who buy fruits and vegetables at extremely low rates directly from farms, but jack up prices in further sales -- from distribution to retailing through commission agents and wholesalers.

Source: *Daily Sun*, 17 Nov, 2021, accessed: Spring, 2023

Figure 2.2: Media portrayal of middlemen

However, on-field data reveals a picture of these middlemen that goes unreported. From my field research, 95 percent of farmers viewed the presence of middlemen in the villages as beneficial to the farmer's economy in the village (positive perception), as they facilitated the sale of products, farm input lending, cash loans, and the transportation of fertilizer and crops. According to the farmers, the cost of transportation was less than if they had to transport the goods themselves or rent out their vehicles. The remaining 5 percent of producers had a negative opinion regarding intermediaries. In this study, the meaning of "positive perception" varied based on the farmer's relationship with and attachment to intermediaries. The farmer's attachment refers to their steadfastness in selling their goods to a particular middleman. Consequently, approximately 73 percent of producers are affiliated with intermediaries, while 27 percent are not.

An efficient marketing system is necessary to guarantee the accessibility of vegetables to end consumers at the suitable time and location. In addition, the perishability of vegetables necessitates a high level of efficacy in marketing and supply chain management, as noted by Kumar et al. (2004). This phenomenon allows for the inclusion of intermediaries, either individuals or groups, whose involvement is justified by their ability to meet efficiency objectives. Marketing intermediaries, known as middlemen, facilitate the exchange of products without adding any physical value to them. They receive a fee for their services, which expedites the transaction process. This practice often results in consumers paying a higher price for the

products than they would have otherwise, as noted by Bryceson (1993) and Agbebi and Fagbote (2012). According to Rubayat and Jony (2016) and Agbebi and Fagbote (2012), intermediaries are responsible for maintaining communication with buyers, bargaining prices and delivery terms, facilitating credit and collection processes, ensuring product maintenance, managing inventory and storage, conducting product grading, and organizing transportation. Middlemen perform a crucial function by facilitating the connection between smallholder farmers and traders, as well as the ultimate markets. This has been noted by scholars such as Abebe et al. (2016) and Hasan and Bai (2016). According to Suryavanshi et al. (2006), a significant proportion of vegetable sales, exceeding 80 percent, are facilitated through intermediaries. This underscores the considerable reliance of the vegetable supply chain on these intermediaries. The role of intermediaries in emerging economies, such as Bangladesh, may be interpreted as a reflection of the suboptimal marketing practices of agricultural producers. According to Lyon (2000) and Ellis et al. (1997), farmers rely on intermediaries to market their produce.

In the contemporary agricultural system of Bangladesh and other regions of the Global South, middlemen fulfill the following functions:

1. In numerous nations, the majority of agricultural production occurs within rural communities, which are frequently geographically isolated from urban markets due to inadequate infrastructure (Parvez, 2021). Farmers face restricted entry to markets for their produce, whereas consumers encounter limited availability of their desired products. The intermediaries play a crucial role in connecting the divide by venturing into the rural regions, consolidating the produce from the cultivators, and subsequently conveying it to the markets to facilitate consumer accessibility. Considering that agricultural practices are predominantly carried out in rural areas, intermediaries serve as significant sources of information for farmers regarding consumer behavior, shifts in consumer preferences and trends, market prospects, emerging competitors, and other related factors. Buyers and sellers frequently exhibit reluctance to undertake market risk due to apprehensions regarding potential losses. The intermediaries situated in the product market chain undertake the risks associated with theft, logistical challenges, perishability, and other plausible hazards (Ekwall and Lantz, 2019). As a result, intermediaries relieve farmers of the burdensome responsibilities of marketing and distribution, allowing them to focus on

their core function of production. Intermediaries take on supplementary tasks such as warehousing, distribution, advertising, and insurance. Intermediaries facilitate the promotion of goods to consumers on behalf of producers and may even play a role in market creation. The goods and services are provided based on the preferences, styles, and requirements of the consumers. The individuals in question facilitate the transportation of agricultural commodities from their original raw state, as produced by farmers, to consumers in a timely and appropriate manner, ensuring that the products are delivered in the correct quantity and condition.

2. Financial intermediaries such as banks and other financial institutions occasionally provide financial services such as loans and advance payments to farmers. In the majority of the country, smallholder farmers with restricted financial resources are responsible for the majority of agricultural production, making this a matter of great significance. On top of that, as discussed in chapter 3, section 2, low-interest loan schemes designed for farmers are non-existent or are not enough or in most cases, hijacked by politically influential elites and/or elite businessmen. In other cases, these loans are inaccessible for marginal farmers with very little to no patron-client relationship in place with the officials who are responsible for disbursing them. In addition to these barriers, access to loans are farfetched for marginal farmers given how financial institutions and governmental organizations necessitate a variety of documentation as a form of assurance. Farmers are required to undergo a complex and arduous process involving intricate procedures and documentation, which often are beyond their realm of expertise (Ramay, 2021). Based on the field data, it appears that farmers tend to refrain from engaging with banks and government institutions. Conversely, the middleman do not require or involve farmers in complex documentation procedures. Negotiating loan terms with middlemen is a more convenient option for farmers. So, in many occasions, intermediaries provide financial assistance to farmers at the outset of the production process, whether it pertains to crops, to facilitate the fulfillment of their agricultural or personal requirements (Singha and Maezawa, 2019). This is done with the anticipation of receiving reimbursement in the form of monetary compensation or agricultural goods at the culmination of the production cycle. Middlemen can be conveniently accessed by farmers at their place of residence. Farmers have the ability to initiate contact with him at any given moment,

including during nocturnal hours. He serves as a reliable source of financial support for farmers, readily dispensing funds upon request (Das and Bhardwaj, 2020). In contrast, such a forthcoming response is not evident in the context of financial institutions and public agencies.

The proposition is made that farmers require government support in order to secure loans, gain equitable access to public resources, and negotiate prices with middlemen. The elimination of middlemen is not deemed necessary, and the aforementioned measures would suffice to address the needs of farmers. The middlemen are organized groups. Through the implementation of systematic procedures and the establishment of strong relationships with farmers, they may possess a degree of power over said farmers, potentially resulting in the exploitation of marginal producers. If farmers are able to establish an organized cooperative and establish strong connections with their community, they may also be able to attain bargaining power and effectively negotiate equitable prices for their agricultural products. By the end of the day, farmers can also be considered entrepreneurs, in addition to middlemen. From a business perspective, it is advisable for the parties involved to have equal bargaining power with intermediaries.

2.1.4. India's Farmers Protest

Disregarding the importance of middlemen, the policymakers and the media often blame them for food prices soaring beyond consumers capacity and the farmers not receiving a fair price for their produce (Jasim, 2022). Similar views were expressed by various officials, including Dr. MA Sattar Mandal, a former vice-chancellor of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) and a professor at the Agricultural Economics department of BAU, Brigadier General Mohammad Jobaidur Rahman, the chief health officer of Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), and representatives from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), NGOs, and other government bodies in a news report (Jasim, 2022), which is not a one-off thing. Time and again, the Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh, has identified the middlemen solely as the main problem behind farmers incurring losses and vegetable prices hiking (*Dhaka Times*, 2022). In this regard, an understanding of the recent farmers' protest in India is crucial. Very similar to India, where farming involves 60 percent of

the population and contributes 18 percent of the gross domestic product, 50 percent of Bangladesh's population is primarily employed in agriculture, with more than 70 percent of its owners dedicated to growing crops. More than 70 percent of Bangladesh's population and 77 percent of its workforce live in rural areas. Nearly half of all of Bangladesh's workers and two-thirds in rural areas are directly employed by agriculture, and about 87 percent of rural households rely on agriculture for at least part of their income (The World Bank, 2016). Similarly, in India, the cause of the protest would impact more than 85 percent of those living in India, the world's second-most populous country (Dalta, 2020). Second, the farm laws were touted as game changers because they would enable farmers to come out of distress. And it is a fact that farming stress is a major contributor to the total number of suicides in both countries (Tripathi, 2020).

According to the legislative report (PRS, 2021), the following is an elucidation of the three legislations that have incited widespread agitation:

1. Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act of 2020: The objective is to provide autonomy to agricultural producers in vending their commodities beyond the officially designated Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) premises, commonly referred to as *mandis*¹⁴. The objective of this initiative is to enable the attainment of profitable prices by means of alternate trading avenues. According to this Act, farmers will not incur any cess or levy charges when selling their produce.

According to the government, the implementation of this measure is expected to expand the range of options available to farmers, decrease expenses associated with marketing, and enhance their ability to secure more favorable pricing. This initiative is expected to facilitate improved pricing for farmers in regions with surplus produce while simultaneously providing consumers in areas with shortages with access to more affordable goods.

The opposition from farmers centers around the potential loss of revenue for states resulting from the inability to collect "mandi fees" in the event that farmers choose to sell their produce outside of registered Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) markets. Moreover, commission agents may face a potential loss in the event of the complete relocation of the agricultural trade

¹⁴ Big wholesale markets (similar to haat) that do not have a fixed place

from mandis. There is a concern among farmers that the MSP-based procurement system may eventually come to an end, which could result in exploitation by private companies.

2. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020: Aimed to provide farmers with the opportunity to engage in contractual agreements with agribusiness firms, processors, wholesalers, exporters, or large retailers for the purpose of selling their forthcoming agricultural produce at a predetermined price.

The Center has expressed its intention to shift the burden of market volatility from farmers to sponsors. In addition to providing contemporary technological resources and improved agricultural inputs, the initiative aims to enhance farmers' revenue by mitigating marketing expenses.

The farmer bodies express their opposition to the law, contending that it is designed to cater to the interests of large corporations that aim to exert control over the Indian food and agriculture sectors, thereby diminishing the bargaining leverage of farmers. Moreover, prominent privately-owned corporations, entities engaged in exporting goods, large-scale distributors, and those involved in processing may gain a competitive advantage.

3. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act of 2020: aimed to eliminate certain commodities, such as cereals, pulses, oilseeds, onions, and potatoes, from the essential commodities list. Additionally, the Act intends to eliminate the imposition of stock holding limits on these items, except in exceptional circumstances such as war, famine, extraordinary price increases, and natural disasters. The government of the Union has stated that its objective is to encourage private investment and foreign direct investment (FDI) in the agricultural sector, while also achieving price stability. The opposition from farmers pertains to the perceived liberty of large corporations to accumulate commodities, which will enable them to exert influence over farmers by dictating terms.

According to Krishna N. Das and Mayank Bhardwaj (*Reuter*, 2020), a group of over 60 rice, wheat, and potato growers hailing from the agricultural states of Punjab and Haryana have expressed their belief that the government's efforts to eliminate agents from the farming industry are an attempt to privatize agriculture. These agents are considered a crucial component of the farm economy and serve as the primary source of credit for thousands of farmers.

According to the farmers, the intermediaries facilitate prompt disbursement of funds for purchasing seeds, fertilizers, and addressing familial contingencies. The agents provide assistance in grading, weighing, packaging, and marketing harvested produce to potential buyers. According to the protesters, the initiative to remove intermediaries in the state of Bihar's agricultural sector did not result in attracting fresh investments. Furthermore, farmers in the region have been negatively impacted; they are frequently compelled to sell their produce at lower prices due to the unavailability of structured wholesale markets. According to Das and Bhardwaj (2020) of *Reuters*, farmers perceive a mutually beneficial relationship between themselves and middlemen, with the latter being likened to automated teller machines (ATMs). The protests have demonstrated the potency of both formal and informal social networks that connect mandi/arhtiyas (middlemen) and farmers. Additionally, they have highlighted the apprehension surrounding large-scale privatized farming models and the government's initial miscalculation in assuming that the promise of exponential profits through free market mechanisms would supersede all other financial and social factors (*The Diplomat*, 27 September, 2022). The government's failure to recognize the significance of trust, informal kinship, skepticism, and subjective evaluations of the current regime was a misinterpretation of these factors. The lack of consideration for these matters was seemingly due to their immeasurability. Srinivasan observes that the legislation was driven by the accelerating logic of the free market, which was coupled with a straightforward financial objective of doubling the income.

The laws implemented by parliament in September have the objective of establishing a direct connection between potential bulk purchasers, namely WalMart Inc., Reliance Industries Ltd., and Adani Enterprises Ltd., and farmers, thereby circumventing government-regulated wholesale markets and intermediaries. However, farmers express concern that corporate buyers may reduce prices after initially offering favorable returns for their produce (*Reuters*, 2020). The government's proposal to introduce "private investment" in the agriculture sector was met with disapproval due to the farmers' apprehension towards the potential influence of large corporations. The farmers feared that, in the long run, they may be compelled to accept unfavorable margins without the assurance of government procurement. The government's advocacy machinery was unable to comprehend and address the subjective nature of the chimera, despite its efforts. This is a common pitfall in policymaking, known as a "top-down approach," as noted by Thomas R. Dye (2001). Additionally, my opinion in this matter is that the

government attempted to eliminate most of the middlemen, who do not directly serve the government, be it for the sake of the regime's survival or the expectation of capitalistic gain, so it wanted to replace all the communities and groups of middlemen with just one or two big ones.

2.1.5. In defense of the middlemen

The cost of vegetables in Bangladesh is increasing significantly, resulting in a shift towards premium produce, as reported in a recent article (*The Financial Express*, 2023). However, it is observed that the exorbitant pricing of agricultural products does not translate into substantial profits for farmers. According to market experts, the intricate distribution process involving intermediaries is the primary cause of the significant price difference between agricultural products at the farm and retail levels (UNB News, 2021).

According to the Directorate of Agricultural Marketing (DAM), vegetable prices in the capital are between 100 and 300 percent higher than at the farm level. (DAM website, accessed 13.04.23, 14.25). According to my estimations based on field research, in general, the farmer's share of the price is not more than 40 percent. It is hard to establish whether or not farming is profitable for farmers based just on farmgate prices since there is a dearth of information¹⁵ on the expenses of production. From the conversations that took place with the executive members of the merchants' association at one of Dhaka's wholesale marketplaces, *faria* and *aratdar* are responsible for around 43 percent of the price that is passed on to customers. As a point of contrast, the equivalent percentage of potatoes in Spain¹⁶, where value-added operations such as washing, sorting, and packaging are undertaken by intermediaries, is around 34 percent (ADB, 2020). There are substantial shifts in the prices of vegetables throughout the year in Bangladesh. Tomatoes had an increase in their average monthly wholesale price of almost 634 percent in 2018, while potatoes and onions saw increases of around 204 and 254 percent, respectively, over the same time period (BBS, 2019). To give a little more perspective, the price of spiny gourd has increased from Tk 15 per kilogram in the fields to Tk 50 per kilogram. The difference in price is

¹⁵ While estimations in regards to real expenses are possible, unrealized expenses, for example, the cost of farmers' own labour often goe unaccounted for.

¹⁶ It is to be noted here that although Bangladesh is the fifth-largest consumer of potatoes (Faostat, 2020), it is not exactly considered a staple, as rice is, but a vegetable.

at least Tk 35 per kilogram for pointed gourd, which sells in marketplaces for Tk 55-Tk 60 per kilogram. Cucumbers that were purchased for Tk 15 per kilogram are being retailed for Tk 50 (*The Business Standard*, 2020).

According to a report by *Prothom Alo* (September, 2022), a prominent daily bilingual newspaper in Bangladesh, market tenants and vegetable dealers have reported a significant increase in truck fares within a month's time. Specifically, they claim that transporting a five-ton truck of vegetables from *Jessore* to *Karwan Bazar* in Dhaka¹⁷ now costs Tk 20,000, compared to Tk 16,000 just a month ago. Price fluctuations can be influenced by international geopolitics, however, this topic falls outside the scope of my thesis and will not be further discussed. As previously stated, the significant increase in fuel and essential commodity prices cannot be rationalized by a corresponding surge in international market prices. Furthermore, the expenses are gradually increasing over time. The workers who were previously remunerated at a rate of 300 taka per day for their labor in sorting and packaging agricultural products, as well as loading and unloading these goods onto transportation vehicles, are currently facing a charge of 500 taka. While this increase in compensation might have been considered favorable in a different situation, it is not so under the current circumstances where everyday commodity prices have risen abruptly. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the financial burden of these significant fluctuations is primarily shouldered by intermediaries rather than the prominent *beparis* and *aratdars* located in urban areas. There has been a rise in the cost of one to two taka per kilogram. Hence, the revenue generated from the sale of vegetables in Dhaka is constrained for the small-scale businessmen (middlemen). *Jessore's* vegetable market faces a competitive disadvantage against Dhaka due to the relatively higher expenses incurred in transporting the produce to the market.

In instances where there is a surge in the cost of a commodity within the domestic market, the government frequently attributes this phenomenon to two prevailing factors: an overabundance of intermediaries within the supply chain and an escalation in the global market price. Firstly, I will provide a brief overview of the latter before delving into the former.

¹⁷ *Karwan Bazaar* is the country's biggest wholesale marketplace for fresh produce and is located in the center of the capital, Dhaka. The distance between *Jessore* and Dhaka is approx. 192 km.

According to a recent study conducted by an intelligence agency, as reported by *The Daily Star*, the rationale provided by the government for refraining from adjusting prices in the global market lacks empirical evidence. The research analyzed the fluctuation of commodity prices in both domestic and global markets during a 12-month period starting in August of the previous year (*The Daily Star*, September 27, 2022). The findings revealed that the escalation of prices in the local market was not commensurate with the corresponding increase in the international market. The Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has asserted that the inflation data provided by the government is not an accurate reflection of reality. In support of this claim, the organization has conducted a comparative analysis of the prices of essential commodities in Bangladesh vis-à-vis global prices and prices in other countries (CPD, March 20, 2022). The study by CPD revealed that despite having a significantly lower per capita income in comparison to the United States and Spain, consumers in Bangladesh are allocating a larger portion of their expenditures towards essential goods (CPD, March 20, 2022). According to Towfiqul Islam Khan, despite the stabilization of the international market a few months later, Bangladesh has yet to reap the advantages of a reduction in worldwide commodity prices. The speaker noted that despite the decrease in prices of certain fundamental commodities in the international market, their advantages are not entirely accessible in the domestic market due to the inadequacy of the US dollar and other factors (*The Daily Star*, 2023). As per the report of the intelligence agency, the increased inflation cannot be solely attributed to the supply chain disruptions that were caused by the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while the report suggests that the syndicates took advantage of the situation (*The Daily Star*, September 27, 2022).

**BIG DISCREPANCY
IN COMMODITY
PRICE MOVEMENTS
AT HOME AND
ABROAD**

	WORLD MARKET	LOCAL MARKET
Wheat	8%	67%
Rice	7.21%	19%
Lentil	-13.71%	39%
Onion	-27.71%	9.20%
Sugar	-10.78%	14.84%

Fig 2.3: Essential commodities: Price rise for global hike not justified, Source: Sukanta Haldar, Mohammad Suman, *The Daily Star*, Tue Sep 27, 2022.

The discussion of the disparity between commodity prices in Bangladesh and the global market is deemed beyond the purview of this thesis and will not be expounded upon any further. For those seeking further information, reports published by The World Bank (2016), CPD (2022), and numerous other sources may be consulted.

Returning to the previous argument regarding the attribution of price increases to intermediaries, I will commence with a brief comparison of the various categories of said intermediaries. As per Lipon Mondal's (2022) observations, marginal farmers are relatively disadvantaged and lack power. Conversely, affluent farmers may only hold the title of farmer on paper, utilizing public resources for personal gain as rent-seeking landlords. Similarly, middlemen situated closer to the producers within the supply chain tend to possess greater affluence or political influence in comparison to their counterparts within the vegetable supply chain, who are typically based in urban centers or the capital.

As previously stated, the vegetable supply chain in Bangladesh is distinguished by the involvement of rural intermediaries, specifically, *faria* and local *beparis*, who perform a vital function in connecting farmers with consumers. The intermediaries in question serve as a link between agricultural producers and vendors, carrying out a variety of tasks such as procuring produce from farmers, facilitating transportation and storage, and vending to retailers. Based on the findings of my fieldwork interviews, it appears that the difference between the buying price from farmers and the selling price to the next link in the supply chain is not generating significant profits for *faria* and local *beparis*, despite their crucial role in the supply chain. The present discourse pertains to a series of inquiries concerning the valuation of produce, the level of material comfort, and the transactional procedures involved in trade. A significant number of intermediaries function on narrow profit margins due to the need to cover substantial transportation expenses, navigate volatile market conditions, and contend with fierce competition from other intermediaries in the industry. Despite the narrow profit margin, individuals opt to remain in this occupation due to their lack of expertise and competence in cultivating crops, as well as insufficient land ownership to sustain themselves through leasing to agriculturalists. The

majority of my survey participants who serve as intermediaries have conveyed that their forefathers were engaged in farming and bequeathed them with a modest sum of capital to engage in the occupation of *faria* or *bepari*, which involves trading with farmers. However, they lacked the financial resources to pursue formal education and enter the service sector or other commercial ventures. This is partly due to their extensive knowledge and expertise in the field of agriculture.

Furthermore, it is often observed that *Faria* and local *Beparis* exhibit limited political sway, especially when juxtaposed with their urban and metropolitan counterparts. The individuals known as *millers*, *boro beparis*, and *aratdars*, who operate as intermediaries in the major urban centers and the capital of Bangladesh, are responsible for capturing the majority of profits and exerting a substantial degree of political influence. As per David Bergman's (2019) findings, it is observed that these intermediaries frequently act as representatives of the ruling political party, the Awami League. They utilize their political influence to obtain advantageous policies and regulations that serve their business interests. The strong correlation between politics and middlemen in Bangladesh is evidenced by the current Food Minister of Bangladesh, Shwadhan Chandra Majumder, who is identified as an *aratdar* in a *BDNews24* article published on January 9, 2019.

Moreover, given the high volatility of the market, rural intermediaries are responsible for bearing any unexpected alterations, obstacles, or increases in costs. During the period of my fieldwork, there was a notable increase in fuel prices that resulted in a sudden rise in the cost of transporting fresh produce from rural bazaars to urban areas. This was reported in *Prothom Alo* on August 8, 2022. On the evening of August 5, 2022, the government implemented a substantial increase in the prices of diesel, kerosene, petrol, and octane, amounting to Tk 34, Tk 44, and Tk 46 per litre, respectively. As a result of this unprecedented hike, trucks originating from various districts transported vegetables to Karwan Bazar the following day, procuring fuel oil at the elevated rate (*Prothom Alo*, 2022). Through interviews conducted with truck drivers and their intermediaries responsible for hiring them to transport vegetables, it was determined that a 3.5-ton truck traveling from Dhaka to *Jessore* requires approximately 95 liters of diesel fuel. The individual incurred an expense of Tk 11.5K to procure diesel in accordance with the revised government price, resulting in an increase of approximately Tk 3,800 from the previous day's cost. As per the

account of a truck operator, the cost of transportation for a 3.5-ton truck carrying vegetables from *Bogura*¹⁸ to Dhaka has escalated to approximately Tk 4-5K. Thus far, the fare has been approximately Tk 14-15K. Following the recent increase in diesel prices, a fare ranging from approximately Tk 18,000 to Tk 21,000 was being imposed. After conducting interviews with truck drivers at Karwan Bazar, the largest wholesale market in Dhaka, between the hours of 12:00am and 5:00am, it was discovered that truck fares on various routes have increased by 20 to 25 percent in response to the recent rise in fuel prices.

In order to sustain and prosper within the highly competitive and intricate market of Bangladesh, the big intermediaries place significant reliance on their political affiliations and patronage systems. According to a report by *Bangla Insider* on March 11, 2022, intermediaries frequently provide financial support to political parties during election campaigns, and as a result, they are granted preferential treatment by the government in the form of contracts, licenses, and subsidies. The possession of political power confers upon them the ability to regulate market prices and exert influence over the supply chain in a manner that is advantageous to them, frequently to the detriment of both farmers and consumers. The vegetable supply chain in Bangladesh involves rural middlemen who function within a dynamic environment. Their profit margins and political influence are closely linked to the broader socio-political context of the country.

As Altaf Parvez establishes from the very get-go of his book, *Dhan Chaasher Protibedon* (2019), the struggle of marginal farmers is a story of rural vs. urban, political vs. economic, and the story of the middlemen and their role is also rural vs. urban, political vs. commoner.

2.1.6 Conclusion

In Bangladesh, the vegetable supply chain comprises rural intermediaries, namely *faria* and local *beparis*, who act as intermediaries between agricultural producers and vendors. The intermediaries are responsible for executing various functions, including but not limited to, sourcing agricultural products from farmers, coordinating transportation and warehousing, and

¹⁸ Bogura is a district situated in Northern Bangladesh and the distance between Dhaka and Bogura is 190km approx.

distributing to retailers. The agricultural intermediaries play a pivotal role in the supply chain, however, the disparity between the purchase price from farmers and the selling price to the subsequent link in the supply chain is not yielding substantial profits for them. This is due to the fact that they operate on a narrow profit margin, which is further exacerbated by significant transportation expenses, unpredictable market conditions, and intense competition from other intermediaries within the industry. The dominant intermediaries, including millers, boro beparis, and aratdars, who conduct business in urban areas and the capital city of Bangladesh, amass the majority of profits and wield significant political power. Conversely, the rural intermediaries possess minimal political clout. The possession of political power grants individuals the capacity to oversee market prices and exert control over the supply chain in a way that is beneficial to them, often at the expense of both agricultural producers and consumers.

The escalation in vegetable prices in Bangladesh cannot be attributed solely to the forces of supply and demand. The matter transcends the aforementioned and is significantly intertwined with politics. Large syndicates exercise control over both the market and the entirety of the supply chain. The syndicates possess significant power and extensive reach, both horizontally and vertically. In addition to market control, they possess connections to upper echelons of governmental power. This implies that they possess considerable sway over governmental policies that impact individuals situated at the lower end of the supply chain, namely small-scale farmers, farias, and beparis.

The government's inability to completely subjugate or eliminate these syndicates can be attributed, in part, to the historical progression of agricultural policies in Bangladesh. Historically, governmental policies have been implemented that have not been advantageous to the agricultural community. The observed phenomenon has resulted in a surge in the influence wielded by syndicates, which have capitalized on the vulnerabilities of the governing body. Consequently, the absence of regulation in the market persists, allowing syndicates to maintain their dominance over the supply and pricing of vegetables.

The aforementioned syndicates possess the capability to exert influence over governmental policies and decisions, thereby rendering it arduous for the government to effectively regulate the market. Consequently, agricultural producers are compelled to sell their yield to the syndicates at a reduced rate, whereas the syndicates amass substantial gains by regulating market prices. What

is the source of their immense power? Does this imply that they possess greater authority than the government? The explanation for this matter pertains to the second reason for the government's inadequacy, which is connected to the fundamental theoretical structure of my dissertation - neopatrimonialization. This concept emphasizes the interconnectedness of syndicates and other individuals with malicious intentions, as well as the relationships that exist among them. The process appears to be institutionalized, with a tendency to manipulate the system in a self-serving manner.

The initial segment of the forthcoming chapter will retrospectively examine the governmental policies and their implications for the agricultural communities and the industry holistically. The latter portion will deliberate on the consequences of patronage politics in relation to neopatrimonialization.

Chapter 3 - If Not The Middlemen Then What?

The existence of this reality after decades of formal institution building is indicative of a social and political 'prison', a pattern of behaviour socially or culturally so deeply embedded that successive regimes in Bangladesh cannot be distinguished from one another with respect to this underlying behaviour. Irrespective of the nature of the various regimes—democratic, nationalist, autocratic—they are all understood as 'large factional agglomerations of patron-client favours and loyalties which extend from top to bottom of their organisations.' Aril Engelsen Ruud (The Mohol: The hidden power structure of Bangladesh local politics, 2020)

This chapter seeks to examine some of the deeper issues that get foreshadowed by the narrative that incriminates the middlemen in the supply chain of fresh produce and rarely benefits the producers. In particular, my area of interest pertains to the relationship between the state and its producers. I aim to delve into the fundamental neoliberal and neopatrimonial dispositions that reinforce the current (dys)functionality of the supply chain. In doing so, I frequently raise a series of questions in order to understand the origin of state policy with regard to agriculture, the market regulation mechanism, and economic management and try to discuss them in two main sections. While the first section explores the implied neoliberal agricultural policy reforms, taking on a historical chronology of the same, the second chapter looks into the neopatrimonial nature of their execution.

3.1.Shift towards a neoliberal agriculture sector

The issue at hand pertains to the inadequate compensation received by fresh produce farmers, who typically receive a mere 20-45% of the final retail price paid by consumers (Bangla Tribune, 27 January, 2020), while the intermediaries involved in the supply chain are frequently held accountable for obtaining the lion's share of profits. In order to look into the role of the state of Bangladesh in promoting the sustenance of the farmers, especially the small-scale producers, I often ask myself how the state has approached this crucial task. In order to delve into this

inquiry, it is my belief that the optimal methodology would entail the construction of a chronological historical record detailing the agricultural policies implemented by the government. Also, since the central argument of this section is that the neoliberal economic system sits at the root of these reforms, it is, in my opinion, only fitting to look back in time to the rise of such a system and eventually build up to the present time.

After gaining its independence in 1971, Bangladesh quickly moved to institute a sort of state-directed, planned economic development. In fact, "socialism" was designated as one of the four primary pillars of the state in Bangladesh's initial constitution, which was ratified in 1972 (The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972). The original tone of the proclamation was softened in 1979 when the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution was added. This amendment restricted the meaning of socialism to imply only "economic and social justice" (Supreme Court of Bangladesh, 2017). It did this by establishing a central Planning Commission that was given the responsibility of coming up with policies for short-, medium-, and long-term economic development. In July 1973, the Commission came up with the idea for the first Five-Year Plan (Misra, 2012). The plan was intended to focus on the rehabilitation of the war-torn country as well as an increase in food grain production in order to provide food security for a rapidly growing population. It established import substitution programs as a means of protecting the domestic agriculture and industrial sectors of the economy (Misra, 2017).

3.1.1. Structural Adjustment Plan

A three-year medium-term adjustment plan was implemented by the subsequent Janata administration, the provisional government after the military coup, in 1986/87 as part of a loan from the International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). A government must carry out a series of economic adjustments known as structural adjustments in order to be eligible for a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and/or the World Bank. Adjustments to the structure of the economy usually take the form of a collection of different economic policies, such as the liberalization of trade and the reduction of the size of the government's budgetary outlays (Halton, 2021). Structural adjustment programs have demanded that borrowing countries introduce broadly free market systems coupled with fiscal restraint—or occasionally outright austerity (Halton, 2021). Critics also portray conditional loans as a

neoliberal instrument for neocolonialism's perpetuation. According to this argument, wealthy nations offer subsidies to impoverished nations—often their former colonies—in exchange for reforms that allow multinational corporations to invest exploitatively in the poor nations (Thompson et al., 2017). Since the proprietors of these companies reside in wealthy nations, colonial dynamics persist, albeit with nominal national sovereignty for the former colonies. From the 1980s to the 2000s, sufficient evidence accumulated demonstrating that structural adjustments frequently reduced the short-term standard of living in countries adhering to them, prompting the IMF to announce that it was reducing structural adjustments (IMF, 2001). This appeared to be the case through the early 2000s, but the use of structural adjustments increased to previous levels in 2014. This has again sparked criticism, most notably that countries undergoing structural adjustments have less policy flexibility to deal with economic disruptions, whereas wealthy lending nations can openly accumulate public debt to weather global economic cyclones that frequently originate in their markets (Kentikelinis, Stubbs, King, 2016). However, a second three-year loan in 1990 was received as part of an expanded SAP credit scheme (SAPRIN [The Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network] 2002). These loans were granted on the condition that certain reforms were carried out, including liberalizing foreign trade and exchange rate regimes, reorganizing the industrial sector, strengthening fiscal and monetary management, increasing the participation of the private sector in development, and privatizing state-owned enterprises (SOEs). (GoB 1998, 36). In order for the nation to qualify for these loans for structural adjustment, it began to liberalize and deregulate the agricultural sector, scaled back the operations of a number of state-owned businesses whose primary purpose was to supply agricultural inputs to farmers, and reduced the amount of money that was allocated to agricultural subsidies (Aminuzzaman, 1993). Of course, the Washington Consensus served as a major backbone to it, which I will discuss shortly in this section of the thesis. The long-term goals of the adjustment programs were to steer the country away from its traditional path toward industrialization and create a groundswell of support for market-friendly changes driven by the private sector.

3.1.2. Green Revolution

The root of these reforms can be found in the adoption of Green Revolution technologies—modification of agriculture starting in the 1950s through the use of machines,

fertilizer, pesticides, and irrigation, and the growth of hybrid varieties of rice, wheat, and corn, especially, and later vegetables also (europa.eu) - back in the 1960s and 1970s. Through the introduction of this technology, the farming community had to be integrated into the market (strictly in the economic sense, since now there were surpluses) in order to cover the extensive cost of chemical fertilizers and pesticides that became a requirement to be used under the said technological revolution (Uddin, 2021). Agricultural produce shifted from becoming products to be sold in the market to producing food to sustain a living—a kind of sustenance farming.

During the "green revolution," the use of different chemical fertilizers and pesticides initially enhanced agricultural productivity but subsequently led to the extinction of numerous animals and plants and a decline in soil fertility (Kumar, 2017). Furthermore, the loss of soil, water, and ecosystems raises the price of food production. The "green revolution" distinguishes between "manufacturing" and "agricultural lifestyles" from the economic perspective of commodities and food production alone (Kumar, 2017). The yield target is focused only on generating a profit through production and marketing. Also, the new varieties have been bred in such a way that the more fertilizers or artificial inputs applied to the land, the higher the yield. Fossil energy based synthetic chemical fertilizer plants started being set up in the aftermath of this new technology or imported from countries where fossil energy based fertilizers are produced at a high cost of foreign exchange (Uddin, 2021). Again, since the production cost of these chemical fertilizers is high, it is not possible for the poor farmers without capital to buy them at a high price and apply them to the land, so it has been made easier for farmers to buy fertilizers by subsidizing them with people's tax money (Rashtrachinta Journal, 2023). Farmers are also applying it to the land as desired since they have been taught to do so during many training sessions (Uddin, 2021). As a result, agro-based companies and commercial farms started to dominate the mainstream economy, as I will show shortly in this section of the thesis.

Instead of providing security, agro-based companies and commercial farms have evolved into suppliers of raw materials. If the distinction between "production" and "agrarian living systems" is made solely from a "commercial perspective," the sole objective of production is to maximize profit, which is a capitalist production system (Kumar, 2017). But never "agricultural," as agricultural practices, along with being a mode of survival through trade, are more importantly a traditional lifestyle. In the process of this capitalist production system's rise, a small number of

commercial corporations and agricultural value-adding industries have surpassed farmers as the primary providers of food (Rashtrachinta Journal, 2023). In this perspective, it is essential to keep in mind that, because seed management and food availability are linked to human security, any centralized system of food production is a danger to food security (Tirado-Kulieva et al., 2022). Under centralized capitalist production systems, a few individuals and organizations dominate the food supply and the market for food items, which is a direct assault on state security.

One of my informants, who was a young farmer in the 1970s, looked at the time of such new reforms being adopted and told me how a part of it was forming a discourse. The national television channel soon became a means of spreading agendas and forming discourse. The local authorities - chairman, member¹⁹, and other members of the government in the locality - stressed the importance of adopting the new technology in order to maximize profit. The farmers, according to the informant, saw an immediate financial gain from three times the harvest. They did not have the means to be able to assess a plethora of consequences, e.g., the rivers being 'murdered' (in the words of an expert that I interviewed), fish dying, rapid deforestation since it was a prerequisite to maximize the number of cultivable lands, destroying biodiversity, and so on and so forth. One of the detrimental repercussions was that the hugely diverse breeds of grains and fresh produce were forgone (Nelson, 2019). Furthermore, these novel breeds have had a significant impact on human health. Countries in the Indian subcontinent were among the leading nations to adopt the Green Revolution, which significantly enhanced agricultural productivity and ensured food security; however, the extensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has led to a significant proportion of the population, being afflicted with various health issues such as cancer, hyperthyroidism, blue-baby syndrome, and birth defects (Hasan, 2015). The incidence of congenital anomalies, reduced birth weight, and diminished cognitive function among school-aged children are among the supplementary health consequences that have impacted two successive generations.

¹⁹ A union council, also known as union parishad, rural council, rural union, and simply union, the smallest rural administrative and local government unit in Bangladesh, consists of a chairman and twelve members including three members exclusively reserved for women. Union councils are formed under the Local Government (Union Parishads) Act, 2009.

The experience of an elderly farmer, who had witnessed the shift from conventional farming to the methods advocated by the Green Revolution, revealed that the contemporary crop varieties did not yield the anticipated levels of essential nutrients. As per his statement, "*Ei bhaat khey bol pai nai*", which translates to "This rice did not provide us with any energy". The individual stated that the consumption of the recently introduced rice variant would not yield equivalent energy levels as compared to the previous variant, even if the intake was doubled. This farmer joined the Nayakrishi andolon in the late 1990s. Nayakrishi andolon started as a community movement by some farmers that later took the shape of an NGO. I will talk about this organization and what they do in the next chapter.

Besides discourse formation, incentivizing the new policies was also undertaken. Manoj Misra (2017) collected data from three villages in northern Bangladesh. Farmers in *Panchagarh*²⁰ confided in him that in the late 1980s, the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) provided them with nearly free fertilizers. This was done to encourage farmers to move away from producing foxtail millet, sesame, and other locally cultivated non-cereal crops. In addition, the government created the Barendra Integrated Development Project in order to provide northern Bangladesh with irrigation water.

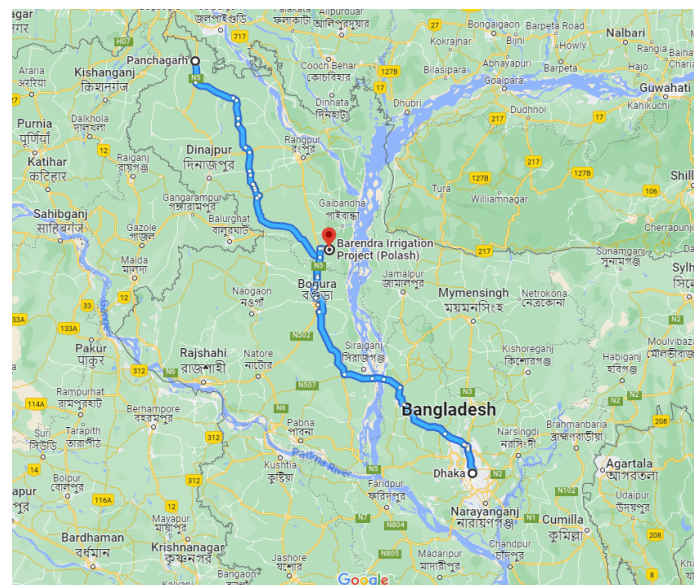


Figure 3.2: Map locating Panchagarh in the North of Bangladesh, Barendra main project site and their distance from Dhaka

²⁰ Panchagarh is the Northernmost district of Bangladesh located 430km from Dhaka.

According to the website of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), the objectives of the Barendra project are as follows:

5. Barind Rain Water Conservation and Irrigation Project (Phase-ii) (2011-2014).
Estimated cost as per PP Tk. 23895.00 lakh.

Objective of the project :

- a) To re-excavate Khas Khal, Pond and water body for increasing the volume of reservoir to hold rain water in the project area and to use this water for various purposes.
- b) To extend irrigation facilities through conservation of rain water/surface water near about 50000 hec. of land by re-excavation of 900 Km derelict khas khal/khari, 700 nos. of khas pond/water body, 9 no. dighi (Including water body) and construction of 212 nos. watercontrol structure & 2 nos. rubber dam.
- c) To dig 100 nos. of dug well for drinking purpose of poor people as well as supplementary irrigation.
- d) To develop surface water body for conservation of rain water and to recharge ground water from such water body, to minimize temperature, to increase humidity for better situation of raining in the driest project area.
- e) To create additional forest resources for developing environment and socio economic condition through plantation of 3 lakh fruits sapling and 6 lakh forest & medicinal plant sapling.
- f) To increase additional employment facilities of the laborers and marginal farmetrts during and after project implementation.

Components	DPP Target	Achievement up to February'12	For the year 2011-2012 (Tk. in Lakh)			Cumulative Expenditure (% of DPP Allocation) (Tk. in Lakh)
			ADP Allocation	Fund Released	Expenditure	
1. Re-excavation of Khas Khal/Khari (Km.)	900	31	1000.00	750.00	582.42	582.42 (2.44%)
2. Re-excavation of Pond (Nos.)	700	0				
3. Re-excavation of Dighi (Nos.)	9	0				
4. Diging of Dug Well (Nos.)	100	47				

Figure 3.1: Objectives of Barendra project. Source: DAE

I have personal experience being part of a study conducted to look at the efficiency of the Barendra project, which is a classic example of the nature of developmental projects in a neopatrimonial country like Bangladesh. I will get into it in the next section of this chapter that discusses the impacts of neopatrimonialism in the agri sector.

3.1.3. Market Reforms Post Green Revolution (GR)

Although the modern technique brought on by GR is predominantly for rice farming, fresh produce farming also underwent a certain amount of modernization, especially in terms of the varieties that would be grown. It is mainly because of the financial incentives that many farmers gradually adopted this new farming technique (Misra, 2017). Because the time it takes for GR rice varieties to mature is noticeably less than the time it takes for conventional varieties, farmers were forced to quicken the production process in order to make the most of the benefits offered by this innovative method of farming. However, many small peasants lacked the financial resources necessary to mechanize their farms, so they continued to rely on animal draft power for soil preparation and other production-related tasks in the early years of the GR variety's development. This slowed down the growth rate of the GR varieties. In addition, there were stringent regulations placed on the import of machinery by private parties, which meant that only a select few types and manufacturers were allowed to be brought in (Ahmed 1995). On the other hand, as GR varieties and irrigation infrastructure revolutionized the production regime, more farmers began farming rice on land that had previously been used for grazing or fallow in an effort to increase their income.

Throughout the years leading up to the Structural Adjustment, the government retained some degree of influence over the market. Farmers were required to receive subsidized agricultural machinery and other inputs, and the BADC was given the responsibility of providing these. During this time period, the BADC was responsible for the marketing of agricultural goods at predetermined rates through *Thana*²¹ Sales Centers (TSCs) and Thana Central Cooperative Organizations (TCCAs) (Misra, 2017). In addition to this, 43,000 private dealers were given licenses to sell inputs in their assigned zones at rates that were regulated by the government (Renfro 1992). In 1978, the government of the time, the *Janata Administration* (People's Party), initiated the process of gradually liberalizing and privatizing the agricultural inputs and machinery sectors in accordance with the policy framework of the New Marketing System

²¹ Literally means police station but contextually meant as local

(IFDC 1980). The gradual abolition of TSCs and TCCAs and the gradual transfer of the BADC's responsibility for importing and distributing machinery and other inputs to the private sector were both the results of the deregulation of the market that was implemented as part of this new system, which led to the introduction of the new system (including seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and irrigation equipment).

3.1.4. First Farm Policy

The entire process of reform took a number of years, and by the middle of the 1990s, the input distribution system had been totally privatized. At the same time as the government started cutting back on the size of its subsidies, producer prices continued to fall, but input costs continued to rise. Farmers that were doing well had little difficulty as a result of this. Yet, because of the unfavorable terms of trade, it was challenging for small peasant farmers to make investments in the purchase of pricey machinery and other vital inputs. It is also important to note that along the hierarchy of affluence among classes of farmers, if they are rather well-to-do, they tend to switch entirely away from farming to being landowners renting their lands to smaller producers.

In light of these circumstances, the federal government formulated its first farm policy, which it referred to at the time as the National Agriculture Policy, in the year 1999. (NAP) (Misra, 2017). The primary purpose of the policy was to "modernize and diversify the crop sector, or the whole agricultural system, by beginning and implementing a well-organized and well-coordinated development plan," as stated in the program's official statement of purpose. In light of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and other international accords, it tried to restructure the agricultural industry while adhering to the ideals of a free market (GoB 1999, 1–3).

The National Agricultural Policy took a very determined stance toward solving the issue of mechanization on farms and called for more actions to be taken in order to finish privatizing the agricultural machinery industry. These efforts included the use of mass media as well as expanding cheap credit facilities, removing limits on standardization and testing of imported and domestically produced machinery, expanding tax benefits for imported machinery, and removing limits on standardization and testing of imported and domestically produced machinery (Matin et

al. 2008). The primary objective of these policies was to encourage participation from the private sector in the sale of agricultural machinery and equipment to farmers. The market share for privately marketed agro-machinery increased from zero in the late 1970s to Taka 13,08 billion 12 in 2004 and then to Taka 35.29 billion 13 in 2007, demonstrating a fantastic market boom in that time period (Matin et al. 2008). As a direct consequence of this, Bangladesh is now considered to have "one of the most automated agriculture systems in Asia," with 80 percent of tillage activities being carried out by mechanical tractors (Biggs et al. 2011, 79–80). It has come to the point now where the agricultural department of the government, called the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), now predominantly deals with motivating farmers to be mechanized. Most of their field work revolves around providing training and tips on how to adopt more 'digital' agricultural practices.

From one of my Focused Group Discussions (FGD), I learned that the use of these heavy machines is part of the mandate from the government. However, other than a handful of farmers who are comparatively well off, they are too expensive for small- and middle-scale farmers to buy. There are provisions to rent them, though. But in any case, be it to buy or rent, the prices are significantly higher than they should be, taking the global market prices into consideration. On paper, there are subsidies available on these machines, but the price to be paid after subsidies is higher than if they were to be bought from the private market, i.e., imported privately (the market for agricultural equipment is monopolized; at best, oligopolized with only a couple of Bangladeshi companies selling them, and even for them, the equipment is not entirely produced in Bangladesh but assembled using only imported parts) (Uddin, 2021). Some of my informants, elderly farmers, still make use of draft animals and wooden ploughs. They use them the majority of the time to smooth out the massive dents created on the land from using tractors in order to evenly distribute irrigation water throughout the land.

3.1.5. Public Food Distribution System (PFDS)

In spite of the fact that years of Structural Adjustment Programs had essentially moved the supply and marketing of agricultural inputs like seeds, chemicals, pesticides, fertilizers, irrigation equipment, and other machinery to the private sector, market realities prohibited the NAP from recommending a comprehensive withdrawal of the state from the agricultural input market. The

majority of the time, the state will intervene in the output market through its public food distribution system (PFDS) (Adams, 1998). This is a common strategy that is utilized in South Asia to stabilize domestic grain markets, with the ostensible intention of protecting both farmers and consumers. The British administration implemented the domestic procurement system that claimed to stabilize the food grain market and feed the ration store in East Pakistan until 1971, albeit on a very modest scale (Mukherjee, 2010). The administration neglected domestic procurement for the first two years following independence due to the massive flood of food aid. The government's failure to avoid famine in 1974 was attributable, in part, to this state's incapacity or reluctance to increase food reserves through internal procurement (Alamgir, 1980).

Nevertheless, serious food shortages necessitated the implementation of a mandatory buying program in 1974–75 (Muqtada, 1981). Not only did it fail owing to the government's administrative incompetence, but it also promoted hoarding by creating panic (Islam, 2022). As a result of the failure of domestic procurement and its effects on agro produce markets, succeeding administrations were extremely cautious in this regard. Consequently, domestic procurement has been a prominent government priority since 1975–76. The reasoning for this decision was that even a small amount of internally bought stock serves as a crucial foundation for the PFDS (Adams, 1998). After a series of policy reforms in 1994, Bangladesh liberalized its trade policy to encourage imports by private traders, which has become a crucial component of its stabilization program (Rashid et al., 2008: 13). The government of Bangladesh still maintains a tiny security reserve through internal purchases in order to avoid disaster-related emergency demands. Throughout the 1980s, the PFDS managed an annual average of 2.5 million metric tons of cargo (MMT) but in the early 2000s, the scope of the PFDS was significantly reduced, and it now only applies to around 1.4 MMT (Chowdhury and Haggblade 2000; Ahmed et al. 2010). If there is a scarcity of a certain product, the country will import that commodity. Several significant economic records assert the existence of a surplus of agricultural products, which is demonstrated annually. Yet, the import of the same continues at the same time. If the consumption data is accurate, there should be no shortfall. And if the shortfall is accurate, consumption and production numbers are inconsistent. There are several discrepancies in the data about the consumption of the nation's most prominent institutions (Parvez, 2021). The scope of this explanation is beyond the purview of this thesis.

By May 1992, the government had virtually dismantled both statutory and rural rationing systems, two of the nation's largest PFDS channels, in order to encourage private-sector participation in food grain procurement and distribution (Chowdhury and Haggblade 2000). As a result of this reduction in the PFDS, individual merchants gained a significant degree of leverage over the grain market. Due to the excessive pursuit of profit by these private merchants, the price of grain experienced frequent artificial fluctuations, which placed the financial security of many small farmers in jeopardy (Misra 2012). The severe food crisis that started in 2007/08 and continued into the years that followed forced the government to reevaluate its position on the PFDS and agricultural subsidies. This was the case despite the fact that considerable rice output was available. Such was also the case during the famine of 1943, which essentially gave birth to the PFDS. In the words of Sugata Bose (1990), it was a famine that struck Bengal "amidst plenty."

3.1.6. Shift in 2013

Having kept some remnants of protectionist measures, the National Agricultural Policy (NAP) indicated a radical shift about the future of agriculture in 2013. A closer look at these policies reveal that the primary difference between the plans of 1999 and 2013 is the shift in focus from attaining food self-sufficiency to reaching 4.0–4.5% growth in agriculture in order to achieve the requisite 7% growth in overall GDP (GOB, 2021-22). In addition, the 2013 plan supports the widespread promotion of new and post-production technologies, as well as the formation of agribusiness potential wherever possible, in an effort to expedite the agricultural capitalization process (GOB website). Was it a mere coincidence that this new policy reflected much of what is stated in the Post-Washington Consensus - the development strategies that focus on privatization, liberalization, and macro-stability? The policies are frequently referred to as "neoliberal" policies because of the emphasis on liberalization, and because, like liberalism from the nineteenth century, they emphasize the significance of the state playing only a minimal role (Krugman, 2007). The 2013-implemented plan includes Post-Washington Consensus terms such as "pro-poor growth," "information technology," "market regulation," "human resource development," and "equity." About the Post-Washington Consensus, as Krugman says, "There was a failure in understanding economic structures within developing countries, in focusing on too narrow a set of objectives, and on too limited a set of instruments." The 2013 agricultural

policy has encountered similar limitations as the Consensus, resulting in its ineffectiveness. Krugman highlights that one of the major limitations is the failure to recognize that imperfect information and incomplete markets (common in all countries, particularly developing ones) or technological advancements resulting from research and development, or learning in general, can lead to inefficient outcomes in markets.

As discussed earlier, the adverse effects of neoliberal economic reforms have led to the poverty of smallholder peasants. Despite this, the state's numerous direct and indirect methods of subsidizing agricultural output and providing social assistance have prevented the complete eviction of small peasants from their land. The empirical evidence collected in Bangladesh reveals the existence of a "reasonably independent" state that juggles protectionist and minimalist tasks in equal measure. This is not the case, despite the widespread belief that peasants in the global south have lost "non-market access to the means of subsistence" as a result of the decline of the developmental state (as stated in Misra, 2017; Araghi 2009, 134). The state has created "a parallel economy in which market imperatives dominate both the upstream and downstream of the agricultural sector" (Misra, 2017), while, at the same time, it has mandated that small-scale farmers provide for their most fundamental needs. The inconsistency in the state's reluctance to eradicate peasant agriculture is partly due to the lingering memories of starvation and misery that continue to haunt and affect the policy regime of Bangladesh (Pinstrup-Andersen 2000). In the seminal analysis of Amartya Sen (1981), the failure of the colonial regime and the subsequent post-independence administration led to the deaths of seven million Bengalis from starvation during the famine previously mentioned. Hence, it only makes sense to call these deaths 'murder'. However, the state remained unhinged on its unwillingness to give up control, which is driven by the fear that a fractured market would lead to a revival of populist upheavals. This fear has been the driving force behind this reluctance. In the current time, as well, we see the same tendency to ensure regime survival, as I argue in the theoretical framework and in the next section that deals with neopatrimonialization. The dysfunctional character of the market contributes to the growth of this fear.

3.1.7. Employment, Subsistence, and Social Safety Net Program (SSNP)

Another issue that compels the state to protect the subsistence sector is the inability of the formal sector, which includes industry and services, to absorb the massive excess of labor that would be released as a consequence of agricultural reforms (Parvez, 2021). When the first Structural Adjustment Facility (SAF) loan (under SAP as explained above) from the IMF was distributed in 1987, agriculture was responsible for 58.79% of the total workforce; however, as of right now, agriculture is only responsible for 45.33% of the employment. (Labour Force Survey, 2022). Over the same time period, the contribution that the industrial sector made to the GDP more than tripled, going from 9.86 percent to 29.93 percent, even though employment in this sector only increased by six percent (BBS 1983, 2010b; GoB 1998, 2012a). In spite of the fact that the average growth rate of the GDP over the previous two decades was between 4% and 6%, the formal sector has only employed 22% of the whole labor force, with just 11% of those employed in manufacturing and the other 28% working in organized service industries (BBS, 2021). The vast majority of these manufacturing jobs are located in the ready-made garment industry, which is primarily focused on exporting and employs young women at earnings that are below the federal poverty threshold. In the same way that it has in a large number of other countries located in the global south, the capitalist economic process in Bangladesh has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to avoid accumulation through wider reproduction. This is true of the process in a large number of other countries as well. Real estate and the stock market are two examples of sectors that have flourished despite failing to contribute to the overall growth of the economy. This is mostly attributable to the fact that wealthy capitalist elites are hesitant to invest their money in productive businesses (Alami, 2021). The extraordinary rise of the informal sector over the last several decades has made a significant contribution to the decrease in unemployment by helping to absorb an excessive number of potential workers (GoB 2012b). In spite of this, the compensation is exceedingly low, and there is very little job security offered by these illegal forms of employment. All these have compelled the state to implement a number of poverty eradication, rural development, and social safety net programs (SSNPs) to support the subsistence sector and stem the flow of rural migrants into the cities (Misra, 2017). The major social safety net programs (SSNPs) in Bangladesh can be divided into four broad categories: (i) employment generation programs; (ii) programs to cope with natural disasters and other shocks;

(iii) incentives provided to parents for their children's education; and (iv) incentives provided to families to improve their health status (Barkat-E-Khuda, 2011). These initiatives are designed to be of assistance to those working in the subsistence sector.

It is plausible to claim that the reforms have diminished the capabilities of the state to such an extent that the state is now incapable of taking any substantial steps toward development, even if it so desired. In my opinion, in certain cases, the government's hands have been tied. Post-independence, the war-torn country needed financial assistance, but that assistance from big donor bodies like the IMF, World Bank, and some developed countries came with some strict rules to adhere to, as I have shown above. And those rules have not proved to be friendly for the people, especially marginal communities, like small-hold producers. Despite this, the government still has some, though limited, capacity to intervene in the market. Aside from the fact that the goal of these interventions is to promote free market capitalism, they may give the impression that they are trying to preserve the sociopolitical status quo. Yet when one considers that the interventions are meant to maintain the status quo, it becomes clear that the capitalist classes are the ones who would ultimately benefit. These neoliberal temperaments, coupled with a government whose primary concern is the survival of its regime by any means, have given birth to a dysfunctional agriculture sector in Bangladesh. The next section looks into the current state of the government's policy implementation and argues that the clientelist attitude of the neopatrimonial regime fails to sustain the farmers.

3.2 Neopatrimonial Make-up

The transition from policy formulation to policy execution is a crucial aspect of governance, which in this section will be shown as underpinned by neopatrimonialism. In the theoretical framework section of chapter 1, I expounded on the neopatrimonialism that underpins the state of Bangladesh. This state serves as a prototype for numerous other developing nations. However, what distinguishes this state are the practices of patronage, clientelism, and patron-client relationships, as elucidated in the theoretical framework. The model comprises three distinct categories of actors, namely patrons, clients, and non-clients. In the allocation of public resources, patrons, who frequently hold significant political power, are typically accorded primary entitlement and decision-making authority regarding distribution. Clients reciprocate the

financial benefits they receive from their patron by providing political support through voting and advocacy during political campaigns. The conduct of clients does not exhibit a significant correlation with their class, business, or ideology.

3.2.1. Neopatrimonialism Facilitates Corruption

Neopatrimonialism requires that politicians and bureaucrats have discretion in the distribution of money and programs, with minimal public supervision of these transactions. Neopatrimonialism also requires that the public have limited access to information regarding these transactions (Shefter 1977, Van de Walle 2001, Migdal 1988, Huber and Shipan 2002, Stokes 2005, Muller 2007). As a result, it provides incentives for politicians to oppose policies that may enhance openness and accountability or improve the rule of law. This is the effect of the incentive that it produces (Geddes 1994). In addition, politicians always have the ability, should they have sufficient determination, to circumvent pre-existing institutional constraints that would restrict clientelist behavior (Stokes 2005, Levitsky 2003). In neopatrimonial regimes, there may be few government players willing to serve as "agents of restraint" against rent-seeking officials. This is because the prosecution of rent-seeking officials would be damaging to the larger political team (Collier and Pattillo 2000). As a result of the fact that bureaucratic officials are selected primarily based on their political connections rather than their skills, there is a possibility that efficiency will decline, and businesspeople, both within and outside of the government, may find opportunities to grease the system through bribery and kickbacks. Because of this, the neopatrimonial aspect of the state, also known as clientelism, leads to systems in which horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms are weak, decisions are made with little transparency, and bureaucratic discretion is great, which ultimately results in the state being neopatrimonial (Singer, 2009). Before delving further into this chapter, however, I want to stress the fact that these same features are almost always accompanied with large degrees of corruption. Under these conditions, political players have opportunities to rent seek as citizens attempt to navigate the bureaucracy, as well as the freedom to do so because there are no penalties for any transgressions that aren't the most serious ones (Rose-Ackerman 1999, Djankov et al. 2002, Botero et al. 2004, Treisman 2007).

So, it is quite likely for clientelism to coexist alongside regulatory systems where corruption may flourish. Because it is difficult to prosecute both large and small forms of corruption in a weak and politicized state, which is what a neopatrimonial state is, as I showed in the chapter on the theoretical framework, neopatrimonialization should be related to a wide variety of corrupt behaviors.

In addition to this, it is often believed that political patrons, also known as politicians who hold power, want to maximize their personal profits so long as they continue to get political support. These benefits are the result of subtracting from total government income the amount that is provided to clients and non-clients in return for political support (Kurer, 1991). The income of the patrons comes from either general taxation or corrupt activities. For example, it is believed that government officials and their agents will 'sell' access to public commodities such as import licenses and industrial licenses in exchange for some kind of personal financial gain [Bates, 1981]. Some other examples of these activities include, amongst others, the illegal sale of licenses and contracts, the solicitation of bribes for the allocation of resources and supplies, and the hoarding of subsidized agricultural resources, which is the topic of the case study that my thesis investigates.

It is presumed that the actors engage in corrupt behavior without any regard for the consequences. Rules imposed by bureaucracies are commonly disregarded, and the likelihood of being disciplined for doing so is extremely low, if not completely nonexistent. The presumption is not wholly inconsistent with reality. "the exploitation of public status for private benefit is a frequent and accepted behavior" in nations where the neopatrimonial form of governance is prevalent, (Andreski, 1979: 277). When corruption is allowed to flourish, it transforms into "an inevitable reality that must be overcome" (Waterbury, 1989: 344). As a result, this section of the chapter outlines some of the most common forms of bribery and corruption that have a detrimental impact on the profitability, productivity, and effectiveness of agricultural operations.

3.2.2. In the Input Market

Poor product quality, non-delivery, and high expenses are typical outcomes of partnerships between government officials and private sector businesses. It is possible for a government agency to buy fertilizer from a private company for a higher price and then get a percentage of

the profit made by the company. One of the main areas in which farmers are subjected to unjust treatment is the fertilizer sector, particularly the market for subsidized fertilizers. Bangladesh is predominantly a fertilizer importer (Bhanu, 2022). Private importers dominate the import market, and the government is in charge of oversight and monitoring. Due to the considerable administrative and monitoring costs involved with giving subsidies directly to farmers, subsidies are paid indirectly via importers of urea, DAP, TSP, and MoP. (Bhanu, 2022).. During my interview with a government official at the Jessore district office of the Department of Agricultural Extension-Ministry of Agriculture (DAE-MoA), I learned that the government estimates the amount of subsidy for importers and/or traders by determining the maximum selling price at the local retailer level; however, dealers do not always sell fertilizers at the government-set price. In the end, not all farmers will profit from the subsidy program, since the vast bulk of the advantages will go to who I call the political elites or the clients of the state. In addition, retailers make it seem as if there is a shortage of fertilizers in order to drive up prices and divert demand for the item away from the agricultural industry (MoA, 2006). According to a survey that was carried out by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) (2012), most farmers who had experienced such practices in the agricultural business did not get their fertilizers on time. Asif Reza Anik (2011) estimates that in any given season, 28 percent of farmers may be unable to acquire the required amount of various inputs due to the unavailability of those inputs on the market, even if they have sufficient funds. This is the case regardless of whether or not the farmers have access to alternative markets. Since the dealers are the exclusive distribution channel for fertilizers in the area, and because subsidized fertilizer commerce and shipment across regions are illegal, farmers often resort to paying more and/or leveraging influence in order to get enough supplies of fertilizer. According to Anik and Bauer, the presence of such practices is enabled by a failure on the part of the relevant government entities to conduct adequate monitoring and supervision (2017). According to research conducted by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) (2012), 92.2% of households that were victims of corruption and irregularities when purchasing fertilizers paid more than the price that was established by the government. In the seed market, about one out of every four farming households that fell prey to corruption and irregularities paid more than the price that was shown on the package (Anik and Bauer, 2017). Adulteration is a significant issue in the seed, fertilizer, and pesticide industries. According to a survey conducted by TIB, more than half of farm households who are affected by

corruption (54.1%) reported acquiring seed of low quality in the agricultural sector (TIB, 2012). Farmers are misled by input dealers, who encourage them to purchase things from dealers who get relatively significant commissions regardless of the quality of the products they sell. Some of the people who responded to my survey told me that they either do not get any seeds or that the seeds they do get are often of poor quality. On the other hand, political elites (clients) in the region have been able to obtain seeds of adequate quality during the same season and at the same time. Occasionally, important local clients are not even genuine farmers; rather, they are sub-dealers or seed hoarders who amass subsidized seeds to distribute to his clients in order to preserve their loyalty and maintain their allegiance. I saw several webs of patron-client relationships only within this discussion that further marginalize the already disadvantaged farmers.

Subsequently, as a result of my fieldwork in Jessore, an Agriculture Extension Officer informed me that various vegetables had been promoted through various initiatives and that all allocations (as determined by DAE) had been distributed in full to the producers. But under the condition of anonymity, a source in the office claims that there is a 5-year initiative claiming to improve production, storage, and distribution of high-quality seedlings, and the initiative is intended to provide demonstration plots of 5 acres each to 15 producers. Each group is supposed to receive 15,000 taka, but that has not been the case. Only a nominal quantity of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and cash has been given to the cultivator per hectare. Sheikh Jaberul Islam (*Ajker Potrika*, 29 September, 2022) discovered that three-fourths of the allotment for farmers is flowing into the pockets of agriculture office personnel. Farmers received 1 kg of seeds and 60 kg of other fertilizers per allotment, compared to the allocation of 4 kg of seeds and 338 kg of urea, TSP, MOP, and organic fertilizers. In another DAE exhibition site, farmers received 12 kg of seedlings and 70 kg of fertilizer in total instead of 50 kg of seedlings and 359 kg of fertilizer. That is, the producers did not receive even a quarter of the government's allocation. On the other hand, farmers are trained through the GKBS, Kandal Crops, NATP-2, Oil Crops Production Enhancement Scheme. 30 farmers participated in each training. In that training, 400 taka for food and 650 taka for bags were allocated for each trainee farmer, but the farmers were given 1 packet of biryani worth 100 taka and a bag of 100 to 150 taka - *Ajker Potrika*, 2022).

In addition to the markets for fertilizer and seeds, the Ministry of Agriculture also offers subsidies for the import of agricultural equipment as well as the electricity needed to run irrigation pumps. The owners of the pumps get a portion of the electricity cost back as a kind of financial assistance, or subsidy. Yet in order to collect the subsidy, the officials harass the farmers by making the official procedure laborious and time consuming (Anik, and Bauer, 2017). This causes the farmers a great deal of frustration. Campaigning via local political authorities in order to remove such bureaucratic red tape (TIB, 2012) - a characteristic element of neopatrimonial systems - is the way to get around the harassment and unfair treatment that is being meted out.

When it comes to agriculture loans, according to a report by the MicroCredit Regulatory Authority (MRA), most of the agricultural loans disbursed by NGOs are being spent on other sectors instead of being used for agriculture. For this reason, MRA has advised NGOs to be more aware (Mawla, 2017). According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) data (2017), only 11 percent of beneficiaries receiving loan money for agriculture are farmers. About 58 percent of households receiving the loan use it for other purposes, mostly for different businesses. Not only that, according to BBS data, 4.1 lakh families in the country applied for agricultural and rural loans to banks and financial institutions but were not given loans. Out of this, many of the families were denied agricultural loans because they could not make any kind of 'advocacy', meaning, they did not have a patron vouching for them. Besides, many others did not get loans because they could not 'satisfy the bank officials', meaning, they do not belong in the client group patronized by a political elite. Many entrepreneurs and political power brokers in Bangladesh seek to claim a relationship to agriculture on their tax returns because agricultural income in Bangladesh is exempt from taxes (Uddin, 2021). They take advantage of their identification as farmers even further by working with bank officials, who aid them in securing agricultural financing, which often has a cheaper interest rate than other types of financing. On the other hand, due to Bangladesh Bank's weak policy and debt monitoring process, private banks and microfinance institutions are taking advantage of the farmers' weakness, and as a result, they have to pay interest at a rate of at least 25 percent and in some cases 40 percent, whereas, the government's fixed rate of interest is 8-9 percent (Uddin, 2021).

3.2.3. Agriculture Extension Service

The Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) is the primary organization in Bangladesh that offers agricultural extension services, and it has facilities located in rural areas. In addition to offering farmers advising services on a monthly basis, the Department of Agricultural Extension organizes demonstration plots and displays with the purpose of promoting the diffusion of technology and educates farmers on the most up-to-date agricultural practices (DAE website). On occasion, the DAE is also involved with material input, particularly in the wake of natural disasters and when promoting new technologies (DAE website). The Department of Livestock (DLS) and the Department of Fisheries (DoF) are in charge of the livestock and fisheries industries, however they have a comparatively small number of workers and no local offices. Together with these establishments, there are additional organizations that provide extension services, sometimes on a project-by-project basis. On issues pertaining to farming, farmers also communicate with the providers of inputs. In spite of these efforts, based on what I've seen in the field, farmers continue to rely on their families, friends, and other industry professionals as their major sources of knowledge. The DAE identifies prominent farmers whose practices are to be emulated by all other farmers and who participate in demonstrations, exhibitions, and training. Group-based approaches are the foundation of extension policies and programs. There are certain criteria that are used to choose farmers for different programs; nevertheless, many of the people who responded to my survey informed me that these criteria are often ignored in favor of large and influential farmers. When it comes to choosing who would benefit from the many extension programs, the extension office is often accused of favoritism and nepotism (TIB, 2012). Concerns about the selection of beneficiaries might arise in the context of initiatives carried out by NGOs and development organizations. Yet, unlike in other industries and for other services, there are no recorded cases of bribery in the extension service (TIB, 2012). This is probably because extension services are often offered at no cost to farmers, and farmers do not believe it would be profitable to pay for them. Yet, extension offices often engage in dishonesty by delivering inputs that are both low in number and bad in quality. All the farmers that I have interviewed have reported being dissatisfied with their lack of access to adequate training subsidies. The most common complaint that is voiced by farmers is that there is a lack of availability of extension services at critical periods due to limited field visits made by agents and

absence from the office. The effectiveness of these services is a significant issue. For example, Anik (2011) found that neglect of duty was the most common kind of corruption in agricultural extension services, followed by nepotism and favoritism. Only affluent and/or politically connected farmers are selected for different extension programs, with the exception of the extension agent's friends and family. As I have seen in Jessore and Dhamrai, the majority of local farmers are unaware of these activities, and only those with the necessary connections and influence attend displays of new technology, field excursions to demonstration plots, and training.

3.2.4. Lack of Proper Representation, Monitoring, and Supervision

According to the Ministry of Agriculture's website, monitoring committees made up of suitable government authorities are created at different administrative levels in order to monitor the local agricultural input supply and demand situation. The committee has the power to intervene in the market and impose sanctions on dealers who violate the rules. The highest executive at the relevant level serves as the committee's chair. The committee's member secretary is the agriculture officer. The group also comprises farmers, non-governmental organizations, merchants, and representatives from all important government agricultural ministries. Government officials choose the NGO representatives, while the local Member of Parliament selects the farmers' representation. As a consequence of this, the representative of the farmers becomes a representative of a political party and performs his duties in an appropriate manner. On the other hand, the representative of the non-governmental organization, who was tasked with conducting objective monitoring and bridging the gap between the farmers and the government, becomes a representative of the government office (Rehman, *The Daily Star*, 2011). In my opinion, it is also difficult to obtain sufficient representation from the farmers because there is no organization in the country that adequately ensures farmers' representation. This makes it difficult to obtain sufficient representation from the farmers. According to a farmer in Barinagar, Jessore, the committee lacks the technical help and resources to maintain field-level quality monitoring, and administrative authorities put agricultural considerations behind the bulk of other concerns. Not only are farmers unable to get their voices heard, but the media, civil society, and other groups that exert pressure are not particularly concerned with the condition of farmers. For instance, the Bangladeshi chapter of Transparency International regularly conducts research

on corruption in a variety of sectors, such as healthcare, education, law enforcement agencies, local governments, the textile industry, the election commission, the national parliament, and many more. In addition to that, if there are issues or crises in these businesses, they often publish public statements. Despite the fact that I studied their reports, they do not seem to be concerned about the widespread corruption in the agriculture industry. The scope of the research program that TIB is doing for the industry is limited to a household survey that is conducted throughout the country and takes agriculture into consideration along with other industries. A second study was conducted around 10 years ago to see how satisfied farmers were with the extension program. Agriculture is a topic that is seldom brought up in key civil society organizations in the country that promote good governance, such as SHUJAN-Citizens for Good Governance, CCC Committee of Concerned Citizens, and others. This should not come as a surprise considering that these organizations are more dependent on activities that take place in urban areas and have not yet expanded their operations outside of metropolitan areas.

During a personal interview, a political figure who had previously utilized Test Relief (TR) during their party's tenure disclosed that officials and activists of the present government frequently reap the rewards of various development initiatives, including Test Relief (TR) and Food for Work (FFW) projects. The aforementioned political figure demonstrated a proclivity for utilizing TR as a political tool during their party's tenure in office, particularly in the implementation of various programs. Typically, the advantages of such initiatives are dispersed among the parliamentarians, the Upazilla Chairman, and the supporters, adherents, and other political enthusiasts of the MP and Chairman concerned. Likewise, the economically disadvantaged demographic does not reap the advantages of the government's food subsidies provided by way of the Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) initiative. According to a prominent political figure in the community, initiatives that align with the political objectives of politicians have primarily benefited other politicians over the years. The aforementioned politically-driven endeavors stem from commitments made by Members of Parliament (MPs), Ministers, or influential political figures during their visits to specific regions or localities within their respective constituencies. The aforementioned commitments were undertaken with the aim of securing endorsement from the populace residing in the respective locality or district.

The presence of a relationship between a household and public representatives has been found to have a significant impact on reducing the likelihood of encountering corruption in its various forms. Households that maintain affiliations with various officials affiliated with the Upazila Executive Officer's office exhibit a reduced likelihood of encountering instances of corruption and bribery. The presence of affiliations with the upazila executive officer's office and community organizations has been found to have a notable impact on the reduction of bribery occurrences. The aforementioned outcomes are consistent with the discoveries made by Hunt (2004). Hunt posited that trust networks serve as a mechanism for households to identify alternatives to bribery, such as quid pro quo arrangements, thereby diminishing the likelihood of encountering instances of bribery. By providing services to households that have a connection with a power entity, service delivery officials may anticipate reciprocation from said power entity. In addition, it is anticipated that rational authorities will demonstrate a readiness to circumvent issues and confrontations with influential organizations. Consequently, the probability of engaging in corrupt practices is reduced among households that maintain a connection with a powerful entity.

The fact is that patronage politics, which are the result of neopatrimonial regimes, are the primary factor weakening the capacity of the state in Bangladesh. While a feeble state is one that fails to perform a number of activities, the failure of performance in the neopatrimonial Bangladesh state is the deliberate result of regimes. For example, when I had the chance to be an assistant to the consultant appointed by the donor during an assessment round of the Barendra Multipurpose Project (Barendra Irrigation Project at the time) that I talked about in the last section, I witnessed firsthand how developmental projects in a neopatrimonial state work. At the time, the objective of the project was to dig small canals from the river Brahmaputra to the surrounding areas to ensure a smooth supply of irrigation water. However, the participants that we interviewed opined that instead of digging canals, the people in charge only weeded the surface of the pre-existing canals in some places, while the other sites were completely untouched. It was discovered from that study that the project's contract had gone to a local elite, who in turn subcontracted some of his fellow rich elites to do the job. The report they submitted to the donor concluded that more money was required to successfully finish the job.

3.3. Syndicate

The escalation of vegetable prices can be attributed to unscrupulous business practices, specifically, the reckless extortion tactics employed throughout the supply chain. This phenomenon has resulted in the increased cost of essential goods. Of greater concern is the fact that these illicit activities are transpiring in close proximity to the relevant authorities, yet there appears to be a dearth of effective oversight to properly monitor and address such criminal behavior (*Bangla Post*, 26 December 2021). According to vegetable traders, more than half of the transportation expenses are reportedly absorbed by extortionists who operate as a syndicate. According to a confidential report from the Special Branch of Police submitted to the Ministry of Commerce, a group of individuals sought to exploit the increased demand from consumers during Ramadan 2023 by spreading a false rumor of an import ban from China due to the Covid-19 crisis. This tactic was used as a pretext to unjustifiably increase the prices of essential goods (*Bangla Post*, 16 February 2020).

Frequently, the escalation of vegetable prices lacks a credible justification despite the ample harvest of such produce. In reality, there are numerous occurrences whereby farmers resort to burning their produce due to feelings of hopelessness and dissatisfaction stemming from their inability to secure a just price for their goods (*The Daily Star*, 9 July 2019).

Conversely, it is not uncommon for importers and agents to establish a syndicate and promptly raise the price of oil in response to an increase in the international market price. However, it has been observed that the reduction in international market prices does not result in a corresponding decrease in prices by the concerned parties (*The Daily Star*, 27 September, 2022).

Linking these extortionists who create syndicates with the government, during an interview with Deutsche Welle (DW), Dr. M. Asaduzzaman, a former research director at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) and an economist, asserted that

“...the individuals engaging in extortion possess certain connections with policymakers. The relationship in question is characterized as transactional. Otherwise, it is not feasible. There is no innocent control being exerted over them. If one receives

benefits from an individual, what is the appropriate manner in which to behave innocently? There exists a group of individuals within the profession who possess a desire to act in accordance with ethical principles. However, in situations where directives are issued from higher authorities, they may find themselves with limited options.” (DW, January 27, 2021)

It is indeed asserted time and again in the media that no punitive measures are being implemented or will be implemented against them due to their connections with individuals in high-ranking positions within the government (*Prothom Alo*, October 25, 2020).

From a legal standpoint, this particular type of extortion does not fall under the category of corrupt practices (DW, May 21, 2019). The Anti-Corruption Commission in Bangladesh has not provided a clear definition of corruption that encompasses the aforementioned matters. The Anti-Corruption Commission Act contains several Schedules of Offenses (Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2004). Corruption is only attributed to those specific actions.

Currently, farmers lack agency in determining product pricing as they are subject to the control and monopoly of large-scale traders, wholesalers, and retail syndicates who dictate the profitability and market demand for agricultural goods. They artificially stimulate demand in the market and subsequently increase prices without any justifiable reasons. They maximize their profit from the market by taking the highest possible margin. They exert a dominant influence over both the agricultural producer and the consumer. The stakeholders involved in the agricultural market do not disclose pertinent market information to the farmers and customers, thereby maximizing their own profits. Additionally, they create a false sense of necessity. Consequently, in response to the aforementioned market demand, producers proceed to vend their entire inventory to wholesalers at a justifiable cost under the impression that it constitutes their earnings. However, the entity incurs significant financial detriment as the wholesaler proceeds to vend the aforementioned commodity at a substantially elevated rate within the urban market. But who are the members of the syndicates in question? And how do they assert such power? On March 18th, 2023, Mahmudur Rahman Manna, the president of *Nagorik Oikya*, a leftist political party in Bangladesh, made a statement regarding the escalation of prices of essential commodities in the lead up to Ramadan:

“It is anticipated that there will be a surge in prices during the period of Ramadan. However, it is unlikely that the government will prioritize this issue. They lack the authority to take any action. There exist alleged entities known as syndicates that purportedly manipulate market prices. The present administration can be characterized as a syndicate.” [Manobkontho, 18 March 2023]

One of the leaders of another political party directly stated:

“The government is implicated in collusion with syndicates that engage in price hikes. This syndicate is composed of individuals affiliated with the government” [Jugantar, 2 April 2020]

According to numerous assertions, the entirety of the market is under the control of six to seven major industrial conglomerates or corporations, encompassing both domestic and global entities (Manobkontho, 18 March 2023). Besides the illegal extremely profitable captured, the legal income of the officials have increased 300 times, while that of the common citizens have not at all and the farmers incur consistent losses; on the other hand, the prices of essential goods have increased at least 10 times (Prothom Alo, 10 March 2022) - this means that the government essentially is marginalizing its own people.



একান্ত সাক্ষাৎকারে শিল্প প্রতিমন্ত্রী

শেয়ার কেলেঙ্কারিতে জড়িতরা এখন মন্ত্রী, দুঃখ হয় সবাই টাকার পিছে ঘুরছে

সব কথা বলতে গেলে দেখবেন আমার লাশটা রাস্তায় পড়ে আছে

মন্ত্রীদের ভেতর একটা সিন্ডিকেট আছে

সিন্ডিকেট করে দ্রব্যমূল্য বৃদ্ধি, দুর্নীতি-দুটপাট, অর্থনৈতিক দুরবস্থা, খেলাপি ঋণসহ স্পর্শকাতর নানা বিষয়ে যুগান্তরের সঙ্গে খোলামেলা আলাপ করেছেন শিল্প প্রতিমন্ত্রী কামাল আহমেদ মজুমদার। রোববার সন্ধ্যায় মিরপুরে নিজ কার্যালয়ে তার সঙ্গে একান্তে কথা বলেছেন যুগান্তরের বিশেষ প্রতিনিধি **মাহবুব আলিম লাবলু**। সাক্ষাৎকারের চূড়ক অংশ পাঠকের জন্য তুলে ধরা হলো—

যুগান্তর : কেমন আছেন? ■ পৃষ্ঠা ১১ : কলাম ১

Figure 7: “There is a syndicate among ministers” - Kamal Ahmed Majumder, State Minister of Trade, People’s Republic of Bangladesh. Source: *Jugantar*, 17 May, 2023

Translation of figure 7: “Those involved in the scam of the share market are now ministers... If I were to reveal all the truth, you would find my dead body in the street..”

3.4. Conclusion

According to the pattern that has emerged throughout the course of Bangladeshi political history, in order for regimes to amass more power, they have a tendency to progressively weaken state institutions and the centralized decision-making process. Before the year 1990, the authoritarian and paternalistic modes of administration were the distinguishing features of the several regimes that were in power in Bangladesh, however, notwithstanding the fact that the form of patrimonial power has changed since the multiparty election in 1991, the authoritarian and paternalistic attitudes of governments have not changed (Islam, 2022). Since 1991, regimes have wielded "patrimonial" authority inside a "legal-rational" dominion as the amount of bureaucratic institutionalization has become firmly anchored. In this new paradigm, political patronage politics is used to preserve regimes, and the results of policy decisions are determined by political manipulation of state resources. The political elites of Bangladesh are able to build networks and alliances because they make use of the traditional patron-client structure of the society. They depend on exchanges to accomplish the objectives that they have set for themselves. In this sense, state elites employ components of the state and political system to mediate these exchanges: regimes deploy diverse governmental machinery for personal or sectoral goals, not societal purposes. Consequently, the farming society is left with no representation, has highly inadequate access to state resources, and is being marginalized further. Under these circumstances, to what extent are we supposed to rely on private initiatives? On NGOs per se? My next chapter looks into the role of NGOs and other actors in the private sector and cites the model of one particular organization to assess its impact and further analyze if their model can be a universal one for the Global South.

Chapter 4: Is there an alternative?

The present chapter delves into the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the agricultural domain of Bangladesh, with a specific emphasis on tackling the issues brought to light in the preceding sections. In order to enhance the participation of citizens in public decision-making processes and augment their capacity to ensure governmental responsibility, alternative strategies are necessary. This prompts us to contemplate the role of civil society advocacy organizations. Therefore, the present chapter aims to examine the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the agricultural sector of Bangladesh, particularly in addressing the challenges highlighted in the preceding chapters. The present chapter will employ Nayakrishi Andolon of UBINIG as a case study.

The initial segment of this chapter presents a comprehensive outline of the agricultural extension services in Bangladesh, along with an account of the National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP) that was instituted by the Department of Agricultural Extension. The text elucidates the primary obstacles encountered by the present agricultural production systems in the nation, including but not limited to diminutive landholding, predicaments with input provisioning and operational funds, apprehensions regarding food safety, and restricted accessibility to irrigation water. This will naturally segue into an examination of the influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this domain. Finally, the discussion will conclude with an analysis of Nayakrishi's approach to this issue. It is noteworthy to indicate that the interviewees in question are Farhad Mazhar and Farida Akhter, the founders of UBINIG and its subsidiary, Nayakrishi. As an NGO, UBINIG is the focal point of this study. Furthermore, I have had the opportunity to reside at the UBINIG center and engage in informal conversations with several farmers affiliated with the initiative. Therefore, the discourse pertaining to Nayakrishi that is being presented herein predominantly constitutes my primary research data.

According to James Buchanan (1980) and other neo-classical economists, reducing government intervention is necessary to facilitate the more efficient functioning of the market. The argument posits that a reduction in resources available to government officials would result in a corresponding decrease in their ability to provide incentives to their associates. As per Buchanan's statement:

... so long as government action is restricted largely, if not entirely, to protecting individual rights, persons and property, and enforcing voluntarily negotiated private contracts, the market process dominates economic behavior. ... If, however, government action moves significantly beyond the limits defined by the minimal or protective state ... the tendency toward the erosion or dissipation of rents is countered and may be shortly blocked [Buchanan, 1980: 9].

From the standpoint of this thesis, it is important to acknowledge that in Bangladesh, similar to numerous other developing nations, the market may not possess any greater level of efficiency than the state in providing affordable sustenance to impoverished individuals. The profit-seeking merchant is driven by the same individual self-interest that motivates the rent-seeking bureaucrat/agent (Toye, 1991: 322). Neither of the actors demonstrates a concern for the welfare of the impoverished. It is noteworthy that the notion of rent-seeking bureaucrats/agents, although valuable in elucidating certain facets of public policy in emerging economies, is inadequate. The explanation posited by rent-seeking bureaucrats/agents, which centers on the actions of domestic officials and their agents, fails to account for the significant influence that international actors frequently exert on policy formulation in developing nations [Bagchi, 1993; Toye, 1987]. In the context of Bangladesh, it can be observed that two prominent global entities, namely USAID and the World Bank, have exerted significant influence in advocating for the reduction of government spending on food and agriculture subsidies (Misra, 2017). The aforementioned reductions have had a significant impact on the levels of subsidies obtained by various income brackets, including farmers who are marginalized. These external groups advocating for government cutbacks on food subsidies cannot be classified as rent-seeking bureaucrats or lobbies, as they do not derive any material gain or rent from their endeavors. To summarize, the concept of rent-seeking bureaucrats/agents has the potential to elucidate certain aspects of the functioning of the food subsidy system in Bangladesh, as per R.H. Adams (1998) analysis. However, it may not be sufficient to account for all the intricacies involved.

Within this particular context, the relevance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) - which, although technically including USAID and the World Bank, are not the focus of discussion here -

assumes a degree of significance. Non-governmental organizations that are exclusively focused on providing services fail to address two crucial elements of the development process - initially, it is noteworthy that they cannot hold the state accountable for its actions of both commission and omission by the concerned parties. Furthermore, there is a lack of provision or facilitation of citizen inputs towards policy-making processes. To summarize, this type of non-governmental organization does not participate in advocacy efforts, as stated by Adams (1999). Service delivery organizations have been observed to exclude the ultra poor from their microcredit and social programs, despite their efforts to assist the poor in general terms (Rahman & Razzaque, 2000; Matin & Hulme, 2003). The service delivery sector can address remedies for this second shortcoming. Certain non-governmental organizations have initiated a shift towards this approach, exemplified by BRAC's Agriculture, Food Security, and Livelihood (AFSL) program, as documented by Matin (2002). The initiative involves broadening and reorienting additional endeavors such as the Feed the Future Developing Local Extension Capacity (DLEC) initiative, which is spearheaded by Digital Green, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Care International, and GFRAS, with a focus on providing agricultural extension advisory services.

4.1. Extension Services

NGO-led projects must conform to the predetermined policies and objectives of the government and engage in cooperation with the government throughout the project's duration, at least to obtain local licenses and permits. The Department of Agricultural Extension has established the National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP) to determine the specific areas of emphasis within the agriculture industry. The policy was revised in 2012. The National Agricultural Extension Policy aims to promote the provision of coordinated and efficient services by the various partners and agencies within the National Agricultural Extension System (NAES). This is intended to enhance the productivity and efficiency of agriculture in Bangladesh, with the ultimate goal of ensuring food security and promoting business development. This policy was established by the NAEP and MOA in 2012. The Agricultural Extension Services (EAS) system in Bangladesh has traditionally prioritized rice production, however, in recent decades, it has undergone expansion to encompass education and training assistance for vegetable production. In Bangladesh, a dynamic pluralistic system is observed in which various public, private, and

civil society organizations offer agricultural extension services. The National Agricultural Extension Policy (NAEP) has identified a set of twelve significant limitations in the field of agriculture (DAE, 2012). It has been suggested that extension services offered by both the public and private sectors can potentially address these constraints. Certain ones among them hold greater significance:

The Agricultural Extension Policy (2012) has been drawn up to strategically address the following key challenges of the current production systems and aim for a rebound and turnaround of the agricultural sector.

- The prevalence of small-scale landholders, including those with tiny, marginal, and small holdings, has become increasingly pronounced. In 2008, the average size of individually owned land decreased significantly to 0.28 hectares. Approximately 24 percent of farmers who engage in cultivation on land measuring between 0.5 to 1.49 acres are categorized as marginal farmers, while approximately 11 percent of farmers who cultivate land measuring between 1.50 to 2.49 acres are classified as small farmers. Approximately 53% of individuals who lack land ownership possess small plots of land measuring less than 0.49 hectares. The percentage of farmers who are classified as medium and cultivate land between 2.5 to 7.49 acres is 11%, whereas the percentage of farmers classified as large who cultivate land over 7.5 acres is only 1%. Barga chashis, referred to as small-scale lessees who engage in sharecropping, are a prevalent demographic throughout the nation. The presence of disparities in the accessibility and tenure of land can serve as a deterrent to the implementation of sustainable investment practices and utilization.
- The production system is constrained by issues in input supply, specifically the lack of timely supply of adequate quantities of quality seeds, appropriate fertilizers, and plant protection chemicals at fair prices.
- The capital-intensive nature of modern production systems, which rely on advanced technology, irrigation, and improved crop varieties, has resulted in a shortage of working capital. Small-scale farmers who are already lacking in resources face challenges in accessing the banking system to invest in productive assets and operations. This is due to

issues with governance, strict collateral requirements, complicated procedures, and high interest rates. The microfinance initiatives exhibit insufficiency and lack of accessibility towards the financially underserved individuals who possess limited creditworthiness.

- Issues pertaining to the safety of food: The uncontrolled application of chemicals and pesticides has raised concerns regarding the safe production of agricultural products, as it poses potential health hazards to humans, livestock, and fisheries. The implementation of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques has been initiated; however, the limited availability of necessary inputs and insufficient knowledge are hindering its widespread adoption. Currently, there are no officially sanctioned Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) or "Bangla GAP" standards in Bangladesh that guarantee the production of high-quality agricultural products with acceptable levels of traceability for both domestic consumption and export markets.
- The inadequate utilization and limited availability of irrigation water. The primary irrigated crop in the region is Boro rice, with approximately 6.36 million hectares of land being utilized for irrigation purposes. The inefficient utilization of water resources and imprudent extraction of subterranean water reserves contribute to the depletion of underground water. This depletion leads to negative consequences such as drawdown, salinity intrusion, and the unavailability of water for both irrigation and drinking purposes. Conversely, elevated levels of sedimentation in rivers and other bodies of water, coupled with diminished precipitation, result in reduced aquifer recharge, thereby contributing to drawdown issues and a dearth of water for irrigation purposes. Inadequate management of Shallow Tube Wells and Deep Tube Wells, as well as suboptimal utilization of surface water, can lead to a dearth of irrigation water.

It is to be noted here that this policy is solely targeted at the production side of the process, as can be seen from the handbook of NAEP (2012), forgoing the marketing part. Although there is a separate division of the Ministry of Agriculture - Department of Agricultural Marketing (DAM), however, DAM rarely engages itself in ensuring a transparent and farmer-and-consumer-friendly market and has no special policies in place in order to reach a sustainable goal. Hence, initiatives from both the public and private sectors remain heavily embedded within extension services, but even more so within advisory programs such as training and demonstration. Feed the Future's,

one of the biggest projects in Bangladesh working with farmers implemented by the U.S. Government's Global Hunger and Food Security Initiative, "Bangladesh: Desk Study on Extension and Advisory Services" report emphasizes that helping with market involvement is a crucial area for EAS to take into account, and that extension's role in this area may include training, guidance on how to obtain inputs and loans, linkages to markets, and the formation of farmers associations. However, they only suggest the following recommendations in order to create a farmer-and-consumer-friendly market:

- Streamline output market linkage through aggregation and technology, leveraging farmer organizations, training local service providers (i.e., agro-retailers) and using digital finance with credit scores in partnership with current value-chain projects.
- Strengthen input chains through high-quality inputs, the organization of agro-retailers, digitizing transactions, and the provision of credit in partnership with current and planned value-chain projects. [Feed the Future, 2017]

This goes on to stress the point I made above about the NGOs being unable to hold the state responsible for its deeds and failure to fulfill its duties. Subsequently, as previously noted, the current political economy of agriculture and food in Bangladesh has been significantly influenced by the catastrophic famine of 1974. During this event, food grain reserves reached a historic low, and prompt imports were not feasible to alleviate the crisis. According to Rahman's (1994) assertion:

From a political economy standpoint, the fact of the famine engendered a massive loss of political legitimacy that all subsequent leaderships have treated as the number one problem to avoid [Rahman, 1994:15].

With the specter of famine ever in mind, one of the main goals of the Bangladesh government since independence has been increasing food production. In Bangladesh, food is synonymous with food grains, especially rice [Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1990: 4]. However, this point of view has slightly changed with the new NAEP (2012), which includes aspects of vegetable production as well, as mentioned above.

4.2. Nayakrishi Andolon

However, there are a few NGOs that concentrate on alternative agricultural methods. These NGOs include UBINIG, whose Nayakrishi Andolon initiative is one of them. Nayakrishi Andolon, or New Agricultural Movement led by Farming Communities, is the name of this project, which they see as a movement. According to them, the term Nayakrishi refers to a cutting-edge approach to ecological agriculture based on biodiversity that was developed by Nayakrishi farmers in 1990 with the assistance and inspiration of UBINIG (Policy Research for Development Alternative - *Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharoni Gobeshona*) (UBINIG website, accessed 22 April, 2023). These farmers developed farming techniques that strengthened the ecological and biogeographical basis of agriculture and guaranteed an improved yield per acre of land. Agroecological systems of farming households and villages capable of participating in social exchange and economic activities are said to have evolved from simple to complex, demonstrating the urgent need to shift from an economic to an ecological notion of community development (UBINIG website, accessed 22 April, 2023). Over 300,000 agricultural families in 19 regions are active in Nayakrishi Andolon, according to their website.

4.2.1. Marketing

Approximately 75% of Nayakrishi farmers are classified as small-scale farmers, owning less than one acre of land (UBINIG website, accessed 22 April, 2023). A greater number of women are assuming leadership roles in the mobilization of fellow farmers. The primary motivation for impoverished farmers to engage in Nayakrishi is predominantly driven by economic factors. The cost of chemical fertilizers and pesticides has experienced a notable surge, resulting in an increased application of fertilizers compared to previous practices. A significant proportion of individuals are currently facing indebtedness and are compelled to liquidate their landholdings due to their inability to continue cultivation activities owing to financial constraints.

Gradually, Nayakrishi is being embraced by small and medium-scale farmers who possess land areas ranging from 1 to 3 acres, as well as by farmers with surplus land areas of 3 to 5 acres (Mazhar, Akhter, et al., 2001). The data indicates that the proportion of middle farmers in the representation is 20%, while the proportion of surplus farmers is 5%, and the organic farming system has been recognized as economically viable by middle and surplus farmers, whereas poor

farmers have primarily joined for subsistence purposes (UBINIG website, accessed 22 April, 2023). It has been acknowledged that the utilization of chemicals and the prevalent implementation of monoculture have resulted in environmental risks and a decline in biodiversity.

The Nayakrishi farmers generate adequate food crops to fulfill their subsistence requirements. The excess supply of vegetables, rice, pulses, and oilseeds is initially marketed within the confines of their respective villages, as well as in the local hat, which is a weekly market, and the bazaar, which is a daily market. There is a significant demand for food products cultivated without the application of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, as consumers exhibit a heightened interest in such produce. There is a willingness among consumers to pay a premium for products that offer superior taste. Nevertheless, farmers from Nyakrishi express their reluctance towards having their products labeled as exotic or luxurious commodities. The items in question are required to be accessible to the general population. Farmers refrain from increasing prices unless it is necessary.

The Nayakrishi farmers, residing in multiple villages, have established a market in a particular region. The group convenes biweekly and engages in the collective sale of their produce. A Nayakrishi banner has been erected to enhance the visibility of this market, which is experiencing a surge in popularity. The traditional method of husking rice using a wooden tool called a *dheki* is in high demand for local rice varieties in Dhaka, the capital city. In a limited capacity, the farmers are supplying rice to Dhaka.

The primary significance lies in the overall assurance among agriculturalists that Nayakrishi is a financially feasible approach. Furthermore, there has been an improvement in the ecological situation, with the land exhibiting signs of regained fertility and an enhancement in biodiversity. The individual's monetary earnings have experienced a rise of approximately 50 to 200 percent (Mazhar, Akhter, et al., accessed: 03 January 2023). Mixed cropping has been found to have a productivity level that is three times higher than that of monocultures. Additionally, it generates income from the cultivation of profitable crops. Farmers can achieve greater economic benefits by avoiding input costs while still maintaining crop output levels comparable to those of High Yielding Varieties (HYVs). In addition to ensuring food security, it can also serve as a viable risk management approach.

The efficacy of the community seed centers has been noteworthy. Following the harvest, it is mandatory for the farmers to restore double the quantity of seed they initially acquired. The aforementioned provision is exempted in the event of an unproductive harvest. The majority of farmers tend to exceed the expected quota as they possess ownership over the seeds and seed wealth centers, thereby directly reaping the benefits. The seeds produced by the farmers can be marketed for sale. Numerous indigenous cultivars have been gathered and subsequently reintroduced. The Nayakrishi Seed Network (NSN) has amassed a collection of approximately 70 distinct varieties of jackfruit. According to an essay written by Mazhar (2019) in the book “Pluriverse: A Dictionary of Post-Development”, the NSN comprises three tiers. Initially, Nayakrishi Seed Huts (NSH) are founded through self-directed efforts by one or two households within a village that are affiliated with the Nayakrishi Andolon movement and are committed to overseeing the replanting, regeneration, and preservation of all shared species and varieties by local farmers. The Specialized Women Seed Network (SWSN) is composed of women who possess specialized expertise in particular species or varieties. The objective assigned to them is to gather indigenous cultivars from diverse regions of Bangladesh. In addition, they oversee and record the introduction of diverse species within a given village or locality, and maintain current data regarding the variability of the assigned species. Community Seed Wealth (CSW) is an established institutional framework that facilitates the interconnectivity between farmers within and across villages, districts, and national institutions for the purpose of seed sharing and exchange. The CSW also upholds a proficiently established nursery. The development of Community Seed Banks (CSBs) is founded upon two fundamental tenets: (a) utilization of construction materials that are readily accessible within the local vicinity and (b) adherence to household seed conservation practices in terms of maintenance. Individuals affiliated with the Nayakrishi Andolon have the opportunity to procure seed from CSW under the condition that they commit to returning twice the amount of seed obtained upon the completion of the harvest.

In the CSWs, there is a collection of over 3,000 rice varieties, and 538 varieties of vegetables, oil, lentils, and spices (Mazhar, 2019).



Figure 4.1: To the left - one of the seed collection huts, to the right: list of some of the vegetable seeds and the collection season. Source: These pictures were taken by the candidate herself during fieldwork.

4.2.2. Sovereignty of the Farmers

The government's endorsement of commercial seeds that were insufficiently tested and contravened established seed regulations and global benchmarks is undermining native seed systems, the natural environment, ecological balance, and biodiversity, thereby impeding current food production and posing a grave threat to future food security. The government provides assistance exclusively for the use of commercial seeds by farmers, which necessitates the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and groundwater irrigation. Conversely, support for ecological farming based on biodiversity is not extended to farmers, despite evidence and demonstrations of its potential to significantly increase food production and improve food accessibility for impoverished communities. It is noteworthy that the traditional seed systems of farmers continue to serve as the foundation of the agricultural system that sustains the population of Bangladesh. For millennia, women have been engaged in the practice of seed preservation. The implementation of company seeds has resulted in the displacement of women in agricultural households, thereby negating their traditional function as primary food providers for both their families and the wider community.

The farmers were misled by both the promotional campaigns of the corporation and certain non-governmental organizations. The government has refrained from initiating any legal proceedings despite assertions made by certain corporations and non-governmental organizations regarding the superior performance of their products over those of farmers, without any empirical or scientific evidence to support such claims. The Proposed Voluntary Framework of Federal Risk and Authorization Program (PVFRPA) of 2016 acknowledges the entitlements of farmers and sharecroppers to gather, preserve, uphold, reproduce, and employ the propagation material of any safeguarded variety for personal and non-commercial purposes, as stated by Vernooy et al. (2020). The act of exchanging seeds for commercial purposes is prohibited. While the legislation acknowledges the rights of breeders, there is a lack of provision for safeguarding the varieties and associated knowledge of farmers. The preliminary version of the PVFRPA is currently pending approval. Nayakrishi Seed Huts (NSHs) facilitate the distribution of seeds to Nayakrishi farmers based on their demand, with the expectation that the farmers will reciprocate by returning or compensating for the seeds post-harvest. By means of NSH activities, farmers engage in the collection, regeneration, and preservation of crop species that have been neglected or underutilized, as well as rare plant varieties. Female farmers of Nayakrishi have gained expertise and knowledge in seed preservation methods and cultivate diverse home gardens. UBINIG has established a women's seed network in certain NSHs, including the one located in Mamudpur, in collaboration with the local community. UBINIG is a non-governmental organization operating at the local level, with a focus on conducting policy and action research that is led and based on the community. (Sobhan et al. 2015). The Women's Seed Network is involved in various activities, including the collection, drying, and storage of seeds in hygienic and moisture-free containers to ensure the preservation of seed viability. On a weekly basis, the group convenes to evaluate and authorize the cropping plan for the upcoming season, which includes the allocation and interchange of seeds. Community Seed Wealth Centers (CSWCs), which are a type of Community Seed Bank (CSB), have been established by Nayakrishi farmers in different ecological zones of Bangladesh. These centers are typically located in *Biddaghors* or farmer training centers. The proliferation of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Seed Banks (CSBs) in Bangladesh has facilitated the preservation of farmers' entitlements to conserve, employ, interchange, and merchandise farm-saved seeds, thereby reinforcing the regional seed structure (UBINIG, 2018).

Community Seed Banks (CSB) members primarily receive non-financial advantages, including opportunities for skill enhancement, the transfer of technology, and the availability of seeds preserved in the national gene repositories. In addition to their primary agricultural activities, farmers engage in collaborative participatory research endeavors focused on seed conservation and crop improvement in conjunction with the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, the Bangladesh Jute Research Institute, and the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE). Consequently, agricultural practitioners have enhanced their technical and organizational proficiency. Members of NSH and CSWC have directly benefited from the practice of participatory variety selection for Aus rice, which involves the cultivation of varieties during the July-August cropping season. Thus far, the collaborative efforts have resulted in the development of nine enhanced cultivars. Two submissions have been made to the National Seed Board, however, their official release is currently pending. Currently, farmers have been provided with seeds of two varieties that exhibit drought-resistant traits, a quality that is increasingly sought-after by breeders and farmers alike. The aforementioned observation indicates that the entitlement of farmers to register and disseminate a particular variety is feasible, despite the fact that it has not been acknowledged in the preliminary version of the Plant Variety and Farmers' Rights Protection Act. The DAE has initiated a campaign to encourage the utilization of indigenous crops within local communities, following consultations with NSH and CSWC constituents.

Thus, the Nayakrishi Andolon movement embodies the opposition of farmers to the corporate domination of the worldwide food industry and emphasizes the crucial role of the agricultural sector in sustaining our food supply while being engaged in the preservation and advancement of agriculture as a sustainable livelihood and economically viable pursuit, thereby contributing to the regeneration of the future (Mazhar, *Global Tapestry of Alternatives*, accessed: 03 January 2023). It posits itself in contrast to the vicious Green Revolution, the engulfing of the traditional, healthy, and profitable agricultural sector by the big corporations and the syndicate culture.

4.2.3. What works and what does not

The agricultural industry demonstrates a heightened level of confidence in its capacity to bring about favorable changes in its socioeconomic conditions. The adoption of organic farming

techniques, which involve the avoidance of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, in conjunction with a diverse and nutrient-dense diet, has led to enhanced health outcomes among households engaged in farming (Mazhar, Akhter, et al., accessed: 03 January 2023). The influence of cultural factors on the prevalence of violence against women has been noted to lead to a reduction in its frequency (Mazhar, 2019). The approach adopted by Nayakrishi towards the activities of village life has the capacity to provide women with empowerment, rather than subjecting them to subjugation.

Nayakrishi's rural initiatives at the national level are increasingly gaining recognition among smaller non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Forming alliances with professionals in the realm of agriculture constitutes a significant achievement. The Nayakrishi practice has prompted a thorough analysis of traditional agricultural ideology and has fostered a cooperative and supportive alliance with the primary agricultural institutions in the country (UBINIG, 2018).

Although the Nayakrishi movement is known to the Ministry of Agriculture, it has not received substantial support at the national level. UBINIG is presently endeavoring to exert its influence by addressing issues pertaining to marketing, pesticides, seeds, and irrigation.

In addition to their commendable initiatives, which have the potential to serve as prototypes for national and potentially global emulation, the principal constraint of these endeavors, in my view, is their confinement to particular regions within the country. The website purports to have a presence in 19 regions across the country. However, it remains ambiguous whether these regions correspond to complete districts or sub-districts, also known as upazilas. Based on the findings of my ethnographic research, it is evident that the term "region" is imprecise as it does not refer to specific districts. The participation of farming households in the Nayakrishi movement is limited, even within the areas where it operates. However, it is noteworthy that those households that do engage with the movement tend to remain within the community, as evidenced by the existence of second-generation Nayakrishi farmers. However, this implies that the pace of assimilating new farmers or farming households is negligible.

Furthermore, although the economic condition of the first generation of Nayakrishi farmers has improved manifold, the majority of Nayakrishi farmers with whom I have conversed engage in subsistence agriculture and produce only a minimal excess for commercial purposes. A limited

number of large-scale farmers make use of Prabartyana, the UBINIG retail store located in the capital, although the store's customer base remains relatively modest. The store is marketed as a premium establishment and attracts a select clientele of devoted patrons.

4.3. Conclusion

To summarize, this chapter has examined the contribution of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the agricultural domain of Bangladesh, with a particular emphasis on the obstacles encountered and the participation of Nayakrishi Andolon as an illustrative example. The present agricultural production systems have brought to the forefront certain limitations and restrictions, encompassing concerns pertaining to small-scale landholders, input supply, financial accessibility, food safety, and the availability of irrigation water. The chapter underscores the necessity of extension services and advisory programs in tackling these challenges, while underscoring the significance of market engagement in ensuring the triumph of agricultural endeavors.

The chapter acknowledges the constraints that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) face in terms of ensuring state accountability and enabling citizen participation in policy-making procedures. The statement underscores the importance of civil society advocacy groups in augmenting the quality of public decision-making procedures and promoting governmental accountability. The Nayakrishi Andolon organization is notable among non-governmental organizations for its advocacy of ecological agriculture, which emphasizes biodiversity and aims to enhance agricultural productivity per unit of land. The program has garnered involvement from a significant proportion of underprivileged agricultural workers, particularly females, who are incentivized by financial considerations and the necessity to tackle monetary limitations.

Additionally, the chapter acknowledges the impact of global entities, such as USAID and the World Bank, in promoting reductions in government expenditures on food and agricultural subsidies within the context of Bangladesh. This statement underscores the intricate interplay of various factors and external forces that shape the process of policy development in developing countries.

The chapter emphasizes the significance of comprehensive strategies to tackle the obstacles in the agricultural domain, encompassing the participation of governmental and non-governmental entities. The Nayakrishi Andolon case study serves as an illustration of an alternative methodology that prioritizes ecological agriculture and endeavors to enhance the subsistence of small-scale farmers. Through the utilization of the knowledge acquired from this chapter, policymakers and stakeholders can enhance their comprehension of the capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and alternative agricultural movements to tackle the complexities of the agricultural industry in Bangladesh.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The findings of the research offer valuable understanding into the complex political and economic variables that are implicated in the process of vegetable farming in Bangladesh. After conducting an analysis of the government's efficacy in addressing the challenges faced by agricultural producers, it has become evident that the agricultural predicament is fundamentally rooted in the neopatrimonial regime that is presently dominant in the country. The current system is characterized by the existence of patron-client relationships, corrupt activities, inadequate resources, and deficient governance, which contribute to the inequitable compensation of food cultivators and hinder the sustainable development of the vegetable farming sector.

The investigation has shed light on the crucial role played by intermediaries, commonly referred to as middlemen, in the agricultural supply chain. Contrary to the initial notion of middlemen being exploitative intermediaries who artificially inflate vegetable prices and deprive farmers of equitable compensation, empirical data collected from fieldwork suggests that their existence is viewed as beneficial by the overwhelming majority of farmers, as reported by 95% of the participants. The uneven distribution of power among a limited group of intermediaries has resulted in erratic price fluctuations and limited retail accessibility, emphasizing the need for improved transparency and fairness within the system. It is noteworthy to underscore that the existence of a firmly established structural mechanism would obviate the need for intermediaries. In the event of the lack of said mechanism, these intermediary groups assume an essential role.

In chapter 3, I explained how the Janata government introduced a medium-term adjustment plan lasting three years in 1986/87, which was financed through a loan obtained from the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the International Monetary Fund. The implementation of this program necessitated that recipient nations adopt comprehensive free market frameworks in conjunction with fiscal discipline or austerity measures. Conditional loans have been criticized by some scholars as a tool of neoliberalism that perpetuates neocolonialism. This is due to the fact that affluent countries provide financial assistance to underprivileged nations on the condition that they implement reforms that enable multinational corporations to invest in these nations in an exploitative manner. Subsequently, an additional triennial loan was obtained in 1990 under an augmented SAP credit program. The loans were provided under the stipulation

that specific reforms be implemented, such as the liberalization of foreign trade and exchange rate systems, the restructuring of the industrial sector, the enhancement of fiscal and monetary management, the augmentation of private sector involvement in development, and the privatization of state-owned enterprises.

Chapter 3 also highlighted a crucial aspect pertaining to the implementation of Green Revolution technologies during the period of 1950s and 1970s. The agricultural sector underwent significant modifications through the utilization of various technologies such as machinery, fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation systems, and the cultivation of hybrid strains of crops, particularly rice, wheat, and corn, as well as vegetables in later years. The focus of agricultural production has transitioned from the creation of marketable goods to the cultivation of sustenance for livelihoods. The implementation of various chemical fertilizers and pesticides during the "green revolution" initially resulted in a boost in agricultural productivity. However, it also had adverse effects such as the extinction of several flora and fauna species and a reduction in soil fertility. Following the advent of this novel technology, or through importation from nations where fossil fuel-derived fertilizers are produced at a significant foreign exchange expense, synthetic chemical fertilizer facilities reliant on fossil fuels began to emerge.

The exorbitant production expenses associated with chemical fertilizers posed a significant challenge for impoverished farmers lacking the necessary capital to procure and utilize them on their agricultural plots. The provision of subsidies through the utilization of taxpayers' funds has facilitated the procurement of fertilizers by farmers, thereby enabling them to apply the same in accordance with their preferences. Consequently, agro-centric enterprises and commercialized agricultural lands have emerged as the principal sources of sustenance. The current capitalist mode of production poses a threat to the stability of food security, as a limited number of individuals and organizations exert significant control over the food supply and market, thereby undermining the security of the state.

The utilization of the national television channel emerged as a mechanism for disseminating political or social objectives and constructing a platform for discussion. The significance of embracing the latest technology for the purpose of optimizing profits was emphasized by the regional governing bodies. Although the farmers, in turn, experienced an immediate monetary

benefit as a result of a threefold increase in their yield, the Indian subcontinent experienced a notable adverse impact from the Green Revolution, which led to the depletion of various strains of grains and fresh produce. The aforementioned has resulted in noteworthy implications for human health, including but not limited to supplementary health outcomes such as cancer, hyperthyroidism, blue-baby syndrome, and birth defects. A senior farmer, who had observed the transition from traditional farming to the techniques promoted by the Green Revolution, disclosed that the current crop cultivars did not produce the projected amounts of vital nutrients. In addition, a significant number of small-scale farmers faced financial constraints that hindered their ability to adopt mechanization techniques, thereby compelling them to persist with animal draft power for soil preparation and other production-related activities. Furthermore, there existed rigorous regulations governing the importation of machinery by private entities, thereby limiting the permissible types and manufacturers to a select few.

The process of liberalization and privatization the agricultural inputs and machinery sectors that was gradually initiated by the Janata Administration (People's Party) in 1978, in alignment with the policy framework of the New Marketing System, also led to the deregulation of the market, resulting in the gradual abolition of Thana Sales Centers (TSCs) and Thana Central Cooperative Organizations (TCCAs). Additionally, the responsibility for importing and distributing machinery and other inputs was transferred from the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) to the private sector.

The National Agriculture Policy, implemented in 1999 by the federal government, aimed to enhance the crop sector through modernization and diversification efforts. The objective was to implement a reorganization of the agricultural sector while upholding the principles of a laissez-faire economy, and advocated for further measures to be implemented to complete the privatization of the agricultural machinery sector. The principal aim of these policies was to incentivize private sector involvement in the vending of agricultural machinery and equipment to farmers.

On the other hand, the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) primarily focuses on encouraging farmers to adopt mechanization and providing them with guidance and instruction on how to implement advanced digital agricultural techniques. Nevertheless, the cost of these

machines is considerably greater than what is justifiable when taking into account the prevailing global market prices. Certain senior farmers continue to employ draft animals and wooden ploughs in order to level the substantial indentations caused by tractor usage on their land. The distribution of irrigation water is facilitated through the utilization of the Public Food Distribution System (PFDS). In most cases, the state will intervene in the output market by means of Public Financial and Developmental Institutions (PFDS). The stabilization of domestic grain markets is a prevalent approach in South Asia, ostensibly aimed at safeguarding the interests of both farmers and consumers. The domestic procurement system, which was introduced by the British administration with the aim of stabilizing the food grain market until 1971, proved to be unsuccessful due to administrative inefficiencies on the part of the government. Furthermore, the system inadvertently encouraged hoarding by creating a sense of panic among the populace. Following a sequence of policy reforms in 1994, Bangladesh implemented trade policy liberalization to incentivize private traders to engage in imports, which has since emerged as a pivotal element of its stabilization program. In May 1992, the government had effectively dismantled the statutory and rural rationing systems, which were two of the largest Public Distribution System channels in the country. This was done with the aim of promoting private-sector involvement in the procurement and distribution of food grains. The decrease in the Public Food Distribution System (PFDS) resulted in a notable increase in the bargaining power of individual merchants and large corporations in the grain market, thereby causing the emergence of contrived fluctuations in the grain prices.

In 2013, a shift in policy occurred within the government regarding the Public Food Distribution System (PFDS) and agricultural subsidies. The National Agricultural Policy (NAP) of 2013 marked a significant departure from the previous approach to agriculture, as it shifted the emphasis from achieving food self-sufficiency to achieving a growth rate of 4.0-4.5% in the agricultural sector. The proposed strategy aimed to facilitate the acceleration of the agricultural capitalization process by advocating for the widespread adoption of novel and post-production technologies, and the cultivation of agribusiness potential in all feasible locations. Nonetheless, the policy implemented in 2013 has faced comparable constraints similar to those of the Post-Washington Consensus, leading to its inefficacy. Krugman underscores a significant constraint, namely the lack of acknowledgement of the potential for suboptimal results in markets due to imperfect information and incomplete markets.

Notwithstanding this, the state's mechanisms of subsidizing agricultural production and furnishing social aid have averted the total displacement of small-scale farmers from their property. The data gathered in Bangladesh provides empirical evidence of a state that is "reasonably independent" and balances protectionist and minimalist responsibilities equally. The state has established an alternative economic system in which market forces exert significant influence over the production and distribution of agricultural goods. This has resulted in small-scale farmers being required to fulfill their basic necessities within this framework. The state's hesitancy to eliminate peasant agriculture can be attributed, in part, to the enduring recollections of famine and destitution that persist and impact the policy framework of Bangladesh. Furthermore, the formal sector, comprising industry and services, has been unable to accommodate the substantial surplus of labor that has been released due to agricultural reforms. Consequently, the state has resorted to safeguarding the subsistence sector.

The government has instituted various poverty alleviation, rural advancement, and social safety net initiatives (SSNPs) aimed at bolstering the subsistence sector and curbing rural-to-urban migration. In Bangladesh, the SSNPs are classified into four primary categories, namely: programs aimed at generating employment opportunities, programs designed to mitigate the impact of natural disasters and other unforeseen events, incentives provided to parents to encourage their children's education, and incentives provided to families to enhance their overall health status. The aforementioned initiatives have been formulated with the aim of providing support to individuals employed in the subsistence industry. However, the implemented reforms have resulted in a reduction of the state's capabilities, thereby limiting the government's capacity to intervene in the market. This is because the real objective behind these interventions are to advance the principles of free market capitalism and uphold the existing sociopolitical order, with the ultimate beneficiaries being the capitalist strata, as I have shown in chapter 3. So, to reiterate, the neopatrimonial regime's clientelist approach has resulted in an ineffective agriculture sector in Bangladesh, as it has been unable to provide adequate support to farmers.

Furthermore, the intricate web of patronage, clientelism, and patron-client relationships - the neopatrimonial underpinnings of governance - has significantly influenced the allocation and distribution of public resources. The findings reveal that political elites, or clients of the state, often receive the lion's share of benefits from subsidy programs, leaving the already marginalized

farmers at a disadvantage. This skewed distribution of resources is evident in various sectors, including fertilizers, seeds, agricultural equipment, and loans. The fertilizer sector, dominated by private importers and monitored by the government, has witnessed the exploitation of farmers through practices such as inflated prices, artificial scarcity, and low-quality products. Similarly, the seed market is plagued by corruption, with farmers receiving substandard seeds while political elites secure access to high-quality ones. The agriculture extension service, although designed to provide guidance and support to farmers, is marred by favoritism, nepotism, and inadequate representation of the farming community. Additionally, the monitoring and supervision mechanisms established by the Ministry of Agriculture have been undermined by vested interests, leading to ineffective oversight and the perpetuation of patron-client practices.

In regards to loans of farmers, as per a report by the MicroCredit Regulatory Authority (MRA), there appears to be a discrepancy in the allocation of agricultural loans disbursed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with a significant proportion being diverted towards non-agricultural sectors. According to the data provided by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in 2017, a mere 11% of individuals who receive loan funds for agricultural purposes are identified as farmers. Approximately 58% of households that receive the loan allocate the funds towards alternative purposes, primarily for diverse entrepreneurial ventures. Furthermore, as per the BBS data, a total of 410,000 households in the nation submitted applications for agricultural and rural loans to banks and financial institutions, yet were denied access to such loans. Many farming families are declined agricultural loans due to their inability to provide advocacy, which refers to the absence of a patron to vouch for them or because they can not 'satisfy the bank officials', meaning, they do not belong in the client group patronized by a political elite. A significant number of entrepreneurs and political figures in Bangladesh attempt to establish a connection with agriculture in their tax filings, as agricultural earnings in the country are not subject to taxation. The individuals in question leverage the identity of a farmer to a greater extent by collaborating with banking personnel, who assist them in obtaining agricultural funding that typically carries a lower interest rate compared to alternative forms of financing. Conversely, the inadequate policy and debt monitoring process of Bangladesh Bank has enabled private banks and microfinance institutions to exploit the vulnerabilities of farmers. Consequently, farmers are subjected to exorbitant interest rates of no less than 25 percent and, in

certain instances, as high as 40 percent, in contrast to the government's established interest rate of 8-9 percent.

The extension offices often engage in dishonesty by delivering inputs that are both low in number and bad in quality. All the farmers that I have interviewed have reported being dissatisfied with their lack of access to adequate training subsidies. The most common complaint that is voiced by farmers is that there is a lack of availability of extension services at critical periods due to limited field visits made by agents and absence from the office. Extension programs tend to favor farmers who are affluent and/or politically connected, with the exception of those who have personal relationships with the extension agent.

Monitoring committees are created to monitor agricultural input supply and demand, with the highest executive at the relevant level as chair and farmers, non-governmental organizations, merchants, and representatives from all government ministries as members. The selection of NGO representatives is made by government officials, whereas the farmers' representation is chosen by the local Member of Parliament. As a consequence of this, the representative of the farmers becomes a representative of a political party and performs his duties in an appropriate manner. On the other hand, the representative of the non-governmental organization, who was tasked with conducting objective monitoring and bridging the gap between the farmers and the government, becomes a representative of the government office.

Drawing on the aforementioned findings, it is feasible to offer vital suggestions and proposed solutions to address the challenges faced by vegetable growers in Bangladesh. It is crucial to first acknowledge the neopatrimonial nature of governance, which perpetuates deficient and corrupt governance practices. The creation of a conducive atmosphere for the advancement of agriculture requires the restructuring of the political framework to enhance responsibility, openness, and compliance with legal principles. Facilitating the achievement of this objective may be realized through the implementation of comprehensive anti-corruption strategies, the establishment of institutional reforms, and the augmentation of regulatory bodies' capacities. Therefore, it is crucial to prioritize the improvement of smallholder farmers' capacities by enabling their access to upgraded resources such as financing, technology, and inputs. The adoption of organized cooperatives and the promotion of communal connections have the

potential to enhance the bargaining power of farmers, enabling them to participate in discussions for equitable market prices of their agricultural produce. Furthermore, the advocacy for sustainable and organic farming techniques possesses the capability to augment soil productivity over a prolonged duration, preserve the ecosystem, and improve the health consequences of agricultural households. To address the systemic challenges faced by small-scale farmers, it is imperative to promote alternative agricultural approaches that prioritize ecological sustainability and biodiversity.

In the given context, the significance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is noteworthy. NGOs with a sole focus on service provision are inadequate in addressing two fundamental aspects of the development process. Firstly, they lack the capacity to hold the state accountable for its actions, both in terms of commission and omission by relevant parties. Additionally, there exists a deficiency in the provision or facilitation of citizen inputs in policy-making procedures. In summary, Adams (1999) has indicated that this particular non-governmental organization refrains from engaging in advocacy endeavors.

The Nayakrishi initiative has shown promise in improving health outcomes, reducing gender-based violence, and fostering cooperative relationships through its emphasis on organic farming practices and protection of farmers' rights. However, the current initiatives are limited in their scope and geographic reach. Efforts must be made to promote alternative agricultural practices and replicate successful models at both national and global levels, with a particular focus on regions in the Global South. The attainment of sustainable farming practices requires the collaboration of governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and agricultural research establishments. The cooperation among stakeholders is of utmost importance in promoting the progress of sustainable agricultural practices, facilitating the availability of resources, and fostering a conducive environment for farmers through the establishment of supportive networks.

In addition, the issue of intermediaries requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes their crucial role in connecting farmers with markets, while ensuring fairness and transparency in pricing. The integration of various measures, such as the implementation of mechanisms that promote price transparency, the adoption of fair trade practices, and the improvement of market

linkages, has the potential to augment the equity and effectiveness of the agricultural supply chain.

Ultimately, it is crucial to increase financial resources allocated towards agricultural research and development, with a particular focus on exploring alternative agricultural approaches that prioritize the preservation of traditional knowledge. Hence, it is imperative that this undertaking embraces a bottom-up methodology instead of a hierarchical one. The aforementioned goal can be achieved by empowering farmers, who serve as the primary agents of research related to their respective vocations and lifestyles. The Nayakrishi approach has exhibited promise and justifies further support and extension on a wider scale.

The vegetable producers in Bangladesh encounter significant challenges that are fundamentally linked to the neopatrimonial system, which is marked by weak governance, insufficient resources, and corruption stemming from patron-client relationships. To summarize, these issues are the primary factors contributing to the difficulties faced by vegetable producers in Bangladesh. To tackle these obstacles, it is imperative to implement all-encompassing reforms that give precedence to accountability, transparency, and the empowerment of smallholder farmers. Through the implementation of sustainable practices, the establishment of stronger market connections, and the allocation of resources towards agricultural research and development, Bangladesh has the potential to facilitate the emergence of a more just, robust, and sustainable agricultural industry that safeguards the economic well-being of farmers, the availability of food, and the prospects for enduring progress.

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Appendix 2 - Information Letter and Consent Form

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

“Harvesting Power: Understanding the Dynamics of Agricultural Politics in Bangladesh”?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to investigate if there are any anomalies within the supply chain of agricultural produce in Bangladesh that affects the farmers getting a fair price. In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

The fundamental purpose of this project is to observe the agri-value-chain in Bangladesh and gain insight into the functionality of the agri supply/value chain in order to deduce what plays a role in farmers receiving a fair price. Embedded in this is also to understand if any and/or what is the structural hierarchy of authority that allows for the price hike. The data collection is part of the same project that is being conducted for the completion of a Master's thesis at the University of Oslo in Norway. Beyond writing a thesis, the scope of this project is limited to supporting arguments in academic articles that the student may wish to produce later. However, nowhere will any personal data be published.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of Oslo is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

The sample has been selected based on categories collected from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, whereas, the selection of participants has been made possible through local networking.

Your basic information has been collected from the village commissioner or BRAC's (a NGO based in Bangladesh) database or from another participant (*in which case, the participant will be made aware of the particular source*).

What does participation involve for you?

If you chose to take part in the project, this will involve you taking part in an in-depth interview and/or a focused group discussion. Each of the sessions will take approx. 45 minutes. The interview and/or FGD include questions about your agricultural practices, satisfaction in regards to trading, and views on the functionality of the agri supply chain. Your answers will be noted down and voice clips recorded electronically.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your

consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- I, Mahima Rahman Srishty, a student of the University of Oslo along with my thesis supervisor, Dr. Niladri Chatterjee at the same institution will have access to any and every personal data collected for this project.
- I will replace your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details, and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data.
- Among the personal data collected, age, occupation, and trade union membership might come up in the published work(s). However, no real name will be divulged.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end approx. on May 31, 2023. Upon the end of the project, the data will be completely archived.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data be deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you be corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives me the right to process your personal data?

I will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the University Of Oslo, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- *Mahima Rahman Srishty, Researcher*
Mobile: +4796687995; +8801817541797, +8801689829211
Email: mm.rahman1303@gmail.com; mahimars@uio.no
- Gudrun C.E. Helland, Our Data Protection Officer
Telephone: +4722858730
Email: g.c.e.helland@sum.uio.no
- Data Protection Services:
Telephone: +4753211500
Email: personverntjenester@sikt.no

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader
Mahima Rahman Srishty (Researcher/Student)
Dr. Niladri Chatterjee (Supervisor)

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project “Following the Trail: Influence of middlemen on the agri supply chain” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in interview and/or focused group discussion
- for my personal data to be processed outside of Bangladesh

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. May 31, 2023

(Signed by participant, date)