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Informal Trade and Movement of People at the Bangladesh-India Border

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Glossary

BDR	Bangladesh Rifles
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BISS	Bangladesh Institute of International Strategic Studies
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BSF	Border Security Force
BIDS	Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IMDT	Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal Act
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PIB	Press Institute of Bangladesh
RMMRU	Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit
YRF	Young Researchers' Forum
ICRIER	Indian Council for Research and International Economic Relations
VGD	Vulnerable Groups Development
Brahman Caste	Brahman is one of the top classes among the Hindu religious faith.
<i>Mohajon</i>	Mohajonis a local word for 'lender', indicating a person who offers loans to people usually at a high interest rate.
Gamchas	Gamchas are 'towels out of which clothing bundles can be made.
Ramadan	It is the ninth month of Hijri (Islam) calendar. It is considered the holiest month. Prayers, fasting, self-accountability and charity have special association with Ramadan
Pūjā	Pūjā is a religious ritual of the Hindu community to pray or show respect to God (or goddess).

Eid ul-Fitr	Eid ul-Fitr is an Islamic festival that marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting.
Eid ul-Adha	Eid ul-Adha takes place on the tenth day of the Islamic month of Dhul Hijja. It is one of two Eid festivals that Muslims celebrate.
Hawala	Hawala (also known as hundi) is an informal money transfer system used primarily in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. In the most basic variant of the hawala system, money is transferred via a network of hawala brokers, or <i>hawaladars</i> .
Sharecropping	Sharecropping is a system of cultivation involving an arrangement between the landholder and cultivator for sharing the produce according to the established system, The basis of which was largely determined by local customs.
Poliomyelitis	Poliomyelitis, often called polio or infantile paralysis, is a viral paralytic disease. The causative agent, a virus called poliovirus, enters the body orally, infecting the intestinal wall. It may proceed to the blood stream and into the central nervous system causing muscle weakness and often paralysis.
Tuberculosis	Tuberculosis (commonly abbreviated as TB) is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium <i>Mycobacterium tuberculoiss</i> , which most commonly affects the lungs (pulmonary TB) but can also affect the central nevous system (meningitis), lymphatic sysytem, circulatory system (miliary tuberculosisi, genitourinary system, bones and joints.

Customs Act 1969 and Special Power Act 1974, (a) Gold, ingots, silver ingots, highly precious stones, coins, gold or silver or precious stones (gems) or any other goods which are published by the government of the government gazette and whose value exceeds 1000 takas each, or (b) indirect approval facilitating any attempt at bringing in or taking out any other goods through channels other than those mentioned in Section 9 and Section 10 or from a place other than the Customs post’.

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Abstract

Cross-Border population movement for Informal border trade is an issue of increasingly bilateral significance between Bangladesh and India. It takes place between people who are divided by the boundary- both national and international. This study deals with the people living in the border areas on Bangladeshi side, for whom, cross-border informal trade has become a coping mechanism, which ensures their livelihood. This research analyses the nature, scope and impact of informal border trade between India and Bangladesh. After a field based studies, it addresses the sources of security and insecurity through the process of informal border trade. It also analyses the different socio-economic conditions of informal traders in border areas. Our research findings suggest that informal border trade plays vital role in livelihood and survival of the poor people involved in the trade, although informal border trade is considered illegal. The state failures in fulfilling the needs of the poor have forced them into the activity and unless changes occur it looks set to continue.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1 Background

Political borders are where the territorial security¹ of states begins and ends. However if the daily lives of the people living in the border areas are not taken into consideration when the political map is drawn, minimal human security² is severely jeopardized. The Bangladesh-India border is no exception.

When the Bengal Border Commission in 1947 drew the borders between India and former East Pakistan (currently Bangladesh) along a Hindu-Muslim divide, it did not consider the fact that only 26% of the 4000 KM long border could not be divided in this way (Schendel, 2005: 44). Rivers, canals, villages, agricultural lands and tropical forests which were once geographically integrated, have assumed separate identities. The territorial partition cut across the lifeline of Bengal, a hitherto single economic and social unit developed over the centuries, causing disruption and dislocation. As many as 44 local markets in Rangpur alone, which was adjacent to the East Pakistan-India borders, confronted closure and once lively market towns like Hingalganj in Basirhat of 24 Parganas (North) were distanced from Satkhira, resulting in the transformation of Hingalganj into a ghost town (Samaddar, 1999: 61; Schendel, 2005: 38).

Cultivators and traders found themselves in a catch-22 situation, unable to claim their right over landed properties which assumed new territorial identities. This is because there was no-one in the Commission to represent the Bengal (Ali, 1967: 203-204) nor was any public hearing held to draw the geographical division. As a result, the new reality of 'nationhood', as it had been politically constructed, endangered the livelihood of the inhabitants living in the border

¹ It is traditionally defined in terms of national security.

² It is defined in terms of freedom from want and freedom from fear.

areas; inhabitants that faced adjustment to a new reality at both state and individual levels.

Both the states now continue to protect their territorial boundaries with the promulgation of citizens' laws, other relevant laws, and the stationing of border forces etc. However, cross-border movement and cultivation across the borders were initially tolerated under the 1948 Inter-Dominion Agreement signed between India and Pakistan. Under the agreement, cultivators were allowed to take back a certain portion of their crops harvested in the fields across the border (Schendel, 2005: 124). Also in those days, both India and Pakistan were happy to welcome the immigrants on the basis of a Hindu-Muslim divide.

But with the emergence of political movements against cross-border movement in Assam, India, enacted under the Immigration Act of 1950 in which Hindus were considered as refugees while Muslims were considered aliens (ibid: 212). Although the Kashmir War of 1965 between India and Pakistan, eventually led to the official prevention of refugees from coming into India (Joseph, 2006: 7), when the 1971 war broke out between East Pakistan and West Pakistan, the Indian government sheltered 10 million East Pakistani refugees in the bordering states, most of whom returned to Bangladesh after the war. In reaction to the Nalli massacre however, an event which saw hundreds of Muslims slaughtered as a result of an anti foreigner drive launched by the local political parties, the Federal Government promulgated the 'Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal Act (IMDT)' for Assam in 1983. This act enabled the Government to expel 'illegal foreigners entered on or after the 25th March 1971 (Ibid: 11). In 1986 the Indian Government's approved the Indo-Bangladesh Border Roads and Fence Project, a securitisation project that prevented infiltration from Bangladesh. Even the West Bengal Government, which had not hitherto been seriously concerned with the so-called 'infiltration', altered their policy in the late 1990s and began to erect barbed wire fences along its border with Bangladesh. However, these developments generated societal insecurity among the border people of India, as

the fencing project necessitated the relocation of 450 villages falling within the 150 yard wide belt on the Indian side (Schendel, 2005: 212-214).

In the latter part of the 1990s, India's religious centred political party, the BJP, utilized anti-Muslim propaganda in order to gain popularity among voters. This further contributed to the gradual transformation of the growing trend in cross-border movement from 'infiltration' to 'planned subversion' and the 'demographic invasion'/'lebensraum theory', and coincided with the growing influence of religious based political parties in the Bangladeshi body politic. These developments highlight the way in which securitisation efforts on the part of the state contributed to turning 'the home coming thesis' of Hindu refugees in India and Muslim refugees in East Pakistan into a 'planned subversion' which often put its own population in peril (*Ibid*, 196-198).

For the individuals living on the border areas, far-away from the administrative centre of the 'nation-state', a livelihood which was previously fortified by the integrated ethnic and social networks now confronted dislocation. Ensuring a minimal livelihood became a desperate activity, and many were forced to continue crossing the border in order to find work or trade goods through the kith and kinship networks that remained. In 1999, a borderlander, who migrated from India to Rajshahi in 1949, described how these networks lived on:

I never exchanged my land. It is still all there [just across the border in West Bengal, India]. My two brothers take care of it. I go there every year... We are still a joint family. Two good houses, about 45 *bighas* [6 ha] of land, 15 *bighas* of garden; neither I nor my younger brother took our share of the land...And when I go there, stay for weeks or a month. (Schendel, 2005: 130).

In continuing to cross the border however, these people often became trapped in grey areas of legality and illegality. Their only means for ensuring a secure livelihood posed a threat not only to the states they crossed but also to themselves, as they become vulnerable to illegal activities such as drug, arms and human trafficking.

As a result, in the case of Bangladesh and India, the cross-border movement of people and informal border trade has become an increasingly salient issue. It forms part of the controversial debate between 'national security' and 'human security' that has emerged within the security discourse since the end of the Cold War. In other words, the greater securitisation that takes place on the part of states, the greater insecurity that is felt by the individuals involved in such activities.

In such a context, this research project attempts to broadly examine the following issues; issues of particular significance to the cross-border movement of border people and informal border trade:

- To ascertain whether cross-border movement is taking place for the purpose of informal trade, and reliant on existing kith and kinship networks.
- Whether informal trade can contribute to the improvement in the livelihood of those who are involved in the trade at the field level.
- Whether informal trade can ensure their 'human security'.

1.2 Structure of the Present Study

This research project endeavours to empirically explore the socio-economic status of the people living near the borders. Ascertaining the precise conditions that compel these people to become involved in informal trade and cross-border movement. It also seeks to examine whether their involvement in such activities contributes to ensuring their survival in terms of an improvement in status. Finally the research will examine the role of the state in the process of such dynamics.

In doing so, this report proceeds in eight chapters. Chapter I outlines the rationale, objectives, methodology, and limitations of the study. Chapter II elaborates on the research context. Chapter III focuses on the socio-economic conditions of the respondents. Chapter IV discusses the nature and process of informal border trade. Chapter V of this report highlights the reasons for involvement in informal trade. Chapter VI analyses the impact of informal trade

on the socio-economic status of the individuals. Finally, Chapter VII brings together the major findings and policy recommendations.

1.3 Rationale

Irregular population movement for the purpose of informal border trade not only has an impact on the politics and the economics of a state, but also contributes to bringing about a shift in livelihood opportunity. Many scholars believe that informal border trade is providing economic security as much as it is generating social insecurity for those living in and around the bordering areas. In turn, the process of this shift gives birth to a number of concerns that scholars and policy makers have so far failed to adequately address. Therefore, further research in this regard is severely wanting. This research project has been undertaken with these issues in mind.

1.4 Objectives

An understanding on the dynamics of informal border trade requires an examination of the context in which the people of the bordering areas are living. However, much literature on the issue reveals that little research has so far been conducted in Bangladesh. Two seminal works in this context are worth mentioning. The first is entitled *Analysis of the Informal Trade of Bangladesh with Its Neighbouring Countries*, undertaken by A. Gafur, Moinul Islam and Nowashad Faiz of the BIDS in 1990 and 1991. The second, by Rahman and Razzaque (1998), is entitled *Informal Border Trade in the Bangladesh-India Border*". From a macro-economic perspective, these two studies are hugely significant, but they do not focus on the socio-economic aspects of informal trade and the movement of people. Also, Sanjib Pohit and Nisha Taneja of the ICRIER conducted a similar comparative study in the border areas of India and Bangladesh under the title *India's Informal Trade with Bangladesh and Nepal: a Qualitative Assessment* in 2000. The study primarily deals with the profile of informal and formal traders, the environment in which their transactions take place and their discriminating characteristics.

However, the monograph on *Border, Livelihood and Informal Trade* published by RMMRU Sikder (2004), touches upon the socio-economic aspects of the bordering areas of Comilla and Brahmanbaria districts of Bangladesh. Again it also does not offer a comprehensive account of the bordering areas of Bangladesh. Therefore, the current project was undertaken as broader research, under the initiative of the Ford Foundation. In this regard, two areas located in different districts have been selected to draw a comparative account. The objectives of the study include:

- Determining the socio-economic context that forces the people in the bordering areas to become involved in informal trade.
- Comparing the socio-economic situation of two bordering areas within the districts of Satkhira and Brahmanbaria.
- Examining the nature of participation on the part of Bangladeshi citizens in informal border trade.
- Comparing the process of participation of the people of the bordering areas of Satkhira and Brahmanbaria in informal trade in terms of their cross-border movement.
- Examining the social and political impact of informal border trade.
- Finally, the study addresses the policy recommendations.

1.5 Methodology

As mentioned above, the issue of irregular population movement for informal border trade is a little explored area within existing literature in Bangladesh. Therefore, it is important to identify the different sources of information that will be utilized. The methodology employed in this study represents a combination of different approaches, both qualitative and quantitative, in an attempt to extract the existing perceptions, information and evidence about the trade. Since this study focuses on individuals, households and communities, it adopts a primarily qualitative approach however it also strives to quantify the data and reach conclusions on the basis of all findings. The methodology applied in this study is described below in detail:

Since this study forms part of the Research Project on *Population Movements: Non-Traditional Issues in South Asian Security Discourse* conducted by the Ford Foundation, it requires a theoretical uniformity with other studies under the same project.

1.5.1 Brainstorming Meeting

Before developing the conceptual framework and beginning the field-work, a brainstorming meeting was organised by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU), University of Dhaka on 25-26 July 2004. Concerned scholars and experts from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka took part to offer the researchers guidance in relation to the research questions, timetable, report writing, and fieldwork.

1.5.2 Secondary Data

Published material and research reports available from the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) and Bangladesh International Institute of Strategic Studies (BISS) constituted the most important sources of secondary information. Secondary data for the study was also collected from books, reports, journals, daily news papers and electronically available resources.

1.5.3 Primary Data

Given the paucity of information, a methodology was designed that relied more heavily on the generation of primary data. The data was collected from primary sources, including household surveys, interviews with the local political leaders, teachers, journalists, government officials and stakeholders. It was also used for gathering and processing the opinions of informed individuals. The two Upazillas of the two districts near the Bangladesh-India border were brought within the study. One is Akhaura Upazilla, situated in the Northeast district of Brahmanbaria in Bangladesh. Another is Satkhira Upazilla, situated in the Northwest district of Satkhira in Bangladesh. Ten villages falling within this two Upazillas were surveyed.

1.5.4 Methodology for Collecting Data

The main objective of the study was to collect primary data about the people engaged in informal trade in the bordering districts of Satkhira and

Brahmanbaria. For this purpose, the study relied on individual interviews, focus group discussions as well as observational techniques.

For the study, 100 individuals engaged in informal trade were randomly selected. Of these, 50 were male and 50 were female. Also, due to the dearth of adequate secondary materials, the following methodologies were adopted for collecting the qualitative and quantitative data.

Firstly, the research issues for the study were developed in line with a previous study on a similar topic conducted by RMMRU. Secondly, after scanning the news reports from different daily newspapers, the bordering areas of Satkhira and Brahmanbaria districts were selected. Thirdly, a preliminary questionnaire was prepared before being tested in the field. Before finalising the questionnaire, it was revised several times on the basis of their responses.

Field visits were undertaken in June 2004, which continued until October 2004. Data was collected from a total of 100 individuals selected purposely for the study. For each district, the number of respondents was 50. Among them, 25 were male and 25 female. However, the questionnaire underwent some changes in accordance with a newly emerging context. In most cases, those interviewed were people who had been involved with informal border trade for a long time.

Although an attempt was made to explore the socio-economic situation of the individuals involved in informal trade, simple individual interviews were not always adequate. Therefore, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the issues under study, a focus group discussion approach was also adopted. A total of eight focus group discussions were conducted in the two districts. Such discussion meetings ensured not only the participation of the individuals engaged in informal trade, but also dealt with those who were not involved, with the objective of drawing a comparison between the groups' perspectives. Two focus group discussions were also conducted among journalists at the Press Club of two districts.

The local elites residing in the areas under study were also interviewed, including local journalists, the Union Parishad Chairmen, Union Parishad members, local politicians, local solicitors, local doctors, local teachers, government officials, NGO officials, police and BDR personnel.

Several in-depth case studies were conducted in order to highlight specific issues. The techniques of direct and participatory observation were also employed by researchers in the field in order to help gather insights into relevant issues. However, the participatory observation method was also helpful in exploring some security sensitive issues about which the subjects of the study were not comfortable discussing during the interview.

The data collected from the interviews at different levels were analysed using SPSS software. Before analysing the data, the questionnaires were examined thoroughly.

The primary findings of the study were also presented at RMMRU's in house seminar. RMMRU's researchers and members of the Young Researchers' Forum also attended and their suggestions and comments are also included.

1.6 The Location of the Study Areas

This study was conducted in the Akhaura Upazilla district of Brahmanbaria and the Satkhira Sadar Upazilla area of Satkhira district. One of the reasons for the selection of these areas was that they were considered to be the most informal border trade prone areas in Bangladesh, and the scanning of the national and local daily newspapers confirmed this. Another reason is that this study aims to draw a comparison between the informal border trade taking place in the two different border areas of Bangladesh. Finally, easy access to these areas also motivated the researchers during the selection process.

However it is essential to understand the socio-economic situation of the areas under study in order to understand the nature and impact of informal border trade. In this section, the existing information was collected from the

different government offices of Akhaura and Satkhira Sadar Upazilla, as well as from local and national NGOs.

1.6.1 Geographical Characteristics of the Areas under Study

Akhaura Upazilla in the Brahmanbaria district lay within the administrative structure of the Tripura state of India before the partition of 1947. Maharaja Radha Krishna Manikya, the King of the state (1899-1901) established a temple named 'Akhaura', after which the place was subsequently named at the end of the liberation war in Bangladesh in 1971. Akhaura, in the district of Brahmanbaria, became a Thana in 1976. At present, it has one City Council, 5 Unions, and 113 villages. The total area of the Upazilla is 92.59 sq. km, including a 21 km long border with India (Local Statistics Bureau Office of Akhaura Upazilla, 2002-2003). The other part of Akhaura falls within the Indian Territory and is known as Agartala thana, which is now the capital city of Tripura state. However, for historical reasons, cross-border movement between the people of the two countries is very common as people living around the border areas still have relatives both in India and Bangladesh. There is also an international land port situated on the borders of Akhaura and Agartala through which goods and people can legally move from one country to the other. In Akhaura Upazilla, there is a railway junction that connects the Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Sylhet railway routes (Annex-1).

Satkhira Sadar Upazilla covers an area of 403.48 sq. km. It is the leading Upazilla in Satkhira district in terms of agricultural productions. Kolaroa is in the north of the Upazilla, while Tala and Ashashuni are in the east and south respectively. On the other hand, Baduria and Basirhat thanas of West Bengal lie on the West side of Satkhira Upazilla. The Isamati, Betrabati, and Morichchap rivers run through this Upazilla, and regularly experience tidal flows. Due to the presence of the Sundarban mangrove forest and the impact of the monsoons, this area experiences huge rain fall, averaging 1650 mm per year. However, some of the areas, including Kingri, Dhulihar, Brahminrajpur, Labokhkho, Alipur and Bhomara Union, are affected by salinity. The river water of these areas is very salty. As a result, the inhabitants of these areas cultivate shrimps. So far,

2000 hectors of land has been brought under the shrimp industry (Local Statistics Bureau Office of Satkhira Sadar Upazilla: 2002-2003). Kolkata, the capital city of West Bengal in India, lies on the other side of the border. There is also an international land port in Bhomara for the movement of goods and people across the borders of Bangladesh and India. A large volume of goods and people cross the borders on a daily basis.

1.6.2 Population

The population of Akhaura Upazilla is 129,776, of which 65,039 are male and 64,737 female. The population growth rate is 1.49%, while the density of the Upazilla is 1320 per sq. k.m. Satkhira Sadar Upazilla has a total population of 401,525 of which 202,760 are male and 198,765 are female (Statistics Bureaus of Akhaura and Satkhira Sadar Upazilla Office: 2002-2003).

1.6.3 Agricultural Land

Table 1.1 shows that out of a total land area of 25203.2 acres at Akhaura Upazilla, 16,831 acres are made up of cultivatable land, whereas 10,773 acres are used for producing two crops per year and 2,949 and 3,030 acres of land are used for one and three crops. However, 12,860 acres of land falls under the irrigation project. In Satkhira Upazilla, out of a total land area of 41,878 hectors, 29,005 hectors are used for cultivation. Of a total 29,005 hectors, 18,950 are used for producing two crops per year, 4,925 for single crops and 5,130 for three crops.

Table 1.1: Land Use in Akhaura and Satkhira Sadar Upazilla

Description	Akhaura Upazilla (In acres)	Satkhira Sadar Upazilla (In hectors)
Uncultivable	5891	-
Cultivatable	16831	29005
Single crop	3030	
Two crops per year	10773	4925
Three crops per year	2949	18950
Seasonal fallow	79	5130
Cultivatable	138	-

Permanent garden		1530
Nursery		110
Seasonal fallow		3207
Permanent garden		1530
Permanently barren (Schools, Colleges, Homesteads)		5886
Ponds/Ditches		610
Land Brought under Irrigation	12860	-
	1195.20	-
Total Land	25203	41878

Source: Statistics Bureaus of Akhaura Upazilla and Satkhira Sadar Upazilla Office: 2002-2003.

1.6.4 Major Crops

The major crops produced at Akhaura Upazilla are rice (Awus, Aman, Boro), wheat, vegetables, mustard and jute, and, in Satkhira Sadar Upazilla, they are rice, jute, wheat, potatoes, vegetables, mustard and spices etc.

1.6.5 Educational Profile

According to the Statistics Bureau of the Akhaura Upazilla and Satkhira Sadar Upazilla Office (2002-2003), the literacy rate in Akhaura Upazilla is 42% and Satkhira sadar Upazilla is 46.45%. There is one college of further education, eleven high schools, four secondary schools, fifty-seven primary schools and six Madrasas in the Akhaura Upazilla area. At Satkhira Sadar Upazilla, there are ten colleges, fifty-three high schools, 140 primary schools and 43 Madrasas.

1.6.6 Other Information

Besides the Upazilla Offices, the following statistics were also collected from the local BRAC offices.

Table 1.2: The socio-economic conditions of the study area

Description	Akhaura Upazilla	Satkhira Upazilla
Number of Hospitals	5	7
Number of Banks	5	17
Number of Local Markets	15	63
Paka road (km)	84	195.53
Kacha road (km)	134	589.20
Number of NGOs	6	20
Number of Ponds	1577	4197

Number of Ditches	-	7570
Number of VGD cards	150	1400/723
Number of Chickens	64443	1607550
Number of Cows	21222	99625
Number of Goats	18750	18357
Number of Ducks	-	67625

Source: BRAC office of Akhaura Upazilla and Satkhira Sadar Upazilla (2004)

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The present study has several limitations. The time available with which to conduct the fieldwork was relatively short. When the study was undertaken, the border areas of the two districts were caught up in the severe tensions that existed between Bangladesh and India. As a result, in a few cases, interviews were shortened. Since informal trade in the bordering areas often results in cross border movement and trafficking, many of the interviewees were reluctant to give information. Also, the dependence on informal trade for their livelihood made interviewees wary. However, the researchers did not have any other option but to rely on interviews, as there is a dearth of adequate secondary data about the issue.

The scope of the research is limited as the study was undertaken covering only two bordering districts. It therefore does not claim to provide a general scenario of informal trade and related cross-border movement because the nature and characteristics of each border area vary. It should also be mentioned here that Bangladesh shares a 178-kilometre long unfenced border with Myanmar. The district of Bandarban accounts for 129km of this international border, while the districts of Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar share the remaining 49km. However, no micro-level research into the issue is available from this area.

Chapter-II

Setting the Research Context

This chapter highlights the context of the study. It explores the current situation in the bordering areas of Bangladesh marked by current trends in cross border population movements, informal border trade in general as well as border disputes and firing. It begins with a short description of the Bangladesh-India borders.

2.1 The Bangladesh-India Borders

Bangladesh shares a long border with India, which covers a distance of 4,095 km. Four states of India, including West Bengal, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Assam and Tripura, share a border with Bangladesh. West Bengal shares 2216.7 km, Meghalaya 443 km, Mizoram 318 km, Assam 262 km and Tripura 856 km of border with Bangladesh (Singh, 2002: 59). However, the Bangladesh-India borders possess many interesting features. 51 Bangladeshi enclaves are located in Indian Territory, covering an area of 7,110 acres. Similarly, India has 111 enclaves in Bangladeshi territory, covering an area of 17,158 acres. Moreover, there are about 52 areas that actually belong to Bangladesh but are currently in the possession of India, and 49 areas of Indian land that are in the possession of Bangladesh (Krishan, 2001: 665).

Under these circumstances, although the authorised transit points for the transportation of goods and the movement of people are limited along the borders, people from both sides continue to cross the porous borders through many unofficial transit points with ease, thus encouraging a large volume of irregular or unofficial trade. The ethno-cultural affinity of the populations living on both sides of the borders, and the absence of physical barriers as well as the vigilance of the security forces have all facilitated such border trade. The influence of ethno-cultural affinity on the border trade was also highlighted in a study conducted by Pohit and Taneja (2000:16). According to the recent study,

among the Bangladeshi informal traders, 48% of them claimed that they had ethnic ties while 54% of the formal traders said they had ethnic ties. On the other hand, 50% of the informal traders in India had ethnic ties while it is only 14% in the case of formal trade.

2.2 Current Trends in Population Movements

As Siddiqui (2006) states, migration takes place from both sides. Although no reliable information is available on Bangladeshi migrants, it is well documented that both men and women migrate from Bangladesh to India. Some migrate as families while others, both male and female, migrate independently as principal migrants. In 2003, the Intelligence Bureau of the central government of India, among other agencies, estimated the number of irregular Bangladeshis in India to be 16 million. In the case of migration from India to Bangladesh, professional and skilled Indians have also been participating in short term migration to Bangladesh in recent years, along with traditional migration through marriage and seasonal agricultural employment. This is due to the expansion of opportunities in the service sectors and trade. According to newspaper reports and information received from the immigration department, people of Indian origin are temporarily employed in garment factories, shrimp firms, poultry and finishing firms, sugar mills, textile and leather industries, steel and re-rolling mills, pharmaceutical industries, telecom industries, natural resources exploration, beverage companies, audit firms, the railway sector, construction firms, schools and colleges (as teachers), hospitals (as doctors, nurses and technicians), hotel management, chefs, and as hair dressers and beauticians. No research is available in this area. According to estimates from the foreign ministry, based on immigration clearance, the number of skilled and professional Indian workers hovers at around 0.1 million. Newspapers every now and then also report on seasonal migration from India to Bangladesh in the bordering areas. Again systematic work is not available to clarify the extent of such movements (Siddiqui, 2006, 1-3). A study conducted by Sikder shows that irregular cross border population movement takes place from the Northeast state of Tripura, India to the Comilla district of Bangladesh (2005: 443). Everyday, many Indians

cross the border and work in agricultural labour, as well as local hotels and restaurant businesses, local barber shops and grocery shops etc. A decline in remuneration in agricultural labour was found to be one of the reasons for migration to Bangladesh, as was revealed during the focus group discussions. Interestingly, this decline in wages coincides with a decline in wage in Bangladesh due to the growing availability of cheap labour with the in-migration of Indians during the harvesting season. In the process it encourages easy cross-border movement of people between these areas.

2.3 Informal Border Trade

As Taneza (2004) states, Bangladesh is sandwiched between north-eastern India and India's West Bengal borders. Informal trade between India and Bangladesh takes place both along the borders between West Bengal and Bangladesh and between the north-eastern regions and Bangladesh. Commodities exported informally from India to Bangladesh through West Bengal are cattle, sugar, kerosene oil, saris, bicycles, automobile components and parts as well as other consumer goods like plastic items, razor blades and medicine. Items imported from Bangladesh into India through West Bengal are synthetic fabrics, spices and Hilsa fish. Informal exports from the North East Region to Bangladesh include fruits, fish, sugar, cattle, raw cotton, spices, medicines, saris and coal. Imports on the other hand consist of polythene, palm oil, plastic shoes and a range of miscellaneous consumer items. The formal exports are dominated by industrial manufactures among which textile products are the predominant item. India's formal imports from Bangladesh are comprised largely of crude raw materials- chiefly jute, and chemical products such as fertilizers.

The total volume of unofficial exports to Bangladesh is estimated to be 11.65 billion rupees annually, of which West Bengal accounts for as much as 96 percent, Assam three percent and Tripura one percent (Gurudas and Purukayastha, 2000: 39). Nevertheless, according to the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, India exported goods worth US\$5 crores in 2001-2002 and the trade deficit for Bangladesh was US\$89 crores, which is more than 50000 crores in taka. On the other hand, there is no data concerning

the informal trade that takes place with India. Yet, many scholars assume that the volume of informal trade could be as much as four times higher than the formal trade (Sikder, 2004: 1). However, as the Custom Act of 1969 has empowered the BDR to seize, search and arrest smugglers within 5 miles of the border, in 2001 smuggled goods worth a total value of Taka 103,27,88,598 were seized and 24,044 cases were filed (Chowdhury, 2003: 72). (Annex-2).

2.4 Border Disputes and Firing

As the Indira-Mujib Agreement of 1974 is yet to be ratified by the Indian Government, the border disputes and cross-border firing for land is a common phenomenon in border areas. When ordinary Bangladeshi people work on the farmland along the Bangladesh border they are often killed by the BSF. According to the *Odhikar*, a Human Rights Organisation based in Bangladesh, in the last four years a total of 374 Bangladeshi people have been killed and 264 injured by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and local Indians. Among them 276 people were killed by the BSF and 98 by the local Indians. Most victims were ordinary farmers and they were all killed on the Bangladeshi side. During the same period, local Indians kidnapped 420 Bangladeshis and another 438 Bangladeshis were arrested by the BSF (*Daily Ittefaq* 2006: 20 March). Firing incidents between the BSF and BDR are also regular occurrences along the Bangladesh-India border. Security forces on both sides have died due to border clashes. In 2001, 3 BDR and 15 BSF soldiers died during the border clash (Chowdhury 2003: 71) (Annex-3). Due to such border clashes and firing incidents, ordinary Bangladeshi farmers have been forced to stop working along the borders. People have been displaced, losing their work and homes, many of whom have feared for their lives. The daily livelihood of the border people is frequently disrupted in these ways.

To prevent illegal cross border movements and informal border trade, the BSF has constructed a series of high voltage flat lights, as well as a fence, along the Indian border. The Indian Daily *Ananda Bazaar* reported that 123 km of the total 277 km border has already been covered with these high voltage flat lights

in the West Bengal region of India. However, the Indian Government also decided they would set up the same flat light in the Meghalaya, Mizoram, Assam and Tripura states of India along the Bangladesh Border which would cover a total of 3286.8 km. The newspaper also reported that 2187.40 km of fence would be constructed in the north and eastern provinces of India along the land border with Bangladesh (*Daily Ittefaq*, 2006: 21 March).

2.5 Conclusion

In this section we have seen that geo-political proximity, common culture and shared history have contributed to generating cooperation between the inhabitants of the border areas on both sides. Although the partition of 1947 may have divided the territory, it was unable to remove the cultural affinity of the inhabitants. Therefore, irregular cross border movement has become a natural phenomenon in the border areas and contributes to informal border trade. Irregular and regular migration also takes place from both sides with people from both countries engaged in work in the formal and informal sectors. The study has also shown that Bangladeshis are often killed by the Indian border security forces as well as by local Indians when they work near the farmland on the Bangladeshi side. Border disputes and firing often take place in the border areas, severely disrupting livelihoods. The following chapter will discuss the socio economic situation of 100 respondents who were directly involved in informal border trade.

Chapter-III

The Socio-Economic Condition of the Respondents

This chapter discusses the socio-economic condition of the respondents who were directly involved in informal border trade. The main objective of this section is to understand the status of the respondents and their household context, livelihood options, income opportunities and social circumstances. This section examines the gender, religious affiliation, marital status, educational status, age, family structure and income of the respondents.

3.1 Religious Affiliation

Table 3.1 reveals that 91 of the 100 respondents were Muslim and 9 of them belonged to the Hindu community living in Satkhira district. Among the Hindu faith, 8 were female and only one was male. There were more Hindus who were directly involved in informal border trade, but were unwilling to be interviewed which limited our understanding the socio-economic conditions of the Hindu community.

Table 3.1: Number of people involved in informal trade
by religion and sex

Religion	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Muslim	25	25	24	17	91
Hindu			1	8	9
Total	25	25	25	25	100

3.2 Marital status

According to Table 3.2, 61 respondents were married, while 22 were not currently living with their spouses. They were divorced, separated or widowed and all were female. 17 were unmarried. Among them, 14 were male and only 3 were female. Of the 61 married interviewees, 31 hailed from Brahmanbaria and 30 from Satkhira districts. The married respondents had married at a very young age. It may have been that the extra family burden forced them to become involved in informal border trade.

Table 3.2: Marital status by sex

M. Status	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Unmarried	5		9	3	17
Married	20	11	16	14	61
Separated		7		6	13
Widowed		7		2	9
Total	25	25	25	25	100

3.3 Age

Table 3.3 outlines the age of the interviewees. This table considers the present age as well as the age during involvement in the study/ in border trade.

Table 3.3: The Difference of Age by sex

Age group	Present Age					Age during involvement				
	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female		Male	Female	Male	Female	
6-15						7	1	11	2	21
16-25	8	3	18	5	34	12	11	14	12	49
26-35	7	14	6	11	38	4	10		9	23
36-45	7	6	1	7	21	2	3		2	7
46-55	1	2		2	5					
56-60	2				2					
Total	25	25	25	25	100	25	25	25	25	100

26 of the male respondents belonged to the 16-25 year age group. The second and third largest groups were the 26-35 and 36-45 year age groups respectively. Only 2 of the interviewees belonged to the age group 56-60 and one to the age group 46-55. Of the 50 females, 25 of the interviewees were aged 26 to 35 years, and 13 were 36-45 years old. The 4 youngest female interviewees belonged to the 16-25 year age groups.

As many as 26 of the 50 male interviewees were between 16-25 years of age when they became involved in border trade. Eighteen interviewees were aged 6-15. Four of the respondents became involved in border trade when they were between 26-35 and two respondents were 36-45. The four main age groups

among the female interviewees were: 6-15 for 3, 16-25 for 23, 26-35 for 19 and 36-45 for 4.

Table 3.4 shows that the ages of the oldest respondents were 60 and 46 and the youngest respondents were 18 and 19 in Brahmanbaria and Satkhira respectively. The average ages of the respondents in Brahmanbaria and Satkhira were 34 and 30.

Table3.4: Average age by sex

	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Avg.	34	33	25	34
Minimum	18	24	19	20
Maximum	60	50	41	46

Fieldwork revealed that most of the interviewees became involved in informal border trade between the ages of 16 and 25. According to Table 3.5, the average duration of involvement in informal border trade was 11 years, and the highest and lowest durations were 29 and 2 years respectively. The average duration of involvement in cross-border informal trade in the two districts does not differ.

Table 3.5: Total years of duration of involvement (by sex)

	Brahmanbaria			Satkhira			Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Avg.	14	8	11	11	11	11	11
Minimum	5	3	3	3	2	2	2
Maximum	29	16	29	27	16	27	29

3.4 Educational Background

Table 3.6 reveals that 54 of the 100 respondents were illiterate. Out of the total 46 respondents, 11 attended classes I to V, 5 attended class VI to X and quite a few of them had studied up to SSC. 27 of the respondents could sign their name. Among the interviewees, there were no HSC holders or graduates. The rate of

illiteracy among the female interviewees was higher than among their male counterparts.

Table: 3.6 Educational profiles by sex

Status	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Not literate	9	16	10	19	54
Can sign	10	7	6	4	27
Class I to V	3	2	4	2	11
Class VI to X	2		3		5
SSC	1		2		3
Total	25	25	25	25	100

The disinclination of the families of the respondents towards education was one of the reasons for the high rate of illiteracy. 38 of the respondents sent their children to school whereas 33 did not. The rest of them neither have children nor are married. However, most of the 38 respondents admitted that they sent their daughters to school only in order to receive the government scholarship for their enrolment. They also revealed that their earnings were higher than the scholarship fund. If their children were engaged in informal border trade they were often employed as carriers, also saving them money on the transportation of goods.

3.5 Average Family Size

The average family size of respondents was over 5, according to Table 3.7. The highest family size was found to be 15 in the Satkhira district and the lowest was 2 in Brahmanbaria. It was found that the average family size of the male respondents was higher than that of the females. Here, family size was calculated as the number sharing meals from the same kitchen. Of the 100 interviewees, 83 respondents lived in nuclear families while 17 were members of joint families.

Table 3.7: The total family size of the respondents (by sex)

	Brahmanbaria			Satkhira			Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Avg.	5.84	4.80	5.32	5.44	4.68	5.06	5.19
Minimum	2	2	2	3	2	2	2
Maximum	11	8	11	15	9	15	15

3.6 Family Income

According to Table 3.8, the average family income of the interviewees was 3127.6 Taka, the highest income being Taka 15,000 and the lowest Taka 300.

In Brahmanbaria district, the average family income of the male respondents was Taka 5,929.2, which was higher than that of the female respondents. However, the highest family income of a female respondent was Taka 15,000 and the lowest was Taka 300. In Satkhira district, the average family income of the male respondents was Taka 1,129.17, which was lower than that of the female respondents.

Table: 3.8: Total family income (Taka)

	Brahmanbaria			Satkhira			Total
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Avg.	5929.21	2720	43246 1	2732	1129.1 7	1930.59	3127.6
Minimum	2000	500	500	300	300	300	300
Maximum	14000	15000	15000	9900	2500	9900	1500

It should be noted here that the family income of the interviewees not only included personal income from informal border trade but also income from other sources. In both districts, it was observed that, besides informal border trade, they were also engaged in other occupations in order to generate a livelihood. The other sources of income included for example money from micro credit or petty business. However, the socio-economic situation of the interviewees belonging to the Hindu community was far poorer, and their family income was very low. Some of the Hindu respondents were of *Brahman* Caste³. According to the principle of *Brahmanism*, they are not allowed to carry out any work other than the performance of rituals. Although the male respondents remained loyal to their religious principle, the female members of their family usually become involved in informal border trade for survival. It was also found that, in most cases, more than one family member was engaged in the trade which eventually

³ *Brahman* Caste is one of the top classes among the Hindu religious faith.

helped to increase the family income. A total of 8 respondents had family members who were involved in informal border trade. Table 3.9 details the involvement of the family members, which included fathers, husbands, wives, brothers, daughters and sisters.

Table: 3.9 Members of the family involved in border trade

	Brahmanbaria			Satkhira		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Husband		2	2			
Daughter					2	2
Father	1		1			
Brother				3		3
Sister				2	1	3

3.7 Occupation

Table 3.10 demonstrates the occupational status of the respondents. Here, the occupational status is divided into two groups: primary and secondary.

It was found that, in the Brahmanbaria district, the primary occupation of the 38 respondents was informal trade, while it was a secondary occupation for 12 respondents, who were also engaged in cultivation, share cropping, fish cultivation, casual labour, pulling rickshaws, rearing livestock etc. Seven of them were also students. Also, of the total 25 female respondents, informal border trade was the primary occupation for 17 of them while, for the rest, it was secondary.

In the Satkhira district, of the total 50 respondents, informal border trade was the primary occupation for 34 respondents, while it was secondary for 16 respondents. However, among the female respondents, 12 were primarily engaged in informal trade, while five earned their livelihood by cultivating land, share cropping, day labouring, pulling rickshaws etc. The job opportunities for the females in Satkhira district were no different from those in the Brahmanbaria district. However, 6 respondents in the Brahmanbaria district were technically skilled in driving, masonry, carpentry and machine operation etc. Nevertheless, the scope for getting jobs in those sectors was very limited.

Table 3.10: Types of Occupations

Occupation	Brahmanbaria					Satkhira				
	Male		Female		Total	Male		Female		Total
	First	Second	First	Second		First	Second	First	Second	
Cultivating own land	1				1	1	2			3
Share Cropping	1				1	1	1			2
Informal border trade	21	4	17	8	50	22	3	12	13	50
Fishing	1	1			2	1				1
Day labouring	1				1	1				1
Rickshaw Pulling	1				1	1				1
Poultry business	1				1					
Student	1				1					

3.8 Conclusion

It was found from the fieldwork that the socio-economic context of the study area was very low income and respondents were dependent on involvement in the trade to ensure a sustainable livelihood. The study also found that the people of the border areas became engaged in informal border trade at a very young age, considering it to be a natural, obvious and even legal profession. Although border trade involved substantial risk, it helped them at least to survive. It was also seen that most males were married and many female respondents were widowed, separated or divorced. Therefore, the shouldering of family responsibility also forced them to become involved in such trade, and as a result it was not only respondents alone but often other family members as well that took part. However, respondents also stated that informal border trade was often not their first occupation, many also working as agro farmers, agro labourers, in petty trading, day labour and rickshaw pulling etc. It is interesting to note however, that besides housework, most female respondents had only one occupation. The following chapter will discuss the nature and process of informal border trade.

Chapter- IV

The Nature and Process of Informal Trade

This chapter primarily deals with the nature and process of informal trade in the bordering areas. In doing so, it will define the term 'informal border trade', which is more commonly known as smuggling, before identifying the individuals engaged in the trade, their traded goods and the process of undertaking the activity.

4.1 Informal Trade

Bangladesh is an India locked state sharing 4,095 km of its border with the country. For various reasons, a significant number of people from both India and Bangladesh cross each other's borders every year, many without valid documents. To a large extent, this cross border migration is caused by the informal transportation of goods, commonly known as 'Informal Trade' that takes place in and around the borders of both Bangladesh and India. However, section 2, Para 19 of the Customs Act of 1969 defines smuggling as the act of bringing into Bangladesh any commodity violating the laws or prohibitions, or by the strategic evasion of payment of custom duties/tariffs or any other tax imposed thereon.⁴ Section 25(b) of the Penal Code of Bangladesh details the punitive measures involved. However, Taneja (2004) defined the process differently, describing informal or unrecorded trade as broadly including all trading activities between any two countries which should be included in the national income according to national income conventions but are presently not captured by official national income statistics.

⁴ Customs Act 1969 and Special Power Act 1974, (a) Gold, ingots, silver ingots, highly precious stones, coins, gold or silver or precious stones (gems) or any other goods which are published by the government of the government gazette and whose value exceeds 1000 takas each, or (b) indirect approval facilitating any attempt at bringing in or taking out any other goods through channels other than those mentioned in Section 9 and Section 10 or from a place other than the Customs post'.

A number of issues facilitate, encourage and perpetuate informal trade. Due to the traditional kinship networks that remain among the inhabitants of the villages falling within the borders of both India and Bangladesh, visits to each other's homes, on both sides of the border, during different religious and social occasions are common. In the process of crossing the border many people become involved in informal trade. Moreover, the insufficient supply of certain commodities encourages their unofficial transportation to Bangladesh, while poverty and unemployment are also motivating factors. As a result, many of those living in region believe it to be a natural, obvious and necessary activity.

4.2 Those Engaged?

Initially the researchers focused on identifying the people involved in informal cross border trade. It was observed during this process that in terms of the different types of tasks performed five categories of people existed. The first group of people were those physically involved in the trade but without capital to invest and therefore those not receiving a share of the profit earned. They can be described as paid 'carriers' of the goods, and were responsible for transporting goods from one border to another. Locally they are known as '*Mojuri Sromik*' (labourers), and the fieldwork revealed many such people to be located in the border areas. A strong network of social ties exists between the five categories of people, and the tasks performed by other groups are discussed below in detail.

4.2.1 *Carrier-cum-investor*

Carrier-cum-investors contribute small-scale investments to the activity and carry the smuggled goods themselves, receiving the small profit from their own investment. They operate and transact money within their own localities and, for transporting their goods, and use a range of transportation methods including bicycles.

4.2.2 *Investor*

Individuals belonging to this category only offer capital to the trade and are not directly involved. The profit sharing mechanism for the investors is very formal, usually in writing. However, if, for any reason, border patrolling forces seize the

goods, the investors remain unaffected. On the whole investors are repaid their original capital sum by the working partner, although in some cases, investors and carrier-cum-investors agree to share the loss equally if any difficulty is confronted.

4.2.3 Entrepreneur

These are individuals who invest their own money or borrow money for conducting the activity, as well as being directly involved in the transportation of goods, but through the employment of carriers. They manage the whole process themselves and generally sell the goods outside their own localities.

4.2.4 Syndicate

A syndicate signifies a well-organised team that is comprised of the individuals who live within or outside the localities close to the borders of India who represent influential segments of society. They maintain communication with the foreign smugglers and are in charge of large-scale smuggling.

4.3 Goods

There appeared to be some difference between the districts of Brahmanbaria and Satkhira in terms of the way in which goods are smuggled. Research findings indicate that in Sakhira the respondents smuggled goods from India into Bangladesh, but rarely the other way around. However, across the Brahmanbaria border, some quantity of goods was smuggled both ways.

4.3.1 Contraband goods brought from India

It was found from the focus group discussion with journalists of Brahmanbaria district that narcotics are primarily brought in through Akhaura and its' adjacent borders and phensidyl and pathedine occupy the bulk of such items. India is complicit in enabling such dealings be taken place. The oil exported into India is smuggled, as well as stones, cement, dry-fish and plastics. Some goods are also smuggled into India for preserving, so that they can be sold at a higher price later on. Fish is smuggled into India in large quantity because the district of Tripura does not contain an adequate supply of fresh water fish. As a result the people of Akhaura have established fisheries with a view to smuggling the product to India.

There are even some Indian businessmen who invest in the young of these fish in advance.

Our respondents from Brahmanbaria and Satkhira reported that they primarily import goods such as sugar, spices and drugs and that 72 of them bring sugar from across the borders in both districts. The price of sugar was found to differ between the two places. According to the respondents, the large-scale inflow of sugar caters for its scarcity in the domestic market of Bangladesh and, as many people from the villages of the border districts work in the city, they frequently carry 4-5 kg of sugar to the city from return visits home, which typically takes care of the needs of their families for the whole month. Many traders bring sugar from India in large quantities, prepare sugar candy, and sell it in various urban areas. Most of the houses near the border have small workshops for preparing sugar candy, as they have reported that the selling of sugar candy after preparation brings greater profits than the raw material itself. Apart from this, among spices and cereals, turmeric, cumin, lentils and onions are brought from India, as well as packets of powdered milk. One of the reasons for the demand for milk powder is its use in preparing sweets and tea in the houses and shops of the border areas. With regard to clothing and cosmetics, most are saris, blouses and petticoats etc, and among kitchen utensils, items such as bowls, spoons, jugs and tiffin-carriers make up the majority, as well as objects made of steel, bell metal and brass.

The most harmful commodities that respondents reported importing to Bangladesh across the Satkhira and Brahmanbaria borders were various types of narcotics. Among these are Phensidyl, wine, beer, cannabis and addictive tablets. Phensidyl is a cough syrup that has been banned under the Drugs Policy of Bangladesh as an inessential drug. Initially, it entered the drug market as a cough syrup, but it was soon found to have a particularly high alcohol content. Subsequently, Phensidyl has become a generic name for a cocktail of drugs, the basis of which may be the cough syrup. Table 4.1 shows that out of 100 respondents, 58 bring phensidyls, 18 smuggle wine, and 19 transport while 2 respondents bought heroin and 2 bought cannabis. With respect to the trading in

drugs, some significant differences may be noted between the two districts. The selling price of Phensidyl at the Brahmanbaria border is comparatively low in relation to that in Satkhira, and it emerged during the informal discussion, that this is because many drug factories on the Indian side were producing the drug. The female respondents who carried drugs needed to pay more to purchase them than did the men; they also had to sell them at lower prices. In order to ensure higher prices, they risked their lives by selling them in distant cities and suburbs rather than in the local market. Many said that they did not bring much beer or alcohol, as large bottles were inconvenient to carry, and the profits were comparatively small. Instead, they brought Phensidyl and cannabis, although the Phensidyl was very often snatched by local goons or mobs.

Table 4.1: Contraband goods brought from India (by Person) (Multiple)

Items		Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
Sugar		12	22	20	18	72
Drug items	Phensidyl	18	17	15	8	58
	Wine	8	2	8	7	18
	Beer	4	2	7		13
	Cannabis	2	2			4
	Heroin			2		2
Steel and cooking utensils	Ball		22	4	19	45
	Bati		18		15	33
	Glass		22	3	22	47
	Plates		22		18	30
	Spoons		22		21	43
Salt and Spices	Salt	8	12	8	6	34
	Turmeric	12	6	10	12	40
	Onions	18	4	8	4	34
	Cooking oil	10	8	12	10	40
	Garlic	8	2	8	4	22
	Lentils	12	4		3	19
	Cumin	4			2	6
Dairy products	Powdered milk	12	2	16	8	38
	Horlicks	4		8	4	16
Fruit	Apples	2				2
	Grapes	2				2
	Mangoes	2				2
Clothing and	Saris,	6	18	12	32	58

cosmetic items	Blouses	2	18	12	22	54
	petticoats	2	18	12	22	54
Cows				2		2

Several discussions with female respondents also revealed that female traders bringing goods from India often developed a good relationship with their Indian sellers, which sometimes meant that they did not need to travel to India themselves to bring in goods. A higher level of trust had been reached between these two groups, normally due to the fact that several business transactions had been conducted successfully on previous occasions. Female respondents also stated that Indian informal traders believed them to be honest because no fraudulent practices had previously been experienced when working with female Bangladeshi traders. A letter of order sent through a worker/carrier was enough for the goods to be delivered to them through other carriers and, on the whole they were not required to travel to India themselves. In these cases, the women were workers whose houses were situated just inside the Bangladeshi border. As many were on good terms with the people living adjacent to the Bangladeshi border, or with the Indians across it, local carriers bought goods on credit and paid only after selling the goods in or outside the locality. Respondents explained that previously they would travel to India in the night and in groups, in order to smuggle in goods, and as they returned to Bangladesh late at night with their purchases, they would take shelter in houses near the border. Because of their previous acquaintance with people living near the border, they were able to spend the night in their houses, but they were required to pay 10 to 15 takas per night to the owner of the house. Fieldwork also revealed that many women not directly involved in informal trade are nevertheless engaged in selling goods at the local level.

Informal traders bought drugs from the Agartala market of Tripura and sold them later. They hide these in cartons of apples, oranges and other fruit. According to statements from the officers-in-charge in the Akhaura *Upazilla* police station, most of the carriers were extremely poor.

The local people of Brahmanbaria observed that the quantity of drugs brought across the border dropped during the month of *Kartik* (mid-October to mid-November). This was because most of those who smuggled the drugs were below the age of 20, and as rivers, canals and marshes became dry at this time, they remained busy fishing, smuggling their catch into India at a later date. It was found that Phensidyl is now being prepared by certain chemical processes at the border in the villages of Tripura, and many respondents bought Phensidyl from here in cartons, before filling them into loose bottles to be sold. This reduced the cost and therefore raised the profit. It was found from the fieldwork that female respondents in Satkhira and Brahmanbaria district reported that, apart from drugs, most of them bought steel appliances, cooking utensils, cosmetics and clothing. The reason for this was that, if they were caught with these items, the goods would not be seized, and as the items were not harmful the police were sometimes sympathetic. However these items are in demand every season and the business can therefore continue all year round.

4.3.2 Contraband goods smuggled out of Bangladesh

Respondents observed that the quantity of goods taken to India across the Satkhira and Brahmanbaria borders are meager in comparison to what they bring into Bangladesh. However, according to their own statements, there is a great demand for Bangladeshi goods in the Northeast Indian states. Field studies also show that there is indeed a great demand for various Bangladeshi products in the shops in Agartala in Tripura. Among these are garments such as trouser pieces, polythene bags, Keya soap, Elaichi biscuits, Sun-Moon cigarettes, Burmese shoes, potato chips, all kinds of juices, pickles, cane chairs, Pran cold drinks, mattresses, soya-bean oil, vests, cloth fabric, different kinds of coconut oil, and computers.

Three of the respondents in Brahmanbaria reported taking Bangladeshi products to Tripura state of India. Among these were fish, chicken and duck eggs, vegetables, polythene and ready-made garments of Bangladeshi material. 10 respondents sold fish in India and studies highlight the profitability of

cultivating fish in these areas. Many farmers excavated ponds to raise fish in the bordering villages of Akhaura instead of planting crops. The local people believed that pisciculture yielded a greater income per kilogram and this was the primary reason for the rise in the number of ponds in the Fourth Fishery Project of Bangladesh as well as the success with these enterprises on the part of NGOs. One respondent explained that he smuggled between 30–600 kg of fish per month, and that prices varied for different kinds of fish sold. Apart from these pisciculture projects, fish were also obtained from the river flowing through Indian Tripura. When this riverbed dried, people caught fish and sold it in the local market or sent it to India.

Eggs are also taken to Tripura state and sold there, according to nine respondents. Seven of these were women, who usually collected duck eggs door to door. Duck eggs are easily available, as ponds dug for raising fish were also used for rearing ducks. It was also found that women often take extra eggs for the Indian Border Security Forces (BSF), so that the rest of their contraband goods will be allowed to go through.

Only one of our respondents exported vegetables to Tripura state of India. The monthly quantity stood at 100 kg in total and the selling price was between Taka 40–100/kg. The focus group discussion also revealed that many sent old garments made from Bangladeshi cloth, with each piece of cloth earning a profit of Taka 10–12. According to the officer-in-charge of the local Akhaura *Upazilla*, computers were also taken from Bangladesh to India in great numbers. The figure ranged from 100 to 150 a month, usually smuggled in cartons of fruit that arrive in the border areas by rail.

In the Satkhira district, three respondents reported illegally exporting gas cylinders into the Indian market to meet demand in India. They also mentioned that others did the same as it was also profitable, as was the export of diesel and gold. The export of these goods was generally controlled by a *syndicate*.

The focus group discussion revealed that the Seven Sister Provinces of India are poor compared with other parts of India, and due to geographical proximity with Bangladesh, many of their products are imported from the country; a significant proportion of which are imported illegally. A field trip in the capital city of Agartala in Tripura state confirmed such statements and Bangladeshi products were indeed widely available in the markets. West Bengal however is a relatively rich Indian state, and as a result the majority of goods are exported out of the country, and into Bangladesh.

4.4 Sources of Capital

The nature of involvement in informal border trade depends on how capital is managed, and it is therefore very important to examine the sources of capital used for the activity. According to Table 4.2, 44 respondents used their own capital in the trade, 18 respondents borrowed money from the local *Mohajon*⁵ and 12 from a *Mohajon* living outside the borrower's locality or a *Mohajon* from India. 11 respondents managed to obtain capital from the micro credit programme of the NGOs and 13 had their own capital as well as the loans with interest.

In the Brahmanbaria district, 28 respondents invested their own money in the activity, among whom 20 were female. In the Satkhira district, 16 respondents, all female, invested their own capital.

Table 4.2 Sources of Capital (Multiple answers)

Sources	Brahmanbaria			Satkhira		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Own Capital	8	20	28	-	16	16
Own capital and loan without interest	2		2	-	1	1
Own capital and loan with interest	6	3	9	4		4
Loan from NGO	-	7	7	1	3	4
Loan from local <i>mohajon</i>	6	8	14	3	1	4
Loan from Indian <i>mohajon</i>	2	5	7		4	4
Other	2	5	7	1	4	5

⁵ *Mohajon* is a local word for 'lender', indicating a person who offers loans to people usually at a high interest rate.

Interestingly, in relation to the money borrowed from NGOs, many of the female respondents reported difficulties in repayment when they were only invested in small projects such as livestock rearing and handicrafts etc, but explained that the return was relatively high if loans were invested in border trade, and therefore loans were easier to repay. A local officer of BRAC, a national NGO, explained that the money is closely monitored, although they do know that their micro credit is sometimes used in informal border trade. Their preference for offering group loans is to counter this predisposition, as once they identify any anomaly in the utilisation of funds by any of its' members, they refuse to give loans to the whole group. NGO officials also stated that they have seen cases where people who were previously involved in informal trade have changed their occupation since involvement in NGO micro-credit programmes, becoming involved in petty trading and livestock rearing etc instead. In these cases the micro credit schemes helped them to change their life and become independent.

The study revealed that Indian *Mohajon* are also involved in lending money to the Bangladeshi traders. The female respondents from the Brahmanbaria district disclosed that, as they had conducted business with their Indian counterparts regularly, they were now on very good terms, which helped them to buy Indian goods on credit. After selling the products, they returned this money. The level of trust is now so deep that fraudulent behaviour is rare and if someone does attempt to cheat, the Indian *mohajon* can recover their money with the help of influential local Bangladeshis, who the Indian *mohajon* keep on good terms with. In the Satkhira district, it was revealed during the focus group discussion, that the capital used for trade was also provided by the Indian *Mohajon*, acting in the same way as 'supplier's credit' does in formal trade systems. As the Satkhira district is largely a shrimp producing area, the informal traders prefer to import *renu* (fries) from India on credit. During the fieldwork, we talked with two Indian businessmen who crossed the border illegally and entered Bangladesh. They informed us that like others, many Indians invested money in Bangladesh for producing shrimp. Everyday, they crossed the border and

followed up their business checking the condition of the field that was used for producing shrimp. During their crossing of the border, they also brought *renu* (fries) from India and carried more money if necessary.

In these two districts, there was another group of people who were never directly involved in informal border trade but who lent money to others. The pattern of this lending is of two types: one is a loan with interest, and the other is a loan without interest but on the basis of an equal profit sharing mechanism. The second category of loan is conditioned by the fact that if, for any reason, informal goods are seized by the border forces or are damaged, the loss will be equally shared. In most cases however, the loss had been borne by the respondents.

It was found from the fieldwork that the average amount of money borrowed by the respondents was Taka 4802 in Brahmanbaria, and 2965 in Satkhira. The highest amount of money borrowed in Brahmanbaria was Taka 15000 and Taka 10000 in Satkhira, and the lowest amount of money borrowed in Brahmanbaria was Taka 2500 and Taka 3000 in Satkhira. However, many respondents stated that on several occasions they failed to repay the money on time, and had to pay a large amount of interest. An individual is usually required to pay 100 taka per 1000 taka every month. In Satkhira, respondents stated that the people who had been involved in informal border trade and shrimp cultivation struggled a lot. In the last couple of years, shrimp cultivation had been affected more than once by a virus. Therefore, those who were working on credit had failed to repay the money borrowed. At the macro level the virus caused many local people to lose their jobs, subsequently forcing them into informal border trade. In Brahmanbaria, the study found that many of the respondents' goods had been seized several times by border forces or local mobs. The capital they invested in this sector, borrowed from different sources, faced serious losses.

4.5 Amount of Investment

Table 4.3 details the amount of money invested on a monthly basis by the respondents. It was found that the average amount invested in informal border

trade was Taka 17,000 per month. The highest amount of investment was Taka 60000 in the Satkhira district and the lowest amount was Taka 1600 in the Brahmanbaria district.

Table 4.3: Total amount of money invested (Taka per month)

	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Average	18625	13118	27696	8560
Minimum	2500	1600	3000	2000
Maximum	48000	40000	60000	35000

The amount of money for investment varied month by month, according to the season, occasion and situation of the border areas. Of the 100 respondents, 42 reported investing the same amount of money all the year round, while the investments of the remaining respondents depended on the current situation in the border areas.

4.6 Frequency and Timing of Cross Border Movement

Timing is a very important factor as this decides the frequency of movements across the border. The study has shown that not everyone crosses the border in order to buy goods. Many respondents crossed the border, some traveled only as far as the border and some did not go to the border at all but sold goods door to door. This last group of people were mainly female respondents. As discussed earlier female traders did not always need to cross the border themselves as local people or Indians supplied them with goods. Therefore, their profits depend purely on the number of goods sold.

Table 4.4 shows that, of the total 100 respondents, 67 crossed the border, 15 traveled only up to the border and 18 did not go to the border at all, receiving a home delivery which was then sold door to door. Of the total 67 respondents, the average frequency of movements was 10 times per month, the highest number of crossings was 60 per month and the lowest was once.

Table 4.4 Type of movements across the border (Persons)

Types of movement	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Cross the border	11	7	24	25	67
Up to the border	14		1		15
Stay at home and sell door to door		18			18
Total	25	25	25	25	100

It should be noted that on the whole interviews took place near the ‘Zero’ point of the border area. However, interviews also took place in the homes of respondents, sometimes far from the border. Those who lived in the ‘O’ point crossed the border every time they traded goods, and houses in India were close enough for transactions to be delivered by hand. In the Satkhira district, 25 female respondents crossed the border, all of whom lived near the ‘O’ point of the border area. 24 of the male respondents also crossed the border but these did not all live in the ‘O’ point. In the Brahmanbaria district, 18 respondents stated that they crossed the border. 18 of the females did not cross the border, since they enjoyed good relations with the local and foreign informal traders and received informal goods at home before selling them door to door.

As table 4.5 shows, most goods were bought between midnight and early morning, in order to avoid the border security forces and to capture the local market by selling goods in the early morning. 9 respondents preferred to trade during the night due to security factors while 22 of the respondents preferred the afternoon, since this coincided with the timing of the local village market. However, the respondents who stayed in the ‘O’ points did travel at particular times; whenever they had capital, they bought and sold goods.

Table 4.5 Preferred timing for the carriage of goods (Persons)

Time	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Early morning to midnight	7	8	13	16	44
Afternoon	7	4	8	3	22
After Evening	4		5		9
Total	25	25	25	25	100

The number of hours spent in buying and selling goods was also examined however, the total time spent by respondents depended on the frequency of crossing and traveling to the border. According to Table 4.6, 68 of the respondents spent an average of 0-5 hours per day buying and selling goods. Of these, 31 were female and 37 male. 23 respondents reported spending an average of 6-10 hours, while 4 respondents spent the highest average hours, from 30 to 50 per trip. It was found from the fieldwork that the number of people involved in informal trade depended critically on how much time was required for the work. According to local sources, it was primarily landless people that were involved in the activity and consequently, the average time spent was higher. Those who bought many goods and those who sold goods door to door also took more time.

Table 4.6: Rate of time spent in bringing in goods illegally (Persons)

Hour	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
0-5	15	11	22	20	68
6-10	7	12		4	23
11-15	1	2	2		5
30-40	1		1		2
41-50	1		1		2
Total	25	25	25	25	100

4.7 Carriage of Goods

The means of transportation was vital to respondents because the amount of profit depended on transport costs. Table 4.7 shows that 91 respondents carried goods in handbags, baskets and *gamchas*⁶- 47 in Brahmanbaria and 44 in Satkhira, using bicycles, van trailers, tampoo and buses. 5 of the respondents used rickshaws. Those who carried the items in handbags stated that, as their primary objective was to maximise profits, it was important to avoid spending extra on transportation costs.

⁶ *Gamchas* are 'towels out of which clothing bundles can be made.

Table 4.7: Different modes of carriage (Persons)

Method	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Hand bags, baskets and gamchas	23	24	22	22	91
Bicycle			1		1
Rickshaw	1		1	3	5
Van trailer			1		1
Tampoo		1			1
Bus	1				1
Total	25	25	25	25	100

4.8 Goods Market

The main task after good were brought from India was to arrange for their sale. According to the respondents in Brahmanbaria and Satkhira, most of the goods were sold locally. Table 4.8 reveals that of these, 69 respondents sold goods from home, door to door or in the local market. Among them, 16 females from Brahmanbaria and 8 females from Satkhira sold goods door to door, while a total of 21 respondents sold goods in the Upazilla market. It was found from the fieldwork that in both Brahmanbaria and Satkhira respondents tried to sell their goods in Dhaka and other districts, despite the difficulties this involved and the increased risk of being caught by the police, because it yielded greater profit. The field study showed that 10 out of 100 respondents sold their goods in Dhaka and other districts, including Comilla, Brahmanbaria, Jessor and Tongi. Interestingly 2 female respondents from Satkhira also sold goods in the district markets, most preferring to sell goods from home to the local market in order to avoid security issues.

Table 4.8: The location of the market in informal goods (Persons)

Place	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
From home	1	4	1	10	16
Door to door	1	16		8	25
Local market	10	3	8	7	28
Upazilla market	8		13		21
District market	2	2	2		6
Dhaka market	3		1		4
Total	25	25	25	25	100

4.9 Seasonal and Occasional variation in Informal Trade.

Respondents, in both Brahmanbaria and Satkhira, explained that although the trade in daily necessities occurred throughout the year, seasonal changes were very important, in relation to products besides daily necessities and in relation to the number of people engaged in the activity. Many respondents did not trade all year round. In particular, the young and middle-aged traders in Brahmanbaria were not engaged in the activity during the months of *Katrik* (mid-October to mid-November) and *Agrahaayan* (mid-November to mid-December), because, with the rivers and marshes drying up at that time, they were busy fishing. Also, they did not work in the months in which they were occupied observing religious rites or religious festivities. For example, many respondents who smuggled Phensidyl, wine, beer and cannabis did not do so during the month of *Ramadan*⁷, as they believe this to be a holy month. This is the reason why, owing to the low supply of drugs during this time, prices rise, in certain cases by 4 to 5 takas. Similarly, those who smuggle fish cease to work during the Hindu *Pujas*⁸, as the people of Tripura in India have a low demand for fish at this time. Although most of the traders remained engaged in the business all the time, seasons and occasions did affect their trade. Table 4.9 shows that although 89 respondents continued throughout the year, daily necessities and spices were needed more during festivities, there being a great demand for these during both the *Eid-ul Fitar*⁹ and *Eid-ul-Adha*¹⁰, festivals. 73 respondents stated that they engaged in business during the dry seasons. The respondents in Brahmanbaria reported that, as the terrain is hilly, it was hard for the women in particular to conduct business at this time and, for this reason most of the respondents preferred the winter. 37 respondents however reported conducting business during the monsoon season. Those in Satkhira stated that, during the monsoon season, the route to the

⁷ It is the ninth month of Hijri (Islam) calendar. It is considered the holiest month. Prayers, fasting, self-accountability and charity have special association with Ramadan. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramadan>.

⁸ **Pūjā** is a religious ritual of the Hindu community to pray or show respect to God (or goddess). Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puja>

⁹ **Eid ul-Fitr** is an Islamic festival that marks the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eid_ul-Fitr

¹⁰ **Eid ul-Adha** takes place on the tenth day of the Islamic month of Dhul Hijja. It is one of two Eid festivals that Muslims celebrate. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eid-ul-Adha>

border areas became muddy, and hence the law enforcement agencies patrolled less frequently and those in Brahmanbaria explained that, during the monsoon season, they use the river *Howra* route, where no checks are carried out by the law enforcement agencies. Most of the respondents reported that the winter season was better suited for doing business.

Table: 4.9 Number of people involved in informal trade on a seasonal and occasional basis

Place	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Holly Eid	25	25	25	25	100
Pujas	22	18	23	22	85
Summer	17	14	21	21	73
Monsoons	6	7	12	12	37
Winter	21	19	19	24	83
All the time	23	19	23	24	89

4.10 The Role of Hundi

The relation of *hundi*¹¹ (informal international money transfer) to informal trade at the borders is a widely discussed subject. Transactions are carried out in a number of ways, and as the field study shows the currencies of both countries are used at the Brahmanbaria and Satkhira borders. As the cost of the carriage of goods from India to Bangladesh is more than the other way round, Bangladeshi currency tends to accumulate on the Indian side of the border. Gold is also used as a method of payment, as is the purchase of gold against the amount of money remaining. As a result there is a flow of gold from Bangladesh to India, leading to the smuggling of gold at the two borders points. An Indian *hundi* trader living in a village near the Agartala border reported that they sometimes kept large amounts of Bangladeshi money in accounts under false names in Bangladeshi banks near the border areas of Bangladesh. Bank employees were bribed and therefore complicit in this process. Representatives of these Indian *hundi* traders, also with bank accounts, are situated in Dhaka, to

¹¹ **Hawala** (also known as **hundi**) is an informal money transfer system used primarily in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. In the most basic variant of the hawala system, money is transferred via a network of hawala brokers, or *hawaladars*. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundi>

whom Indian *hundi* traders then transfer their money. This Bangladeshi currency is then cashed as Indian rupees and sent out again by cheque. In most cases, however, money is withdrawn from the bank and Indian rupees or dollars are bought on the black market, before being sent across the border either in cash or through the bank. This is largely how the smugglers' syndicates paid for goods.

4.11 The Role of Border Security Forces

According to the respondents, the linemen play an important role in informal trade. The local people informed us that the linemen lease a certain area of the border from the border security forces, based on a verbal agreement of one year. This area is then demarcated and kept under their control. They have realized that they can take a fixed payment and shares at certain rates, on any contraband goods brought from this area, a certain portion of which was then given to the security forces. 93 of the respondents reported having to give a certain amount to the border security forces for the safe passage of their goods, while the other seven had been able to evade the fixed payment while bringing in the goods. All of the female respondents not only reported paying the bribe but believed that as they were paying a fixed payment to security forces, the trade was not illegal. It was also stated by the local people that those who delivered goods by train to Dhaka or other places collected a special token, on a monthly basis, from the local security forces and members of various law enforcement agencies. Each token cost 3000 takas per month, and protected the goods for that period. Several linemen occupy the area under the jurisdiction of one *Upazilla*; for instance, according to unofficial sources, there are linemen in 10 places within Akhaura Upazilla and 25 in Satkhira Upazilla.

The focus group discussion with a group of journalists in Akhaura Upazilla revealed that although it had been three to four months since the barbed fences were erected along this border holes were deliberately left in those fences so that the informal traders could easily cross. Though flag meetings are held between the border forces of both countries, no solutions have yet been achieved with regard to the trafficking of women and children, informal border trade and other

problems. A lower ranking lineman works as a medium of communication between the two border forces. The criminal activities of Akhaura Upazilla are not centered on politics but on border trade, and regular informal border trade has caused the cession of other criminal activities such as theft and robbery. Theft and robbery normally take place when border security is high and people are unable to find work. The law enforcement agencies and administration has not taken any steps against this illegal activity because of the money they receive from it.

For each carton of beer or spirits, for example, members of the different law-enforcement bodies at the border share approximately Taka 45. They have to be paid 50 takas, 60 takas and 70 takas for each quintal of sugar, pulses and turmeric/cumin respectively. Local people reported that the linemen regularly pay 20,000 –50,000 takas per month to different organizations, but that even then their goods were sometimes seized. Goods get seized at least once a year, and those caught are either sent to prison or released with only some of their goods seized.

4.12 Conclusion

Although there is no clear definition of smuggling, the Customs Act 1969 and the Special Power Act 1974 include and describe the term. The field study found that different kinds of people were involved in informal trade, from carriers to carrier-investors, investors, primary traders and syndicates. There were more investors than direct participants in the activity and landlessness and unemployment were considered the main reasons for involvement.

The number of engagements was seen to depend on the price of the items because if the price was high, fewer people would be involved. As the narcotic substances were comparatively rare, cheaper and easier to sell at a greater profit, most of the respondents brought these contraband goods from India, and besides the males, many females were also engaged in importing these items. Normally female respondents did not reinvest in importing goods

until their stock had been sold, and females were forced to both buy goods at a higher price and sell at a lower price than males.

Concerning capital, the main sources were found to be the local *mohajons*. Apart from this, NGOs and other local and non-local businesses were also sources of capital. The respondents preferred to buy and sell goods between midnight and early morning, usually crossed the border twice in a day and carried goods by a variety of methods. The frequency of movements increased during occasions like Eid and Pujas, although most of the respondents conducted business all year round.

The role of *hundi* played a significant part in the exchange of money. The law enforcement agencies also played a part in facilitating the illegal activity. The following section will describe the socio-economic conditions of the respondents and seek to establish the reasons for their engagement in informal border trade.

Chapter- V

The Reasons for Involvement in Informal Border Trade

This section describes the reasons for engagement in informal border trade cited by the 100 respondents. Most respondents stated that they became involved in the activity for both economic and social reasons, however, economic factors often underlay the social. Many respondents reported multiple reasons, as follows.

Table 5.1: Reasons for involvement in informal border trade

Reasons		Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Total
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
Economic	Ensure livelihood	19	15	23	22	79
	Easy access to capital	5	12	4	6	27
	Lack of job opportunities	8	17	9	9	44
	Increase in economic status	3	1	4	2	10
Social	Death of main income earner	1	7		2	10
	Insecurity		7		6	13
	Influence of others	3		2		5
Geographic	Geographical proximity	2		1		3
Other		1	3		3	7

5.1 Economic reasons

Economic factors played a large part in involvement in informal border trade; this applied at the level of the household as well as the local community more generally. The reasons were described as follows:

5.1.1 Livelihood

According to Table 5.1, 79 respondents reported that their engagement in informal border trade was to ensure their livelihood. Of these, 34 were in Brahmanbaria and 45 in the Satkhira district. The reasons most commonly cited were that the size of their family was beginning to increase, there had been a sudden death of the main family earner, limited sources of income existed, or

there was a lack of cultivable land. It was found from the fieldwork that the respondents were so poor that only 23 of them had their own cultivable land. However, a few were engaged in farming under sharecropping arrangements but the income generated was not sufficient to cover their family expenses. As they had no cultivable land and no other opportunity to get work, informal border trade had become the only viable option.

Case Study- 1

Mr. Billal Mia, 38 of Akhaura Upazilla became involved in informal border trade when he was 18. He had been schooled up until class three but his wife was not literate. His children were fortunate enough to have been given primary education. His daughter was married at the age of eleven and his elder son began agro-farming after completing his primary education. In response to a question about involvement in illegal border trade, he explained that jobs were not available in his locality, but most people in the area were involved in informal border trade. For this purpose, he collected capital with interest from various sources and crossed the border at least 20 times per month. Each time he travels he carries approximately Tk. 3,000, although the amount of investment differs. It took him 35 to 45 minutes to reach the border, which he preferred to cross early in the morning because it was quieter with fewer hazards. He sold goods in the local markets, but noted that law enforcement agencies often seized his goods and they were also stolen by local mobs, although there was no way to complain. As a result he paid a bribe to the law enforcement agencies for ensuring their safety.

Despite the profits he makes he is still unable to save, so when his income falls, he thinks of new items to smuggle. Due to his unauthorized trade, he had little access to the community, as although he does not personally consider it 'illegal', much of the village do. Unless, any major changes take place in his life, he will continue, but he will not encourage his children to become involved due to the high risks involved as well as the lack of future.

Unemployment was also a major problem in the study areas. It was found from the fieldwork that 37 of the respondents had been unemployed before engaging in informal border trade. However, it is worth noting that most of the female respondents were housewives prior to involvement.

5.1.2 Access to capital

Easy access to capital was another reason for involvement in informal border trade because access to capital remains central to the process. The main sources of capital cited by respondents were the local and non-local *mohajon*, local investors and national NGOs, and 27 respondents reported engaging in informal trade for this reason. They also stated that, as they do not need to think about capital, they wanted to utilise the opportunity to do business. Some male respondents also borrowed money from their wives and daughter. Since the female respondents were involved with NGOs, they could easily access credit. It was however difficult for them to repay the loans on time and as a result they invested this credit in informal border trade. It was found from the focus group discussion that there were more investors who wanted to use their money to offer loans with interest, which meant that many young people were also becoming involved.

5.1.3 Lack of job opportunities

Forty-four respondents reported a lack of job opportunities in the locality as a reason for involvement; 25 in Brahmanbaria and 18 in the Satkhira district. As mentioned earlier, job opportunities in the study area are limited, and as a result people have sought alternative employment. In Brahmanbaria district, the job opportunities relate to cultivable land and this has been steadily decreasing. It was found from the fieldwork that although 10 years ago most people produced crops, they now dig up cultivable land and engage in fishing instead. In Satkhira district, the situation is similar, with people now producing shrimps, as the amount of cultivable land has decreased. People are losing their jobs, and have found informal border trade to be an easy alternative livelihood.

Mr. Md. Shamim Hayder, Senior Satkhira Sadar Upazilla Fisheries Officer, Satkhira explained that the socio-economic structure of Satkhira is heavily reliant on shrimp culture and that around 70% of those in the area were involved in shrimp culture in some way. The status of those associated with this activity fall into two categories; the very rich who invest money and land and the very poor who work as day labourers in the shrimp polder (*'Gher'*). Polders are made by the fencing off of paddy land, so that with the introduction of brine water in January, shrimp culture can occur for the following six months. Natural salinity of water in Satkhira Sadar is 10 ppt. and salty water is essential for shrimp culture. As a result, not only are a large number of people involved, but also the business is profitable. Shrimp culture itself enhances the illegal business of informal border trade as the young of shrimp are relatively cheap in India and can be easily carried, while shrimp is also taken from Bangladesh to India as well. After the end of the season of shrimp culture, the frequency of illegal border trade increases as the people of the border area become unemployed. According to Mr. Hayder, 30% of the women in this area work at shrimp polders, primarily as labourers. During the off-season, they become involved in informal border trade. As a result, it is increasingly important that shrimp industries are developed in order to generate legal employment opportunities.

It also emerged from the informal discussion with the Principal of Akhaura Government College that Brahmanbaria district experiences significant in-migration. People from the Mymensingh, Jamalpur and Gaibandha districts migrate in search of employment, and the existence of an efficient rail network has facilitated such in-migration. The problem now facing the Upazilla is that immigrants have found jobs more easily than local residents, as they are willing to accept lower wages than the locals. The majority of these immigrants live close to the railway station as they do not have sufficient money to meet their livelihood needs, and in desperation are more amenable to involvement in informal border trade. However, the informant also noticed that no conflict has

arisen as yet between locals and migrants in relation to participation in informal trade.

A focus group discussion (FGD) took place at the Pres Club of Akhaura Upazilla of Brahmanbaria district. A number of journalists attended and described their views on informal border trade. Akhaura Upazilla lies in the east of Brahmanbaria, and journalists explained that not only has the contribution made by the people of the area during the liberation war never been fully recognized, but also that nobody has taken the initiative for regional development. As a result local people are adverse to the development. Although some families are fairly prosperous, there is much poverty and many families have to depend on informal border trade to maintain their livelihood. The lack of employment opportunities in Akhaura is attributed to the lack of industrialization. Some local people have established industries in Dhaka but they do not want to invest in Akhaura due to the lack of education among residents in the area as well as poor communication links. It could equally be argued however that as the area is well connected by rail, production could easily be transported, facilitating the establishment of industry.

5.1.4 Increase in economic status

Four of the respondents reported that they became involved in informal border trade in order to increase their economic status. Of these, three had a fishing business and one was a poultry farmer. It was found from the informal discussion with local journalists in Brahmanbaria district that, besides these interviewees, many people in Akhaura Upazilla were engaged in fishing. While fish was produced on this side of the border, the market was located across the border in Tripura. Exporting this fish provided a cover for smuggling and many of these people were involved in informal border trade while illegally exporting their fish in order to increase their economic status. Some of these people had previously worked as carriers, before attaining good positions in society, but in order to increase their economic status, they continued the activity. One respondent in

the Brahmanbaria district reported that the income from his poultry business was not sufficient to meet his needs, and he was forced to supplement his income by engaging in informal border trade.

Case Study- 2

Mr. Kalu Mia, 33 was from Satkhira and a married Muslim, who became involved in illegal border trade at the age 20. Mr. Mia was illiterate but all of his three sons had been educated to primary level. He had some land, including his homestead (around 3 decimals), a pond (7 decimals), cultivable land (about 165 decimals), and fellow land (1 decimal), and had bought the cultivable land with the money made from the illegal trade. He also had a small wood factory, but in spite of this, did not earn enough to cover to his family expenses, and insufficient earning was therefore the primary motivation for involvement in the activity. To increase his income, he crossed the border 15 times in a month, each time carrying around TK 25000. He invested most during the winter season because this is when border security is lowest and preferred to cross on foot after midnight, although it takes almost 5 hours to reach from his home. He normally smuggled spices, phensidyl, gas cylinders (used in refrigerators and as cooking fuel), as well as cigarettes. As he had to smuggle large quantities, he normally required the help of carriers, to whom he paid Taka 300 each per trip. Despite bribing law enforcement agencies to ensure his goods were not seized he had twice been taken into custody.

Mr Mia explained that there was no doubt Illegal trade had increased his income. He was now able to cover all livelihood expenses such as food, health care and sanitation, the purchase of household appliances, conveyance and savings. He had also increased his quantity of livestock, poultry and fisheries. In relation to his current status, Mr Mia stated that since becoming involved in informal trade, the school enrollment of his children and interaction with local people had increased. He added however that involvement with informal border trade had created social problems such as violent interactions with some local people and he did consider the activity criminal.

5.1.5 Loan defaulting

Other reasons for involvement in the activity included the low price of goods and the pressure to repay loans. Six of the female respondents reported that, as they

had borrowed money for their family expenses, they always felt pressure to return the money. Before they worked as domestic workers, but it could not cover all of the expenses, and so had to borrow money from others. However, they also took out micro credit from NGOs, which they were required to repay at the end of each month. To reduce their anxiety over loan defaulting, they became involved in informal border trade in order to return the money borrowed.

5.2 Social reasons

The social reasons can be divided into three categories.

5.2.1 Death of the main family income earner

Out of the total 100 respondents, 10 stated that the reason for becoming involved in informal border trade had been the death of the main family earner. Of these, 9 were female, all of whom were widows. It was established during the focus group discussion that women who are mainly widows were directly involved in trade in order to ensure the livelihood of their children. One male respondent in the Brahmanbaria district stated that he had had to become involved in informal border trade as his father had died and there was no other male member in his family.

5.2.2 Insecurity

Thirteen of the respondents identified social security as one of the main reasons for engaging in informal border trade. All of these were female respondents, mainly widows, orphans or separated from their husbands. The respondents in the Brahmanbaria district stated that, after the death of their husband, they lived in their father's house, but their brothers and other family members had considered them a burden, and they had been forced to move. Some respondents reported that they experienced increased economic and social insecurity as they had been separated from their husband, and informal border trade had at least provided some sense of security. Respondents in Satkhira echoed such statements, but added that they initially became involved in order to help their husbands carry out the trade. They did not want to divorce, but wanted

social security for themselves and their children. Some respondents added that their husbands had forced them to do this business or explained that they had to do it for the future of their children.

The study found from the focus group discussion with Journalists of the Akhaura Upazilla that female family members took part in informal trade primarily in order to increase total family income and ensure economic stability. Women who had been divorced as a result of family feuds had also become involved. Polygamous marriages were more often observed amongst migrants than local residents, those hailing from the Gazipur, Mymensingh, Bhairab or Kishorganj districts for example. These migrants often divorced their wives for trivial matters, having received dowries from other brides.

5.2.3 Influence of others

A total of five respondents – three in Brahmanbaria and two in Satkhira – stated that they had become involved in informal border trade due to the influence of others. They had seen their friends undertaking such activities and earning good money, and had also required a supplementary income to cover their daily expenses. Once involved these respondents found it difficult to give up, and had continued, noting that as informal border trade was the main occupation in border areas they had grown up aware of the activity and did not consider it illegal, but as just as acceptable as any other occupation. It was found from the focus group discussion that women are also influenced by others to become involved. In a small village in Satkhira district, where most residents are Hindu, at least one female member from every family is engaged in informal border trade. When asked the reason for undertaking this activity they explained that it was because they had seen other women involved.

Case Study- 3

In order to understand the socio-economic condition of the local area and the nature of informal border trade, an Interview was conducted with Mr. Shuvash Chowdhury, District Correspondent of the Daily *BhorerKagoj*, and Advisory Editor of the Daily *Drishtipat*, Satkhira. He explained that poverty and unemployment, especially amongst women, were the main reasons for involvement in informal border trade. Husbands frequently forced wives to become involved, and unsuccessful wives were treated very badly or divorced but had no choice but to continue their involvement in the activity in order to protect their children's future. He believed this all resulted from insufficient education.

Describing the nature of informal border trade, Mr. Chowdhury explained that 'syndicates' consisting of 10-20 people, controlled the smuggling, and few people were involved privately. Many people consider this profession natural. Many solvent families in the locality were also involved in informal border trade, and few consider it a crime. Children grow up influenced by family members involved around them, and many parents use their children as carriers in order to carry it out themselves. He believed that informal border trade had no positive impact whatsoever and that while cases of theft had reduced, other crimes had increased substantially. These criminal activities were causing the country a significant economic deficit. Interestingly Mr. Chowdhury noted that traders do not desire conflict between the border forces of the two countries and have sometimes worked as mediators to ease BDR-BSF tension.

5.3 Geographical Proximity to Market

As described earlier, the number of people involved also depends on geography proximity to the market i.e. the distance from Bangladesh to the informal trading market in India.

Three respondents described the informal trade market as very near to their home and easy to access, and this was regarded as a reason for involvement. It was established during the focus group discussion that, in the

Brahmanbaria district, the Tripura state in India in particular is very near the border and many goods are available there, so that when a big party places an order, they are easily obtainable. The border area of Brahmanbaria is also hilly which makes it easy to hide goods and avoid the border security forces. In Satkhira district, people commented that Calcutta city of West Bengal was just half an hour's drive from the Bangladesh border areas, the local market was very near and goods were easily accessible, but as the border area was very flat, they sometimes did not feel able to cross the border.

5.4 Conclusion

Respondents are primarily involved in informal border trade for socio-economic reasons. Female respondents were often involved due to widowhood, separation from their husbands or because of the death of the main breadwinner, although some stated that they became involved by helping their husband or in order to earn extra money and ensure their family's security. The dearth of local employment can be seen as another motivating factor, as well as easy access to capital and the necessity of greater livelihood security. The following section will outline the socio-economic impact of informal border trade on the study areas.

Chapter- VI

The Socio-economic impact of Informal border trade

As has been described respondents claimed to have become involved in informal border trade in order to guarantee socio-economic security however the field study shows that their objectives were not fulfilled as anticipated. The socio-economic and political impact, as ascertained through interviews, focus group discussions and informal discussions in the study areas are analysed below.

6.1 Economic Impact

Respondents were primarily involved in informal border trade in order to increase their economic security. The different economic impacts will now be described.

6.1.1 Increase in average monthly income

It was found from the fieldwork that 37 respondents were unemployed prior to their involvement in informal border trade, and that since involvement their average monthly income had increased. Table 6.1 shows that in the Brahmanbaria district, before their involvement in the activity, the average income of male respondents was Taka 1,200 per month and that of females was Taka 350 per month. The highest income earned was Taka 2,400 and the lowest Taka 350. The main income of the female respondents before involvement was earned with the help of micro credit. When they borrowed money from the NGOs, they could earn money by selling milk as well as chicken and duck eggs, although some female respondents also worked as domestic workers for rich families in the local area. After their involvement in informal border trade, the situation had changed, and the table also shows that the average income of male respondents increased to Taka 5,360, while that of females rose to Taka 2,006. The highest monthly income was Taka 9,000 and the lowest Taka 650.

In the Satkhira district, it was found that, before involvement, the monthly income of the male respondents was Taka 1,100 and that of females was zero. The highest amount was Taka 4,000 and the lowest Taka 400. Here, it should be mentioned that before their involvement in informal trade, none of the female

respondents were involved in any occupation other than working as housewives. Since involvement in the activity the average income of male respondents rose to Taka 2,384 while the income of females rose to Taka 1556. The highest monthly income earned was Taka 8,000 and the lowest Taka 600. It was found from the fieldwork in Satkhira that as most of the female respondents were Hindu, personal insecurity had made them afraid to conduct business on a large scale. They imported only the amount of goods necessary to cover their daily expenses.

Table 6.1: The difference between the present and previous monthly income of the respondents (Taka)

	Present				Past			
	Brahmanbaria		Satkhira		Brahmanbaria		Satkhira	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Average	5360	2006	2384	1556	1200	350	1100	000
Minimum	2000	650	600	500	600	350	400	000
Maximum	9000	7000	8000	5500	2400	350	4000	000

The field study found that, although the average monthly income had increased, overall the economic situation had not improved because the majority of the income generated had to be returned to the NGOs or local *mohajons*, or was required for family expenses. However, the respondents also reported that their goods were regularly seized by the law enforcement agency and, because they not only invested money from their own pocket but also had to borrow capital from NGOs, as well as local and non-local *mohajons*, they bore year round losses.

6.1.2 Physical assets

Table 6.2 shows the status of physical assets after involvement. It was found that 6 of the respondents had been able to buy cultivable land after obtaining profits from the trade. One respondent in Brahmanbaria stated that he had borrowed money from the local *mohajon*, but could not repay the money because his goods had been seized by the border forces, and he had had to sell his cultivable land. 77 respondents stated that they had no cultivable land. It was also found that 21 respondents had bought livestock and poultry, and that although most

respondents had neither made a profit nor been able to utilize such, 12 respondents noted that they had been able to save money from that earned through informal trade. The majority of female respondents wanted to buy land or *adita*¹² cultivable land rather than save money, because they felt that this would make more profit. 9 respondents reported that they could buy household goods like TVs, tables, chairs and cooking utensils etc and some reported that they had been able to buy household goods for their daughters' dowries, although this had prevented them from making a profit.

Table 6.2: Perception of gains and losses in terms of assets, savings and income (Persons)

Items	Increase	Decrease	No change	N/A ¹³
Cultivable land	6	1	16	77
<i>Adita</i> land	4			96
Livestock	11	4		85
Poultry	10	2	90	
Tube well	6		94	
Fish ponds	5			95
Household goods	9	3		88
Cash/savings	12	2		86

6.1.3 Patterns of expenditure

Expenditure on the most significant livelihood necessities, including food, clothing, housing, education and health care either increased or decreased post involvement in the activity. 32, 22, 17, 23 and 14 respondents reported an increase in expenditure on food, clothing, housing, education and health care, explaining that they were aware of this increase. However, respondents also mentioned that although they wanted to spend money on their well-being, as the profit from the informal border trade was marginal, and most went towards loan repayments, they had little left to spend. Fourteen respondents also reported that they were now spending more on sanitation. Before involvement, many had had

¹² Sharecropping is a system of cultivation involving an arrangement between the landholder and cultivator for sharing the produce according to the established system, The basis of which was largely determined by local customs. Source: <http://banglapedia.org/>

¹³ N/A means they have no assets.

no toilet, which they had felt very much in need of, but after involvement they had been able to set up at least a ring toilet, which they bought from the local health department office. 39 respondents reported that the primary increase in expenditure had been regarding loan repayments. As mentioned earlier, the main sources of capital were the NGOs, local and outside *mohajons*, and, after doing business, they had to repay the loans, their capacity to do which had increased. However 18 respondents reported that their capacity to repay loans acquired had actually decreased, the main reason for which was that they had not been able to conduct the enterprise properly. The profit was low and they had regularly had to pay tax to local thugs.

Although it was difficult to measure the primary avenues of expenditure, it was discovered during the informal discussion that overall expenditure had not increased. The group was poor and illiterate, with a low level of awareness and limited expectations. Some people had been able to improve their situation but most continued as before.

Table 6.3: Changes in patterns of expenditure (Persons)

Items	Increase	Decrease	No change	N/A ¹⁴
Food	32	12	66	
Clothing	22	4	74	
Housing	17	2	74	
Education	23	5	72	
Health care	14	2	84	
Sanitation	14	7	79	
Repayment of loans	39	18		43
Sponsoring family members for migration	2			98
Conveyance	8	1		91

6.1.4 The vicious cycle of debt

Respondents had been forced to take a risk by becoming involved in informal border trade due to financial desperation. The sources of capital for which were local *mohajons*, NGOs as well as their relatives. They had had to repay loans

¹⁴ N/A means respondents did not have any expenditure.

acquired after engaging in the business, as well as tax to the local linemen. Throughout the year respondent's had their goods seized by both law enforcement agencies as well as local thugs and female respondents reported that, as women, local thugs seized their goods more regularly. As a result they had never been able to repay the loans acquired and had become trapped in a vicious cycle of debt. Out of 100 respondents, 42 reported such experiences.

6.2 Social Impact

Fieldwork also examined the social impact of informal border trade; changes experienced by respondents at the household and community level after becoming involved in the activity.

6.2.1 Improved household status

Individual respondents were asked to present their own assessment of the gains and losses brought through involvement in informal border trade, and the responses were mixed. 41 respondents reported that the school enrolment rate of their family members had increased. Nevertheless, it was found from the informal discussion that the people in the border areas do not consider education important. They wanted to send their children to receive a government stipend for enrolment.

Losses resulting from family splits were also reported by 9 respondents. Of these, 8 were female and one was male. Female respondents explained that their husbands had married a second time to increase their family income, while the male respondent explained that his family had split due to his involvement in the activity. The male reported that prior to his marriage his father-in-law's family had been unaware of his involvement and after learning of it, his wife divorced him. It was also found from the focus group discussion that many local people did not allow their sons and daughters to marry those involved in informal border trade, and as a result it was difficult for informal traders to marry into good families. This was also experienced by females; for example a young female, whose father or mother is involved in informal border trade, will only be able to marry someone else who is himself involved in the activity. As she must marry

into another family of informal border traders, she is trapped in within a cycle that is difficult to escape from.

Nine respondents reported that, after involvement, they received informal community support. They claimed that before involvement no one supported them because they were poor but once they were earning money people willingly helped. 24 respondents stated that the degree of their interaction and mobility had changed. Once involved in informal border trade they were able to maintain good relations with local people, including the elite, in order to obtain loans and help during crises. Some respondents also reported that as they often crossed the border they had also formed relationships with different types of people within both the Bangladeshi and Indian areas, and had been able to get to know the culture and customs of other parts of India.

Thirteen respondents reported improved participation in decision-making at the household level as a result. Female respondents explained that, with an independent income source, their husbands were more willing to listen to them. At the same time however, male respondents noted that they were no longer able to be involved in decision-making at the local level, because they were known in the area as 'smugglers'. Two respondents stated that, as they now earned money, people had invited them to become involved in government work, like earth digging, however, it was also revealed in the focus group discussion that people who were not involved in informal border trade generally took an unfavourable attitude towards them. They frequently avoided them, referring to them 'traitors', who were unwelcome in community work.

Four respondents, all female, reported an increased ability to raise a dowry. As they are earning money, they were now able give a dowry during the wedding ceremony of their children, something previously unthinkable.

Table 6.4: Perceptions of gains and losses (Persons)

Items	Change	No change
School enrolment	41	59
Family structure (split)	9	91
Access to informal community support	9	91
Interaction/mobility	24	76
Access to GO programme	2	92
Participation in decision making	13	87
Ability to give a dowry	4	86

6.2.2 Risk of human trafficking

The fieldwork revealed that beyond the smuggling of goods, some people are also involved in human trafficking. Human trafficking has recently become important in Bangladesh, with the victims mainly women and children, however no accurate statistics have yet been produced in the country. Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA), an organisation involved in the rescue of trafficking victims reports that 10,000 women and children are trafficked to India every year and 30,000 Bangladeshi children have been supplied to Indian brothels (BNWLA, 1999), however these statistics remain controversial as they are also not based on any formal research. Traffickers take women and children from different areas of the country, and any woman or child is at risk of being targeted. Since it is economically beneficial, many people living in the border areas have taken to this activity, and as a result a connection has been found between informal border trade and human trafficking. In the border areas the route through which goods are transported (as well as humans) is locally called '*Ghat*'. This '*Ghat*' is controlled by local influential informal border traders and no-one is able to pass without their help. It was revealed during the focus group discussion that during the process of informal border trade, children working as carriers are at particular risk of being targeted by traffickers. An interview was conducted with Mr. Abdur Sobur, Executive Director, Agrogoti Songsta, a local NGO in Satkhira District. Mr. Sobur explained that the outsiders used the Satkhira border as a root for trafficking and that the people of Barisal and Bagerhat districts are being trafficked through this area, facilitated by the

numerous inter-district bus services. However, due to the methods employed by traffickers it is often very difficult to identify victims and very often the victims themselves are unaware that they are being trafficked. Interestingly as local people know each other, not only are they not being trafficked themselves, but outsiders are also easily recognisable within the community. The port (*Ghat*) owners generally get money, *Bokhara* (bribe), to transfer illegal goods but sometimes they do not because they cannot identify those who are actually victims.

6.2.3 *Use of child labour*

Out of 100 respondents, 21 used children as carriers, of which, 16 were in Brahmanbaria and 5 in Satkhira. Most children were aged between 8 and 14 years old, and it was mainly female respondents that used them, not only because children get sympathy from border security forces but also because they are very cheap labour. For a one-day carrier, they have to pay only Taka 50. It also emerged that most of the female respondents rent out their children to act as carriers in order to earn extra money. As a result, they put their children at risk of being trafficked, physically injured or caught in crossfire. This was detrimental to the health of the future generation, not only because children wanted to concentrate on earning rather than going to school but also because they were growing up without an moral code.

It was found from the focus discussion with journalists of Akhaura Upazilla that children are actively involved in informal border trade. They can very effectively carry 17/18 bottles of phensidyl at a time, operating beyond the suspicion of BDR and as a result are capable of earning a lot. 80% of children have been encouraged by their families to become involved in the activity, often enrolling in primary schools in order to avail themselves of a sub-stipend (*upabritti*) even though they are not attending. It is worth noting that the schools themselves are crippled with corruption and irregularity; the role of the government administration in the area is negligible.

6.2.3 The Impact of legal punishment

Eight of the respondents had received legal punishment due to their involvement in informal border trade, among whom one was female. The whole family suffered as a result, facing increasing vulnerability as the family income was suddenly taken away, while they remained under pressure from the lenders.

6.2.4 Reductions in local and international conflict

It was found from the focus group discussion that informal border trade can reduce local conflict. As most people in the border area are involved in informal border trade, they are very busy carrying out the activity and as result, the frequency of petty crimes, like stealing, are reduced. It also emerged that the number of crimes increased when the informal border trade stopped due to a reemergence of border conflict.

People involved in informal border trade play a role in border conflicts. Respondents explained that incidents such as cattle theft or the seizure of contraband goods can lead to clashes between the people living near the borders of the two countries, quite often leading to conflicts between the countries' security forces. At such times, the movement of goods across the borders cease, causing a sharp decline in the daily earnings of a large number of people involved in the trade. In such situation females are particularly severely affected. In order to restore peace at the borders, people become involved in informal border trade to ensure that the clashes are resolved between the border security forces of the two countries with the help of the linemen of both countries. These measures ensure that people involved in informal border trade are able to resume their activity.

Case Study- 4

Another focus group discussion took place at the press club of the Satkhira Sadar Upazilla with more than 16 journalists attending. They explained that People of both countries who live in the border area are guided by particular cultural trends that encourage them to become involved in illegal business. The journalists estimated that around 85 per cent of people are interested in border smuggling but only 45 per cent of people are able to rely on the business. Nevertheless small businessmen/ women choose to become involved because they have few alternatives. There is a general lack of employment opportunities and as far as women are concerned, divorce and widowhood have left them insecure and forced their involvement. The socio-economic system is such that once involved people find it difficult to stop. It is very difficult to consider the occupation negative when as many as 95% of the inhabitants of a village are involved. The remaining 5% of inhabitants have become a minority who are unable to raise their voices in relation to the issue of a class distinction between the groups. The majority of families put little emphasis on education; when boys grow up their participation in the trade is assumed while girls are merely married off.

6.3 Health Insecurity

It was also discovered from the informal discussion with the Satkhira Sadar Upazilla officer and the local health officer that, when informal traders cross the border, they visit the red light district of West Bengal in India. As a result, they often carry the HIV/AIDS virus. The health officer had not identified any cause of the spread of HIV, but he did not ignore the threat. However, in Brahmanbaria district, as most people migrated from different districts, they had been involved in informal border trade and the local journalist reported that many of the females were also working as sex workers. They crossed the border and became involved in prostitution in Tripura in India. As well as visiting clients they also smuggled goods. The threat of HIV/AIDS had thus increased.

An interview was conducted with Mr. Md. Abdus Shahid, a Health Assistant of Bhomra Port land, Department of Health Care, Satkhira district. He explained that the Government of Bangladesh had instigated a Polio¹⁵ vaccination programme for children under five years old at the Satkhira border areas. This programme had been established for the children of the border area of Bangladesh, as well as the children traveling from Bangladesh to India and vice versa. Besides this, the family health clinic 'Bonophool', run by a local NGO, arranges health tests for the people of the area, as well as truck drivers traveling from India, every Sunday and Wednesday. It was found in the Satkhira district that although the incidence of common diseases is not high, cases of TB¹⁶ have reached epidemic proportions, spread largely by truck drivers coming from India. They are spreading this disease by staying in hotels and mixing with the local people, and the situation is becoming increasingly dangerous. This is currently the only major health concern noted in the area, although the daily star, a leading Bangladesh news paper (2006) reported that according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), India, which has suffered a resurgence in polio this year with 283 new cases reported, was 'actively exporting' the virus to Nepal, Bangladesh and Africa. The WHO website described India as 'currently the only area of the world that is actively exporting the polio virus to other countries,' on Thursday, September 14, 2006. The threat of the disease has thus increased.

6.4 Conclusion

In this section, we have seen that, as most people are involved in informal border trade in order to ensure their socio-economic security, the socio-economic impact

¹⁵ Poliomyelitis, often called polio or infantile paralysis, is a viral paralytic disease. The causative agent, a virus called poliovirus, enters the body orally, infecting the intestinal wall. It may proceed to the blood stream and into the central nervous system causing muscle weakness and often paralysis. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polio>

¹⁶ Tuberculosis (commonly abbreviated as TB) is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, which most commonly affects the lungs (pulmonary TB) but can also affect the central nervous system (meningitis), lymphatic system, circulatory system (miliary tuberculosis), genitourinary system, bones and joints. Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuberculosis>

is substantial. It has also been found that, although many incomes have increased, respondents had to pay the majority of this to lenders and as smuggled goods were sometimes seized by law enforcement agencies and local thugs year round losses were experienced. A few of the respondents made a profit that could be utilized, but some did not. The status of their physical assets, the patterns of expenditure, as well as the perception of gains and losses also produced mixed responses. The risk of human trafficking, use of child labour and health security has also been discussed in this chapter.

Chapter VII

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation

Cross-border informal trade is one of the most important issues of current concern between India and Bangladesh. It takes place between people who live a short distance apart, but who find themselves separated by an international boundary. The people of the international border area consider cross-border informal trade a necessary process in terms of the maintenance of sustainable livelihoods for the unemployed. The research documented analysed the nature and impact of informal border trade between the two countries highlighting the sources of security and insecurity that are generated by the activity, as well as the different socioeconomic conditions that create it. The research argues that, although informal border trade is considered illegal, it is necessary for the maintenance of the livelihood of the poor in the bordering areas, and that the failure of the two states in terms of fulfilling the needs of the poor have forced them into this illegal activity.

The fieldwork was carried out in the Brahmanbaria and Satkhira districts; however the geographical profile of each side of the border is different. While the Bangladeshi side is relatively flat, Tripura in India is marked by undulating hills. The two Upazilla's in Bangladesh that were selected for the study are also marked by differences. Satkhira sadar Upazilla in Satkhira is situated on the Khulna–Dhaka highway and is relatively prosperous, enjoying good communication facilities, while the Upazilla of Akhaura, chosen from the Brahmanbaria district, is not situated directly on the Sylhet–Dhaka highway, but it does have better rail links thanks to the Chittagong–Dhaka-Sylhet railway line. Employment opportunities are limited in Brahmanbaria compared with Satkhira, and the nature of cross-border informal trade has been affected as a result.

One hundred respondents were interviewed, 50 from each district. The median age of the respondents was 34 and 30 years in both cases, but the

youngest person interviewed was 18 years of age and the oldest 60. The female respondents who participated were not literate while male literacy varied, with three having studied up to the SSC level. Some of the men had worked in highly skilled sectors in different industries, but had been unable to secure similar jobs on their return to the local area, and had been forced to choose this profession as a result.

Most of the women had married young, and many were either divorced or widowed. Our respondents from the Brahmanbaria area were generally better-off than the respondents from Satkhira. The average family income was 3,127.6 Taka; the highest income being Taka 15,000 and the lowest Taka 300.

The reasons for engaging in the trade were mainly economic, arising, for many females, from the death of the main male breadwinner, usually their husband. While landlessness and unemployment were regarded as the main reasons for entering the trade, an interesting finding, especially in the Brahmanbaria area was that many of those involved in cross-border informal trading owned small shops or small fisheries. Goods for these shops are smuggled in from India and the fish is sold in Indian markets. The money obtained from the sale of fish is plied back into the fishery projects, or used to buy Indian goods, which are then sold in Bangladesh.

Another interesting finding is that as many micro-finance NGO's work in these areas, money used to provide the initial capital for cross border trade is often acquired through them.

A drop in the remuneration for agricultural labour was one of the issues that emerged during the focus group discussions. Interestingly, this wage reduction was traced to the entry of immigrants from different districts, who are willing to work for less, during the harvest season. This reflects the ease of internal movement between the areas. In Satkhira district, the short duration of the shrimp cultivation season, and the fact that the activity only produces one crop in a year, has resulted in frequent unemployment. On average five to six

labourers are necessary for scrimp cultivation while other forms of cultivation require more. Due to the geographical proximity to the international border and ease of access to goods, many people work as carrier or investors in the business.

Communication networks are also important facilitators of the trade. In Brahmanbaria, for example, the respondents claimed that the industry had not grown substantially, as it was not situated on the main Dhaka–Sylhet highway, and unemployment was high. Cross border trade was facilitated by the lack of viable alternatives as well as the ease of communication across the border.

Although there was not a great deal of religious diversity among respondents, neither region containing large Hindu populations, we were informed that people of the Hindu community are often involved in the trade. These people were unwilling to participate in the interview process, but it was revealed that connections on both sides of the border gave them a particular advantage in conducting the activity.

For most of the people involved, cross-border informal trade did prove to be economically beneficial, but it was also considered very risky, as being caught by the police or the border security forces on either side remained a genuine possibility. In order to avoid such occurrences, significant amounts of cash had to be offered, and this ate considerably into earnings.

It is also interesting to note that the earnings from cross-border trade were invested in other areas, primarily to upgrade standards of living, through the purchase of TVs and other household goods. Families had also bought or mortgaged lands, or purchased cattle.

While some economic benefit, if insecure, was at times experienced, many respondents felt that, in social terms, their situations had not improved. Once known as smugglers in the area, they had found difficulty in forming social alliances such as marriages. Political influence was also an important factor.

People involved in the trade supported candidates who gave them protection, and not only worked for them during elections but gave them part of their earnings in exchange for the protection offered. However, it remained a risky business for those involved.

An interesting observation was that cross border conflicts have a negative impact on the trade. In the case of any such conflict, traders on both sides of the border put pressure on the border security forces to resolve the situation quickly, so that the trade can resume. In many cases, the traders themselves have helped negotiate a settlement.

Another important finding concerns health security in the region. The study found that as many people cross the border, the transfer of polio, HIV/AIDS and other diseases is possible, and has occurred, while the risk of human trafficking is also worrying.

Although the state imposes restrictions on the border areas on the basis of this internal and international security, the movements have not ceased. While the state is concerned with its sovereignty, the people are concerned with their socio-economic security, for them human security issues override traditional security. In this era of globalisation, human security is a growing concern. If people are deprived of their basic rights, they will threaten the state from within.

The state considers informal border trade as a threat to its security, because it generates border clashes as well as a reduction in revenue from customs. It is true that the socio-economic and political condition of the state is affected by informal border trade, but the people who reside in the border areas are attracted to the economic security made possible through involvement in the business, despite the risks involved. The state must take this economic security into consideration and should consider withdrawing restrictions on the movement of individuals. In this research, we have used interviews, informal discussions

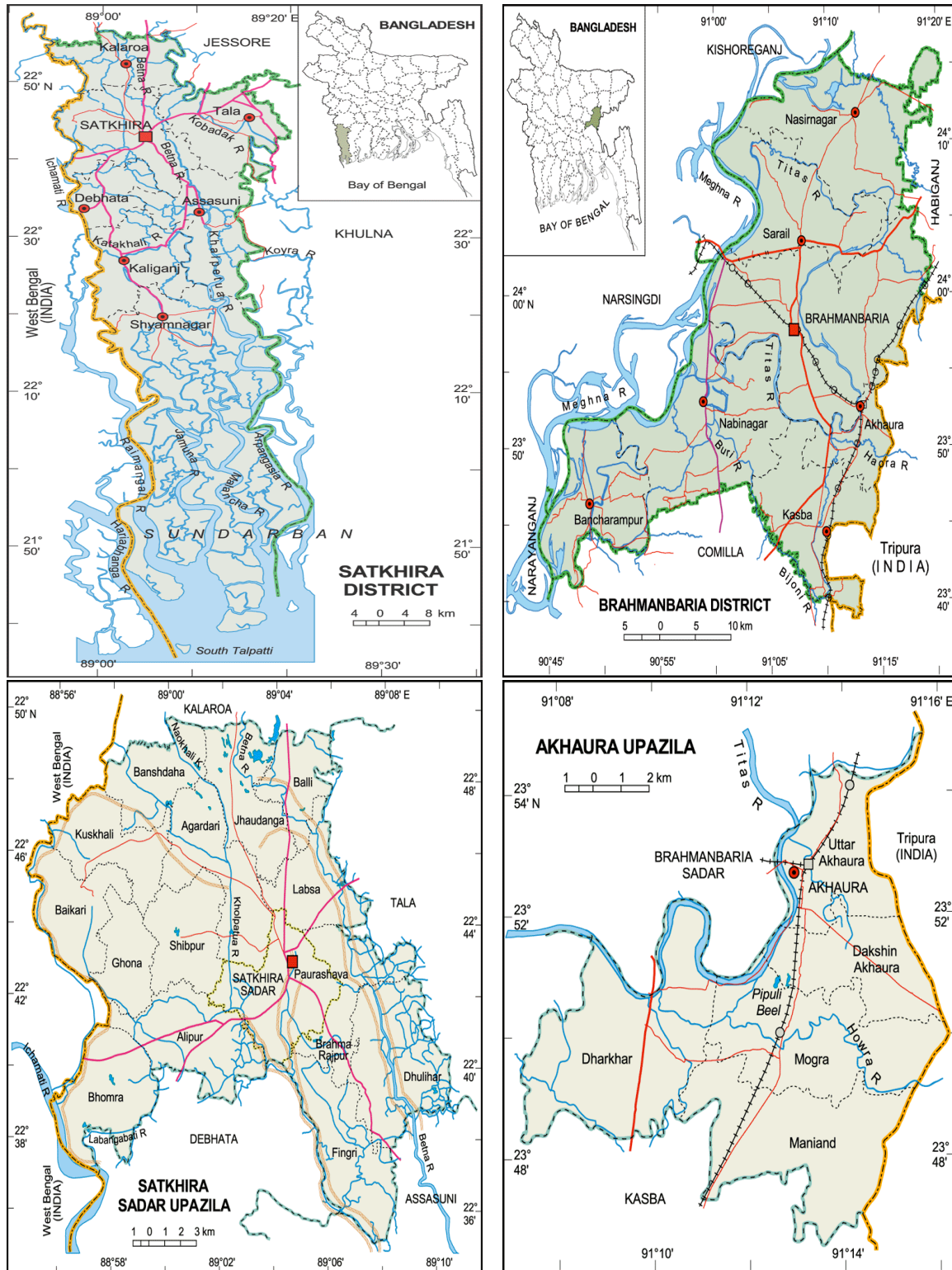
and a focus group discussion to assess the necessity of free and legal movements between two countries.

Policy Recommendation

- (I) Measures occurring at individual and state level:
 - Individual level: Creating more employment opportunities -role of NGOs and agro-based industrialization (prohibition of industrialization under Custom Act 1969 in the border areas needs to be withdrawn)
 - At state level (border regions need to be treated as a separate entity)
 - Special transit passes for people living in the border areas, legalizing their movement and easing the process of cross border trade.
- (II) Joint investment in agro-based industrialization in the border areas.
- (III) Trans-border cooperation over the issues of common concern: environmental degradation, arsenic contamination, disease control.
- (IV) Arrangements facilitating the interaction between people living along the Bangladesh-India border as well as interaction between the border forces of the two countries (sports and cultural competitions).
- (V) Encouragement of media coverage in both countries that injects trust and confidence in the minds of the policy makers and politicians.
- (VI) Journalists from Akhaura Upazilla demanded the construction of the “Hawra Dam”. This is because the flooding caused by the Hawra river has generated extensive damage, disrupting lives on a regular basis. Besides these floods, the drain water of Agartala town in Tripura leaks through the drainage system and canals, causing the people of Akhaura poisonous infections. Crops and crop fields have also been contaminated with poisons.
- (VII) The development of comprehensive shrimp industries, and the employment this would generate in Satkhira district.

- (VIII) Due to health concerns, Bangladesh should take the initiative to encourage Indian truck drivers either to stay in Bangladesh or to check their health certificate. This should be done by NGO's with expertise rather than Bangladeshi health officials.
- (IX) The Government of Bangladesh should allow Bangladeshi citizens to build factories (small, medium or large) in the area, lifting the law that prohibits such development within 15 km of the border areas.

Annex 1: Geographical Map of the Study areas: Satkhira Sadar Upazilla of Satkhira district and Akhaura Upazilla of Brahmanbaria district.



Source: Available at: http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/Maps/MS_0134.GIF
http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/Maps/MS_0135.GIF
http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/Maps/MB_0612.GIF
http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/Maps/MA_0143.GIF

Annex 2: Year Wise Seizure Statement

Year	Incoming value	Outgoing Value	Total Value	No of Cases	Arrested
1976	83,06,184	41,61,001	1,24,67,185	3,737	4,630
1977	77,83,084	60,81,520	1,38,64,604	3,664	5,004
1978	94,64,930	1,68,37,587	1,63,02,517	4,616	5,929
1979	1,96,77,435	1,71,35,480	3,68,12,915	7,510	6,500
1980	1,99,16,160	6,23,99,773	8,23,15,933	6,007	4,909
1981	3,04,19,524	4,21,68,656	7,25,68,180	5,833	4,346
1982	2,52,30,141	3,44,65,612	5,96,95,753	5,359	4,449
1983	5,02,46,701	5,12,19,375	10,14,66,076	8,316	6,596
1984	9,07,43,366	4,66,07,145	13,73,50,599	9,137	5,741
1985	19,25,55,866	5,32,15,387	24,57,71,253	8,683	4,663
1986	16,88,76,902	10,10,24,595	26,99,01,497	9,921	3,492
1987	21,45,47,104	11,79,39,566	33,24,86,670	9,412	4,122
1988	36,35,41,629	13,67,34,630	50,02,76,259	10,198	4,732
1989	109,24,20,712	14,00,31,535	123,24,52,247	13,737	4,379
1990	42,04,98,212	9,69,69,842	51,74,68,054	11,467	3,811
1991	60,74,99,668	13,92,12,161	74,67,11,829	13,252	3,318
1992	62,16,52,045	17,14,14,109	79,30,66,154	18,655	2,770
1993	76,69,94,647	8,76,24,861	85,46,19,508	23,616	1,819
1994	62,49,68,726	6,97,08,712	69,46,77,438	26,479	1,187
1995	105,38,80,868	50,17,37,662	156,36,18,530	32,557	1,734
1996	106,66,17,079	14,80,50,692	121,46,67,771	29,529	1,918
1997	85,40,01,338	56,33,33,117	141,73,34,505	27,091	1,358
1998	77,19,13,550	54,60,63,063	131,79,76,613	28,157	1,323
1999	84,34,42,826	59,51,66,927	143,86,09,753	29,662	1,429
2000	88,71,53,358	33,83,12,347	122,54,65,705	27,025	1,044
2001	94, 35, 93,208	8,91,95,390	103,27,88,598	24,044	767

Source: Brigadier General Abdus Salam Chowdhury (2003) 'Bangladesh- India Border Issues and Management', *NDC Journal*, vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 72.

Annex 3: Firing Incidents along Bangladesh-India Border

Year	Killed	Injured	Number of Incidents
1976	42 including 10 x BDR	33 including 09 x BDR	29
1977	43 including 09 x BDR	18 including 10 x BDR	23
1978	07 including 02 x BDR	09 including 04x BDR	16
1979	16 including 01 x BDR	31 including 04 x BDR	76
1980	14 including 03 x BDR	17 Including 09 x BDR	29
1981	20	26 including 03x BDR	38
1982	29 including 19 x BDR	12 including 09 x BDR	26
1983	11	11	21
1984	08	01	12
1985	-	03	02
1986	01	-	03
1987	03	09 including 03 x BDR	19
1988	01	07	13
1989	10	04 including 01 x BDR	22
1990	44 including 15 x BDR	28 including 06 x BDR	37
1991	20 including 03 x BDR	31 including 02 x BDR	35
1992	16 including 03 x BDR	11	19
1993	13	03	16
1994	19	13	30
1995	12	10	26
1996	09	12	29
1997	11 including 01 x BDR	06	26
1998	22 including 01 x BDR	16 including 02 x BDR	47
1999	31 including 03 x BDR	34 including 02 x BDR	44
2000	13	13	29
2001	58 including 03 x BDR	34 including 05 x BDR	82

Source: Brigadier General Abdus Salam Chowdhury (2003) 'Bangladesh- India Border Issues and Management', *NDC Journal*, vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 71.

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