

## **Accumulation by Dispossession: State of Labour in Bangladesh 2013**

The Unnayan Onneshan, an independent multidisciplinary think-tank states that, Bangladesh has witnessed a parallel process of economic growth driven by, and associated dispossession of, labour. The research organisation has launched a book on the auspicious event of the International Labour Day titled “Accumulation and Alienation: State of Labour in Bangladesh 2013”.

“The development in Bangladesh is an aggregate product of multiple factors while labour remains at the core, yet labourers are dispossessed by a number of ways,” adds the research organization.

The research organisation says that the fundamental challenge and the reasons for dispossession of labour in Bangladesh is the growing gaps between the creation of employment and the requirements for the new entrants into the labour force. The growth rate of youth labour force during the period from 1999-2000 to 2010 has stood at 3.72 percent while the growth rate of total labour force was 3.37 percent per year.

“There is a growing disparity between the rate of growth in employment and unemployment, implying fragility of absorption capacity and vulnerability of labourers to low-wages and non-adherence of rights,” notes the think-tank. Over the last decade the employed population has grown at a rate of 3.33 percent compared to 3.71 percent increments of unemployed population.

The Unnayan Onneshan observes that the formal work environment has undergone a process of rapid transformation in the context of globalisation and technological change, leaving the majority of the workforce in the informal sector. The formal sector witnessed a decline by 3.40 percent per year during the period from 1999-2000 to 2010. On the other hand, informal sector increased at an annual rate of 4.90 percent during the same period and consequentially every year a significant number of 1.8 million people had to join informal sector.

Referring to the rising share of women in the labour force as feminisation of labour, the Unnayan Onneshan reasons that growing need and decline of familial support along with the ever-increasing pressures to sustain has pushed women especially in rural areas to engage in income generating activities. Women participation in labour market in Bangladesh increased with a rate of 10.0 percent, 10.63 percent, and 8.18 percent at national, rural, and urban area respectively between 1999-2000 and 2010.

The research organisation also finds that the rapid growth of population and the lack of availability of jobs force displacement from the rural areas, generating a growing flow of migrant workers. The low-skilled work force migrated with an accelerated pace than that of skilled work force, reflecting intrinsic weaknesses and rigidities and implying high degree of vulnerability, adds Unnayan Onneshan. The low-skilled work-force migration has increased with a rate of

28.59 percent per year during 1991 to 2012 while the semi-skilled work force migration decreased with a rate of 1.95 percent per year during the same period.

Referring to the omnipresent violation of rights of labourers, the Unnayan Onneshan adds: “the laws are failing to protect workers. Even formal sectors do not adhere to minimum wages, toil them into hazardous working conditions, discriminate due to gender, and retaliate for speaking up or trying to organize or form associations.”

Pointing out the lack of effective trade unionism in protecting workers’ rights, the Unnayan Onneshan observes that the fragmentation of trade unions has adversely impacted on the prospects of coordinated collective actions and movements.

The organization argues that achieving the goals of economic growth, social development and poverty reduction depend much on developments in the labour market and success in expanding decent employment opportunities through both waged and self-employment for the growing labour force.

“Unless major changes are made for decent employment, development of the country will not increase significantly and it requires major policy and institutional reforms on both demand and supply sides of the labour market, adds Unnayan Onneshan.