

Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



The land tenure system in Bangladesh: trends, challenges and options for reforms

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INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is predominantly an agrarian country. Due to its very fertile land and favorable weather, varieties of crops grow abundantly in this land. The agricultural and rural sector in Bangladesh plays a vital role in the sustained food and livelihood security of its large and ever-growing population. Agriculture is the largest employment sector in Bangladesh. The performance of this sector has an overwhelming impact on major macroeconomic objectives. Bangladesh's rural economy, and specifically agriculture, has been powerful drivers of poverty reduction in Bangladesh since 2000. Indeed, agriculture accounted for 90 percent of the reduction in poverty between 2005 and 2010 (World Bank 2016). It is claimed that every year about one per cent of farm land in the country is being converted to non-agricultural uses. Such high rate of conversion will not only hamper agricultural production but will have adverse impact on food security (Quasem 2011). Aims of the paper is to review the past history current trend of land tenure in Bangladesh and provide thoughts for reforms.

MATERIALS & METHODS

Data were collected from published sources such as journals, books, periodicals and newspapers, website and visit to different organizations. Data were presented by map, picture and figure.

RESULTS

- Prior to 8th century AD there were mainly three types of land, which regulated the relation between the state and the peasantry. These were homestead land, plough-land and cultivable wasteland with different rent structure.
- Mughal rulers sold lands to individuals recognising them as proprietors.
- During the Company period (1757–1858), the permanent settlement, which was a grand contract, signed in 1793 between the government of the East India Company in Bengal

and individual landholders of Bengal - *Zamindars* (land lords). The government revenue demand upon *Zamindars* was fixed for perpetuity.

- The fear of being dispossessed to their zamindaris, due to the inability of punctual payment of public revenue, led many zamindars to create perpetual tenures in lieu of rent.
- The proprietary *zamindari* tenure soon led to the rise of intermediate tenures separating the zamindars and actual tillers of land.
- In adopting this device, the intermediate tenures, called *Raja*, divided the whole *zamindari* into numerous lots. Every lot was settled with a tenure-holder with a rent rate fixed perpetually.
- The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950, under which all *zamindari* and intermediate interests were abolished and the raiyats were declared owners of land.
- Ethnic groups, also known as tribal people live in two different geographic regions of Bangladesh, the plains and the hills. Rights over land in the CHT may be divided into two broad categories, namely, common rights and private rights. Common rights are based upon customs and usage and include the right to jhum (slash and burn cultivation), to use forest resources for domestic purposes, to graze cattle on common pastures, and to occupy land for homesteads. Private rights are the rights of individuals over a clearly demarcated piece of land. Privately held lands in the CHT may be categorized on the criterion of land use.



Picture 1: Individual owners of land

CONCLUSIONS

Land ownership means the legal rights to hold and use of the land. It may be state ownership, communal and collective ownership and private ownership (Wikipedia 2011). Land reform involves the changing of laws, regulations or customs regarding land ownership (Batty, 2005). Land reform may consist of government-initiated or government-backed property redistribution, generally of agricultural land. Land reform can, therefore, refer to transfer of ownership from the more powerful to the less powerful (Borras, 2006). Reduced the ceiling for landholdings, Prohibiting the purchase or transfer of land in the name of another person to conceal the identity of the true landowner, fixed the minimum wage of agricultural laborers, prohibiting the eviction of peasants from their *paternal* homesteads, proper crop sharing policy between landowner and the sharecropper.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to Dr. Nikhil Chakma and Dr. Matieu Henry for their comments and suggestions. All errors are mine. This is a revised version of a paper that was previously submitted in conftool of the Conference.

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