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## ***TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP OF AGRICULTURAL LAND IN TWO VILLAGES IN MYMENSINGH DISTRICT***

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### **ABSTRACT**

A sample survey was conducted in two villages in the district of Mymensingh with the objective of identifying the major causes and effects of land transfer. The major findings are that the trend of distress sales of land, mainly crop land has been increasing and that large farmers and businessmen are buying land. A significant proportion of sellers have become completely landless within a few years, some became tenants, some lost their draft animals as well and most sellers have too many people in the family to work on too little land left after selling.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

One of the major problems of Bangladesh agriculture is said to be connected with the distribution of land, the key productive resource. Control over land ensures access to other productive inputs. Also the rights in land are considered as the basis of economic, social and political status at the village as well as at the national level.

It was found in a nation wide survey in 1977 that 32.27% households were landless, 29.10% of the land owners owned 0.1-1.0 acres, 15.78% owned 1.0-2.0 acres, 15.64% owned 2.0-5.0 acres, 4.94% owned 5.0-10.0 acres, 0.99% owned 10.0--15.0 acres and 0.76% owned over 15.0 acres. Top 1.75% households owned 19.3% of the total cultivable land (Jannuzi and Peach 1977).

The existing unequal landownership pattern is getting more skewed through frequent transfer of land resulting in escalation of rural poverty. The small landowners are selling or mortgaging out land and the large farmers or businessmen are buying or mortgaging in that land. Transfer of ownership of small landholdings in the rural areas of Bangladesh has increased in the recent years. Statistics show that the increase in transfer of ownership of land in 1976 rose by four times as compared to 1971 (Table 1).

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TABLE 1 BUYING AND SELLING OF LAND IN RURAL AREAS IN BANGLADESH, 1971-1976.

Year	Land purchased		Land sold	
	Acreage	No. of units	Acreage	No. of units
1971	37,811	77,914	64,064	94,099
1972	95,404	240,890	108,461	228,820
1973	179,206	361,202	147,259	325,308
1974	198,401	493,388	156,526	453,189
1975	173,199	456,529	157,158	373,196
1976	180,096	325,258	127,535	378,679

Source : (Debnath 1977)

The present landownership pattern in Bangladesh has, however, been severely questioned. There is a feeling that the present trend of increasing inequality in the ownership of land is widening the inequality in political power, social and economic status ; and unless the present pattern of transfer of agricultural land is stopped, the national objective to bring about a qualitative change in the life style of the rural poor will greatly be impeded. A systematic and comprehensive research, however, is lacking in this regard. In view of this, the present study was conceived with the following objectives :

1. To identify the major causes and effects of transfer of land.
2. To assess the pattern of change in the transfer of land.
3. To observe the socio-economic relationship between the buyers and the sellers.

In section II, source of data and method of collection are described. In section III, results are discussed.

## II. SOURCE OF DATA

For purposes of this study two villages, namely Pailabo and Kullabo of Bhaluka Thana in Mymensingh district were selected. First, a list of those who had sold land (80 farms) was made and then from that list forty farms were chosen randomly. These forty farms sold land to eighteen farms which were also included in the sample and interviewed separately. An assumption was made that in the case of buying and selling land by the same farmer, if the amount of land sold exceeded the amount bought the farmer would be treated as a seller and in the reverse case as a buyer.

Data was collected in July 1979. Land transfer during 1970-78 was covered in the study. In the selected villages, most of the land is double cropped, some land is single cropped.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Land Transfer by Sellers

By land transfer was meant sale, purchase, mortgage in and mortgage out of land. However, mortgage in and mortgage out amounted to 0.10% of total land transfer. Most farmers reported that they mortgaged out part of their small landholdings at the initial stage of the study period and later they had to sell out those lands for some pressing needs. Therefore, in this study mortgage in and mortgage out of land were treated as land purchase and land sale respectively and accordingly adjustments were made.

#### Amount of Land Sold

In all, 27.10 acres of land was transferred by the seller farms during the study period. Of the total land, 24.53 acres was transferred through selling and 2.57 acres through buying. A sizeable amount of land was sold in the years 1972, 1974 and 1978 which were the years of inflation, flood and drought respectively. The lowest amount of land was sold in 1971, the year of liberation struggle (Table 2).

#### Pattern of Land Sale

Out of the forty sellers, thirty three (83%) reported that they had first sold their crop land where high yielding varieties of boro, jute and aman used to be grown. They had to do so as the market value of non-crop land was very low. Of the total land sold, the highest amount, 16.16 acres (65.88%) was crop land (Table 3).

The highest amount of land, 12.64 acres (51.53%), was sold by the farmers belonging to the 3.01—6.00 acre size group<sup>1</sup>. The sellers of this size-group were found dependent mainly on agricultural income and they did not have subsidiary sources of income as found in the case of other size groups. The owners of over 6.0 acres of land were found to have sold the lowest amount of land (Table 4).

In the case of land purchased by the seller farms, the highest amount of land was purchased by the largest land holding group. The landless and the farms belonging to the 0.01—1.50 acre size group did not purchase any land.

1. Size refers to size of holding defined as cultivable land area owned excluding homestead.

TABLE 2 LAND TRANSFER BY THE SAMPLE SELLERS, 1970-1978

Year	Land sold (acres) 1	Land purchased (acres) 2	Net amount sold (acres) 3=(1-2)
1970	2.60	1.00	1.60
1971	0.67	—	0.67
1972	4.12	—	4.12
1973	2.89	—	2.89
1974	3.89	0.65	3.24
1975	1.49	0.60	0.89
1976	2.81	0.19	2.62
1977	1.68	—	1.68
1978	4.38	0.13	4.25
Total	24.53	2.57	21.96
Per farm	0.61	0.06	0.55
Per farm Per year	0.07	0.01	0.06

Source : Choudhury 1980

TABLE 3 TYPES OF LAND SOLD BY SAMPLE SELLERS, 1970-1978

Year	Crop land (acres)	Pasture (acres)	Orchard (acres)	Cultivable waste (acres)	Uncultivable waste (acres)
1970	2.02	1.00	0.50	0.35	—
1971	0.48	—	—	0.19	—
1972	3.08	0.60	0.04	—	0.40
1973	1.88	—	0.88	—	—
1974	2.28	0.61	—	—	—
1975	1.29	—	—	0.19	—
1976	1.59	—	—	0.60	0.62
1977	0.85	0.83	—	—	—
1978	2.69	—	0.50	0.80	0.26
Total	16.16 (65.88)	3.04 (12.39)	1.92 (7.83)	2.13 (8.68)	1.28 (5.21)

Figures within parentheses are percentages.

Source : Choudhury 1980

TABLE 4 QUANTITY OF LAND SOLD BY DIFFERENT SIZE OF LAND HOLDERS BY YEAR

Year	Land sold by size of holding (acres)			
	0.01—1.50	1.51—3.00	3.01—6.00	6.01 & above
1970	0.67	0.37	1.17	0.19
1971	0.43	0.19	0.05	—
1972	1.28	0.91	1.93	—
1973	0.98	0.53	1.38	—
1974	0.47	0.58	1.54	1.30
1975	0.06	0.35	1.07	—
1976	0.16	0.52	2.13	—
1977	0.44	0.13	1.11	0.13
1978	1.04	0.50	2.26	0.66
Total	5.53 (22.54)	4.08 (16.63)	12.64 (51.53)	2.28 (9.30)
Per farm	0.14	0.10	0.31	0.05

Figures within parentheses are percentages.

Source : Choudury 1980

#### Causes of Land Sale

The causes of landsale were found to be so complicated in nature that it was hardly possible to isolate the major and minor causes. In many cases the sellers sold land owing to a number of causes i.e., economic, social, religious etc. However, the major causes of land sale are shown in Table 5. The highest amount of land, 15.54 (63.35%) acres, was sold for family consumption mainly for meeting food requirements. Land sold for treatment of diseases, recreation i.e., organizing opera-party, song gathering etc. and other incidental needs was brought under 'others' category. The amount of land sold for these purposes was 1.04 (4.24%) acres only. Distribution of sellers according to causes of land-sale showed that 68% of the sellers sold land for family consumption, 15% for debt repayment and buying cows, 10% for social or religious needs and the rest for treatment of diseases and other incidental needs.

Heavy burden of dependents seemed to be one of the major causes of land sale by the seller farms. All male members below 12 years and above 56 years and all female

TABLE 5 ACREAGE SOLD ACCORDING TO CAUSES OF SALE

Year	Acreage sold for					
	Family consumption	Social needs	Debt repayment	Law suits	Buying draft animals	Others
1970	2.00	—	0.42	0.13	—	0.05
1971	0.34	0.20	0.13	—	—	0.39
1972	2.27	—	—	0.14	1.00	0.32
1973	2.57	—	0.06	—	0.26	—
1974	1.52	0.80	0.20	0.37	0.60	—
1975	1.29	—	—	—	0.19	—
1976	1.90	0.40	—	0.92	—	—
1977	1.00	0.10	0.33	—	0.25	—
1978	2.65	0.59	0.60	0.26	—	0.28
Total	15.54 (63.55)	2.09 (8.53)	1.74 (7.09)	1.82 (7.42)	2.30 (9.37)	1.04 (4.24)

Figures within parentheses are percentages.

Source : Choudhury 1980

members were categorized as dependents. Of the total population of 265 of the seller-farms, 166 (63%) people were found to be dependents at the time of the survey in 1979. For most of these farms, numbers of dependents increased over the years.

#### Effects of Land Sale

In this study the major effects of land sale by the seller farms are reflected in changes in their basic agricultural resource base specially animal power and labour ; changes in their professions ; indebtedness and changes in their tenure status.

In the study area animal power and human labour were the main sources of farm power. To calculate animal power supply over the period all adult animals were considered whereas to calculate working family labour supply, the dependents as stated earlier were excluded. Out of the forty seller-farms, 30 (75%) had draft animals in 1970 but in 1978 only 8(20%) of them were left with draft animals. In 1970, the number of draft animals

per farm was 2.6 but in 1978 the number came down to 0.3 because animals were disinvested along with sale of land. In 1970, the total and per farm family labour supply for the seller farms were 40 and 1 respectively whereas in 1978 those figures increased to 99 and 2.5. There are, therefore, too many people to work on too little land.

In eight years' time there had been marked change in the occupation of the sellers. Initially those who were engaged in agriculture, at the end of the period (1978) they were found engaged in petty business, fishing etc. In some cases the subsidiary occupation of the initial period turned out to be the main occupation at the later part of the period. In 1970 and 1971, 33(83%) farms were engaged in agriculture but this figure came down to 18(45%) in 1977 and 16(40%) in 1978 (Table 6).

TABLE 6 CHANGES IN SOURCES OF INCOME OF THE SELLER FARMS, 1970-1978

Year	% Farms having main occupation				% Farms having subsidiary occupation			
	Agri-culture	Busi-ness	Earth digging	Others	Agri-culture	Busi-ness	Earth digging	Others
1970	83	5	10	2	18	17	10	13
1971	83	2	10	5	18	12	7	15
1972	70	7	15	8	22	18	8	17
1973	70	5	12	13	30	15	10	18
1974	55	10	25	10	35	18	15	20
1975	55	25	12	8	40	15	13	22
1976	50	20	12	12	43	20	20	20
1977	45	8	32	15	35	15	17	23
1978	40	15	30	15	40	20	20	13

Source : Choudhury 1980

In 1979, 85% and 40% of the seller farms borrowed in the form of cash and kind respectively. Cash loans were taken for buying draft animals, family expenditure, debt repayment etc. and kind loans were mainly in the form of rice needed for family consumption.



It was observed that there had been an alarming change in the tenure status of the sellers over the period 1970-1978. Table 7 shows that before 1970 the number of owner-operated farms was 30 (75%) whereas after 1978 it was 8 (20%) only. Table 8 also reveals that before 1970 there was no landless among the 40 seller farms but after 1978, the number of landless households increased to 14 (35%). This 35% landless came mainly from

TABLE 7 CHANGES IN TENURIAL STATUS OF SELLERS OVER TIME

Tenur Status	1970		1978	
	Number	Percent of total farms	Number	Percent of total farms
Absentee owner	3	7.5	5	12.5
Owner operator	30	75.0	8	20.0
Part operator	—	—	2	5.0
Part tenant	7	17.5	10	25.0
Tenant	—	—	1	2.5
Landless	—	—	14	35.0
Total	40	100.00	40	100.0

Source : Choudhury 1980

TABLE 8 CHANGES IN SIZE OF LANDHOLDINGS OF SELLERS OVER TIME

Size of holding (acres)	1970		1978	
	Number	Percent of total farms	Number	Percent of total farms
0	—	—	14	35.0
0.01-1.50	18	45	15	37.5
1.51-3.00	8	20	7	17.5
3.01-6.00	12	30	3	7.5
6.00 & above	2	5	1	2.5
All sizes	40	100	40	100.0

Source : Choudhury 1980

0.01-1.50 and 3.01-6.00 acre size-group of farms. As stated earlier, the later size group had no subsidiary sources of income and agriculture was the sole income generating source.

#### Some Characteristics of Buyers

Both the buyers and sellers were found to be the residents of the same area with the exception of one who was found to be in a service in an urban area. The buyers were found to be knowledgeable and resourceful. They were found to be prompt in adopting modern technologies. All the buyers had subsidiary sources of income such as, construction works, business, agriculture, money or commodity lending with high rates interest. Table 9 shows the classification of the buyers on the basis of occupational status and land they bought during the study period.

TABLE 9 OCCUPATIONAL STATUS OF THE BUYERS AND THE AMOUNT OF LAND BOUGHT BY EACH GROUP.

Status	No.	%	Amount of land bought (acres).	%
Large farmer	10	56	14.60	60
Medium farmer	4	22	1.23	5
Businessman	3	17	7.85	32
Service holder	1	5	0.85	3
All status groups/ Total	18	100	24.53	100

Source : Choudhury 1980

Most of the buyers (83%) were found to be more interested in investing their savings on possession of lands than other profit earning activities with the exception of money or commodity lending business. The rest 17% of the buyers were found to be interested in investing their savings on buying cows, goats, fruit trees and a sizeable amount on money

lending business. The buyers put forward the following reasons in support of their preference for buying land :

- (i) Forty four percent of the buyers reported that they knew how to do agriculture and nothing else and so their descendants would have to starve in future unless they had accumulated sufficient land for them.
- (ii) Thirty nine percent did not show their preference to depositing their savings in the bank as they were illiterate and were unable to maintain documentary formalities.
- (iii) Sixty eight percent stated that the rates of interest provided by the bank were much lower compared to that of money lending.
- (iv) Some buyers (35%) feared that if money was deposited with the banks Government would know the financial position and would impose direct tax or levy.
- (v) Twenty eight percent strongly believed that social prestige power and family aristocracy were closely linked to possession of land.
- (vi) Some of the buyers (28%) thought selling land, buying food grains from the market for family consumption and the inability of selling any surplus in the market were injurious to social prestige.
- (vii) A few buyers (17%) reported that they were to buy land for utilizing the proceeds accrued to them due to selling of cows, goats, fruit trees, bamboo etc.

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