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Mitigation of land scarcity situation through tenure practices: a study on two selected villages in Jashore district of Bangladesh

A.K. Ghosh* and M.H.K. Sujan

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A B S T R A C T

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries with immense pressure on agricultural land in rural areas. Mainstream of the rural households depend on either agriculture or its associated activities for their livelihood. However, rural land distribution is highly skewed, majority of them are landless. Under such a land scarce situation, farmers in rural areas have been gradually inclining towards land tenancy. Present study steered to explore the nature and volume of temporary land transaction through tenancy agreement in studied areas and to scrutinize its role in aligning land distribution. In 2017, a total of 166 farmers were randomly selected from two different villages in Jashore district for study. Result of the study administrated that land tenancy practice has been significantly mitigating land disparity among rural farmers. Study also explored that comparatively rich farmers are leaning towards tenant out land and most of these lands tenanted in by the landless and marginal farmers. Consequently, on an average landless farm could significantly increases their cultivable land from 0.01 acre to 0.98 acre compared to the marginal farm 0.31 to 0.73 acres. At the same time, cultivable land of medium farm has decreased as of 3.74 acres to 2.83 acres in studied villages.

Keywords: Land lease, Land scarcity, Landless, Mortgage, Tenancy.

Dept. of Development and Poverty Studies, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

*Corresponding author's email: ashoke1971@yahoo.com (A.K. Ghosh)

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Introduction

Bangladesh is an agrarian country and land is considered as a very precious asset among the rural farm households. However, land distribution is very uneven and as a result major share of cultivable land owned by very few people. On the other hand, mainstream of the rural households are either landless or near landless (Raihan *et al*., 2009). A key factor of rural poverty is landlessness and limited access to cultivable land. The extent of landlessness is very high in South Asian countries like 22.0% in India and 49.6% in Bangladesh (Kabir *et al*., 2014, Rashid, 2015). Landlessness often materializes the manifestation of poverty, datedness and powerlessness of the majority of rural households. This situation has been worsening gradually because of abnormal population pressure, dearth of land, low productivity in agriculture, split of family, river erosion and alteration of cultivable land in different purposes (Rahman and Manprasert, 2006; Rana *et al*., 2019). Under such a situation, land poor farmers find tenancy as an alternative and viable option to continue cultivation as well as utilize their spare family labor. Earlier studies also showed increasing trend of rented in land to the total cultivable land. The amount of rented in land was only 23.4% in 1988 which has increased to 32.8% in 2000, 39.8% in 2008, and 47.5% in 2014 (Sen, 2018). Generally, land tenancy refers to the temporary possession or occupancy of land that belongs to other persons. In that cases, owners allow tenant to use their land for a certain period of time for which owner receive some fixed amount of cash, goods or services. Nature of land tenancy practices varies from time to time and place to place. Studies show that more than one-sixth of the total cultivated lands in Bangladesh are operated under different tenurial arrangements (Griffin *et al*., 2002; Taslim and Ahmed, 1992). Three major types of land tenure practices are very common in rural Bangladesh such as; land lease, sharecropping and mortgage. Land lease refers to utilization of land by the tenant who pays fixed amount of rent for certain duration. In case of sharecropping agreement,

tenant utilize land in return of paying certain portion of output produced from that land. Mortgage agreement accomplished when tenant keep a significant amount of money to the owner and utilize their land until they paid back the given amount.

Considering the importance of land tenancy, several studies have conducted on land tenure and its associated poverty related issues. Haque and Jinan (2017) conducted a study to examine the impact of land tenure system on socio-economic characteristics of the farmers in Mymensingh district. They found a positive relationship between tenure categories and annual incomes of the farmers. Islam and Maharjan (2015) conducted a study in two upazilas under Comilla and Tangail districts, Bangladesh and found that the technical efficiency of the farmers were varied among different farm categories. Their study also revealed that land rent had significant positive impact on the technical efficiency of the farmers. Nasrin and Uddin (2011) conducted a study in two villages under Sadar upazila of Mymensingh district to measure relative efficiency of farming under tenancy systems. They found that cash tenants earned more profit than share tenants from Boro rice production. All the above mentioned studies have addressed abundant issues regarding landlessness, land tenure practices, its forms and effects on profitability and productivity. Still ample of issues in micro level have not yet explored. Present study is an endeavor to grasp such issues; as to reconnaissance the nature of tenure practices, volume of land transacted not only among diverse classes of farmers but also in the locality. This study also investigated the contribution of existing tenancy practices to mitigate the severe land scarcity among landless and marginal farmers.

Methodology

Date sources

Primary data was collected from two adjacent villages namely, Lebutala and Kodalia under Sadar upazila of Jashore district, Bangladesh. A list of farm households was collected with the assistance of local Union Parshad. A total of 166 households were randomly selected for discussion and necessary data collection. Sample includes all type of farmers; tenant, land owner and non-tenant. Non-tenant farmers were also included (as it was random sample) to have holistic evidences regarding tenancy and its gravity in these localities. Such approach was commenced to validate certain vibrant answers like, percentages of farmers and land under tenancy in these villages. Data regarding characteristics of the respondent, land ownership, land tenancy, its associated information and problems were collected using pre-tested interview schedule during May to June, 2017. Besides, focus group discussion (FGD) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) were conducted with local leaders and neighboring people to assess the status of land tenure practices in the study areas and to cross check the collected data.

Analytical technique

Collected data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics to attain the objectives of this study and to obtain meaningful results. Various descriptive statistical measures like sum, average, percentages, etc. were used in tabular form to ascertain the objectives.

Results and Discussion

Land holding sizes among different farm categories

The scarcity of cultivable land has been increasing day by day due to the rapid population growth in Bangladesh. Consequently, land holding size is getting small to smaller and finally this process leads to the landlessness. Table 1 shows different categories of farmers on the basis of their owned cultivable land. Result shows that 9.04% farmers were landless with very tiny amount of land (up to 0.04 acre of land). Besides, a significant portion (22.29%) of the farmers were on marginal farm (with 0.05-0.49 acre) category. Result also shows that 55.42 and 13.25% of the respondents were on small (with 0.50-2.49 acre) and medium farmer (with 2.50-7.49 acre) category, respectively.

Table 1. Different farm categories with their average sizes of cultivable land.

Farms categories	No. of H.H.	(%) of H.H.	Average farm size (in acre)
Landless	15	9.04	0.01
Marginal	37	22.29	0.31
Small	92	55.42	1.15
Medium	22	13.25	3.74
All farms	166	100.00	1.20

Note:

1. H.H. refers Household

2. Landless farm indicates land up to 0.04. Marginal farm is with 0.05-0.49 acres of land, small farm is with 0.50-2.49 acres of land, medium farm is with 2.50-7.49 acres and large farm with 7.50 acres of land and above.

Moreover, same table shows that the average farm size of the landless and marginal farmers were only 0.01 and 0.31 acres, respectively. It was also found that the small farmers were enjoying on an average about 1.15 acres of land compared to 3.74 acres by the medium farmer.

This implies that land scarcity existed in rural Bangladesh and it is unevenly distributed; half of them having very tiny piece of land or without land. On the other hand, upper one-fifth of the farmers having handsome amount of cultivable land.

Farm categories and land tenure practices

Findings of the study show that almost all of the poor farmers (landless and marginal) were engaged with land tenancy activities (Table 2). The reason behind this behavior was to secure their household food requirement by using unemployed family labor. On the other hand, upper part of the well-off farmers was tenanted out their land. Results reveal that a higher percentage (93.33%) of landless farmers was tenanted in and 91.89% of the marginal farmers were also engaged in similar practices. Additionally, a less percentage (13.51%) of the marginal farmers was tenanted out their land. It was also found that 31.52% of the small farmers tenanted in land against 25.00% of them were tenanted out. In case of medium farm, only 9.09% cases were found as tenanted in and 45.45% as tenanted out their land. Findings of this study also depict that on an average 47.59% of the farmers among all categories tenanted in and 22.89% were tenanted out their land.

Table 2. Different farm categories with their engagement in tenure practices.

Farm categories	Total No. of	Tenant in land		Tenant out land	
	H.H.	No. of H.H.	% of H.H.	No. of H.H.	% of H.H.
Landless	15	14	93.33	0	0.00
Marginal	37	34	91.89	5	13.51
Small	92	29	31.52	23	25.00
Medium	22	2	9.09	10	45.45
All farms	166	79	47.59	38	22.89

Types of tenancy and land transaction

Different types of tenancy practices observed in studied villages. Result comes out as landless and marginal farmers greatly absorb tenanted in land through mortgage, sharecropping and leasing agreements. Results also express that about 33.33%, 20.00% and 40.00% of the landless framers leased, sharecropped and mortgaged in land, respectively (Table 3). The incidence of mortgage in land is comparatively higher for its secured and durable nature of agreement. It is worth to mention that none of the landless farmers were found tenanted out their land. Result also reveals that 21.62% of the marginal farmers leased in land followed by 35.14% sharecropped and 32.43% mortgaged in land, respectively. Again, a few 8.11%, 2.70% and 2.70% of the marginal farms were engaged in leased, sharecropped and mortgaged out their land, respectively. Among the small farmers, 10.87% were leased in against only 1.09% leased out of their land. In case of sharecropping, 9.78% and 8.70% of the small farms sharecropped in and out, respectively. Again 10.87% and 15.22% of the small farmers were found mortgaged in and out of their land, respectively. None of the medium farmers were found leased in land except 13.64% of them were found leased out. Only 9.09% of the medium farms were sharecropped in land against 27.27% of sharecropped out. None of the medium farmers was mortgaged in land except few (4.55%) mortgaged out their land.

Table 3. Farm categories under different tenure practices.

Types of land tenancy	Farm categories			
	Landless	Marginal	Small	Medium
Incidence of leasing	*33.33*	*29.73*	*11.96*	*13.64*
Lease in H.H.	33.33	21.62	10.87	0.00
Lease out H.H.	0.00	8.11	1.09	13.64
Incidence sharecropping	*20.00*	*37.84*	*18.48*	*36.36*
Sharecropping in H.H.	20.00	35.14	9.78	9.09
Sharecropping out H.H.	0.00	2.70	8.70	27.27
Incidence of mortgage	*40.00*	*35.13*	*26.09*	*4.55*
Mortgage in H.H.	40.00	32.43	10.87	0.00
Mortgage out H.H.	0.00	2.70	15.22	4.55

Result suggests that landless and marginal farmers are mostly tenanted in land; through leasing, sharecropping and mortgaging. All this land came from medium and small farmers as they have enough land and sometimes felt labor shortage in family. However, many of the small farmers were found tenanted in land as they were capable of handling much land with their family labors. Table 4 represents quantity of land transected among different categories of farmers. It is evident that landless farmers were received 5.10, 2.31 and 7.09 acres of cultivable land through leasing, sharecropping and mortgaging in land, respectively. They did not lease, sharecrop and mortgage out any land. On the other hand, marginal farmers were leased in 3.11, sharecropped in 7.47 and mortgaged in 6.20 acres of land against very little 0.81, 0.33 and 0.35 acres of land out through leased, sharecropped, and mortgaged. Result also denotes that small farmers acquired 5.84, 5.89 and 7.38 acres of land through leased, sharecropped and mortgaged in land, respectively. On the other hand, 0.66, 6.22 and 7.96 acres of land were transferred out through leased, sharecropped and mortgaged, respectively. Very little amount of land (2.32 acres) was found as sharecropped in among the medium farmers against 4.54, 17.33 and 0.66 acres of land out through leased, sharecropped and mortgaged, respectively.

Table 4. Farm categories and quantities of land transaction through different tenure practices.

Types of land tenancy	Farm categories and quantity of lad under tenancy (in acre)			
	Landless	Marginal	Small	Medium
Land under leasing	*5.10*	*3.92*	*6.50*	*4.54*
Lease in land	5.10	3.11	5.84	0.00
Lease out	0.00	0.81	0.66	4.54
Land udder sharecropping	*2.31*	*7.80*	*12.11*	*20.65*
Sharecropping in land	2.31	7.47	5.89	2.32
Sharecropping out land	0.00	0.33	6.22	17.33
Land under mortgage	*7.09*	*6.55*	*15.34*	*0.66*
Mortgage in land	7.09	6.20	7.38	0.00
Mortgage out land	0.00	0.35	7.96	0.66

Changes in land holding sizes among farm categories

Result of the study straightly indicates that medium farmers tenanted out more than one-fourth of their land which was tenanted in by landless and marginal farmers (Table 5). This has increased cultivable landholding among poorer section of the farmers. Result of the study demonstrates that all together landless farmers owned 0.11 acres of land which was only 0.06% of the total cultivated land. On the other hand, marginal farmers possessed 11.56 acres of land and that was 5.78% of total land. However, small and medium farmers owned as much as 105.84 and 82.36 acres of land constituting about 52.95% and 41.21% of the total land, respectively. Same table also shows that landless farmers gained a significant portion (7.25%) of the land through tenancy. Similarly, marginal farmers also tenanted in 8.40% of land with 0.75% tenanted out. Moreover, small and medium farmers received 9.56% and 1.16% of land in compared to 7.42% and 11.27% of land out. Overall findings of the study reveal that out of 199.87 acres of total land, a significant portion was (26.37%) tenanted in and tenanted (19.44%) out.

Table 5. Farm categories, quantity of land holding and percentage of total land tenant in and out.

Farm category	Number of households	Land holding (in Acre)	% of total land	% of land tenant in	% of land tenant out
Landless	15	0.11	0.06	7.25	0.00
Marginal	37	11.56	5.78	8.40	0.75
Small	92	105.84	52.95	9.56	7.42
Medium	22	82.36	41.21	1.16	11.27
All farms	166	199.87	100.00	26.37	19.44

Result straightly shows that all farm sizes moderated through land transaction among different categories of farmers. Farmers from poorer section received substantial amount of land compared to the land rich farmers. Consequently, cultivable landholding sizes of poor farmers increased significantly. This process itself reduces the land size of medium farmers. This was transpired as because tenancy practices acted as a catalyst to mitigate uneven land distribution problems. Table 6 reveals that change in possession of cultivable land after engaging with tenancy practices. It is found that tenancy practices lead to increase the

landholding size significantly from 0.11 to 14.63 acres for all landless farmers while 0.01 to 0.98 acres per household. Similarly, total land possession of all marginal farmers have increased from 11.56 to 26.85 acres with an increment of 0.31 to 0.73 acres of land per household. However, very little change in land possession was observed among small farmers as their total land holding increased from 105.84 to 110.10 acres with per household 1.15 to 1.20 acres. Moreover, the land possession situation has decreased significantly 82.36 to 62.15 acres for all medium farmers and 3.74 to 2.83 acres per household.

Table 6. Possession of cultivable land before and after tenancy agreement.

Farm category	Total cultivable land owned (acre)		Cultivable land under tenancy (acre)	
	Total land	Land per H.H.	Total land	Land per H.H.
Landless	0.11	0.01	14.63	0.98
Marginal	11.56	0.31	26.85	0.73
Small	105.84	1.15	110.10	1.20
Medium	82.36	3.74	62.15	2.83

Problems encountered by tenant farmers

Although tenancy practices have been playing an important role to redistribute the cultivable land temporarily but still some problems are faced by the farmers. Table 7 exhibits that poorer section of the farmers mainly faced the problem of shortage of capital (57.14%), higher payment for land (21.43%) and competitive land tenancy market (21.43%). Similarly, among the marginal farmers, 38.24% mentioned lack of capital, 35.29% mentioned higher rent for land and 20.59% found competition in tenancy market. However, small farmers faced problem differently as 31.03% found shortage of capital, 10.34% found uncertainty in tenancy market, 17.24% worried about the absence of legal contract, 24.14% found higher rent and 17.24% did not find any problems. Medium farmers were always privileged as 50% of them found problem as land tenancy market operated through verbal contract and another 50% did not find any problems.

Table 7. Nature of the problems encountered by different categories of farmers under tenancy.

Nature of the problems	Farm Categories (No. of Respondents)			
	Landless (14)	Marginal (34)	Small (29)	Medium (2)
Lack of capital	57.14	38.24	31.03	0.00
Uncertainty	0.00	0.00	10.34	0.00
Only verbal contract	0.00	0.00	17.24	50.00
Higher rent	21.43	35.29	24.14	0.00
Severe competition	21.43	20.59	0.00	0.00
Not mentioned	0.00	5.88	17.24	50.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Result clearly shows that majority of landless and marginal farmers faced capital shortage and its related problem as they are economically vulnerable section of the society. Obviously, tenancy market was competitive as there were large number of land poor farmers against limited quantity of available cultivable land. Few small farmers also faced problem of capital shortage. Medium farmers did not find any problems in tenancy except informal contract between two parties.

Conclusion

Agricultural farm structure in Bangladesh is characterized by small size of land holding, uneven land distribution and abundance of landless and marginal farmers. Besides these drawbacks, land tenancy practices have given an opportunity to the landless and marginal farmers for acquiring cultivable land to some extent. Tenancy acted as an equalizer to mitigate land distribution problems. Tenancy market is harshly competitive. Majority of the land poor farmers find difficulties to acquire land due to lack of capital. This problem can be addressed through easy access of government loan. Moreover, few non-government organizations have already initiated easy loan for tenant farmers.

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