

Landlessness and its Impact on Economic Development: A Case Study on Bangladesh

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Abstract: This research has accomplished a critical appraisal on landlessness and economic development of Bangladesh through conducting a primary survey and traced out what are the best alternative recommendations to ameliorate land ownership pattern of the economy. Basically landlessness often materializes the manifestation of poverty, indebtedness and powerlessness of the majority of the rural households. The causes of landlessness and near-landlessness are numerous including dearth of land, rapid population growth, low productivity in agriculture, lack of effective government policies, colonial legacies etc. Due to these circumstances, land-oriented poverty and rural to urban migration without any expansion in the housing and utility services lead to the expansion of slump with all affiliated social problems. On the other hand, it has been found that landlessness diminishes the rate of land-fragmentation, which facilitates automation in production process through both extensive and intensive directions. Therefore, this research has uncovered that landlessness has a significant level of positive impacts on economic development through facilitating modern technology in primary sector. For social welfare, the policymakers can rehabilitate the landless people through creating income generating activities. In this regard, setting up agro-based industries as well as promoting employment in non-agricultural sector is a must for achieving potential economic growth. However, this research also identified that landlessness causes to boom up the service sector. It has been happened due to the radical emergence of non-government organizations that generated income-oriented activities in the rural areas through social movement.

Key words: Landlessness, Standard of Living, Land-oriented Poverty, Economic Development

INTRODUCTION

Social welfare through poverty alleviation is the first and foremost objective of any developing economy like Bangladesh. Normally the majority of the rural population in the developing countries is dependent on land as their primary source of income ^[1]. The landholding pattern is a major determinant of their economic solvency, social power structure and hierarchy. Most of these countries have been experiencing an alarming growth of landlessness among their rural population over the past few decades ^[27]. The state has been eradicating poverty by raising their standard of living through preventing the concentration of wealth and means of production and distribution in the hands of a few. Landlessness often proves to be both the cause and the manifestation of poverty, insecurity, indebtedness and powerlessness of the majority of rural households. It has been found that a steady increase in the number of landless households, which had reached over 50 per cent of all households in 1994, is alarming, particularly in the context of the scarcity of alternative employment opportunities in the rural farm and non-farm sectors ^[19]. Landlessness has

increased at almost the same rate of growth as the population in Bangladesh in the recent past ^[7]. Between 1960 and 1984, while the number of rural households increased at 2.2 per cent per year, the number of rural landless households increased at 2.5 per cent per year ^[19]. Therefore, a close correlation was found between landlessness and poverty ^[24]. In rural areas, precisely 2.10 million households are simply landless ^[28]. Due to this phenomenon, there is an absolute increase in the asset-less people who cannot meet their livelihood requirements on their own that leads to the expansion of slump with all concomitant social problems. In fact, landlessness, which is a function of economic, demographic and environmental factors, is the major determinant of rural poverty ^[28]. All these factors have definite impact on country's economy to destabilize the macroeconomic environment to a great extent. Past and recent government efforts to check the growth of landlessness in view of all these socio-economic problems have not yet been experienced with positive outcomes and hence could not eliminate poverty. This paper has prepared for formulating a critical appraisal on landlessness through conducting a primary survey in the context of Bangladesh and finding out what are the best alternative recommendations to ameliorate land ownership pattern of the economy.

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This paper has accomplished a critical appraisal on landlessness and economic development of Bangladesh through conducting a primary survey and traced out what are the best alternative recommendations to ameliorate land ownership pattern of the economy. In this regard, many scholars and researchers have set out to examine the prevailing patterns of land ownership in developing countries. These investigations generally conclude that rural landscapes in developing countries are characterized by highly inequitable social structures, or what many have called “bi-modal agrarian systems,” in which expansive commercial estates control vast tracts of fertile land while large numbers of landless or nearly landless people cultivate little or no land. Where measurable evidence is available, indications suggest that polarization is increasing and that new inequalities and conflicts are emerging^[26].

One of the papers has found that ironically landlessness is one of most frequently cited cause of poverty, particularly among the chronically poor^[19]. The analysis shows that once landless, the chronically poor are exposed to several interlocking factors that push them further into poverty. Some of these factors are both causes and consequences of poverty and landlessness, thus bringing in the aspect of multidimensionality.

In Bangladesh, the percentage of landless households (defined as those with less than 0.2 hectare) on total was 46% in 1988 but increased to 49.6% in 1995, and their share of total land had declined by nearly half a percentage point^[26]. Most of landless in rural areas are poor and work as agricultural wage labourers. Marginal farmers and tenants are found everywhere in the sub-region but they predominate in countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan^[27].

In particular, the high level of landlessness or near-landlessness and rural social deprivation are quite closely related in Bangladesh. Nearly half of all rural households are considered landless^[10], and out of a total of 14 million agricultural households, 11 million possess no more than 0.05 acres (0.02 hectares)^[27]. Since the 1950s, the state has formulated land reform laws with a view to providing land to the tillers, and improving the living conditions of the rural poor. At the same time, however, national elites have lacked the political commitment required to implement legislation and promote land reform. This is primarily because both state institutions and local power structures have tended to be strongholds of landlords^[28]. Until the beginning of the 1980s, land reform measures were limited to the fixing of a land ceiling at around 33 acres (13.4 hectares) per household and attempts to acquire the excess land for eventual distribution to the landless^[23]. In a country where landlessness is so widespread

and the average land holdings are unusually small, the land ceiling for the landlord has remained remarkably high. Moreover, attempts to appropriate land beyond the ceiling from landlords have been slow and largely ineffective^[10].

Objective: This paper is mainly conducted a critical appraisal on landlessness and economic development of Bangladesh through accomplishing a sample survey. At the end, it has been attempted to trace out what are the best alternative recommendations to ameliorate land ownership pattern of the economy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Formulation of Scientific Theory: This research has formulated a theory that comprises of five facets including a set of definitions that clearly define the variables to be used, a set of assumptions that outline the conditions under which the research finding is to apply, one hypothesis about the relationships of selected variables, a set of predictions that are deduced from the assumptions of the theory and finally hypothesis testing against actual empirical observations.

Specification of variables: This research is concerned with how landlessness is related to economic development. Basically it has dealt with a sub-set of rural people, which is simultaneously referred to as landless, near-landless, marginal farmers, asset-less and the likes. It has been found that the rural poor in this set consist of a heterogeneous group of landless workers, tenants, share-croppers, marginal farmers and poor artisans. This research has followed four criteria for determining the sociological position of the landless people- ‘landless household-I’ that does not claim ownership of homestead land or other arable land; ‘landless household-II’ that claims ownership of homestead land but no ownership of arable land; ‘Landless household-III’ possesses ownership of some arable land specifically not more than half an acre but no homestead land; and finally ‘Landless household-IV’ claims ownership of both arable and homestead land but area of arable land should not exceed half an acre^[3]. On the contrary, since there is no hard and fast rule for measuring economic development, the research has used ‘standard of living’ as a proxy of economic development. In contemporary economics, standard of living is measured by real GDP Per Capita based on purchasing power parity in terms of US Dollar. From another point of view, standard of living is “a sustained, secular improvement in material well-being, which we may consider to be reflected in an increasing flow of goods and services”^[20]. In another context, six social indicators have been considered for measuring standard of living including health, education, food, water supply, sanitation, and housing.

Nevertheless, the research has defined standard of living by using two proxies- 'income earnings' and 'utility facilities' (i.e. access to pure drinking water, sanitary latrine, and the rate of electricity consumption).

Assumptions: In this research, there are some presumptions- all of the factors that make the effect on standard of living are considered as exogenous variables excluding the degree of landlessness. The means and modes of production are largely dependent on the use of land. That is, almost all economic activities in the rural areas are concentrated on the ownership of land.

Hypothesis: The critical step of this research in theorizing the relationship between landlessness and economic development is formulating hypothesis: 'When the degree of landlessness increases, the standard of living falls.'

Predictions: When land ownership pattern is subdivided from the haves to the have-nots, the discrimination of land distribution would be gone up. If this phenomenon occurs, it will accelerate the degree of landlessness. Therefore, the total land ownership pattern would be controlled by a powerful minority group that may turn to be the exploiter class of the society. Moreover, as the degree of land fragmentation diminishes, there would be every possibility to use modern technology for adopting both extensive and intensive use of land. In contrast, this defragmentation of land ownership might raise unemployment rate in the production process of primary sector. Simultaneously, when unemployment rate increases in the economy, and on the whole, due to the lack of optimum opportunity for income generation, the economy would face income inequality that leads standard of living to fall.

Research Setting: The study utilizes a primary sample survey to measure the relationship between landlessness and economic development for ameliorating land ownership pattern of developing countries especially Bangladesh. As the respondents of the research are rural people, only face-to-face interview method has been conducted through preparing a questionnaire to amalgamate raw data.

Sample: A primary survey was conducted in the grass-root level during October- December 2005. In his regard, the laboratory area was Batiaghata Upazilla of Khulna district in Bangladesh. Spatially Batiaghata Upazilla is situated in the southern side of Khulna district. Fultala Upazilla and a part of Khulna city stand in its northern side. Furthermore, Paikgasa, Rupsha, and Dumuria Upazilla situated on the southern, eastern, and western sides respectively. The area of this Upazilla is 236.44 sq. km. it is to be mentioned that there are seven unions in Batiaghata Upazilla. Hence, the survey has

been conducted in all of the unions by applying a random field survey method. That is, on the basis of random sampling, a total of 700 questionnaires were surveyed (each union contains 100 samples) to potential respondents by knocking door-to-door. However, a total of 41 questionnaires were found unfit to plot in the database due to some sorts of illogical responses. These forty-one questionnaires have included some missing and irrelevant data. As it was difficult to identify the same respondents for collecting data, these questionnaires were omitted to enhance the validity of this research. Precisely, 659 (94.14%) respondents were valid and used for further quantitative analysis. Nonetheless, for attaining the best alternative result, various statistical publications of Bureau of Bangladesh Statistics have been used to compare the discrepancy between primary and secondary data.

Data Collection: The field survey was conducted by formulating a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to collect information on six aspects including socio-economic conditions of households, land ownership pattern, income-expenditure behavior, access to basic and other utility facilities, food-intake pattern of households, and asset generation process. The respondents were asked to respond on a five point scale where it is applicable.

Statistical Tools: Percentile frequency distribution of the respondents, based on income pattern and utility facilities, was followed in this research. Basically descriptive statistics were computed to measure the standard of living of landless households. Data collected on basic needs were processed and disseminated in percentage through the descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis referring to the factors that involves in standard of living as a proxy of economic development has made this research easy to comprehend and interpret.

PREVAILING ISSUES OF THE STUDY AREA

Socio-economic Structure: In the study area, the number of population is about 1,28,184 of which about 95.14% population is living in rural areas ^[18]. About 20.05% of total households are working as day laborers, while about 44.97% and 34.96% of total households are in primary and tertiary sectors respectively. After conducting the sample survey in 2005, it is found that landless people are engaged in some diversified occupations that sets income differentiation in the economy. Basically, hawkers and share-croppers are grouped under the lowest income level (i.e. US \$30- US \$35); van drivers, rickshaw-pullers earns only US \$40- US \$50; and the highest income earners (i.e. US \$60- US \$70) among the landless people are day laborers and petty traders. In one study, it has been shown that

the landless and small farmers gain a larger share of increased income from crops, wages, livestock and fisheries while the non-poor (e.g. large landowners) benefit mostly from business and rural industries ^[18].

Structure of Dwelling Units: According to the report of Bangladesh Population Census 2001 ^[4], the percentage of owned dwelling units is 91.66% on the basis of total population. Besides, the institutional units are about 0.51% of the total population of the study area. Moreover, it is to mention that the volume of floating units in this region is about 0.79%.

Utility Services: From the empirical study, it is found that the percentage of accessing in the supply of pure drinking water is 94.60% ^[4], which is in acceptance level. However, it is very shocking to see that the percentage of accessing in using sanitary latrine is 5.84% of the total population of study area. Moreover, it is to be mentioned that the rate of electricity consumption in this region is about 2.60% of the total electricity consumption of Khulna district in Bangladesh.

RESULTS AND ANALYSES

Trend in Landlessness: According to the report of Bangladesh Population Census 2001 ^[4], the rate of landless households in the study area is about 44.35% of the total population size of the study area. However, from the primary survey conducted in 2005, it is found that 52.14% of households are landless among the total number of respondents. Therefore, by comparing these two data series, it is clarified that the trend of landlessness in the study area is increasing with respect to time.

Moreover, people- young of age, illiterate and unskilled, occupied mostly as agricultural wage labour, were presently heading the fragile floodplain households ^[18]. One third of these households have already experienced lifetime landlessness and a vast majority remains vulnerable. Nonetheless, this current research has pointed out that most of the landless households are mostly employed as day laborer. According to the statistics of Population census 2001 ^[4], about 30.71% of total households were working as day laborer. Besides, about 13.69% of households are engaged in agriculture. Moreover, it is to be mentioned that the negligible portion of total households were in service sector, which is figured out 0.02%. On the other hand, after conducting the sample survey in 2005, it is seen that 51.43% landless households have mainly concentrated in the service sector. However, the landless in day laborers activities is increased from 30.71% to 33.57%. It has been proved that the new landless households are mostly employed as day

laborers. Hence, there is a direct relationship between landlessness and the volume of day laborer.

Landlessness and Income Earnings: In the study area, the main source of income for the landless people is the service sector that is 54.12% of the total landless households. In agricultural sector, the figure is 12.56%. However, according to the Population Census 2001 ^[4], the income composition is totally different. Though data on total nominal income in the census report is absent, there exists data on average income earnings in different occupations. Hence it is possible to calculate total nominal income by multiplying average income earnings with total population size in different sectors. After appropriate manipulations, it is found that the principle source of income for the landless people was the service sector that is 52.06% of the total landless households. In agricultural sector, the figure was 14.14%, which is almost the same as found in the sample survey. Therefore, the comparative analysis of average income earnings between two time periods is traced out. Finally it is seen that within these two time periods, the total landless households have increased while the level of income is decreased. That is, there is a negative relationship between the quantity of landless people and the level of income earnings.

Landlessness and Utility Facilities: This research has also considered 'utility facilities' of measuring standard of living. For measuring utility facilities, three sub-indicators have been considered including condition of drinking water, use of sanitary latrine, and electricity consumption rate.

According to the Population Census 2001 ^[4], above 94% population of the study area was receiving fresh drinking water. On the contrary, according to the sample survey done by this research, almost 100% people use safe drinking water which is a positive factor to social welfare. It is because of the positive campaign towards social awareness made by different non-governments organizations. Moreover, the census report has found that only 5.84% population of Batiaghata Upazilla has used Sanitary Latrine. Nevertheless, according to the sample survey 2005, almost 29% people use sanitary latrine. Therefore, it is seen that the utility facilities in the survey area has increased from 2001 to 2005. However, this period is characterized as a growing number of landless people in the region. Last but not least, electricity consumption rate in the study area increased to 24.85% in 2005. Thence, surprisingly it is revealed that there is a positive relationship between landlessness and the condition of utility services.

Landlessness and Standard of Living: From the analyses, this research has found three functional relationships:

Relationship I: There is a positive relationship between landlessness and the incremental change in the volume of day laborer.

Relationship II: There is a negative relationship between landlessness and the level of income.

Relationship III: There is a positive relationship between landlessness and the condition of utility facilities.

It is to be recalled that the research has defined standard of living on the basis of two indicators-income earnings and utility facilities. Consequently it is proved from relationship II that there is a negative relationship between landlessness and standard of living. Therefore, according to this proposition, the hypothesis is testified. That is, when the degree of landlessness increases, the standard of living falls. On the contrary, relationship III has revealed that when the degree of landlessness increases, the trend of utility facilities goes up. As a result, on the basis of relationship III, the hypothesis of this research has been testified as a null hypothesis.

Now, the issue is- why does this contradictory result come? This research has observed that landless people who is still living in the rural area and searching livelihoods for survival are earning very low income. Hence, after being landless, their level of income goes down that creates a negative relationship between landlessness and standard of living. In contrast, youth members of the landless family migrate to urban area for better income earnings. Then these migrants send money to their respective families as for altruism purpose. However, one micro-level study has shown that migrants from two sites in Bangladesh were less likely to be from landless households and on average owned more land than households without migrants, although the differences were small and varied according to locality, and international migrants in particular were from better off households in terms of landholdings^[6]. In the context of Bangladesh, international emigrants are from some specific regions, and most of the regions of Bangladesh are not familiar with international migration. Among the consequences of landlessness is increased migration of landless youth into nearby cities, placing considerable pressure on urban social and economic services^[28]. In rural Bangladesh, landlessness and pauperization are ongoing processes^[25]. 70% of rural people are either completely landless or functionally landless^[12]. Every year, more than one million people lose their homesteads or arable land due to river erosion. In these circumstances, migration is a major coping strategy for poor people to earn a livelihood^[13]. Studies have shown that displaced people initially try to relocate themselves within the village, then in neighboring villages and gradually move to urban areas when no other livelihood option is

available in their known rural surroundings^[24]. Initially, they try to earn a living from wage labor and other off-farm activities, but once they are in an urban setting they look for jobs in different parts of the informal sector, for example in rickshaw-pulling or vending^[25]. Many young women from poor rural backgrounds also migrate to major cities such as Dhaka, Khulna and Chittagong to work in garment factories and food processing industries^[25]. In fine, due to landlessness, people generally migrate from rural to urban areas (i.e. internal migration) and most of them have been succeeded for getting better income generating activities. From this view point, there relies a positive relationship between landlessness and standard of living. In addition, this relationship occurs due to the radical initiatives taken by a numerous number of non-government organizations (NGOs) that creates social awareness to the grass-root level.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Landlessness of Bangladesh in retrospect is both a historical and structural phenomena. To tackle it one has got to understand the problems both in terms of their cause and effects. Only then a political document can seek for such bottlenecks through the administrative and planning reforms. There is a presumption in the mainstream economic postulation that there remains a negative relationship between landlessness and economic development. However, after conducting a primary survey in the context of Bangladesh, it has been found that landlessness could make a positive push towards economic growth from the consideration of utility facilities (i.e. access to pure drinking water, sanitary latrine, and the rate of electricity consumption). The rationale behind this finding may be due to create a positive push for encouraging rural landless people to migrate urban areas. At this instant, the policy makers have to make their own research towards landlessness for economic development. At present, there are very limited banking services available in rural areas and the wealthy has relatively a better access to cheap credit. The public sector institutions are unsustainable, with a recovery rate of less than 20 per cent in 1994/95^[19]. As a result, the member-based institutions (e.g. Grameen Bank and NGOs) target the landless poor. In this regard, Grameen Bank has achieved a remarkable success. Therefore, rural financial sector aimed at creating a strong and efficient system of financial intermediation have become imperative towards landless people. They can innovate diversification in income generating activities through getting credits. If some funding could be made available to the landless poor on reasonable terms and conditions, they could engage in non-agricultural productive self-employment, thereby alleviating poverty.

There is no doubt that the modern high-yielding variety (HYV) seed-fertilizer-irrigation technology has made a significant impact on rural poverty alleviation^[1]. Modern agricultural technology for proper utilization of land has also helped generating employment in the rural areas of Bangladesh, particularly for the landless. In this regard, it can be pointed out that the policies for mitigating landlessness generally create the fragmentation of land that prohibits the landowner to adopt modern technology in production process. The tendency towards splitting up of existing holdings poses problems in applying modern techniques, increases loss of land to boundaries and forces management of scattered plots^[1]. Specifically in the absence of modern technology, the agricultural productivity goes down, which hinders real GNP to hike up. Therefore, from this point of view, landlessness has a significant level of positive impacts on economic development. For social welfare, the policymakers can rehabilitate the landless people through creating income generating activities. In this regard, setting up agro-based industries as well as promoting employment in non-agricultural sector is a must for achieving potential economic development. It is also observed that when any rural development initiatives accelerates for raising employment opportunities, the landless people becomes the beneficiary target group as they supply the highest proportion of human resources. Matters to be pondered that- when any development strategies leads to infrastructural development for adopting modern technology in agriculture, landless group is also benefited through the further employment opportunities in backward and forward linkage agricultural industries.

In brief, this research has tried to delineate resolving the landlessness issues within a macroeconomic framework under microeconomic perspective. However, it is a brief attempt to see and examine the problems of landlessness for suggesting remedies within the overall context of the economic development of Bangladesh. A national level survey for understanding the trend of landlessness could be the further extensions of this research.

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