

## Chapter - 6

### Summary and Conclusions

One of the main objectives of initiating land reform measures was to ensure land to the landless rural people. In our study we have attempted to show that once land reform programme is undertaken, the beneficiaries should simultaneously be equipped with proper means to initiate improvements in production front. This suggests a marriage between land reforms and new technology, for in the event when redistributive land reform programme creates a large number of small and marginal farmers, agricultural production would largely be dependent on the production performance of this section of the rural people. Their performance in the production front would depend largely on their accessibility to new technology. The study proposes that mere redistribution of land would fail to deliver correct good until and unless the beneficiaries are equipped with improved means of farming. This would call for adoption of new improved technology. Thus, agricultural productivity would be expected to respond favourably when both land reform measures and new technology are found to have been implemented simultaneously. Our discussion asserts that it is discernable that land reforms should be combined with new technology to deliver the desired result in the arena of agricultural production. The land reform measures have enabled the scope of the small and marginal farmers constituting the major portion of our farmers, to adopt new technology. Implementation of land reform measures in conjunction with the adoption of the beneficiaries of new

technology would go a long way in enlarging production capacity of a vast majority of our small and marginal farmers. The study has pointed out the desirability of land reform measures towards changing the agrarian structure inherited from the past. The old agrarian structure has been found to be the main obstacle to effect proper agricultural development.

The study has sought to examine the agrarian situation of pre-independent Bengal for a better understanding of the situation that led the state to adopt land reform programmes as well as of these changes which appeared as a result of the adoption of such programmes.

It has been found that in pre-independent Bengal, the land was under ownership and control of a few persons viz. Zaminders, Sub-zaminders, tenure-holders who were principally involved in collecting rents from the cultivators. They did not generally practice farming on any significant scale. On the other, the actual cultivators, the majority of rural population, were simply tenant farmers without any customary rights over land. The peasants were subjected to rack-renting, eviction and various other form of exploitation and were left with very little means to go in for agricultural improvement. The landlords were interested

more in collecting rents than undertaking any capital investment on land for improvement in agriculture.

A class of rich peasants emerged who usually purchased alienated peasant holdings and turned them into barga (share-cropping) cultivation. These rich peasants often acted as agricultural traders and / or money-lenders. The landlords were involved in land-lease, labour and credit contracts with their tenants. The terms and conditions of tenancy were very stringent. The share of produce going to tenants was very low and the production costs were mostly borne by tenants. Irrigation facility was very insignificant and as result, the cultivators could not adopt multiple cropping practices.

The whole agrarian situation in pre-independent Bengal has been found to be one of disincentive to agricultural growth and continuing exploitation of the actual cultivators. The agrarian structure and the relations the relations of productions of pre-independent Bengal are considered to be the root causes of prolonged agricultural backwardness as had been observed by Blyn (1966).

A change in agrarian structure and relations of production is considered essential to ensure justice to rural poor and also to create a situation for improvement in agriculture. Land reform measures have been adopted in West Bengal immediately after independence for that. A number of laws have also been passed since the early 1950s. Initially the implementation of the Laws has remained unsatisfactory. Besides, the enacted Acts had many loopholes.

The implementation of the enacted acts has gained prominence since 1977 onwards. When Left Front Government took government of the states. Efforts have been made to plug legal loopholes and to implement the existing laws properly. In this matter the rural masses have been mobilised and effectively involved in favour of reforms.

The Government has stressed on distribution of vested agricultural land and recording of bargadars. The programme of '*Operation Barga*' has been launched in 1978 for quick recording of the bargadars. The implementation of land reforms has been more effective as a result of such government efforts. As a result, up to June 1992, 6.7 lakh acres of surplus land had been distributed among 12 lakh beneficiaries, of whom 57 percent are scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Till the end of September 1998, the distribution comes to a figure of 10.32 lakh acres. Similarly, a large number of bargadars have been registered in record of revenue. Nearly 14.39 lakh bargadars were recorded up to June 30, 1992 and the figure reached at 14.86 lakh till the end of September 1998.

The distribution of surplus lands and the recording of bargadars have brought some changes in the agrarian scenario of the State recently. The changes are as follows:

- a) A huge number of rural poor have been made owners of land.
- b) The distribution of land holdings among rural households has been more equitable;

- c) The bargadars in a large number have been recorded and thus they have been assured heritable continuation of tenancy;
- d) The terms and conditions of tenancy are going in favour of tenants.

However, in the process, a large number of small and marginal farmers have been created in the state. The small holdings (small size and marginal size) have accounted for 92.45 percent of the total holdings of the state in 1990-91 and the area operated by those holdings accounts for 66.46 percent of the total area operated. These two categories of farmers claim the largest shares of the total holdings in the State.

Such changes in agrarian structure should have some positive effect on the rural economy in terms of an increase in agricultural productivity. But as the small and marginal farmers are the major operators of land, an increase in productive performance of this section rural population would create a positive impact on the state of the economy.

But, their production performance would be depended largely on the feasibility of their access to new technology, which is mostly costly. The smaller farmers, who are generally poor, might be in a disadvantageous position to make it feasible.

In our macro-study of examining the impact of land reform on the small and marginal farmers in adopting new technology, our analysis has made it

abundantly clear that this category of farmers have gained considerable access to new technology.

Access of this section of farmers to short term institutional credit to a large extent has been observed in our study area. It has been made possible through land reforms in the sense that ownership of land and tenancy deeds have helped these farmers much in getting credit from formal credit institution. The availability of institutional credit has perhaps largely helped the smaller farmers to purchase as well as to use modern farm inputs. Public intervention has also been instrumental in enlarging the scope of adoption of new technology for the poor farmers.

All such observations have led us to state that the State's land reform programmes have largely helped the small and marginal farmers in the State to get them entitled to new technology by creating some favourable conditions for them for its adoption.

We have carried out a detailed investigation in two villages taken from Dhupguri block of Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal so as to grasp properly agricultural responses of land reforms and new technology. At the micro-level of study we have examined the present position of land distribution and tenurial conditions on the heels of land reform measures undertaken in the two villages and also the responses of the smaller farmers created through the redistribution of land to new technology. At the same time we have tried to explain how far

land reforms have created favorable conditions for such farmers to respond to new technology.

Several findings emanate from this part of our study. We summarise them briefly as follows:

- a) Surplus lands have been distributed among 61 landless households of whom 85 percent (52 out of 61) belong to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.
- b) As a consequence of imposition of ceiling and distribution of surplus land, 84.3 percent of operational holdings have been appeared as small and marginal holdings and area operated under such holdings has been 56.18 percent of the area operated in two villages.
- c) 60.4 percent of bargadars producing traditional crop and traditional rabi / boro crops have been recorded. Some tenants have been found to operate land during rabi / boro season only. Such seasonal tenants are generally well-to-do cultivators who lease-in land during this season and raise their scale of production in the crops like boro rice and potato.
- d) Crop-shares are going in favour of tenants.

However, there is evidence of much dependence of small and marginal farmers as well as cultivator beneficiaries on 'Arottdars' and traders of agricultural

produce who combine grain dealing business with credit advancement activity. These indicate that institutional credit available to such farmers falls short of credit requirement.

A favourable climate has been created for the land-poor farmers towards adopting new agricultural technology in production. Small and marginal farmers as well as cultivator-beneficiaries have responded much to modern farm input like HYV seeds, fertilizer, pesticides, irrigation etc.

There has been mass participation in HYV cultivation by these farmers. Availability of crop loans simultaneous with Government help in terms of supply of non-land farm inputs has raised their ability in adopting new technology. Besides, there has developed a market in the study area through which all such farmers hire in tractor / power tiller and pump set and there by use their services in cultivation operation. Hence, agriculture has been found to respond favourably due to land reform measures, which have made possible for the beneficiaries to adopt new agricultural technology. In other wards, once the land reform measures have been adopted, our analysis has made it abundantly clear that agriculture has responded quite effectively to new technology, the adoption of which has largely been possible through the implementation of land reform measures.

## Conclusions

The agrarian structure in pre-Independent Bengal was inequitable and was a great hindrance to agricultural development. The production relations were exploitative and contrary to justice for rural masses.

Land reform measures adopted in West Bengal in post-independence period have changed the agrarian structure as well as the relations of production to a large extent. Land distribution has become more equitable. However, as a result of land reforms a large number of small and marginal farms have been created.

The small and marginal farmers have formed the vast majority of rural population and they have appeared as the major operators of land.

Productive performance of the vast majority of rural population has been improved as a result of adoption of new technology to a considerable extent and land reforms have ensured the accessibility of this section of the rural population to new technology.

And thus social justice has largely accompanied increased agricultural productivity. In the absence of land reforms, inequality in income distribution in our rural economy would have been widened.

Growth of production along with distributive justice is highly commendable. The latter becomes a reality when accessibility of land arising out of redistributive land reform measures is also accompanied by the accessibility of such beneficiaries to new technology. Thus not only every care should be taken for the proper implementation of land reform measures, but also any obstacle faced by the poor small and marginal farmers for the proper adoption of new agricultural technology should be removed as far as practicable. Such a policy would evidently call for an immediate completion of the task of redistribution of surplus land to the landless tillers and of recording of names of bargadars.

*Along with this, such steps should be taken which would make possible agricultural inputs to remain within the reach of the farmers. Lack of capital has been found to be the main constraint in introducing certain cash crops considered necessary for enhancing income of the poor farmers.*

In addition, size of farms appears to be unfit for getting benefits of mechanised cultivation. Scarcity of capital as well as small-sized land holdings has encouraged 'reverse tenancy' and 'temporary tenancy' and have failed to effect economic upliftment of the majority of the rural poor. Right to land may remove capital constraint when land reform programme enables the beneficiaries to get

access to rural credit. Together with this, if steps be taken to bring consolidation of land through encouraging co-operatives among the tillers of the small holdings, while retaining individual ownership, land constraint can also be removed. This would go a long way towards making them self-reliant in effecting their viability in the production front.