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Access to Land in Bangladesh: Role in Poverty Reduction *-A study in Pabna district-*

In Bangladesh, the relationship between people and the land is deep and profound, but many millions of poor, landless families are deprived of that relationship. Nothing perhaps is closer and more fundamental to the requirements of human survival than land. Land provides food, shelter and clothing - the three vital needs of man's existence.

Land is the most scarce of all resources in Bangladesh. Competition for land is always severe. Landlessness and lack of access to land are among the major problems in Bangladesh. The main objective of the study is to identify the opportunities for more equitable land access in Bangladesh, especially for the poor. Specifically this research aims to identify the underlying relationship between access to land and poverty reduction. It reviews the existing regulatory framework that supervises access to land and identifies the specific consequences for the poor in rural and urban areas, recognizes and assesses the significance of principal impediment to improved access to land for the poor and then identifies the ways for more fair access to land for the poor. The empirical study is based on a survey with local people (using standardized questionnaires), semi-structured interviews with experts and an extended review of documents dealing with land issues and poverty reduction in Bangladesh.

Findings: a number of reform measures have been performed and specific rules have been made to curb the growing trend of landlessness. The review of these acts, however, reveals that they have not been implemented adequately due to mismanagement and horrific governance, e.g. the

acquisition and distribution of Khas land (public land). The longstanding and unresolved issues of agrarian reform have been included as important part of the land reform policies of the governments during Pakistan and Bangladesh regime. However, from this study it is evident that the poor- and marginalised people's dream to improve their life and living appeared through public distribution of land from the government. But there was a repulsive failure of expectation.

Land administration is the major area of corruption and manipulation by the local elites. Conflicts between parallel systems of land registration and revenue records, at least two systems of multiple levels of appeal over land disputes, means that those with power can easily maintain and acquire land. Unholy alliances in urban and rural areas are illegally occupying huge amount of public land with the consent of corrupt government officials and dishonest politicians. Thus speculation and grabbing of public land have become one of the major setback issues hindering the process of poverty reduction and true human development in Bangladesh.

Land redistribution would be a vital attack on poverty and landlessness. The study concludes that distribution of land to the landless poor as a basis for income and access to capital would effectively address the problems of rural and urban poverty.

Key words: Land policy, access to land, tenure security, poverty reduction, Khas land, corruption, Bangladesh.