

# **Land Tenure Systems of Rice based Farming Systems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: A Case Study of Baghaichari muk village, Khagrachari District**

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Location of field survey: Bangladesh (Chittagong Hill Tracts)

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## **Research Background and Purpose**

Rice-based farming systems are significantly important for providing food security for the ethnic communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh, where the village of study is located. However, the previous studies on farming systems in the CHT did not place importance on the rice-based farming systems among the ethnic minorities, who are in general considered as *Jhum* cultivators. However, in reality, at present, the ethnic minorities depend a great deal on rice-based farming systems. In the plains of Bangladesh, rice-based farming systems have developed localized characteristics in the land tenure systems. However, few studies on this topic have been conducted in the CHT. Therefore, the present study was conducted in order to describe the existing land tenure systems in rice-based farming systems in the village of study.

## **Results and achievements by fieldwork**

### **(1) Methodology**

This study was conducted in Baghaichhari muk village of Dighinala sub district, in the CHT region of Bangladesh. The village is situated about 30 km away from the district headquarters requiring about 1 hour 20 minutes by bus to reach the village. As the continuation of my study, I visited the area again for follow-up field-work. All 247 households in the study village were interviewed by questionnaire. In addition, interviews using a semi-structured questionnaire and field observations were also conducted.

### **(2) Results and Achievements**

The land tenure systems practiced in the study village were as follows.

***Agrim бага* (Advanced payment system):** In this system an agreement is made between the landowner and the tenant. The land owner rents out his land when the land is unprofitable to cultivate due to the shortage of draught animals, human labor or other production related inputs. The tenant, with enough money for the investment in crop production, wants to cultivate more land than he owns. He would stand to gain a considerable profit in the event of a good harvest. The tenant has to pay rent in kind or in cash in advance to the landowner for cultivating the land. For example for 40 dec (1dec=1/100 acre) of land for one season a tenant paid 1500-2000 Taka in cash converted to Japanese Yen 2,200 -2,900 yen (100 Taka = 142.903 Yen, 2009.3.27) or in kind 25-30 Ari (250-300 Kg) of paddy to the land owner. The price of the rent varied depending on the fertility of land, ease of access to water, etc.

***Khola бага* (Late payment system):** In this system the amount of money for renting the land is almost the same as in the advance payment system, except that the tenant has to pay the land rent to

the landowner after the crop harvest. The landowner prefers the advance payment system because the money could be used in advance for his own expenses. Besides, in the late payment system, in some cases there would be a risk of low crop production or crop failure, and then there would be no guarantee of getting either money or crop after harvest from the tenant. According to the survey, some farmers were practicing this land tenancy system in this study village. It was observed that there was a relationship between farm size categories and land tenure systems. In the small farm size category more farmers were found practicing the rent in (in cash) system compared to the rent out (in cash) system. However, in the medium and large farm size categories, the rent out system was practiced more than rent in system. The reason might be that the landowners had more land than resource inputs. They had some difficulties in cultivating their land because of shortages of labor or draught power or the high price of inputs. Landowners preferred the advance payment more than the late payment system, while the tenants preferred the late payment system. Depending on the economic situations of landowner and tenant, they agreed to accept one of these two systems after negotiating with each other.

**Mortgaging systems:** Mortgage systems commonly practiced in the study village as follows. In this system the payment was done in cash.

***Khoy bondok (Reduced payment):*** Landowner and tenant make a legal agreement in front of the headman or village leaders. The landowner needed money urgently for some reason. In that context, a legal agreement was made between the landowner and tenant. The tenant had to pay a certain amount of money to the landowner to get the temporary ownership of the land for a certain period of 3 to 5 years. For example, the tenant paid money in advance in cash down to the landowner for using his land of 40 dec for five years. It means that the payment of the rent is 1000 Taka per year. When the contract period is terminated, the landowner would get back his land without repaying the money back to the tenant.

***Thede bondok (Fixed payment):*** In this system the economic situation is the same for the legal agreement between landowner and tenant. After negotiating with each other the amount of rent and period of time is usually set up. The landowner has to return the whole amount of money to the tenant after the completion of the contract. For example, the tenant pays 2000 Taka to the landowner for 40 dec of land for a temporary ownership of one or two seasons or years. In some cases, the landowner repays the money back to the tenant only when he can afford to do so without time limitation. The fixed payment system was not found in the study village at the time of survey. Farmers practice this system only when they need money in an emergency for health treatment, school payment and/or business investment etc. In some cases, when the landowner can not return the money to the tenant, for a period as long as 4-5 years, he might lose his land according to the terms of the contract.

**Agricultural Implements used in existing land tenure systems:** Most of the traditional farm implements are possessed by small farmers including the plough, yoke, ladder, spade, and sickle but they do not possess any modern implements and among the modern implements like the power tiller most of them are possessed by large farmers. But medium farmers possess all types of

implements. It is also found that landless farmers, which are very few in number as they are usually involved in off farm activities, have only a spade and sickle. More farmers from medium farm size categories possessed the various items of agricultural implements compared with other farm size categories. There were three power tillers in the village almost all of which were possessed by the medium and large farm size households. Power tillers were introduced 5-6 years ago. The owners rent their power tiller to other farmers in the peak season of land preparation time.



Photo 1 These are traditional agricultural implements still being used at the time of the study the study village



Photo 2 Tilting the paddy plot by using plough



Photo 3 Farmer leveling the paddy plot by using a leveler



Photo 4 Locally made tools for pesticide spray



Photo 5 Farmers trampled their paddies with bullock