

# Essay on Agriculture in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is primarily an agrarian economy. Agriculture is the single largest producing sector of the economy since it comprises about 30% of the country's GDP and employing around 60% of the total labor force. The performance of this sector has an overwhelming impact on major macroeconomic objectives like employment generation, poverty alleviation, human resources development, and food security.

Agriculture remains the most important sector of the Bangladeshi economy, contributing 19.6 percent to the national GDP and providing employment for 63 percent of the population. Agriculture in Bangladesh is heavily dependent on the weather, and the entire harvest can be wiped out in a matter of hours when cyclones hit the country. According to the World Bank, the total arable land in Bangladesh is 61.2 percent of the total land area.

The agricultural year begins in late February when the weather is dry and getting warmer. Over a period of several weeks each field is plowed three or four times; using a wooden plow and two oxen, one man can plow hectares in an eight-to ten-hour workday. In addition to plowing, field preparation for irrigation involves the construction and maintenance of plot boundaries half a meter high, using earth and weeds from the field. These boundaries also serve to retain water in the plots when the rains come a few months later. Traditional methods of irrigation include a pitcher, sewing basket, and a hollowed-out log fixed on a pivot and fitted with a counterbalance. These methods have a natural grace and beauty and are still practiced in rural areas throughout Bangladesh. They offer the dual advantages of depending entirely on locally available materials and on human power for their operation. In those rural areas where electricity is available, tube wells with electric pumps are becoming an important irrigation device.

The ownership of agricultural land remained one of the most difficult problems in the Bangladesh countryside. During British rule, elite large landowners, many of them absentee landowners, owned most of the land in East Bengal. After 1947 new laws abolished large estates and set limits on the amount of land one person could own. Many big Hindu landlords moved to India, but the wealthy Muslims who bought up their holdings became a new landlord elite. Legal ceilings on land ownership resulted in little extra land for distribution to the poor because landlords arranged ways to vest ownership in the names of relatives. As a result, in most villages, a few families controlled enough land to live comfortably and market a surplus for cash, while a large percentage of families had either no land or not enough to support themselves. Studies have suggested that in the mid-1980s the richest 10 percent of the village population controlled between 25 and 50 percent of the land, while the bottom 60 percent of the population controlled less than 25 percent. The disparities between the richest and poorest villagers appeared to be widening over time. A large number of landless or nearly landless peasants reduced the average landholding to only less than one hectare, down more than a third since 1971. Because Islamic inheritance law as practiced in Bangladesh calls for equal division of assets among all the sons, the large population increases led to increased fragmentation of landholdings and further impoverishment. Inheritance, purchase, and sale left the land of many families subdivided into a number of separate plots located in different areas of the village.