

1—Introduction

1.1 The theme of Land Reforms, which figured prominently in the first decade after Independence, had receded into the background in the later decades. When "green revolution" in agriculture burst forth on the Indian scene in the late Sixties, the economists and the policy-makers were quick to persuade themselves to believe that the new technologies held the key to the problems of slow growth as well as to those of socio-economic inequities in the Indian rural society. But, after two decades of "green revolution", this belief has turned out to be an illusion in the wake of limitations of "green revolution" observed in the field viz. it has remained confined to a few pockets, small number of crops and selected farming groups. The setting up of National Commission on Rural Labour in 1987 is a significant landmark in the changing policy perspectives at the highest levels on the problems of rural labour and similar categories of rural poor. A perusal of the themes taken up by the Study Groups assisting the NCRL would show that the issues of institutional and structural reforms in Indian society are coming to the fore in the development strategies for the poor during the 1990s and beyond. The role that land reforms can play in the re-orientation of the development strategy is the theme taken up in this overview report of the Study Group on Land Reforms and Common Property Resources.

1.2 The revival of interest in Land Reforms has also a second source which may be briefly noted. The last two decades have witnessed considerable experimentation with the strategy of "direct attack" on poverty consisting of Minimum Needs, Employment Generation and IRD Programmes. The "direct attack" on poverty was conceived as a complementary approach to stepped-up growth. The two together were expecting to help the process of trickle down to gain in speed, spread and thrust. However, the outcome of "direct attack" strategy has been far too modest as an approach to poverty eradication. This has happened despite the acceleration in growth in the Eighties along with substantial expansion in agricultural output. In particular, the core groups of poor like landless labourers are seen to have obtained minimal enduring benefits from both growth and anti-poverty programmes. There is now an increasing awareness among the social scientists that the attempts to integrate growth with poverty eradication remained largely ineffective owing to the absence of adequate structural reforms and improved access for the rural poor to agricultural and common lands.

1.3 The performance so far of various measures for land reforms, as will be seen later in this paper, has ranged from modest to disappointing. Their cumulative impact on the rural poor after more than four decades of voluminous and impressive legislation

has been disconcertingly meagre. Is the revived interest in land reforms then no more than a passing political whim? This paper adopts a sharply divergent point of view. Its purpose is to build up a strong positive argument for land reforms to improve the status of rural labourers and the poor. The argument is based on the premise that the very failures of our development strategy so far—slow growth, modest poverty eradication and negligible structural reform—are indicative of the scope available in the Indian economy for integration of these three major components in the development strategy to benefit from their capacity to mutually reinforce each other. It needs to be remembered that the conditions prevailing now are substantively different from the context in which the first major push for land reforms was planned and undertaken in the immediate post-Independence years. The foundations now available for growth, for technological modernisation and for extensive and sustained anti-poverty operations mark a significant change in the socio-economic context. The changed context has the effect of creating a new and pressing need for land reforms as well as of providing new and relevant opportunities for their implementation. It is not our case that the land reforms have now become easy to achieve. The objective of this paper is only to show that, given the changed and emerging context, determined measures for reforms may reasonably hope for more substantive success than in the past. What is important is that the measures be consistent with the requirements of changing situation.

1.4 The plan of the paper is as follows. Section 2 outlines our perception of the changed context with particular reference to elements in it relevant for planning of land reforms. Section 3 brings together the glimpses of implementation and impact gathered from the papers prepared for the study group and from the growing mass of information and research literature on this theme. Section 4 reviews the recent grass-roots level trends in the access of rural poor to the common lands and the problems encountered in widening, improving and institutionalising the access. The last section in the paper—section 5—contains the principal operative propositions emerging from the work and deliberations of the Study Group on Land Reforms and Common Property Resources. After describing the strategy framework which we consider to be relevant and practicable, the section identifies and classifies the priority tasks to be taken up so that land reforms get focussed on the rural labourers and poor. The paper does not pretend to offer ready-made solutions for the challenging problems of land reforms to improve the status of rural poor. We only hope that the paper would be of assistance to the NCRL in undertaking a systematic search for the solutions and in working out a policy perspective which is pragmatic and which avoids both the extremes of naive optimism and corrosive cynicism.

1.5 A word about the limitations of scope and coverage of this paper. The focus of the paper is on issues relating to poverty and land reforms which are of special concern to social science researchers. These issues overlap with areas falling in the domain of technical sciences, management, administration and law and legislation. The study group papers—including this overview paper—have looked at the land reforms issues from the perspective of economics and related disciplines. It is only fair to mention that this perspective may be quite inadequate in handling the overlapping areas mentioned above. In particular, we have made no attempt to undertake our own

legal analysis of the provisions in land reforms legislations though we have tried to benefit as much as possible from the proceedings of meetings, conferences and seminars which have looked into the legislative aspects. A second limitation is that the time-cum-resource constraints precluded the Study Group from taking up rigorous and detailed statistical processing of large bodies of secondary data having a bearing on the theme of land reforms. The paper relies primarily on the insights provided by the recent researches on this theme and on the findings of the papers prepared by the members of the Study Group and by invited scholars.

2—The Socio-Economic Context

2.1 Planned structural changes like land reforms need to be conceived keeping in mind the features of socio-economic context. Feasibility of such changes depends on careful prior thinking to adjust the objectives, strategies and programmes to the socio-economic context, particularly the constraints it imposes on policy-induced modifications in structure. Let us first see some telling symptoms of constraints.

- (a) It can be seen from Table 1 given below that by 1985-86 over 76 per cent of total operational holdings belonged to "marginal" or "small" size-groups as compared to 70 per cent in 1970-71. Accelerating marginalisation of holding stands out clear in the table. The percentage share in total holdings of the "marginal" holdings increased sharply over 1970-71 to 1985-86 (from 51

per cent to 58 per cent) In contrast, the shares of size-groups from "small" to "large" decreased over the same period.

- (b) By way of a quick assessment of the "redistributive" potential available in the prevailing structure of operational holdings, one can do the following calculations for the year 1985-86, the latest year in the table. Assuming a ceiling of 10 hectares, the "large" size-group (10 hectares & above) would be the only group having "surplus" which would add up to a little less than 14 million hectares (1.92 million "large" holdings with an average size of 17.2 hectares could each yield a "surplus" of 7.2 hectares). Even if all this "surplus" were transferred to the 56.15 million "marginal" holdings, the average size of holdings in that

TABLE—I
OPERATIONAL HOLDINGS IN INDIA—AGRICULTURE CENSUS

Category & size	Number of operational holdings (Million)				Area operated (Million hectares)				Average size of holdings 1985-86	
	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1985-86	1970-71	1976-77	1980-81	1985-86		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Marginal (below 1 ha.)	36.20 (51.0)	44.52 (54.6)	50.12 (56.4)	56.15 (57.8)	14.56 (9.0)	17.51 (10.7)	19.74 (12.1)	22.04 (13.4)		0.39
2. Small (1—2 ha.)	13.43 (18.9)	14.73 (18.10)	16.07 (18.1)	17.92 (18.4)	19.28 (11.9)	20.90 (12.8)	23.17 (14.1)	25.10 (15.6)		1.43
3. Semi-Medium (2—4 ha.)	10.68 (15.0)	11.67 (14.3)	12.45 (14.0)	13.25 (13.6)	30.00 (18.5)	32.43 (19.9)	34.65 (21.2)	36.67 (22.3)		2.77
4. Medium (4—10 ha.)	7.93 (11.2)	8.21 (10.0)	8.07 (9.1)	7.92 (8.2)	48.24 (29.7)	49.63 (30.4)	48.54 (29.6)	47.14 (28.6)		5.96
5. Large (10 ha. & above)	2.77 (3.9)	2.44 (3.0)	2.17 (2.4)	1.92 (2.0)	50.06 (30.9)	42.87 (26.2)	37.71 (23.0)	33.00 (20.1)		17.20
All categories	71.01 (100.0)	81.57 (100.0)	88.88 (100.0)	97.16 (100.0)	162.14 (100.0)	163.34 (100.0)	163.80 (100.0)	164.56 (100.0)		1.69

1. The figures in brackets are percentage of totals in respective columns.

group would go up from the prevailing 0.39 hectares to only 0.64 hectares. Clearly, with accelerating marginalisation of holdings, the redistributive potential is fast evaporating (on this point see also A. K. Singh (1981).

- (c) Growing pressure of population on land (indicated by table 1) in an unequal society would mean harsher and increasingly precarious conditions of living for the rural poor. A recent report on tenancy prepared by the National Sample Survey Organisation finds evidence of substantial and growing extent of "informal" tenancies. The report observes "the land reforms legislation drove it (tenancy) underground.....The estimates of leased in area operated was of the order of 2.2 million hectares according to the Agricultural Census, 1980-81 (which was) only one-fourth of the corresponding estimate of 8.9 million hectares thrown up by the NSS survey of 1981-82. This difference is mainly because the Agricultural Census, being record-based, could not take into account the tenancy which was contracted orally" (Bhattacharya, M. G. 1989). A recent seminar on "Land Reforms--A Retrospective and Prospect" organised by the Planning Commission mention a much higher estimate of "1/3rd of land (being) under concealed and informal tenancy" (Planning Commission, 1989). "Informal" tenancy is a euphemism for land-lord tenant relationship remaining entirely out of reach of tenancy legislation for security, fair rents and transfer of land to actual tillers. Its growing extent is a revealing symptom of how an adverse socio-economic context could frustrate reformist measures.
- (d) In the prevailing setting, even growth and technological change do not adequately help the poor. The Economic Advisory Council of Government of India mentions in its latest report that during the Eighties, which witnessed aggregate output growth at more than 5 per cent per annum, the growth in employment did not reach the level necessary for absorbing the additions to labour force during this period (Economic Advisory Council, 1990). Detailed statistical analysis done by Mishra show that the levels of employment and of wages do not necessarily improve when technological change occurs in agriculture (Mishra G. P. 1988, 1989).

2.2 More pertinent to note, the socio-economic context exerts a strong dampening influence on the political will and administrative efficiency with which programmes for land reform, get formulated and implemented. This dimension of the socio-economic context is reflected well in the following observations which, interestingly come from an assessment

of the land reforms programme done within the Government of India itself by the Department of Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture (Government of India (1988)).

- (a) "It is widely recognised that the chief reason for poor implementation of land reform has been the lack of political will. It would not be surprising to expect so, if we appreciate the realities of the rural situation and the development of Indian politics" (emphasis added).
- (b) "the rural rich maintain their position through use of muscle power and manipulation of administrative and judicial processes. The poor state of land records and a weak Revenue Administration also serve the rural rich who hold land in excess of ceiling despite all the land laws and violate tenancy laws as well. The dominant faction in Indian politics is recruited from rural rich. It is lack of political will to act against this class which ultimately characterises the lack of political will of State Governments" (emphasis added).
- (c) "This ambivalence at the political level is matched by an administrative style in the bureaucracy. A good officer (is one who) accomplishes "token" implementation.... (for example) collectors who would allot land to the rural poor but will avoid intervention when allotted land is taken back from the rural poor by force or legal harassment. Such a style of functioning, accomplishing "token" implementation, is efficient on paper, and appreciated by vested interests.....the role of Police and Revenue Machinery, especially at the lower level, in implementation of land reforms has also been negative" (emphasis added).

2.3 It would be interesting at this point to make a brief reference to a comprehensive class analysis of land reforms programmes in Karnataka done in ISEC (Thimmaiah G & others, 1984). According to this analysis, in the earlier years of land reforms immediately after Independence, the dominant group opposing land reforms (mostly covertly) was the group of absentee urban elite owning land in the villages from which they had migrated for good. With the changing distribution of political power and emergence of growth pockets in agriculture, the dominant group now is the middle and large land-owning-cum-cultivating groups within the villages. They pose a political challenge—to the Government and to the rural poor—which is far more formidable than the earlier challenge from the absentee owners. The dominant groups now emerging on the scene are much more ruthless, have a tighter grip over the policy-making politicians at the highest levels and use extra-legal methods at the ground level more effectively and with greater impunity and disconcerting frequency.

2.4 An important implication of the features of socio-economic context noted above is that the strategy for structural reforms in the rural society—of which land reforms are a major part—which could be effective in the coming decades would have to have two well-designed components to improve the socio-economic context to make it more congenial for reforms of rural structures and relationships. First, it would be necessary to strengthen substantially the capacity and willingness of Government machinery, personnel and procedures to meet the challenges from the emerging dominant groups. Second, it would be essential to create preconditions which are favourable for the rural poor to acquire adequate countervailing power against the ascendant dominant groups and to build up entrepreneurial capabilities of their own to compete with the rural rich in exploiting new economic opportunities without the crutches of government support and/or aid from external groups.

2.5 These two critical components for land reforms are considered in greater detail in section 5 of this paper. In the light of the description of the socio-economic context given above, it would be legitimate to ask whether such changes to modify the socio-economic context would be feasible at all now or in the near future. While our response to such doubts is not overly optimistic, we point out a few indicators providing some basis, however modest, for a measure of hope. First, growth in Indian agriculture now confronts barriers which cannot be overcome through primarily technocratic strategies which succeeded so admirably in the "green revolution" areas. Growth in the "green revolution" areas is now levelling off. It is also realised that it is being achieved at a high and increasing cost in terms of scarce inputs like irrigation and fertiliser. Growth in dryland agriculture and in the potentially rich eastern parts of India needs a combination of both technocratic and reformist strategies (Rao, V. M., 1986). The point is that, unlike in the immediate post-Independence years, the need for land reforms is now far more pressing—since sustained growth itself depends on them—and this may have the effect of strengthening the political will for reforms to make it more assertive. Second, there

have been two favourable fallouts from the extensive implementation of poverty-alleviation programmes—(i) the development personnel have been under fairly severe pressure to establish contact with the poor and to assess their felt needs, and (ii) the rural poor are now in a better position and mood to demand more enduring benefits from the government than ad hoc relief during periods of distress. In this sense PAP can be regarded as being a "conscientising" influence on both development personnel & the poor. Third and most important, there is a subtle difference between the absentee-cum-non-cultivating owners on one hand and the present dominant rural group on the other in the nature of the resistance they put up to land reforms. The former are rent-collectors whose resistance to reform began to weaken only when they moved out of villages in search of new economic opportunities in towns not depending on land. The latter group, on the other hand consists of profit-earners who may be expected to respond more readily and positively to new growth opportunities in agriculture and rural sectors. If there are policies to ensure that the new opportunities are adequately labour-absorbing and—through a combination of farm and non-farm enterprises—bring a measure of affluence within the reach of even households with modest land holdings provided they are enterprising enough to benefit from the new opportunities, the feasibility of effective implementation of ceiling and tenancy legislations might show a marked improvement.

2.6 Thus, while the socio-economic context has so far been overwhelming adverse to land reforms, some positive changes seem to be in the offing. More important, the policy-maker need not feel as helpless as before in inducing desirable modifications in the context. Despite their modest and mixed achievements, the programmes for growth and for poverty-alleviation, themselves, may work towards inducing such modifications (Rao, V. M. 1988). This is the perspective from which we assess the scope for land reforms which are more substantive than in the past and are more effectively focussed on the poor.

3—Glimpses of Implementation and Impact

3.1 A word about the design of this section. The section is focussed on the specific issue of how far the benefits of land reforms reach the rural poor and landless. There is no intention to cover the entire area of land reforms which is wide consisting of innumerable legislations and their revisions and amendments. From the perspective of social science researchers, there are two principal benefits which the rural poor can obtain from land reforms—(i) ownership of land for those who are landless or have meagre holdings (in fact, so meagre that often these tiny owners lease out their land instead of cultivating it themselves), and (ii) security of occupation and fair terms for the poor tillers of land who are tenants. Our attempt is to bring together the glimpses of diverse field situations in this respect by categorising them in an interesting and meaningful way.

3.2 It is useful to start with the proposition which may seem disheartening to many but which is true viz. by and large land reforms have been a failure in benefitting the poor. The official assessment itself is quite pessimistic—“Land Reforms Programme has virtually come to a dead end. . . . there is a strong opinion in the country that land reforms have really not been implemented” (Government of India, 1988). This is a rather extreme view which we do not fully share. The field situations appear to range from areas where the Land Reform Programmes have been frustrated at the very initial stages of putting the necessary legislations in the statute book to areas where, despite some good and effective implementation and receiving of programme benefits by the poor, there was no enduring impact on the poor and on the system of land relations. Thus, while it would not be wrong to say that the poor did not benefit much from the Reforms in concrete terms, the reasons for failures were not uniform in all areas. In particular, it is necessary to distinguish the situations where there was no worthwhile formulation of Land Reforms Programme from those where the poor did not get enduring benefits despite fairly serious and effective implementation. In this sense, the Indian setting is rich in diversity. The purpose of this section is to see its implications for the Land Reforms strategy and priorities.

3.3 We find it useful to have the following four-category typology of areas.

- (a) “Semi-feudal” areas like Bihar, where according to respected scholars like Professor Pradhan Prasad (a member of NCRL) the barriers to reforms inherent in the prevailing structure of society are too strong to be overcome by the scale and intensity of efforts for Land Reforms made so far.

- (b) Areas (e.g. Karnataka) with less formidable barriers to Land Reforms and stronger thrust for reforms as compared to “semi-feudal” areas but having mixed and, on the whole, modest results of reforms.
- (c) Areas (e.g. West Bengal and Kerala) with strong political mobilisation and effective Land Reforms but where the growth performance has been too weak to complement Reforms to bring about enduring structural change.
- (d) “Green revolution” areas (e.g. Punjab) where capitalist farming is firmly entrenched and where reforms are needed mainly to improve wages, work environment and economic conditions of labourers.

3.4 We begin by taking note of the Reforms situation in Bihar. Abolition of Zamindari was the foundation on which substantive improvements in land relations could occur in Bihar. But, this foundation itself remained weak and could not support any worthwhile changes in land relations. The following glimpses come from a perceptive paper by Dhar (Dhar, Hiranmay, 1990) “By their chickenery, system of ‘benamdari’, collusion and their societal power, the ex-zamindars of Bihar succeeded by and large in protecting their class interest. Upto 1983-84 only 1.26 per cent of cultivated area was acquired as surplus over the ceiling limit. . . . the legislative assembly, the law court and, at the village level, the complex combination of economic and social power have worked to maintain the interests of ex-intermediaries and the dominant landholders”. Dhar gives a graphic description of manoeuvres by an ex-zamindar whose estate covered three-fourths of a whole district (about 4000 villages “rich in forests and minerals”). These manoeuvres included setting up trusts, filing of suits against the Government of Bihar, getting elected to Legislative Assembly and, finally becoming a member of the Select Committee to which the Zamindari Abolition Bill was referred! Not outprisingly, “his membership (of Select Committee) enabled him to look into the Bill and set up his next course of action”. Interestingly, he also formed “Kisan Agragami Dal” comprised of his “relations, servants and jeth-riots. . . . (which) humbled the Congress in the District Board Elections”.

3.5 Dhar’s paper also provides glimpses of village level situations. Dhar finds that, to the extent that ryots gained from Zamindar abolition, the beneficiaries were “occupancy ryots who had large chunk of land under their control”. They were in the forefront in the peasant movement in the colonial Bihar. “The Bihar Land Reform Act, 1950

which came into effect in 1952 conferred proprietary rights on them and gave them unhindered authority on their surplus. In the post-Independence period, they added to their holdings more land by purchases (and) by mortgages leading to sale or coercive appropriation". Dhar also mentions cases of traders and moneylenders acquiring substantial holdings and illegal occupation by the better-off sections of government lands, village common lands and land of ex-intermediaries. Obviously, the rural poor and landless remained on the distant sidelines in the struggle for land dominated by ex-zamindar and larger ryots. The former "live under constant coercion of landowning classes... (on occasions the latter) boycott him totally so that he had to leave the village and join the ranks of migrant labourers in Ludhiana".

3.6 As Pradhan Prasad has pointed out, "semi-feudalism" tries to entrench itself by opposing agricultural modernisation and growth of capitalist farming. Consolidation of holdings is a programme which provides a favourable setting for agricultural growth. A study of this programme in Bihar carried out in 1985 finds that "out of 168.72 lakh hectares of agricultural area (consolidation work) has been completed only in 11 lakh hectares and it was frankly admitted that, out of this land, in about two-thirds of the area the cultivators have not shifted to their newly allotted chaks" (Verma M S, 1985). It should be mentioned here that the Consolidation of Holdings Programme was started in Bihar in 1958! According to the study, "Due to faulty implementation, dilatory completion, lack of publicity and dominance of the vested interests of some influential landowners) the programme is not popular.... (due to) small holdings and extreme poverty the cultivators are unable to develop their land... so they are unable to take the full advantage of the Programme".

3.7 A recent penetrating analysis by Pradhan Prasad looks at the question of how to get a breakthrough in the Bihar situation (Pradhan H Prasad & others, 1989). He emphasises the need for an integrated approach covering growth policies, poverty alleviation programme and land reforms. "Strengthening and implementing of land reform policies (particularly conferring of tenancy rights on share croppers) will go a long way towards weakening the stranglehold of semi-feudal relations of production on rural economy in the plains of Bihar. Our results highlight the failure of these policies of date... (as regards) the policies targeted for basic needs and poor. (they) can provide only interim relief unless the democratic institutions get strengthened and the rural economic base is strengthened and diversified. The previous programme, for instance, would make a great deal of sense as a part of comprehensive package aimed to reduce poverty, for it reaches a group which may not benefit from programmes to increase production and employment.... The strengthening of the economic base would require a massive governmental effort towards increasing the area under "well managed" productive irrigation, flood control and drainage.... (now) irrigation exists only in a limited

area and much of it is 'protective' in nature rather than aimed at production growth". Rural electrification and generation of rural power supply is also mentioned as an essential precondition for development. Another essential precondition is "compulsory free education upto at least secondary level".

The glimpses of the Land Reforms situation in Bihar provided above may convey the wrong impression that the situation is hopeless and beyond the reach of the Government. It should be mentioned here that some growth pockets have already emerged in Bihar agriculture. More important, as Pradhan Prasad finds, the poverty-alleviation programmes do reach the poor. The main implication of the Bihar situation for Land Reforms is that the Reforms would not succeed by themselves alone in isolation in a setting of chronic social and economic backwardness. They need to be part of a broader long term strategy for focussing development on the poor based on a judicious combination of reform measures with growth policies and with programmes for providing immediate relief and support to the poor.

3.8 We now turn to Karnataka as an example of a situation with better land reforms performance than in the "semi-feudal" areas but where the combination of conditions are not favourable for a strong thrust and enduring change. A characteristic feature of the Karnataka situation appears to be that the state has initiated a number of processes of change but has not been able to sustain them at an adequate pace over a long enough period to produce a sizeable cumulative impact. For example, Karnataka's agricultural growth was quite promising upto about late Seventies. There is striking evidence that some of the dryland crops and backward districts in the State benefitted from growth during this period, possibly for the first time in the recent decades (Nadkarni M.V. & others 1983). However, the eighties have been the weak years for Karnataka agriculture and there is as yet no assurance of a firm and positive trend in agricultural production and productivity over the next critical decades for the Karnataka economy. In the field of political mobilisation, Devraj Urs has been able to achieve a notable success in bringing together the hitherto neglected groups in the State and posing a credible challenge to the political influence traditionally exercised by the two major dominant castes viz. the Lingayats and the Vokkaligas. But, the process of mobilisation did not percolate down to the village levels and, consequently, one does not find in Karnataka organisation of poor as effective and widespread as in Kerala or West Bengal. Meanwhile, without a strong base and organisational set up at the grassroots level, the coalition fashioned by Urs could not build upon its initial successes and, after the passing away of Urs, the dominant castes appear to have re-emerged on the political scene in the State with little difficulty. As a third example, Karnataka is often lauded for its bold experiments in Panchayati Raj and decentralisation particularly the radical-looking recent round launched in April, 1987. And, yet, few observers of Karnataka scene appear hopeful that the district and

mandal level arrangements for Panchayati Raj would become operative soon and fast enough to weaken in near future the prevailing constraints on rural development.

3.9 The three dimensions noted above—agricultural productivity and production, political mobilisation of poor and Panchayati Raj—are important determinants of success in land reforms. Let us describe in some detail the link between the two in Karnataka. Until the end of Sixties, land reforms remained ineffective in Karnataka. While the first steps towards formulation of legislation for abolition of intermediate tenures like Inams were initiated in 1947, the laws reached the stage of implementation only by the mid-fifties. Aziz summarises the meagre achievements of this reform as follows: “the spirit of the law appears to have got diluted because of (a) the long delay in putting the law into the statute book and (b) the erstwhile intermediaries giving prolonged legal battles in the Courts. . . . Large size of land was retained by the erstwhile intermediaries under the guise of personal cultivation. . . . sub-tenants and crop-sharers did not benefit at all because they did not have the occupancy rights on the land they cultivated” (Aziz 1990). Aziz also notes that the tenancy and ceiling legislations during this period were mild and easy to evade.

3.10 Interestingly, the Seventies witnessed a quickening of the tempo of land reform in the State. Compared to the earlier provisions for resumption of land having many loopholes which a landlord could use to his advantage, “the 1974 Act which abolished tenancy clearly stated that the right of resumption was to be totally eliminated in all cases except soldiers and seamen who would be permitted to resume the tenanted land. Besides, leasing of land in contravention of the law would amount to loss of land on the part of the owner” (Aziz, 1990). Similarly, there was also a bold attempt to enforce more ambitious ceiling legislation. In the first round of ceiling legislation undertaken in the early Sixties, the ceiling was fixed at 27 standard acres of land for a family of five members which was declared as equivalent to 216 acres of dryland. With the provisions for extra acreage to additional members, a family of 10 members could reach the maximum of 432 acres of dryland. The Ceiling Act passed after 1972 reduced the ceiling limit to 10 to 12 standard acres though the provisions permitting detention above the ceiling (for families having more than five members etc.) could not be completely plugged. On the whole, the second round of land reforms legislation enacted in Karnataka during the Seventies was radical enough for the State to get bracketed with Kerala and West Bengal (Government of India, 1988).

3.11 It is our hypothesis that this second round of legislation became feasible because of the political mobilisation of the non-dominant backward castes and classes referred to above in para 3.8. It is also possible that the buoyancy of Karnataka agriculture

during the Seventies played a helping role. The links between “radical” content of land reforms on one hand and the political and agricultural environments on the other need to be explored and analysed in depth. Our purpose here is only to suggest that land reforms cannot be achieved only through good intentions but need a congenial setting. The decade of Seventies in Karnataka seems to have provided such a setting.

3.12 But, as we noted in 3.8 above, agricultural production lost its momentum in the Eighties and the political wave initiated by Devraj Urs lost its thrust. Predictably, the “radical” content of the second round of reforms legislation in Karnataka largely evaporated during the phase of implementation. In a sense, this was consistent with the hypothesis that effective land reforms need a congenial setting since the weaknesses in implementation could have been due to the changed and noticeably less favourable setting of the Eighties. What is important for us to note is that the benefits of implementation were not focussed on the rural poor and landless (see table 2 given below). The landless did not gain any land under tenancy legislation. Ironically, the principal beneficiaries of the tenancy legislation were the lessees having the farm size of 15 acres and above. This could have happened due to two connected reasons: the group of larger cultivations had in reality leased in more land than the smaller group and the former were in a better position to assert their rights as tenants. Equally ironically, even the ceiling legislation appears to have spread its meagre surplus available for redistribution over a heterogeneous group of beneficiaries ranging from those not

Table 2 : Land gained by Different Size Classes of Farmers under Tenancy and Ceilings Provision in Karnataka

Size Class of Farmers	Land Gained per House (in acres)	
	Under Tenancy	Under Ceilings
0 acres of land held	—	2.30
0—2.5	2.49	2.25
2.5—5.0	3.02	1.73
5.0—10.0	2.99	4.48
10.0—15.0	3.00	Nil
15.0 and above	9.00	Nil

Source: V S Satyapriya and S Erappa, “Land Reforms in India : Some Field Evidences” in A R Rajapurohit (Ed.) *Land Reforms in India*, Ashish, New Delhi, 1984.

owning any land to those owning upto 10 acres. Besides, the schemes specially introduced to help the

allottees of surplus land were found to be "inadequate considering the number of prospective beneficiaries and the actual cost of land development" (Government of Karnataka, 1987). It may be mentioned here that findings on the impact of tenancy legislation in Gujarat were similar to the experiences in Karnataka (Patel B. B., 1990; Sharma Usha S., 1990).

3.13 The meagre impact of land reforms on the rural poor and landless in Karnataka occurred despite conditions more favourable for such reforms than in the "semi-feudal" areas. Obviously, one has to look for a different set of reasons in Karnataka than those noted above in Bihar. A suggestive clue we have is that the reforms of the seventies in Karnataka got diluted at the stage of implementation rather than at the earlier stage of legislation. It would hence be reasonable to assume that it was the inability of the rural poor and landless at the ground level to confront the landowning groups which was responsible for the limited impact of the reforms on the former and the leakage of benefits to the latter. This basic handicap could have been aggravated by contributory factors such as deplorable land records, unhelpful revenue officials and a government whose zeal for radical reforms had begun to abate in the wake of changes during the Eighties noted in para 3.8 above.

3.14 Within the spectrum of land reforms situations in India, Kerala and West Bengal form a situation which is the polar opposite of the situation in Bihar. There has been a genuine attempt in these States to formulate strong reforms and to successfully focus them on the rural poor. The reforms have been supported by adequate political commitment at the highest level and by considerable "pressures from below" exerted by the articulate and well-organised groups of rural poor. However, the other—and less happy side of the picture is that the reforms have hardly helped the rural poor to become economically viable and to overcome the socio-economic barriers keeping them on the periphery of the society, polity and economy. The following paragraphs offer glimpses of both these sides of the picture, the happy as well as the less happy. The intention is not to go into details but only to bring together insights on the curious paradox of "successful" land reforms coexisting with the rural poor remaining peripheral to the main system and having meagre access to viable economic opportunities.

3.15 Tables 3 and 4, that follow, indicate that Kerala imposed an upper limit on holding at 607 hectares as compared to the very much higher upper limit between 21.85 and 24.28 hectares in its neighbouring southern states and that the number of tenants who acquired ownership of their leased-in land and the extent of such area were no only higher in Kerala as compared to the performance in other southern states. More important, an analysis of distribution of operational holdings by George found that the changes between 1970-71 to 1976-77 clearly indicated the effects of land reform in reducing the inequalities in the distribution (George, P. S. 1986).

TABLE—3

Number of Tenants Receiving Ownership of Leased-in Area		
State	No. of Tenants	Area (in acres)
Andhra Pradesh (Telengana Area)	33,000	82,0
Karnataka	57,096	65,844
Kerala	2,48,429	2,40,000

Source : COMMERCE—Vol. 133, No. of 4-8-1976

TABLE—4

Ceilings on land holdings in Hectares (1972)	
Andhra Pradesh	4.05 to 21.85
Karnataka	4.05 to 21.85
Tamil Nadu	4.86 to 24.28
Kerala	4.86 to 6.07

Source : Haque T and Sarohi A S (1986)

3.16 Despite these apparent positive impacts of land reforms, it is doubtful that they provided any substantive benefits to the rural poor. For example, a survey of 17 villages showed that the rich peasants benefited most from abolition of landlordism (see table 5). According to the findings of this survey, holdings with less than 1 acre in size—which were nearly 16 per cent of total holdings—obtained less than one per cent of land re-distributed as a result of land reforms. Holdings less than 5 acres in size (about 88 per cent of total holdings) received only a little over 36 per cent of such land with the rest—nearly two-thirds—going to holdings more than 5 acres in size accounting for only 16 per cent of total holdings.

TABLE—5

Distribution of Land Released by Land Reforms by Size of Holding

Size of Holding (acres)	% of Households	% of Land Gained
0—1	15.6	0.8
1—2	34.4	13.5
2—5	34.2	21.9
5—10	11.5	31.5
10—15	2.5	7.6
15—20	0.6	10.4
20 & over	1.2	14.3
	100.0	100.0

Source : Herring R J (1980)

3.17 Even when the rural poor receive land as a result of reform measures, they find it difficult to hold on to it. For example, the study by George referred to in para 3.15 above discovered that subdivision of land due to new family formation reduced the holdings of small and marginal cultivators and,

further, that the rising market price of land due to the influx of Gulf remittances tempted the holders with small pieces of land to sell them. An important conclusion of this study was that the losing of land by the small cultivators led to decline in cropped area, aggravated their non-viability and impaired their investments in land improvements.

3.18 In view of this adverse environment in which the rural poor are located, the following two overall assessments of land reforms in Kerala would be particularly relevant to be taken note of by the policy-maker.

(a) "A review of some of the major institutional reforms and the economic development programmes initiated by the government specifically aimed at the upliftment of the 'scheduled' sections in Kerala (scheduled castes and tribes) indicated that their impact has been quite modest. For instance, Land Reforms (have) almost by-passed them in the course of the long-drawn process of legislative deliberations and implementation.....the new 'landed' class (i.e. beneficiaries of land reforms from among the poor) enjoy freedom from their traditional socio-economic bondages and feudal obligations....(but) the new status has not guaranteed them economic sustenance since their holdings are too small to generate even a subsistence income. The 'scheduled' communities continue to be the most marginalised section. They still seem to suffer from disabilities despite the introduction of several programmes aimed at their upliftment" (Sivanandan, 1989).

(b) K. N. Raj, the eminent scholar and proponent of strong land reforms, sums up the Kerala experience on land reforms thus "Evidently, it is the improvement in the terms of trade (of its export products) and the large-scale inflow of remittances from migrants abroad that have maintained some semblance of prosperity in the State in recent years. This cannot last very long, unless the opportunity is used for strengthening the technological basis for more rapid agricultural growth in the future : the land reforms that have been implemented provide a sound institutional framework for such strengthening but cannot obviously be a substitute for it". (Raj K. N., 1983). According to Raj, "nothing definitive can be said about the impact of agrarian reform on poverty in Kerala".

3.19 Despite some major differences in the features of their agrarian and rural economies, Kerala and West Bengal share a Common Land Reforms scenario viz. the reforms were successful but did little to improve the economic status and viability of the rural poor. Given the constraints of space, we give below the gist of three recent assessments of land reform in West Bengal.

(a) "The objectives of 'Operation Barga' to formalise the relations and establish a fair exchange between the tenants and the landlords is yet to be fully realised.....the increase in input application rate in real terms has been marginal...yield rate has hardly

witnessed any increase over time.....investments in agriculture and human resources have not reached any significant proportions" (Agro-economic Research Centre, Visva-Bharathi, 1986).

(b) 'the old style large scale absentee landlordism of the early days no longer exists in West Bengal (due to) land reform legislations of 1953, 1956 and 1973....(and) the call given by the United Front Government of 1967 and 1969-70 to the peasants to identify ceiling-surplus land and to get these redistributed by forming committees of peasants.... What matters now is the role of jotedars, the former peasants who have withdrawn themselves from direct cultivation and are now the biggest landholders in the countryside and who employ share-croppers and agricultural labourers for carrying out cultivation.... Whatever be their economic power, which is still considerable, the jotedars in West Bengal no longer exercise the kind of political and social authority that they did enjoy even ten years ago. Panchayats as elected bodies of rural people. Kisan Sabhas as a mobiliser of peasants and the leftwing political parties—all active at the grass-roots level—have seriously eroded their influence over the rural population....Large scale recording of share croppers, near universal recording of homesteads, absence of evictions of share-croppers and agricultural labourers, implementation of minimum wage legislation and defiance of the landlords by the poorer sections....are some of the major features of rural life in West Bengal today....Share croppers are no longer dependent on the landlords for loan, marketing, protection and land for dwelling houses. The situation is similar in the case of agricultural labourer....rural labour market is much wider and broadly based than in the past (and) wages are standardised (and) are in conformity with the wages in similar occupations in the village, and the neighbouring area.....in the case of share-croppers, the bulk of the production is still for subsistence and not for the market....given the small amount of land under their command even achievement of self-sufficiency in food production is beyond them, which is why they largely supplement their earnings with wage income...Distribution of mini-kits, greater access to organised sources of credit and membership of cooperatives have created conditions for more notable growth in production in future....(in their absence), by the operation of market forces, control over land would soon be passed on to the richer elements....in the case of agricultural labourers, increases in wages and employment (due to) minimum wage legislation, public works programme along with a greater sense of security have been in evidence in all the areas.... A major problem, of course, is the phenomenon of growing landlessness and proletarianisation of the poor peasants....this is no doubt an alarming feature which would in future have serious negative implications for both wage and employment....the most significant impact of the reforms has been to enhance the sense of self-respect of these poor groups and to make them believe in their own ability and organisation. This factor is perhaps more important than the immediate material achievements". (Dasgupta Biplab 1987).

(c) "The agrarian reform programme, currently being implemented by the Government of West Bengal, does address itself to the fundamental problems facing the agrarian economy (viz. landlordism, usury, landlessness of rural poor and their need for more employment and higher wages). In the short-run, these measures are both necessary and desirable. However, (their) concrete achievements so far have been inadequate... If the benefits of (these) measures are to be consolidated and built upon in the longer run, conscious efforts must be made to develop cooperative or joint farming at the next stage. This is necessary not only for pre-empting a renewed process of polarisation of income and wealth, but also for facilitating the adoption of modern technology which is essential for growth". (Ghose, Ajit Kumar, 1983).

3.20 Finally, we take a brief look at the land reforms situation in Punjab, a "green revolution" area marked by an extensive and growing spread of capitalist farming. The emergence of capitalist farming in Punjab is clearly reflected in the changing distribution of operational holdings in the State (see table 6), changing characteristics of large holders (see table 7) and changing concentration of land (see table 8). It is seen from table 6 that while at the all India level the trend has been towards increase in the numbers of marginal and small holdings along with decrease in the numbers of medium and large holdings, the trend has clearly been in the opposite direction in Punjab. A similar contrast is also seen in relation to share of large holdings in total operated area (which has increased in Punjab) and average size of large holdings (which has become larger in Punjab) as compared to the all-India level decreasing trend in both these characteristics of large holdings.

3.21 Table 8 provides a glimpse of how the large holdings in Punjab have been able to swim against the strong current eroding the share in total operated land and average size of large holdings in most parts of rest of India. The Table shows that the concentration ratio of ownership holdings remained high in both Punjab and India over the period 1971-72 to 1981-82. In fact, the concentration ratio for ownership holding was significantly higher in Punjab than in India as a whole. It is interesting to compare the behaviour of concentration ratio of ownership holdings with that of the operational holdings. The latter was noticeably less than the former in 1971-72 in both Punjab and India, the difference being particularly marked in Punjab. This suggests that, in 1971-72, the leasing of land was from large owner to a small owner (or to a landless tenant) which had the effect of moderating the concentration of land ownership. This means, in effect, that the lease market compensated to an extent for the inequitous distribution of land ownership. Incidentally, such a lease market would have an important role to play in a situation like ours with meagre political will and capacity to bring about drastic redistribution of land ownership.

TABLE-6

Changing Size-wise Distribution of Operational Holdings—
Punjab and India
(‘000 holdings)

Size-Group	Punjab		India	
	1970-71	1985-86	1970-71	1985-86
Marginal	518	256	35682	56748
Small	260	208	13432	17881
Semi-medium	281	291	10681	13253
Medium	248	260	7932	7920
Large	69	74	2266	1929
Total	1376	1089	69993	97731

TABLE 7

Comparative Characteristics of Large Holdings—Punjab and
India

	Punjab		India	
	1970-71	1985-86	1970-71	1985-86
Share in total operated area of all holdings (%)	26.8	29.8	30.9	20.2
Average Size of Large Holding (Hectares)	15.5	16.7	22.1	17.2

TABLE 8

Changes in Concentration Ratio (Gini Coefficient)

	Punjab		India	
	1971-72	1981-82	1971-72	1981-8
Ownership Holdings	0.78	0.77	0.71	0.71
Operational Holdings	0.42	0.70	0.59	0.63

Note : Tables 6, 7 and 8 are based on the data given in Singh J P (1990).

3.22 However, what is more relevant for us to note is that the lease market seems to have been turning against the small owner over the period 1971-72 to 1981-82. This process appears to have had a stronger thrust in Punjab than in India as a whole. Remembering the fact that this was precisely the decade in which "green revolution" accelerated the emerging trend in Punjab towards capitalist farming, it is tempting to propose the hypothesis that market forces-aided by the technocratic "green revolution" strategy for agricultural growth which had a dramatic impact on Punjab agriculture—helped the large holdings in Punjab to exert pressures in the lease market to achieve enlargement of their operational holdings. It is likely that the large owners withdrew the land leased out by them to the small tenants and, also,

influenced the small owners to lease out their land to them (to large holders) rather than self-cultivate it. It is known that the "green revolution" technology—irrespective of its theoretical neutrality to scale—was far more accessible to large holdings than small.

3.23 If this hypothesis is correct, it would follow that the land reforms in Punjab could not reverse the powerful forces favouring capitalist farming (and, consequently, large holder) released as a combined effect of market and technocratic strategy for agricultural growth. Specifically, the reforms could not impose an effective ceiling on the size of holding, did not succeed in preventing the large owner from resuming land for self-cultivation and gave no protection to the small owner against the forces preying on their land. Needless to add, if this scenario is allowed to prevail, the access of rural poor to agricultural land as cultivators would continue to diminish. This, in turn, would mean that they would be under increasing pressure to fall back helplessly and with weak bargaining power on the market for wage-labour in agriculture. The process could progressively usher in a state in which the small owner "voluntarily" sells his leased out land to his large tenant and the access to land becomes more and more inequitable over time. It should be a sobering thought that the conventional tenancy reforms in the situation would favour the Strong and not the Weak.

3.24 J. P. Singh's paper prepared for the Study Group on Land Reforms and Common Property Resources provide revealing glimpses of weaknesses of

land reforms in Punjab (Singh J. P., 1990). Interestingly, the capitalist farmers were favoured by both the land reform programmes which were relatively well-implemented as well as those which were not so implemented. The first category includes abolition of intermediaries and consolidation of holdings. Singh's observations on these programmes are. "The programmes of abolition of intermediaries has been generally completed by the end of 1954-55 in..... Punjab.....abolition of intermediary interest brought the cultivators into direct relation with the State.....It is only in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh (that) the programme of consolidation of holdings has been taken up seriously..... (it) has shown good impact wherever it has been completed. It has brought in considerable increase in agricultural production, particularly through investments in private irrigation.....But, it has been observed that in the process of consolidation of holdings, tenants and small and marginal farmers are generally losers while influential and large farmers generally receive a better deal.....small and marginal farmers end up receiving inferior quality land..... tenant and sharecroppers get evicted from their leased in land". It is obvious that having the entire holding in a few plots—rather than having it scattered all over in small bits—would be of great help to medium and large farmers to adopt capitalist farming. It can be seen from Table 9 that these groups of farmers had a decided advantage in this respect in Punjab and Haryana, more so in the former.

TABLE-9

Average Number of Parcels Per Holding (Operational) in Northern States

States	Size of Farms					All Size
	Marginal	Small	Semi-Medium	Medium	Large	
Haryana	1.36	1.70	2.04	2.42	2.83	1.91
Himachal Pradesh	8.14	17.99	18.91	19.82	19.89	12.93
Jammu & Kashmir	14.55	5.00	6.40	4.88	4.40	11.84
Punjab	1.11	1.44	1.61	1.74	2.39	1.57
Uttar Pradesh	2.86	4.16	5.84	7.36	11.61	3.71

Source: Government of India, Department of Agriculture and Survey, 1976-77 (Vol. I), 1985, p. 15.

Cooperation, Ministry of Agriculture, All India Report on Input

3.25 Compared to measures for abolition of intermediaries and for consolidation of holdings, those for tenancy reforms and ceiling on holding fared badly in Punjab. According to Singh, "The level of ceiling was usually very high, classification of land gave scope for manipulation, the exemption from ceiling laws were too many and the unit of application of ceiling i.e., family was defined loosely.....so far, the number of persons (who have) benefitted from the distribution of land is only 26 thousand in Punjab" (as compared to 37.4 thousand in Haryana, 4.5 lakhs in Jammu & Kashmir and 3.0 lakhs in Uttar Pradesh. Apparently, the beneficiaries in Punjab remained small in number

because each one received on an average a larger piece of land than in other northern states (nearly 4 acres in Punjab as against 3 acres in Haryana, around an acre in Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir and between half to three-fourths of an acre in Himachal Pradesh and Delhi). As regards tenancy reforms, Singh finds that "in Haryana and Punjab, the land-owners enjoy a continuing right of resumption of land upto the ceiling limit while in other states of northern region, the maximum areas that could be resumed was fixed well below the ceiling limit.....concealed tenancies have been flourishing in the region and ejections of tenants have been continuing". Singh also

notes that fair rent has been fixed at the level not exceeding that suggested in the guidelines in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi but higher than those in Punjab (along with Haryana and Jammu & Kashmir) and that "in the States of northern region, the maintenance of (land) records has been fairly satisfactory in many respects, but not in respect of recording the names of tenants and sharecroppers". On the whole, Punjab provides a convincing illustration of a situation where the capitalist farmers have a dominant influence on the formulation and implementation of land reforms. This did help Punjab to achieve breakthroughs in agricultural production but, clearly, at the cost of access to land of the rural poor and weak.

3.26 The following board propositions emerge from our consideration of the typology of four situations covered in this section viz. Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal and Punjab.

- (i) In none of the four situation did the land reforms help the rural poor in obtaining secure and equitable access to land in the context of growing population pressure on land and keen competition for its control among the different rural strata.
- (ii) The dominant rural groups—ex-Zamindars in Bihar, large cultivators in Karnataka and capitalist farmers in Punjab—exert decisive influence on the process of formulation and implementation of land reforms to divert

the benefits of the reforms from the rural poor to themselves.

- (iii) Even where they are politically well-organised as in Kerala and West Bengal, the rural poor get only the direct and proximate benefits of land reforms but do not succeed in bringing about an enduring improvement in their economic status.
- (iv) The policy-makers usually spend considerable time and energy in improving the legislative and implementation aspects of land reforms. While these are important aspects, the crucial criterion for successful land reforms is the extent to which they form part of a cohesive development strategy capable of integrating the objective of growth with those of equity and poverty-eradication. Without the support of such a strategy, no amount of tinkering with legislation and implementation would be of much help in getting effective land reforms. Keeping this point of view in mind, the last section of this paper makes an attempt to identify the priority tasks in the next round of land reforms which could help in the evolution of such a strategy. Before doing this, it is necessary to take a look at the recent scenario and trends in the access of rural poor to the common property lands. Section 4 is devoted to this theme.

4—Access to Common Lands (CPRs)

4.1 Three points need to be noted about the access of rural poor to common lands. First, the household economy of the rural poor depends crucially on the access to common lands. Second, the extent and quality of the access of rural poor to common lands have deteriorated in recent years and there is as yet no credible intervention by the governments or by the voluntary organisations to reverse this trend. Considered along with the ineffectiveness of land reforms described in the preceding section, it is obvious that the rural poor are currently coping up with the accumulated and growing pressures of diminishing access to both agricultural lands as well as common lands. Third, systematic and effective interventions to improve the access of rural poor to common lands need a planning-cum-policy framework for utilisation of land resources which is capable of linking the national-level objectives and policies with the micro-level schemes, programmes and participatory arrangements.

4.2 Published and aggregative sources of data offer little help in elaborating the first two points noted above. Fortunately, the Study Group could draw on the findings of two recent field studies (one of which is still in progress) which have looked into the problems of access of the rural poor to common lands carefully and in detail. Let us first take up the question of dependence of the household economy of the rural poor on their access to common lands. Table 10 has been compiled from Jodha's study which covered 82 villages from 21 districts scattered in seven major

TABLE 10
Dependence of Poor on CPRs

Fuel Supplies (% of CPR to total)	66 to 84
Animal Grazing (%) (% of CPR to total)	69 to 84
Per Household Employment (days) in a year	128 to 196
CPR Income as Proportion of Income from other sources (%)	14 to 23
Gini-coefficient of Income from	
(a) All sources	0.33 to 0.41
(b) All sources excluding CPRs	0.44 to 0.50

Source : Jodha N S (1990)

TABLE II
Decline of CPR Areas

State	CPR Area as % of Total Village Area		Persons per 10 ha of CPR Area	
	1950-52	1982-84	1951	1981
Andhra Pradesh	18	11	48	134
Gujarat	19	11	82	238
Karnataka	20	12	46	117
Madhya Pradesh	41	24	14	47
Maharashtra	22	15	40	88
Rajasthan	36	16	13	50
Tamil Nadu	21	10	101	286

Source: Jodha N S (1990).

states in the dry tropical zone of India (Jodha N S, 1990). The study defined the CPRs as including "community forest, pasture/waste land, pond/tank, river/rivulet, watershed drainage/river banks and river/tank beds". The study found that the rural poor, [i.e., "agricultural labourers and small farm (having less than 2 hectares of dryland equivalent land) households"], derived the major part of their fuel and fodder supplies—from two-thirds to over four-fifths of the total—from the common lands. The common lands also made significant contribution to their employment (128 to 196 days in a year per household) and income (CPR income accounting for 14 % to 23 % of income from other sources). More important, there is a clear indication in table 10 that inclusion of CPR income brings about substantial reduction in the inequality in income distribution. Thus, clearly, the support provided by the CPRs is important in sustaining the household economies of the rural poor.

4.3 Dependence on the CPRs is an ambiguous indicator of the development status of the rural poor. In the context of effective policies for optimum use of CPRs and for adequate share for the rural poor in the returns from the CPRs, such dependence could be regarded as a positive indicator. However, in the absence of effective policies which is true of the prevailing situation in India, the dependence on CPRs is more likely to reflect the precariousness of the rural poor's struggle for survival. Given the peripheral position of the poor in relation to the mainstream economy and his meagre access to remunerative income-earning opportunities, he falls back on CPRs more out of compulsion than choice. In such a situation, diminishing access to the CPR would be a disaster for the rural poor and diminution in CPRs

should be a point of grave concern for the policy-maker. As table 11 indicates, there has been a precipitous fall in the availability of the CPRs over the period 1950-52 to 1982-84 and an equally alarming rise in the pressure of population on these resources. Taking the median values of the figures in each column of table 11, it is observed that the percentage of CPRs to total village area declined from 21 in 1950-52 to 12 in 1982-84 and the number of persons per 10 ha of CPRs increased from 46 to 117 over the same period. These trends are so sharp and clear that it is hardly necessary to comment any further on their serious implications for the future.

4.4 As systematic utilisation of CPRs needs area-cum-village-specific planning, it would be of some interest to obtain an idea of the CPR situation in different types of villages. The data from a field study in progress in the Institute for Social and Economic Change permit a rough comparison as between relatively developed and relatively backward villages. Tables 12 to 16 present these data. The names of the villages are withheld as our collection of data on the many delicate issues connected with CPRs are still continuing in them. The villages are arranged in the tables in the descending order of their development status i.e. village A is the most developed among the four and village D the most backward. It can be seen from table 12 that the availability of CPRs is negligible in the developed villages, being less than 5 per cent of total village area. The backward villages, on the other hand, have greater extent of CPRs—between one-fourth and one-third of total village area. A clue to these differences is provided by table 13 which

shows that in the developed villages big farmers dominant caste households and the better off in the village encroach in the CPRs while in the backward villages the encroachers belong to the poor and disadvantaged groups.

4.5 The process of privatisation of CPRs seems to work in the following manner. Where the rich compete for the control of CPRs, privatisation gets close to the final limit of the available CPRs. Plausibly the rich have the means to invest in CPRs and make them productive. On the other hand, in the backward villages the field remains open to the poor. It is likely that the rich do not exist in sizeable number in backward villages or do not have a command over resources comparable to that of their counterparts in the developed villages. One implication of such process of privatisation is that the development potential of CPRs is likely to be much larger in the backward villages than in the developed villages. At the same time, it is also reasonable to assume that the exploitation of this potential needs resources—technology, expertise, investments—which are beyond the capacity of the local communities to provide. Another relevant insight arising from our findings is that, contrary to the widely prevailing view, it is the rich rather than the poor who are mainly responsible for the privatisation of CPRs. If this process is allowed to operate unhindered, the poor will continue to lose their access to CPRs or get pushed into those parts of CPRs which have too low status to attract the notice of the rich. It is the same process which in the first instance made the poor landless in agriculture and is now eroding their access to CPRs.

4.6 Reversing this process needs both a comprehensive policy framework at national level and a series of area-specific schemes and programme at the grass roots level. The first priority needs to be accorded to measures which could clear the ground for systematic and sustained policy interventions. A preliminary measure of utmost importance is to improve the land records. We found in the four villages referred to in tables 12 and 13 that there was wide divergence between the availability of CPRs according to land records and the availability as verified in the village (see table 14).

TABLE-12

Availability of CPR Lands (figures in acres)

Village	Total Geo. Area	CPRs Available in the Village
A	452	15
B	923	45
C	3489	810
D	642	182

1. The availability of CPRs shown in this table is exclusive of encroachments, CPRs taken up for regeneration are already distributed to individuals.

Source : Pasha S A (1990).

TABLE-13

Encroachment on CPRs

Village	Area (acres)	By
A	10	Better off people
B	60	Dominant Caste Big Farmers
C	350	SC, ST, Poor & Better Off
D	134	Backward Castes & Poor

Source : Pasha S A (1990).

TABLE-14

Divergence between Land Records and Survey Data

Village	CPRs available in the Village (in acres)	
	According to Land Records	According to Survey
A	53	15
B	390	45
C	1011	810
D	372	182

Source : Pasha S A (1990).

Significantly, the divergence is seen to be the widest in the developed villages marked by the encroachment of the CPRs by the rich. Obviously, the divergence arises not so much from errors as from a design to conceal. It may be mentioned here that the Government of Karnataka set up a group consisting of top officials some four years back (in early 1986) to prepare a village-wise inventory of wastelands by types. As of today (mid 1990), the work is still in progress. Needless to add that without a reliable data base it would be idle to plan policies and programme for CPRs. Second, a careful assessment needs to be made of the investments needed to get adequate returns from CPRs. As can be seen from table 15, in the four villages covered in our Survey, the CPRs did not include village forests and only a small part of them was Gomal land. Over 80 percent of CPRs are C & D lands in an extremely degraded conditions.

TABLE-15

Distribution of CPR Lands by Categories (figures in acres)

Village	Forests	Gomal	C&D	Tank Bed	Other	Total
A	—	15	—	—	—	15
B	—	10	30	—	5	45
C	—	—	750	60	—	810
D	—	80	100	2	—	182

Source : Pasha S A (1990).

Third, it has been repeatedly pointed out that the CPRs in India lack a management system for their protection, conservation and rational use. As one observer puts it, "The Central and State Governments are holding, together with Village Panchayats, most of India's common resources. However, many resources are hardly managed and (are) in practice open-access resources" (Krooneman, 1990). Jodha found that in all of his 82 sample villages, excepting two, there were formal or informal regulation for CPR use prior to 1950s but by the early 1980s when he visited the villages only in 8 of the 82 villages the regulations were still operative ! (Jodha, 1990). In a word, the pre-condition required for policy intervention in the area of CPRs is the building up of management system at the level at which (district, block or mandal) the Planning Commission proposes to organise decentralised planning (Planning Commission, 1990 (b)). The management system should compile and periodically update a reliable data base and also arrange for a competent technical evaluation of the potential use and investment requirements of CPRs.

4.7 In the absence of a sound management system, the schemes now being taken up on CPRs tend to be ad hoc and direction-less in nature Table 16 shows that distribution of CPRs to individuals as house-sites or for cultivation accounts for nearly two-thirds of CPR area covered by programmes.

TABLE-16

CPRs covered by Programmes

Village	Projects for Regeneration	Distributed to Individuals
A	15 (Gomal by a Voluntary Agency)	5 (To SCs for Housing)
B	50 (Gomal by Forest Dept.)	225 (Darkhast)1
C	42 (C & D by Forest Dept.)	50 (Social Security plantation for SCs)
D	50 (Gomal by Forest Dept.)	—

1— Land allotted to SCs and poor for crop cultivation based on the applications made by them. This practice has now been stopped. Darkhast land also includes regularisation of encroached lands.

Source : Pasha S A (1990).

Ironically, not many of the allottees carry out cultivation in practice. "The beneficiaries usually (in 60 per cent to 90 per cent cases have to sell the land as they do not have enough resources to cultivate the marginal land" (Jodha, 1985, 1986). Very likely, the allotted lands also are too poor to make cultivation profitable compared to allotment to individuals for cultivation the schemes for regenerations of CPRs cover less area. Table 16 also shows that the voluntary agencies play a limited role in these schemes. Schemes planned and operated by the collecting efforts of the local people themselves are even rarer and exceptional and do not figure in our survey data at all.

4.8 It is instructive to see the chasm between the present use (or, more appropriately, neglect) of CPRs and their impressive development potential. According to a recent assessment, rural India presents the picture of a "cruel paradox of mass poverty coexisting with vast resource potentials. These potentials were seen to lie in changing resource access and use and included canal irrigation, lift irrigation, land reform, wastelands development, forests and agroforestry.....(these resources) presented large scale potentials which had not yet been exploited. We found evidence that key aspects of (these resources) had been neglected and that the scope for benefits to the poorer were greater than commonly supposed". (Chambers R, 1989). A point which is often overlooked is that the neglect of CPRs is part of the larger problem of lack of a national-level policy framework for conservation, upgradation, and optimum utilisation of land and water resources in India. Eroded soils, silted up tanks and reservoirs and land lost to cultivation due to salinity and waterlogging are the obvious consequences of the absence of a comprehensive policy framework for the land and water resources. Declining standards of cultivation in dryland agriculture, inability to retain high-valued crops (like Cotton) and the increasing precariousness of the economy of small and marginal farmers are other serious conse-

quences attributable to the same reason (Reddy AM, 1990 and Reddy, V.R., 1990). A particular mention needs to be made here of the contradiction which CPRs make to the economy of small and marginal farmers. As Table 17 shows CPRs are important for these farms in mobilising inputs, putting the available land under crops, developing crop by-products and surviving through crisis like droughts.

TABLE—17
Contribution of CPR to Farming Systems

CPR components in Total Own Inputs (Pre-sowing to Pre-harvest)%	31 to 42
<i>Potential Decline in the absence of CPR</i>	
Draft Power	68 to 76
Manure/dung	35 to 43
Area under crops	48 to 55
Crop Byproduct for Sale	84 to 96
CPR contribution to Total Sustenance Income during Drought Years	42 to 57

Source : Jodha N S (1990).

4.9 While the deterioration in CPRs and diminishing access to them affect all the rural poor, tribals form a group whose very existence as distinctive socio-cultural entity comes under intolerable strain. According to the 1981 Census, scheduled tribals had a population of 54 million or nearly 8 per cent of the total population of the country. Out of these, nearly 48 million are forest dwellers living within or in the vicinity of forests (Swamy M C K, 1990). In addition, several rural settlements exist in the vicinity of forests, arid or semi-arid regions, hilly terrains and foothills of the Himalayas whose dependence on CPRs for the economic and livelihood patterns are substantial. Swamy points out that "nearly 80% of lands of tribal households are communal land as well as other parcels of land that are owned or held by the government". Policies for forest and wildlife conservation need to be formulated keeping in mind the interests of tribal population. The communal systems of land-ownership among the tribals also need protection against marketisation of land and its alienation to non-tribals.

5-Priority Tasks : Identification and Classification

5.1 Currently, the rural poor are confronted with a grim situation. The livelihood opportunities available to them are hardly keeping pace with the increase in their number. The deterioration in their access to land—agricultural and common—has already been indicated in the preceding sections. Given the modest agricultural growth, the growth of rural non-agricultural activities also remains low. Consequently, the only avenue left to the rural poor is to seek wage employment in agriculture. Not surprisingly, the working paper prepared in the Planning Commission on the employment situation on the eve of the Eight Five Year Plan shows a number of disturbing signs—more open unemployment, increasing casualisation and growing dependence on unreliable and low-productivity employment in the unorganised activities [Planning Commission, 1990 (a)]. In these circumstances, the credibility of land reforms as a development strategy needs to be assessed chiefly in terms of the contribution they can make to the viability and welfare of the rural labourers.

5.2. It would be obviously unrealistic to assume that all the rural poor can be accommodated in agriculture as owner-cultivators. That strategy capable of making the poor viable has necessarily to be multi-dimensional. This means that land reforms have to be a component in a package of measures specifically tailored to the circumstances of rural labourers. In the following few paragraphs, we briefly describe three packages—more to illustrate the idea of a package than as definitive prescriptions for the problems of rural labourers. It is useful for this purpose to distinguish three groups of wage-paid labourers. The first group consists of those who have always been labourers having never had cultivation as an occupation in their living memories. Asking them to become cultivators may not be the right strategy to meet their problems. We would put in the second group those who, before joining the ranks of labourers, were small/marginal cultivators but either decided to move out of farming (owing to meagre returns in farming) or were forced out by circumstances beyond their control. They are likely to have good potential to become enterprising cultivators provided they are helped with adequate incentives and supporting measures. The third group would include those who are cultivators but turn to wage labour for supplementary income. It would seem reasonable to assume that these three groups would need different packages of measures to help them towards achieving viability.

5.3 The package suggested for the first group is the following. Wherever possible, we have indicated the present status of the component and the need to strengthen it.

(a) Employment Programmes:

This component is needed to support incomes and to remove the excess supply in the labour market. According to the Sub-committee of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee which prepared a report on the Problems of Unorganised Workers in Agriculture Sector, the employment programmes would have to be increased more than eight-fold over their present level if the modest target of providing 100 days of employment in a year to at least one member from each household below povertyline is to be achieved.

(b) Enforcement of Minimum Wages & Social Security:

This is an essential complementary measure to employment programmes. The sub-committee mentioned above observes "It can be safely said that nowhere in the country minimum wage for the agricultural workers is enforced round the year". The necessity of revising the minimum wages at regular intervals has also been neglected so far. As regards social security, only a couple of states seem to have made a beginning.

(c) Allotment of house-sites and Janata Houses :

Provision of house-sites to agricultural labourers should be considered an important item in land reforms. House-site and house not only meet a basic need but also enable households to take up supplementary land-based activities like vegetable growing, poultry, dairying etc.

(d) Social Forestry/Tree Pattas :

Another component of land reforms relevant to labourers is improved access to common lands to add to their incomes. According to a recent estimate, the tree pattas granted upto 31-12-1988 were 1.1 lakh in number covering 2.52 lakh acres (National Commission on Rural Labour, 1990). Needless to add that this is no more than a very modest beginning of a programme which needs far more attention and priority in future

The package suggested above is based on the strategy of integrating the measures for employment generation and improvement in working conditions along with giving at least a modest land base for

labourers. This would not only add to the income-earning opportunities available to them but also reduce their precarious dependence on employers and wage-labour.

5.4 We would strongly urge that the package appropriate for the second group (viz. potentially enterprising cultivators who are now landless) would be the one based on integrating the first three components of the package described above with the distribution of surplus land. The group should be helped over time to become viable cultivators and to reduce dependence on wage-labour and employment programme which could be reserved progressively for the first group (i.e. those who would continue to depend on the wage-labour to a significant extent even in the long run). This is also true of the access to common lands. On the other hand, not only could the poor in the second group be given priority in the distribution of surplus land but, care must be taken to give them a holding above a certain minimum size to ensure viability. They should also be assisted with credit, extension, inputs etc. on an adequate scale. The past programmes for redistribution of land to the landless have been ineffective due to allotment of areas below the threshold of viability and inadequate assistance to allottees. These errors ought to be avoided in future.

5.5 Regarding the third group, the strategy should be to integrate land reforms with the programmes for effective use of land. Looking back on the post-independence land reforms, a striking point which emerges is that the concern has been much more with equity (mostly in the form of unimplementable rhetoric) than with equity-and-productivity. The result has been that land reforms have achieved neither of these objectives. The main links between equity and productivity which need urgent attention in the next phase of land reforms are the following.

(a) Consolidation of Holdings

This programme has been undertaken only by a few states in the north. The background note on land reforms prepared by the Planning Commission in 1989 mentions that 140 million acres of land have been consolidated by that year. If this figure is true, it would mean that about 40 percent of total cultivated land has been consolidated. However, it is doubtful that the figure of 140 million acres reflects the ground level reality for the simple reason that not much is known about the strictness with which the measures for prevention of fragmentation are formulated and enforced. In the absence of these measures, the benefits of consolidation would not be retained over time. It is necessary to emphasise that among the different types of land reforms consolidation of holdings is possibly the most important measure capable of bringing about substantial improvement in the productivity of land.

(b) Land Records

An expert report prepared for the Planning Commission has observed "In all parts of the country,

records relating to land are in a very bad shape. The record as it exists today hardly reflects the present day reality regarding ownership of land...disharmony between the record and the reality not only destroys the utility of the record but also misleads any person who has to deal with land...The preparation and maintenance of record-of-rights in land got low priority in all the seven Five-Year Plans" (Wadhwa, D.C. 1989). It is obvious that we have hardly any system-leave alone an effective system—to monitor land ownership, transfers and lease operations. More important, it is inconceivable that in the absence of reliable land records it is possible to have a satisfactory inventory of land resources, effective programmes for their conservation and upgradation and planning for their fuller use. It is instructive to contrast this attitude with the empty rhetoric about imposition of "radical" ceilings on holding. If we had an adequate monitoring and planning system for land resources, the poor—particularly the poorest strata like labourers—could have gained much more from land reforms which, in addition, would also have had a substantive impact on the value and productivity of land resources. Important consequences of absence of good land records are indicated below.

(c) Equity-cum-Productivity Losses due to Absence of Good Land Records and Monitoring System:

- (i) Ineffective imposition of ceilings on holding owing to concealment of surplus land.
- (ii) Emergence of "informal" tenancy on a large scale having the effect of exploiting the tenants and hindering modernisation of cultivation.
- (iii) Continuation of fragmentation of holding undoing the benefits of consolidation programmes.
- (iv) Negligent use of land—particularly dry land—in large holdings held by owners disinterested in farming as an enterprise.
- (v) Privatisation of the common lands by the rich which means their loss to the pool available to the poor and their use by the norm of profits to the rich rather than utility to the village community as a whole and its major segment viz. the rural poor.
- (vi) Lack of attention and investments to make full use of common lands in a socially optimal way.

5.6 The three packages of measures described above have the limited purpose of illustrating an important point. The point is that even good land reforms—unless they are part of carefully tailored packages—run the risk of ineffectiveness in the Indian environment. Our land reforms suffer from the further handicap that they have been far from good. They were motivated by vague notions of equity which were more talked about than seriously implemented. More important, they were grossly ignorant or negligent about

the important dimensions of use of land resources affecting productivity of agriculture and steady and sustainable agricultural growth over the long run. The next phase of land reforms would have to be planned from the structural-reformist perspective which has been ably analysed and elaborated in the recent researches of P. C. Joshi (Joshi, P. C., 1981, 1986, 1987). It is tempting to quote Joshi at some length to bring out the essential ingredients of the structural-reformist perspective on land reforms :

“Since Independence the old semi-feudal agrarian set-up characterised by the land-lord tenant nexus has been eroded. What has replaced it, however, is a dualistic agrarian pattern putting the large owner-farmer in a dominant position and the small and marginal peasants and labourers in dependent position. This dualistic structure now acts as a formidable constraint on the process of agricultural modernisation. It does not allow the vast mass of small and tiny producers to get involved in the modernisation process and benefit from it in an enduring and self-sustaining manner. In many areas the modernisation process within the dualistic structure is even a destabilising force for the small peasant economy. . . . (we need) a new agrarian pattern which provides incentive to the small peasants and a new organisational pattern which is sensitive to peasants’ needs and problems. . . To generate relevant modern technology and to ensure its absorption in the agricultural sector (having large numbers of) small peasant producers is a highly complex and difficult undertaking. . . . Transforming peasant agriculture involves social engineering. . . . Recent experience has shown that the tendency to view the land policy purely as an operational or administrative question devoid of any philosophical and moral significance has led to disastrous consequences. . . . It is in this background that we have to consider an overall community approach to agricultural development, encompassing vast masses of small cultivators. . . . the new phase calls for a two-fold strategy—firstly, of containing or disciplining the large producer in the direction of welfare-oriented growth and, secondly, of firmly protecting and assisting the small producers and labourers for participatory development. Without a restructured agricultural development strategy firmly based on the vast working peasantry, assisted by a community approach and community institutions, the target-group based anti-poverty programmes alone cannot realise the goal of growth with social justice”.

5.7 In formulating the recommendations based on the work of the Study Group on Land Reforms and Common Property Resources, we have kept in view the past experiences brought out by the materials available to the Study Group as well as the perspective for the future noted above. The recommendations are focussed on the priority tasks which need to be taken up with a sense of urgency and determination to implement them within a reasonable time frame.

A: Improvement in Land Records

- a1—The work of preparation of land records for the states not having them now should

be completed expeditiously. The background note on land reforms prepared by the Planning Commission mentions that the areas in the North-east do not have land records.

- a2—The Interim Report on “Registration of Title to Land” submitted to the Planning Commission by Prof. D. C. Wadhwa has recommended the adoption of “Torrens System” on an experimental basis in some selected districts where the revisional surveys have been completed recently. This system permits “the conversion of the present presumptive titles to land into conclusive titles”. Prof. Wadhwa has also recommended that there should be wholesale revision of all pre-1950 surveys and that along with updating present record-of-rights the system of registration of title to land may be introduced. These recommendations should be implemented with the priority they deserve.
- a3—When updating the records, representatives of rural labour and poor should be consulted to obtain reliable information on (i) Ownership of land above ceiling, (ii) informal tenancies, and (iii) encroachment of common lands. It is of utmost importance that the updated records reflect the true position in the field in this respect.
- a4—It is reported by the Technical Committee set up by the Department of Rural Development, which looked into the pilot projects for computerisation of land records, that the total cost of computerisation for 450 districts (including aerial photography units) would be Rs. 150 crores i.e. Rs. 30 crores per annum in a five year time frame. According to the Committee “technology is now available to facilitate easy access to information, expedite survey operations, facilitate quick updation of land records and enable their storage and retrieval”. After careful appraisal of costs and feasibility, a time-bound programme may be launched for computerisation of land records.
- a5—There should be an effective monitoring system at the Panchayat level of lease, transfer and alienation of land by the target group households, by large owners and by non-cultivators (including non-resident owners of land in the village).

B: Ceiling on Land Ownership

- b1—Concerted efforts need to be made to locate (i) land held evading ceiling provisions, (ii) encroachment of common lands, and (iii) land left fallow/unused for long duration by the large owners/non-cultivators. Appropriate legislation must be enacted to take over these lands without compensation or at nominal compensation. This is also true

of good cultivable lands diverted by a large owner to other uses to avoid the problems in getting them cultivated by tenants/labourers.

- b2—Farm leaders complain that frequent downward revisions in ceiling creates uncertainty and disincentives for enterprising farmers. There is an element of truth in this complaint as any further reduction in ceiling by itself, will not yield much surplus but could hinder investments in agriculture. It is our feeling that it would be desirable to eliminate the uncertainty about the ceiling limit. It would be better to pay more attention to loopholes (higher ceiling limits for larger families, separate provision for adult sons etc.) which need to be closed and to acquisition of categories of land mentioned above in b1.
- b3—The imposition of ceiling on ownership of agricultural land needs to be part of a broader policy of ceiling on assets and incomes in all sections of society.
- b4—It is recommended that the distribution of surplus land should be guided by a composite criterion based on the need of the recipient as well as the objective of ensuring viable use of allotted land.

C : Regulation of Tenancy

- c1—The experience so far shows that complete banning of leasing of land is neither feasible nor necessarily desirable. It should be noted that even West Bengal has opted for giving protection to share-croppers rather than eliminating the system of tenancy altogether.
- c2—A more practicable course would be to insist that all lease transactions must get properly recorded and that their terms and conditions are fair to the weaker party to the transaction—lessees (in most areas) or lessors (where reverse tenancy prevails).
- c3—It would be desirable to have appropriate tax provisions on land to prevent the emergence of large and dominant group of rentiers who own land chiefly to lease it out for rent or for speculative gains. If the land records are reliable, such indirect measures may be more effective in controlling dysfunctional ownership of land than direct measures like banning of land sales or leases. However, when imposing such measures, care must be taken to protect the interest of small owners who find it convenient to take up occupations other than cultivation. Even for such owners, it may be possible to devise financial assets conferring all the advantages which a small owner derives from owning land without cultivating it

viz. security, access to credit etc. As a long-term objective, our policies should be to encourage and enable the actual cultivators to become owners of the land they till. But it would not be advisable to use only direct controls to achieve this objective. The instruments used should also include indirect incentives and disincentives designed to serve the same purpose as the direct controls but more effectively and at a lesser cost.

D : Consolidation of Holdings :

- d1—The researchers who have evaluated Consolidation of Holdings programmes find that the main reason for the extremely slow progress of the Programme is the virtually total neglect of the Programme at the highest policy-making levels. There should be adequate recognition at these levels that consolidation of holdings (and prevention of fragmentation) is an essential component in land reforms in the sense that without it the other components like imposition of ceilings and regulation of tenancy would not be able to achieve the principal objective of land reforms viz. creation of a modernised and viable peasantry.
- d2—What is important for speedy implementation of consolidation programmes is the preliminary ground work to obtain the willing cooperation of all the strata in the community. The advent of decentralised and participatory planning set up at the level of villages could be a powerful factor to promote such programmes which have suffered in the past because of excessive dependence on bureaucratic formulation and implementation of development schemes.
- d3—It is our feeling that there would be a definite advantage in undertaking consolidation of holding schemes along with revision of past surveys, updating of land records, bringing them closer to the field realities and modernisation of system of records. It would be easier then to obtain the cooperation of target groups who are often afraid that they will get a raw deal in consolidation schemes. This is particularly true when they are associated with updating of land records, preparation of consolidation scheme and, more generally, with formulation and implementation of development programmes. Once the target groups are convinced that they can benefit from a programme, it would be easy to obtain their full and willing cooperation.

E—Optimum Use of Land Resources

- e1—The efforts now in progress to evolve practicable methodologies for planning the optimum use of land resources need to be vigorously pursued. Agro-climatic Regional Plan-

ning exercise of the Planning Commission and the Watershed approach for conservation and fuller use of land resources which is being experimented with in some of the states (like Karnataka) should be developed and extended to the point where they become replicable and implementable on a wide scale. There are also other models proposed by experts which deserve to be carefully considered (Ravindranath, 1990)

- e2—Purely technocratic planning of land resources would not be of much help. For example, a recent evaluation of a project proposal from the Karnataka Forest Development Corporation for development of 2000 hectares of C & D class lands carried out by the Karnataka State Council for Science and Technology found that drastic revisions in the proposal were necessary to protect the interests of the target groups in the area of project [Karnataka State Council for Science and Technology (1989)]. The project proposal had not paid much attention to the question of impact of the project on the local target groups which is often adverse.
- e3—The farming systems research should be undertaken and developed to meet the problems of viability of the small and marginal farmers. Area-specific norms for viable size of holdings should be evolved to guide the policies on prevention of fragmentation, distribution of surplus land and imposition of ceiling on holdings.
- e4—The decentralised planning of the district and panchayat levels should accord the highest priority to preparation of time-bound proposals for developing common lands for the benefit of rural labourers and poor. If necessary, private enterprise may be invited to develop common lands through large and lumpy investments and modern technologies provided they agree to hand over a specified portion of developed land to the distributable pool of land available for allocation to the target group households.

F : Planning and Monitoring of Land Reforms :

- f1—At the level of the lowest decentralised planning unit (block, Mandal or Gram Panchayat as the case may be), a listing needs to be made of the households of rural labourers and other target groups. A household-by-household scrutiny should be made to formulate packages of measures (land reforms plus other measures as explained above in paragraphs 5.2 to 5.5) to help these households. Annual targets should be laid down for covering these households.
- f2—Currently, we have only scheme-wise monitoring of implementation and impact. In spite of this, it is known that the extent of

corruption, leakages and ineffective implementation is very large. Once the strategy of package of measures is adopted, the monitoring will have to pay attention to the effectiveness of the package as a whole over and above observing the progress in the implementation of individual components in the programme.

- f3—A system must be devised by the decentralised planning authority to carry out annual surveys on a sample basis to keep a watch on and to adjust the package of measures to the factors giving rise to poverty, landlessness and deprivation. It needs to be mentioned here that even in a state like West Bengal there are groups of poor who continue to be neglected (Sah, K. 1990).
- f4—It is of utmost importance to associate the leaders and representatives of the target groups while operationalising the steps suggested above in f1 and f2.
- f5—There should be a periodic assessment at the state level of the progress achieved by the different decentralised planning authorities in implementation of land reforms. Suitable incentives and penalties may be devised to put pressure on these authorities and to foster among them a genuine sense of commitment to achieving the objectives of land reforms with a definite timeframe. Anticipatory action needs to be taken to protect the decentralised planning authorities from domination by the rural elite.
- f6—There should be annual meetings of National Development Council and Interstate Council with a session exclusively set apart for review of implementation and impact of schemes for land reforms and for development of common lands.

G : Links with Other Policies :

- g1—At the level of overall development strategy, land reforms need support from the broad spectrum of agricultural policies focussed on improvements in agricultural investments, research, extension, credit, services and institutions. These policies should have adequate thrust to help the large number of peasants having only a modest holding.
- g2—The ultimate success of land reforms depends on the emergence of organisations of rural labourers and poor who at the moment are neither economically viable nor politically mobilised. These organisations need to operate from the grassroots level of village and its target group households to the highest level where the development objectives, priorities, strategies and policies get determined. Absence of a sufficiently strong

lobby at the national level is a major problem now confronting the rural labourers and poor. There should be a careful study of the organisations—trade unions, cooperatives, group farming etc.—which have succeeded in the past in mobilising the poor for political and developmental action. In the light of this study, the government should devise a set of promotional measures to help the emergence of such organisations. However, there should be no government

interference or domination in their working. The promotional measures should have specific provisions to counter the opposition of rural vested interests to the organisations of rural poor. It should be remembered that a good system of land reforms is one in which the tasks of building up political pressures for reforms and their formulation, implementation and monitoring are progressively taken over by the organisation of poor themselves.

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APPENDIX

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE STUDY GROUP ON LAND REFORMS AND COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES

- (i) To study the policy and various legislative measures arising therefrom for land reforms adopted during the Five Year Plan periods;
- (ii) To study land holding pattern as per the agriculture census data and the NSSO studies on land holdings with a view to identify such areas which require specific attention for land reform;
- (ii') To study the formulation and implementation of land reform and other institutional reform measures having a bearing on rural Labour, specially on its lands dependent section.
- (iv) To study and report in particular on the efficacy of various legislative and other measures adopted so far with reference to share-croppers and other types of tenants.
- (v) To review State-UT wise implementation of various legislative measures, examine monitoring and evaluation systems of land reforms, to identify gaps between policy legislation and implementation and to suggest effective policy and legislative measures for removal of gaps so identified under each of the following enactments/measures;
- (a) Abolition of intermediaries;
- (b) Tenancy reforms;
- (c) Ceiling on land holdings as per the National Guidelines (1972) (Declaration and distribution of surplus lands);
- (d) Consolidation of holdings;
- (e) Homestead tenancy;
- (f) Implementation of the laws relating to alienation of tribal lands and restoration of lands to tribals,
- (g) Conversion of agricultural lands for non-agricultural purposes;
- (h) Up-dating of land records and strengthening revenue administration;
- (i) Allotment of Bhoodan lands and Government wastelands to the landless labour;
- (j) Measures against keeping land fallow and uncultivated.
- (vi) To review the progress and assess the impact of Centre and State schemes for land reforms, land records, tree puttas, assistance to beneficiaries of land reform measures;
- (vii) To identify new technology in land survey and management of land records and research needs on land reforms. (For instance State Government of Madhya Pradesh has already computerised the land records. This could be taken as a case study).
- (viii) To suggest measures for organisation and involvement of rural poor in land reforms, re-orientation of law and order machinery and administrative policies for land reform in general and establishing a land records administration in the North-Eastern States in particular.
- (ix) The Group will also keep in view the points of the main Questionnaire pertaining to the land reforms devised by the NCRL.

QUESTIONNAIRE LAND REFORMS

1. Do you agree that the legislative measures taken since early 50's regarding abolition of intermediary tenures, security to tenants with the object of conferring the ownership rights on them and imposition of land ceiling to generate surplus have been successful ?

2. It is reported that even after the coming into force of tenancy laws, hidden tenancy exists in large portions of the country by way of oral and informal agreements without bringing the tenancy on record. What measures do you suggest for preventing this ?

3. The land ceiling laws have generated a small percentage of the areas declared surplus for distribution among landless farmers (3.15 per cent). What are your suggestions regarding making the law relating to the ceilings more rigorous or implementing the laws a different way ?

4. It has been found that there is large surplus land with the Government available for distribution. What suggestions you would like to offer for early distribution of available surplus land under the ceiling laws ?

5. Do you agree with the observation that in some States the area of land allotted to the beneficiaries is very small and not economically viable and in some cases the land for distribution is fallow ? Please give your views and suggestions. It has been recommended by some that States should themselves meet the expenditure on converting fallow land into cultivable land as is done in Orissa under the programme of Economic Rehabilitation of Rural Poor (ERRP) on experimental basis. Would you suggest implementation of such programme in other States also ? If so, what modifications you would like to be introduced in such a programme ?

LAND REFORMS—POLICY, LEGISLATION, IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT IN NORTHERN REGION OF INDIA—A SUMMARY

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The main objectives of the paper were to study policy, legislations and implementation of land reforms during the Five Year Plan periods; to examine changes in land holding patterns and prevalence of tenancy; to assess impact on small and marginal farmers, and agricultural labourers; to study impact of land distribution on economic and social conditions of allottees of land; and to examine the influence of land sales on size distribution of holdings and increase in prices of land.

2. Adequate legislative measures seem to exist on the Statute Book on all aspects of land reforms and if these were to be implemented honestly and efficiently, land relations would have been much better today than what they are in northern States of India. The implementation of land reform legislations on all aspects, except abolition of intermediary tenures in all the northern States and consolidation of holdings in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, has not been satisfactory. Land holdings remain quite fragmented in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir and hence need to be consolidated at the earliest. Effective measures need to be taken against further fragmentation of holdings. Tenancy, though prohibited by laws in all the northern States except Haryana, continues to exist in all of them. Although the magnitude of tenancy declined over the years in all the States, it still remains fairly important in Punjab, Haryana and U.P. where it occupies 16.1 per cent, 18.2 per cent and 10.2 per cent of the operated area, respectively. The rent charged by the land owners is much higher than what is provided in the legislations. The share rent is invariably fifty per cent of the gross produce in all the States. Land Records, though reliable in many respects in northern States, do not reflect ground level reality with regard to tenancy and share cropping, as the names of share croppers and tenants are not recorded in many cases. The provisions of the ceiling laws have not been implemented effectively. The area declared surplus under the ceiling laws is less than 1.3 per cent of the cultivated area in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, but 20 per cent in Himachal Pradesh and 25.0 per cent in Jammu & Kashmir. The major part of this area has already been distributed to the landless households. The average area distributed per household varies between 0.48 acre in Delhi and 3.87 acres in Punjab. There does not seem to be much scope for obtaining more ceiling surplus land unless the ceiling limits are lowered, for which none of the States, except U.P., is willing.

3. The total number of operational holdings has increased in all the States except Punjab, where it has declined by about 20 per cent between 1970-71 and 1985-86. The latter has mainly happened because of very fast decline in the number of marginal and small holdings, which are now leasing out their land to large holdings in a big way. In other States, the number of holdings going to marginal and small farmers have risen very fast mainly because of sub-division of holdings due to inheritance and distribution of village Panchayat and ceiling surplus land to the landless and marginal farmers. There has been an increase in concentration of operational holdings in all the States, except Himachal Pradesh, but the increase has been the highest in Punjab. On the other hand, the concentration of ownership holdings has declined marginally in all the States except Jammu & Kashmir. This implies that the extent of leasing in by relatively larger size holdings from the smaller size holdings has increased over the years. The average size of operational holdings declined in all the States except Punjab between 1970-71 and 1985-86.

4. The castewise distribution of ownership holdings in eastern U.P. indicates that 40.6 per cent of the Harijan households are landless, 34.4 per cent own less than one acre and 21.7 per cent own between 1.0 acre and 2.5 acres. Thus, 75.0 per cent of Harijan households are either landless or own less than one acre of land. Such households are only 31.9 per cent among the non-Harijan households. The average size of ownership holdings increases from scheduled caste to backward caste and from backward caste to higher caste farmers.

5. The land transactions do not appear to be a potent means of changing structure of land holdings, as such transactions are quite limited and the prices of land are rising very fast. The land transactions appears to be taking place among relatively larger size and upper caste farmers.

6. A detailed analysis of tenancy in eastern Uttar Pradesh for the year 1985-86 indicates that the extent of leasing to cultivated area was only about 3.0 per cent, about two-thirds of leased in area was cultivated by marginal farmers and about two-thirds of leased out area was owned by large farmers. Whereas the larger farmers did not lease in any land, about one-fifth of the leased out land belonged to the marginal farmers. The economic viability of marginal and small farmers has greatly improved as a result of leasing in land. Farmers belonging to all castes were found to be leasing in land.

Leasing out was found to be relatively more prominent in the caste of Rajputs, Brahmins and Muslims. About four-fifths of the farmers leasing in land had leased in on the basis of share cropping. The yield per hectare was observed to be substantially higher on owned land (25.3 quintals of paddy) than leased in land (22.5 quintals of paddy) mainly because of higher quantity of inputs used and better quality of land. The differential in paddy yield between the owned and leased in land was observed to be considerably reduced in the case of sharing of cost of purchased inputs. Even with input sharing, the net rent received by the land owners works out to be about 40 per cent of the gross produce, which is much higher than the fair rent fixed by the legislation. To cash rent per hectare was found to be substantially lower than the share rent paid by the tenants.

7. In the case of Haryana also, the extent of leasing in was much higher on small farms than large farms. This increased the economic viability of small holdings to a very great extent. But, the extent of leasing out was also higher on small farms. The large farmers have also been leasing in land for utilising the excess capacity of their tubewells and tractors. The net rent paid to land owners is substantially lower for cash renting than share cropping arrangement. Under share cropping arrangement, the land owners contributed half of the cost of seed and fertilizers. The net return per acre on self-cultivated land was found to be more than 20 per cent higher than that on leased in land. Cash renting system appears to be more important in tubewell irrigated areas while share cropping system is observed to be more important in canal irrigated areas. The overwhelming majority of the lease contracts are made for a short period of two years or less. The majority of tenants leasing in land on fixed rent basis belong to upper castes, while majority of the tenants leasing in land on share crop basis belong to backward castes or scheduled castes.

8. In the case of Punjab, leasing in land is becoming more prominent among the large size farmers while leasing out is becoming more prominent among the small size farmers. Bigger cultivators owning tractors and belonging to upper castes account for the major part of the leased in area. They are also able to reap much higher net income from the leased in land than small and middle tenants. Cash renting system of leasing is gaining importance over the crop sharing system. The fixed cash renting is relatively more prominent mode of leasing in Punjab whereas share cropping is relatively more important in other States of the region.

9. In the case of Jammu & Kashmir, the net return per acre has been found to be substantially higher on owner occupied farms than tenant occupied farms. This seems to be quite related to the intensity of input use.

10. As regards distribution of land to landless, about 29 per cent of the households belonging to

18 castes were allotted Gram Samaj land in 4 villages of eastern U.P. The average area allotted per household was about 0.80 acre. More than 50 per cent of the Harijan households of these villages were able to get the benefit of this scheme. The allotment of small piece of land has provided a lot of self-respect, social status and economic benefits to the allottees. In the case of Haryana, the allottees of surplus land had to undergo a lot of harassment in getting possession of the allotted land. Some of them had to sell out their land to the land owners because of this. The majority of the allottees belong to lower castes and have poor economic status. The quality of allotted land is very poor. Despite this, the majority of the allottees are cultivating their land and feel that their income and status have improved after getting the allotment of land. In the case of Himachal Pradesh, every landless rural household has been allotted a minimum of 0.40 hectares of land. But, the major part of this land remains uncultivated because a large amount of expenditure and labour are required to reclaim it for agricultural purpose. The Government should, therefore, take steps to reclaim such land.

11. As distribution of surplus land has proved to be quite beneficial to the rural poor, in general wherever ceiling surplus and village Panchayat land is available, it should be distributed to landless to uplift their economic and social condition. But one must be aware of the limitations of the land distribution to landless in future and its role in providing social and economic justice to them, as there is not much land left for redistribution. Hence, instead of allotting small pieces of land to landless for cultivation, greater emphasis may be given for allotting land for house sites and for starting rural industries by the poor through cooperative venture, for which enough technical and financial assistance may have to be provided by the Government.

12. Although most of the State governments of the northern region are not in favour of reduction of the Ceiling limit, a small reduction in it and strict implementation of the provisions of the Ceiling laws could bring substantial amount of area as surplus. This could be augmented further by bringing the land owned by religious institutions under the purview of Ceiling laws. It should be the responsibility of the governments to acquire good quality land as ceiling surplus, otherwise they should reclaim the bad quality land before distributing it to the landless.

13. As it has not been possible to abolish tenancy and as it goes on emerging in different forms because of the interest of both lessors and lessees in it, it would be appropriate to have rethinking on the issue whether the leasing of land could be legally permitted while having a check on its bad effects. This is all the more necessary as reverse tenancies are emerging in many parts of the country.

Uttar Pradesh is the biggest state of the country with an area of 2.95 lakh sq. km. and a population of 13 crores. Even though agriculture is the main source of livelihood of more than 75 per cent of the people of the state, it contributes only 58 percent towards state's income. U.P.'s agriculture is marked by the predominance of small holdings and a large number of villagers are landless agricultural labours.

U.P. is a leading state in taking necessary steps to initiate land reforms for all round agricultural development and establishment of an egalitarian society. Zamindari was abolished in 1951 by a legislation ending the age old institution of intermediaries between tenants of land and state. But from the studies made so far and the impression and experience gathered during the past few years regarding the implementation of land reforms, it is clear that on the whole results achieved fall short of our goals. There is a great deal of social intransigence in the political structure of the state and so the results do not follow.

Our impression of the rural scenario leads us to two broad conclusions. Those land reforms which adversely affected only a relatively small group with little or no political clout were carried out. But the measures which adversely affect a large number of people especially those who are politically strong and have vested interest in the system, we find that the results have been pitifully small. This has been particularly valid as far as our efforts go to impose ceiling on land holdings since 1961 or to provide security of tenure to those whose tenancy rights are oral or to sort out crop sharing and introduce co-operative farming.

Due to poor implementation of ceiling laws, very little surplus land was made available for distribution among landless labourers. Our investigation shows that 523137 acres of land was declared surplus between 1961 and Sept. 1989 as a result of the implementation of ceiling laws. Out of 523137 acres of surplus land 495595 acres were taken possession of and distributed to landless poor while the remaining 27542 acres were struck up in litigation.

Land received on account of Bhoodan was also not much. Whatever the quantum of Bhoodan land it was distributed to 98467 landless agricultural labour. But the Bhoodan land has not been found to be fit for cultivation.

Since the total number of landless agricultural labour in the state is not known, it is very difficult to assess the impact of land reforms on rural economy. Our impression is that land reforms have not made any significant dent on rural economy. Our survey of 48 villages spread over twelve blocks of six districts viz. Gorakhpur, Deoria, Basti, Azamgarh, Jaunpur & Ghazipur of eastern U.P. more or less confirm the state wide picture of land reforms.

SUGGESTIONS :

Progress in consolidation of holding has also been unsatisfactory as only 1/3 of the cropped area of the state has been consolidated so far. The consolidation has not increased the size of the holdings. Landless agricultural labourers have a per capita holding of less than 3.12 acre or even less for agricultural operations. Experience of Japan shows that as far as production of foodgrains is concerned the operational holdings of 3.12 acres or less can use modern science and technology and can give fairly satisfactory return per acre. But for the production of cash crops and dairy products 3.12 acres may not be the right size for an economic holding. We, therefore, need to increase the minimum size of operational holding per family. This can be done only by implementing ceiling laws faithfully. The more ceiling laws are implemented faithfully, the more there will be surplus land for distribution among landless agricultural labour. With the increase in quantum of surplus land, size of economic holdings may also increase.

In the VIIIth Five Year Plan efforts were made to forge linkage between land reforms and programme of rural development viz, IRDP, NREP and RLEG. But it was done in an half hearted manner. No where in the state land reforms were introduced intensively and agricultural facilities such as irrigation, fertilizers, improved seeds, marketing, transport and processing provided simultaneously to produce good results in terms of increased agricultural production and better standard of living. It is difficult to have intensive land reforms if other facilities are not provided. We don't think that land reforms can be easily carried out in a static situation. If the context is changed; perhaps it will become easier to introduce meaningful land reforms. There is thus a need for dovetailing development with land reform.

The reasons for the poor implementation of measures of land reforms are lack of political pressure of "pressure from below" because the peasants and agricultural workers are passive, unorganised and inarticulate; lukewarm and often apathetic attitude of the bureaucracy, absence of up-to-date land records and legal hurdles in the way of implementation of land reforms. The crucial point in the whole land reform movement is how to build "a pressure from below". We can not achieve the goal of land reforms unless tenants and share croppers are organised into unions. These vulnerable elements in rural community need special attention. After all we are giving special treatment to certain sections of society viz, S.C. and S.T. to bring them up on the social ladder. Why can not we bring about compulsory organisation of tenants and share croppers to provide impetus to land reform movement.