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The Green Revolution and Land Reforms

It would be fair to say that one of the most important events in Pakistan's agricultural history, with extensive repercussions on other sectors, has been the process called the Green Revolution, which occurred in the mid-1960s. The technology package associated with it generated major changes in the economic, social, and political structure of the country, transforming the agricultural and rural sectors irreversibly. Much of what we see today, in terms of economic groups and classes, political affiliation, and even culture, has its roots in, and is a consequence of, the Green Revolution. It forms a watershed between the old and new Pakistan. However, while the mid-1960s are in many ways an important juncture in our history, it is necessary to emphasize that change is a continuous process and events like the Green Revolution act only as an impetus to that change. While present-day Pakistan may have its roots in the Green Revolution, a lot more has happened since the mid-1960s to make Pakistan what it is today. This chapter will examine the nature and consequences of the major transformation that took place in the mid-1960s.

Land reforms are an important mechanism for changing ownership and wealth patterns, economic and social relations of production, political relations, and a host of other factors. Land reforms usually imply a redistribution of land away from those who own large chunks of it to those who are often

landless (see Box 3.1). There have been two sets of land reforms in Pakistan, both of which will be analysed in this chapter.

The purpose of studying any sector or society is to see how it has changed over time and how it continues to evolve. In Chapter-2, we discussed the process of change in agriculture from the times of the Mughals until independence. This chapter discusses some important events resulting in the transformation of the agricultural sector, while the next chapter examines the overall process of agrarian transition. The events and issues discussed in the present chapter have an important bearing on how agrarian transition has taken place.

3.1 The Green Revolution

The annual growth rate in agriculture between 1949 and 1958 was a mere 1.43 per cent, less than half of the annual growth rate in population. Agriculture was allowed to stagnate in the 1950s because the ruling élite believed at that time that it was essential to industrialize at all costs and at great speed. Government policies were heavily biased against agriculture, and it was only towards the end of the 1950s – when it became clear that growth in agriculture was necessary for the survival of the country – that the importance of the agricultural sector was recognized.

BOX 3.1

Land reforms: need and constraints

Viqar Ahmed and Rashid Amjad examine the principle behind land reforms. They argue as follows:

In agrarian societies, land is the primary productive asset and the tangible expression of economic and political power. Therefore, the struggle for control of land and its fruits is a constant one. Throughout history, patterns of land ownership and tenure have played an important, and at times decisive, role in shaping the political and social system. It has, in most cases, also helped to determine the possibility and pace of economic change. It was thus inevitable as economic development became a major goal in these societies, and the principal concern of governments, that large concentrations of land ownership and the feudalistic pattern of social relationships came to be regarded as prime obstacles to sustained growth and development. Demands for radical changes in the land-

tenure systems became more and more persistent both on grounds of social justice as well as a pre-requisite for economic development ...

... A decision to undertake land reforms often meets with strong resistance from landowners who constitute a powerful élite in agricultural societies. It is, therefore, preceded by political controversies and national debate. Even after a land reforms proposal passes through the legislative process, its implementation is a complicated task due to the lack of organization at the village level, a dearth of proper data, a faulty maintenance of land records, and lengthy and complex legal procedures. These obstacles can, of course, be overcome by a strong political will and the active support of the rural masses for the programme.

Source: Ahmed, Viqar and Rashid Amjad, *The Management of Pakistan's Economy, 1947–82*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1984, pp. 117–18.

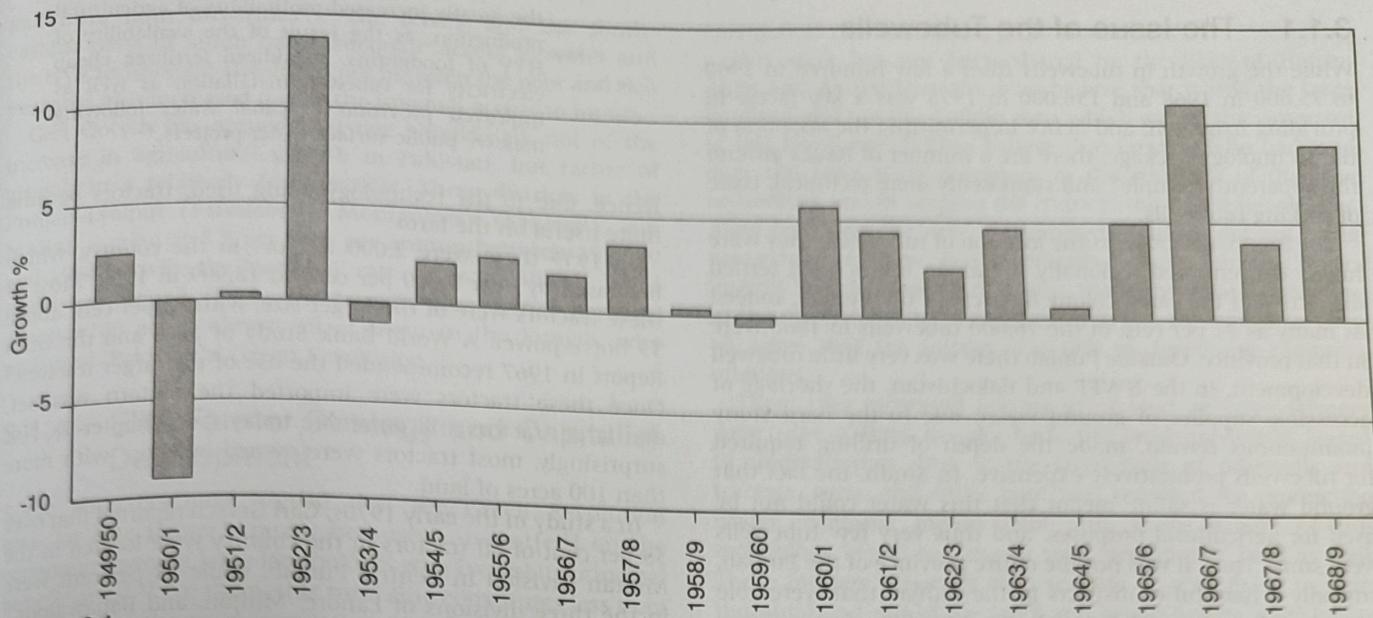


Figure 3.1
Growth rates in agriculture, 1949–69

Figure 3.1 shows the growth rates in agriculture in the 1950s and 1960s, and indicates a marked change between the two decades. Between 1959 and 1964, agriculture grew at an overall rate of 3.7 per cent, but this impressive rate was overshadowed by the even greater 6.3 per cent between 1965 and 1970. Between 1966/7 and 1967/8, the years when the Green Revolution was at its peak, agricultural output grew by 11.7 per cent, and it maintained a high growth rate of 9.6 per cent in 1968/9 to 1969/70. How were these rates achieved?

The phenomenal increase in growth took place in two phases. In the first, 1960 to 1964/5, the main cause of the growth was the increase in irrigation facilities, mainly tubewells. The second phase, between 1965/6 and 1969/70, showed impressive growth when the expanded irrigation facilities were supplemented by the technology package of high yielding variety (HYV) seeds, chemical fertilizers, and pesticides. Essentially, then, it was the complete package of water, seed, fertilizer, and pesticides that caused the large growth in agricultural output and production.

Without any doubt, *the most important ingredient in the technology package was water*, and water which was guaranteed and available as and when required. It was the key variable that established the spread of Green Revolution technology, since the new HYV seeds and the fertilizer package were critically dependent on the timely availability of a sufficient quantity of water. The increase in the availability of water, either by tubewells or through canals, was estimated to be responsible for half of the total increase in output.¹

In the first phase, where irrigation was the critical component of agricultural production, privately owned tubewells were the main factor responsible for the increase in water availability. Between 1960/1 and 1964/5 about 25,000

tubewells were installed, each costing Rs5,000–12,000, and the farm area serviced by tubewells doubled.² In the second half of the 1960s, two HYV seeds, one for wheat, developed by the International Wheat and Maize Institute in Mexico, and the other for rice, developed by the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, were introduced in Pakistan. The Mexi-Pak wheat seed had been experimented upon in the early 1960s and, along with the IRRI rice seed, yielded higher output. These experimental results were soon reproduced across large areas of agricultural land. Since the HYV seeds required large sources of water, those areas that had better irrigation facilities and those that had installed tubewells were the first to adopt these seeds. Moreover, farmers who wanted to use the new seeds were also seen sinking tubewells and the number of tubewells in the country increased from 34,000 to 79,000 between 1964/5 and 1969/70. The area serviced by tubewells increased sixfold between 1959 and 1969. More than half of the irrigated area of the country (6-million acres) was cultivated with the improved seeds in 1969/70. Fertilizer consumption also saw a dramatic increase of 150 per cent between 1965/6 and 1970/1 and a rise of 235 per cent between 1965/6 and 1971/2.³

As Figure 3.1 shows, there were substantial increases in agricultural growth rates in each of the Green Revolution years. Moreover, the output of major crops between 1960 and 1970 increased substantially: wheat production by 91 per cent and rice by 141 per cent. Even other crops not directly related to the HYV seeds showed increases due to the extensive use of other non-seed factors in the package. So it seems that the Green Revolution, at least as far as production, growth, and output are concerned, was a resounding success. Nevertheless, we need to analyse the numerous issues and repercussions of this significant event in Pakistan's agricultural history.

3.1.1 The Issue of the Tubewells

While the growth in tubewells from a few hundred in 1960 to 75,000 in 1968 and 156,000 in 1975 was a key factor in providing irrigation, and hence in permitting the adoption of the technology package, there are a number of issues around the apparently 'simple', and supposedly mere technical, issue of sinking tubewells.

The first issue concerns the location of tubewells: they were highly concentrated regionally, mainly in the rich old settled districts and the canal colony districts of the Punjab; indeed as many as 91 per cent of the 76,000 tubewells in 1968 were in that province. Outside Punjab there was very little tubewell development. In the NWFP and Balochistan, the shortage of accessible supplies of ground water, due to the hard stony mountainous terrain, made the depth of drilling required for tubewells prohibitively expensive. In Sindh, the fact that ground water is saline meant that this water could not be used for agricultural purposes, and thus very few tubewells were sunk. Thus, it was not the entire province of the Punjab, but only a handful of districts in the Punjab that were able to sink tubewells and gain all the benefits of the Green Revolution. This, some observers believe, caused interregional disparities to grow (see below).⁴

Secondly, given their size and cost, tubewells were mainly installed by landowners with over 25 acres of land. Mahmood Hasan Khan writes that 'given the indivisible and large capacity of diesel and electric tubewells, even the middle peasants cannot afford their fixed and variable costs. Therefore, there has been a high concentration of ownership of tubewells'.⁵ Seventy per cent of tubewells were put in by farmers owning over 25 acres, and only 4 per cent by farmers owning fewer than 13 acres.⁶

Thirdly, inducement to invest in tubewells was given to farmers through large public subsidies on fuel, installation costs, and maintenance. Moreover, the Agricultural Development Bank of Pakistan (ADB) followed a fairly liberal credit policy and made numerous loans to farmers so that they could set up private tubewells.

Essentially, then, the apparently 'neutral' effect of increasing irrigation through tubewells seems to have had a number of important repercussions on interregional concerns, economic status and the ability to borrow money. The extensive sinking of tubewells was far from scale neutral.

3.1.2 Tractorization

In Chapter 5 where we discuss the critical issues in agriculture, an important issue examined is tractorization and mechanization. Tractors are now an important part of the agricultural and rural scene, but their contribution during the Green Revolution had very important consequences. Akmal Hussain writes:

tractor imports were systematically encouraged [after 1960] by the provision of cheap credit through institutions such as the ADBP. At the same time the overvalued exchange rate made tractors available in Pakistan at prices considerably below world market prices. Another factor stimulating tractorization was

the greatly increased profitability of agricultural production, as the result of the availability of HYV of foodgrains, subsidized fertilizer, cheap electricity for tubewell installation as well as improved provision of canal water following massive public surface water projects.⁷

Hence, due to the technology being used, tractors became more useful on the farm.

In 1959 there were 2,000 tractors in the country, which increased by over 8,000 per cent to 18,909 in 1968. Most of these tractors were of the larger size, with 84 per cent above 35 horse power. A World Bank Study of 1966 and the Giles Report in 1967 recommended the use of the larger tractors.⁸ Once these tractors were imported the pattern was set, and large tractors still dominate today (see Chapter 5). Not surprisingly, most tractors were owned by those with more than 100 acres of land.

In a study in the early 1970s, Carl Gotsch reported that over 38 per cent of all tractors in the country were located in the Multan Division in Central Punjab, while 58 per cent were in the three divisions of Lahore, Multan, and Bahawalpur.⁹ There was also a very close link with tubewell ownership, where almost 75 per cent of privately owned tractors were on farms that had sunk tubewells.¹⁰

Clearly, tractorization took place in those areas which had 'complementary inputs, [was] carried out by the larger and more resourceful farmers and [was] associated with a proximity to urban markets and services'¹¹ – similar to those found with tubewells.

3.1.3 Regional and Income Disparities

If tubewells were the single most critical factor that was responsible for the Green Revolution, and if the sinking of tubewells had a close correlation with tractorization, which in itself would have helped production further, a pattern emerges. Moreover, if we discovered another close correlation, that between large farms, in specific regions, and tractors and tubewells, the impact on regional and income inequality would be self-evident. Let us examine the evidence.

Hamza Alavi writes that 'because private tubewell development is closely relative to concentration of land in large farms, the "Green Revolution" has tended not only to intensify already large disparities in income and wealth of the different strata of rural population but, by the same token, it has also widened disparities between different regions'.¹² He adds that the incomes of the rural élite increased, while the incomes of small farmers in the districts where the Green Revolution was most successful, and in other poorer regions, 'have failed to improve or have not improved in the same measure'.¹³ These views are shared by most researchers on the Green Revolution. Moazam Mahmood argues that the inputs, especially the installation of tubewells and access to credit, were inaccessible to poorer farmers and, hence, that the latter did not share in the fruits of the Green Revolution, causing increases in relative poverty.¹⁴

Mahmood Hasan Khan says that, since the use of fertilizers and new seeds was premised on the availability of adequate water supply, the lack of water caused 'serious interregional

and intra farm disparities'.¹⁵ The NWFP and the south-eastern parts of Sindh had inadequate access to water and the HYV technology. The difference between the poor and rich peasants also increased due to the unequal access to inputs.

Carl Gotsch has argued that one should talk not of the increase in agricultural growth in Pakistan, but rather of growth in a relatively few districts. These districts in the Punjab-Lyalpur (Faisalabad), Montgomery (Sahiwal), and Multan – grew at 8.9 per cent per annum between 1959/60 and 1964/5, twice the 'national' rate. Thus, as Shahid Javed Burki has argued, it was the farmers who owned between 50 and 100 acres, almost all of them in the Punjab, who produced 'Pakistan's' Green Revolution.¹⁶

3.1.4 Élite Farmer Strategy and Capitalist Development

Some observers have argued that the Green Revolution was 'an élite farmer strategy because...it rest[ed] on the economic power of large landholders who [were] its principal beneficiaries'.¹⁷ For them, this rural élite constitutes less than 5 per cent of the rural population of Pakistan and was the only real beneficiary of the Green Revolution. Akmal Hussain believes that

The new technology made it possible to accelerate agricultural growth substantially through an 'élite-farmer strategy' which concentrated the new inputs on large farms. Now the crucial determinant in yield differences became not the labour input per acre in which small farms had been at an advantage, but the application of the seed-water-fertilizer package over which the large farmers with their greater financial power had superior access. Thus the technocrats felt that the Green Revolution had made it possible to accelerate agricultural growth without having to bring about any real change in the rural power structure.¹⁸

Despite (or possibly because of) these anomalies in the benefits of the Green Revolution, one outcome upon which all observers are agreed is that the Green Revolution resulted in the development and entrenchment of capitalist farming in the regions where the technology was adopted. However, there are some differences of opinion over who were the leaders of this change in the mode of production and in farming techniques.

Shahid Javed Burki and others believe that the rapid agricultural growth was led by a new breed of dynamic middle-class farmers who were capitalist to start with. These farmers had been created by the shift in political power under Ayub Khan, who, Burki argues, through his Basic Democracies scheme took away political power from the traditional big landlords and gave it to the middle-class landowners. It was these middle-class farmers, owning between 50 and 100 acres of land in the Punjab, who 'produced' the revolution in Pakistani agriculture. Ayub Khan's creation, the rural middle class, was considered a 'new powerful and independent factor in the political system', which had been 'released from the political and rural control of the landed aristocracy' and

emerged as the 'traditional profit maximizer'.¹⁹

This view has not been shared by the likes of Hamza Alavi and Akmal Hussain, who believe that it was the large landlord and not the middle class which was at the vanguard of this revolution.²⁰ They believe that farmers who had land over 100 acres were dominant in the adoption of the new technology and in reaping the fruits of the Green Revolution. Alavi feels that the new mechanized methods did not bring into existence a new class of capitalist farmers, but that it was 'mainly the big landowner who ... made the greatest progress in the direction of farm mechanization'.²¹ Nevertheless, they all agree that the impact was one of deepening capitalist relations.

There was increased leasing-in of land as large farmers were now willing to take back the land previously leased to sharecroppers. Due to the large scale of tubewells and tractors, more and more land was resumed for production under capitalist means. Not only that: owners of this technology began to lease-in their neighbours' land as well. These farmers began to evict tenants or send them to more marginal portions of the land, and began to hire wage labour instead. Self-cultivation was on the increase in areas where this technology was used. There was greater income in the hands of landowners, who began to purchase manufactured goods. As demand and consumption expanded, markets began to emerge around small towns. A number of attributes particular to capitalism (see Chapter-2) began to dominate in the agricultural sector, probably ending once and for all the debate on whether agriculture in Pakistan was feudal or capitalist. Capitalism had entrenched itself forcefully and permanently.

3.1.5 Social and Political Effects

Although the economic effects of the Green Revolution were easily observable, with growing overall output and increasing incomes for some, the social and political effects took a little longer to emerge. Amongst the economic factors that had social and political impacts were: the displacement of labour, both at the low end of the spectrum in the form of sharecroppers, and at the higher end, where those with land either sold it or rented it out to neighbours; increased rural-urban migration; an increase in consumerism; the emergence of small towns near agricultural areas that were using capitalist techniques, and hence required new and different services; and the awareness of disparities between farmers and regions.

There was also a change of attitude towards education, especially amongst the big farmers. Writing at that time, Hamza Alavi argued that 'the revolution in mechanical technology and chemical technology which is now employed in agriculture is making new demands upon the capabilities of the farmers. They are becoming increasingly aware of the values of education in terms of their own situation, namely for better farming and coping with new technologies'.²² However, the emphasis upon the social sectors was not particularly impressive in the 1960s and education was not considered important by the Ayub Khan regime (see Chapter-17).

Before the Green Revolution there was a lot of talk about the small farmer and how efficient he used to be. However,

as the new technology spread, the size-efficiency relationship was reversed: rich peasants and landlords made most and best use of the lumpy investments in a technology that, as we have seen, was not scale neutral and was biased in favour of the large landlord. Mahmood Hasan Khan argues that 'the structure of technology and the direction of credit flows themselves reflect the influence of large landowners and capitalist farmers on public policy'.²³ Moreover, it is important to emphasize the fact that, since Punjab and Sindh are the backbone of Pakistan's agricultural economy, with more than 75 per cent of the country's population, and 80 per cent of its cultivated and cropped area, the impact of the Green Revolution was restricted to these provinces. Moreover, because of the water and technology packages identified above, the NWFP and Balochistan missed out on the Green Revolution of the 1960s. (However, Chapter 5 reveals some interesting recent trends regarding increases in output and production in these two provinces.)

Nirmal Sanderatne has been particularly observant about the political consequences of the Green Revolution and relates them to the rise and subsequent victory of the Pakistan People's Party in 1972. He argues that 'the overwhelming electoral victory of the PPP amply justified its strategy [of making promises to the peasantry on agrarian reform] and demonstrated the validity of the hypothesis advanced earlier that the nature of agricultural development in the past, while successful in terms of increasing aggregate production, had intensified existing economic disparities and dissatisfactions. In turn these had radicalized Pakistan's politics'.²⁴ The PPP won conclusively in the heartland of the Green Revolution and some observers found a 'high correlation between the voting for the PPP and the area under Mexi-Pak varieties of wheat. The PPP won in all but one of the constituencies in which more than 56 per cent of the wheat area was under the new varieties'.²⁵

The emergence of the Pakistan People's Party on the Pakistani political scene and its subsequent victory in the 1970 general election were the result of the policies of Ayub Khan's decade. The election results from the rural areas were a direct consequence of the Green Revolution, and even urban areas were not spared the outcome of agrarian change as migrants from rural areas began to play some role in industrial and urban areas as well. With hindsight, one can say that the 1970 election, with the victory of the Awami League in East Pakistan and the People's Party in West Pakistan, may have been the only election held in Pakistan where economic conditions so directly influenced political outcomes. Perhaps it was the degree of turmoil and disparity that emerged after the Green Revolution of the 1960s, as it usually does after any revolution, which made such politics possible. Since then, development in Pakistan has probably been less disharmonious, and hence change has been more gradual and less disruptive. The Green Revolution was the first big shock that disrupted gradual growth, especially in agriculture, but also more generally across Pakistan. There is little doubt that it radically transformed the economic, political, and social direction of the country, establishing deeper, more entrenched, capitalist relations of production than those that had existed earlier in agriculture.

Development and growth, especially of capitalist relations, is a disharmonious process, often creating but also destroying, and having negative consequences for some sections of the population. However, one needs to examine the overall nature of development and not lament the fate of a few. Hamza Alavi, for example, disappoints when he argues that 'the present course of the "Green Revolution" ... has brought about a deterioration in the conditions of life of a majority of the population and further progress of farm mechanization is creating a situation when a very large number of the rural population is faced with the prospect of having no viable means of livelihood'.²⁶ At a micro level this scenario did happen, but this analysis ignores the impact of the greater dynamic of change (even progress) that resulted in the use of this technology. Moreover, Hamza Alavi's lament ignores his own analysis where he recognizes that the Green Revolution was geared to the needs of large landowners, and was even made by the bureaucracy in tandem with their class allies, and hence that the outcome was inevitable. Any other outcome, given the nature of the state, class alliances and the focus on large landowners, would have been unlikely. Akmal Hussain, too, falls into such a trap. He realizes that the new technology did accelerate growth in agriculture substantially through an élite farmer strategy, and that the 'growth of capitalist farming accelerated considerably in the late '60s as large landowners began to resume rented out land to operate their own farms with hired labour and capital investment'.²⁷ But, for Akmal Hussain, 'it was this process of the development of capitalist farming which has generated new and potentially explosive contradictions in Pakistan's rural society'.²⁸ Again, any other outcome would have been unlikely. Given the existing contradictions, class alliances, and the role of the state, the result was a natural consequence of the policies followed.

3.2 Land Reforms²⁹

Pakistan has had a long and varied history of land reform. Most attempts have been just that: attempts without any serious purpose. Table 3.1 gives details of many such attempts, most of which failed. From 1945 onwards there was talk of reform in the nature of tenancy and in the structure of landholding, but little came of it. The reasons for this are fairly clear and not surprising. In the Central Council of the Muslim League in 1947 there was a large representation from the (very) large landlords of the provinces of the Punjab and Sindh – these comprised 50 per cent of councilmen from Punjab and 60 per cent from Sindh. Furthermore, with quite exploitative conditions in rural areas in the 1940s, involving complete domination and control by landlords, it was a little unrealistic to assume that they themselves would be willing to put a dent in their source of power (see Chapter-2, Table-2.2 for landholding patterns in 1947). Landlords were the most significant class in the Muslim League, comprising 163 of the 503 Muslim League parliamentary members in 1942. From the time of independence, all Chief Ministers of the Punjab,

Table 3.1
Key dates and features of land and tenancy reforms in Pakistan

Year	Reform	Key features and recommendations
1945	Tenancy Laws Committee, Sindh	Occupancy rights should be granted to <i>haris</i> who had personally cultivated at least 4 acres of land annually for the same <i>zamindar</i> for 8 years.
1947	<i>Hari</i> Committee, Sindh	Defended the landlords; famous Note of Dissent from one member who argued for radical changes in the land tenure system.
1949	Muslim League Agrarian Committee Report	Abolition of <i>jagirs</i> ; security of tenure for all tenants; share rents should replace rents-in-kind; ceiling on landholdings of 150 acres irrigated and 450 acres for unirrigated; land distribution to tenants and compensation to landlords (report shelved).
1950	Punjab Tenancy Act	No charge by landlords from tenants other than 50 per cent crop share.
1950	Sindh Tenancy Act	Permanent rights of tenancy to long-term tenants; eviction rights to landlords under certain conditions.
1950	Punjab Protection and Restoration of Tenancy Rights Act	Eviction of tenants allowed only under specified conditions.
1952	Punjab Tenancy (Amendment) Act	Abolition of occupancy tenancy; transfer of ownership rights to occupancy tenants; share of landlord reduced from 50 per cent to 40 per cent.
1955	Executive Order	Abolition of <i>jagirs</i> and other revenue-free grants; like other <i>zamindars</i> , now <i>jagirdars</i> required to pay land revenue. Landlordism remained intact, for no limit to ownership as long as all legal dues paid to the government.
1955	Challenge to the Executive Order	Challenge upheld by Sindh High Court.
1959	Land and Tenancy Reforms – Martial Law Regulations 64, 64A and 64B	Ceiling on landholdings: 500 acres irrigated, 1,000 acres unirrigated additional land allowed to bring landholding to equivalent 36,000 PIUs; resumed land to be sold first to tenants and then to small farmers; abolition of <i>jagirs</i> ; occupancy tenants made owners; all tenants, <i>haris</i> and tenants-at-will given legal protection; rents to be paid in kind and all charges other than crop share abolished.
1972	Land and Tenancy Reforms – Martial Law Regulation 115 and amendments	Ceilings on landholdings: 150 acres irrigated, 300 acres unirrigated or equivalent of 12,000 PIUs + 2,000 PIUs for tractor and tubewell owners; no compensation to landowners, land redistributed without charge to landless tenants cultivating resumed land; untenanted resumed land redistributed without charge to small owners/tenants with holdings below subsistence; share system remains unchanged; land revenue, water rates, and seed costs borne by landlords and cost of fertilizers and pesticides to be shared equally; tenant eviction decided by revenue courts if tenant failed to pay rent, failed to cultivate land, sublet tenancy, or rendered land unfit for cultivation.
1977	Land Reforms Act	Landholdings: 100 acres irrigated, 200 acres unirrigated or 8,000 PIUs equivalent; compensation to landowners on resumed land at Rs30 per PIU; redistribution as in 1972. This Act was completely ignored by the military government after July 1977.

Sources: For 1945 and 1947, Khan, Mahmood Hasan, *Underdevelopment and Agrarian Structure in Pakistan*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1981. For the rest of the chart, Nabi, Ijaz, et al., *The Agrarian Economy of Pakistan: Issues and Policies*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1986, p. 60.

Sindh and NWFP were big landlords. If the power of landlords prior to 1947 was substantial, the creation of Pakistan increased their power even further. Many of them were able to acquire large tracts of land from the fleeing Hindus, while others bought land from moneylenders at cheap rates in the mayhem that ensued. Others, because of their influence in the area, were able to get the revenue officials to sign over land to them, in excess of their due share. Hence, there was little scope for serious reform in agriculture at the time of partition.

The 1949 Muslim League Agrarian Committee proposed some measures that would have addressed the issues related to land, its distribution, and its use. The report was shelved soon after being finalized. The hold of large landlords on political power can be demonstrated by the provincial elections held in the Punjab in 1951, where they won 80 per cent of the seats, while in the provincial election in Sindh in 1953 large landowners won 90 per cent of seats.³⁰ Mahmood Hasan Khan writes that in the 1950s,

the landed élite continued to exercise their traditional power without hindrance or opposition in the countryside. In this they were supported by the civilian bureaucracy, as was evidenced by the failure of tenancy reform measures legislated in the Punjab and Sindh. More significantly, as new irrigation and settlement schemes in the Punjab and Sindh were undertaken in the mid-fifties, civil and military bureaucracies were clearly given preferential treatment for irrigated land.³¹

Thus, the nexus of political power between the civil and military bureaucracy and the landlords ensured that the status quo would not be disturbed. As Mahmood Hasan Khan argues,

it seems fair to conclude that the approach to land reforms depended on the class character of the power élite. As long as landlords occupied a central place in the balance of power, and their position remained without threat in rural areas, no land reforms could have been implemented. The political system created new pressures which the landed élite could not successfully resist.³²

The first land reforms in Pakistan were undertaken by a military regime that was perceived to be modern and progressive. The Ayub Khan regime did not owe its allegiance to, and nor was it dependent on, the influence of the agrarian landed class, and thus it was in a position to undertake some sort of reform. However, although the reforms set out to break the power of the large landholding class and to make tenancy more humane, their impact was severely limited. What they did was to distribute power away from some landlords and include the civil and military élite in their strategy. While Shahid Javed Burki has implied that these land reforms were the precursor to the dynamic middle-class farmer of the Green Revolution, who emerged as the main beneficiary of the Basic Democracies system, most other scholars disagree (see section-3.1). Hamza Alavi³³ and

Mahmood Hasan Khan³⁴ argue that the Basic Democracies system maintained the hold of the landlord on the political system of Pakistan. Nirmal Sanderatne also argues that the 1959 land reforms were an eyewash, where the power of the ruling coalition of landowners, bureaucrats, and industrialists was left well intact.

3.2.1 The 1959 Land Reforms

Table 3.1 presents the salient features of the Ayub Khan land reforms of 1959. The reforms were meant to put ceilings on landholdings and were supposed to be an attempt to change tenancy regulations.

As we showed in the previous chapter (Table-2.2), before the land reforms of 1959 the distribution of land ownership was highly skewed in favour of a few large landlords who controlled large tracts of land. Approximately 6,000 owners owned more than the ceiling of 500 acres permitted in 1959. They constituted 0.1 per cent of the owners, but owned 7.5 million acres or 15.4 per cent of the total land. Table-3.2 shows that in all there were only 5,064 declarants, of which only 15 per cent or 763 were affected by the ceilings on individual holdings. The area of land owned by the affected declarants was 5.5 million acres, of which only 1.9 million (35 per cent) was resumed. The main portion of their land was retained by the landlords due to numerous provisions made in the law, such as for the transfer of land to dependents and other members of their families, and exemptions for numerous categories.

Not only was a small amount of land handed over, but of that land, more than half (57 per cent) was uncultivated. Of this, parts were hills or deserts – terrain which was not fit for cultivation – and some consisted of land that needed to be developed in order to be made fit for cultivation. Since a central feature of the 1959 land reforms was that owners were to be paid compensation for their lands, many benefited by handing over poor-quality lands to the government. As Mahmood Hasan Khan argues, 'given the high proportion of uncultivated land surrendered in certain districts, it is clear that landowners received payments for land which was producing nothing and most of it would require improvement after it was sold to new owners'.³⁵ Compensation was paid at rates of Rs1–5 per Produce Index Unit (PIU) (see Appendix 3.1) and in 'fifty half-yearly equated installments in transferable but non-negotiable bonds bearing 4 per cent per annum interest on unpaid balance'.³⁶

Another feature of the 1959 reforms was that resumed land was to be sold to landless tenants. By 1967, only 50 per cent of the resumed land had been sold, with only 20 per cent of the resumed land sold to landless tenants. The remainder was auctioned to rich farmers and civil and military officials. According to one estimate, only 67,000 landless tenants and small owners could have bought the resumed land sold to them.³⁷ The land was sold at the rate of Rs8 per PIU, payable in fifty half-yearly instalments with a 4 per cent annual interest rate on the outstanding balance.

Due to the abolition of *jagirs* in 1959, 0.9 million acres were declared as *jagir* lands, of which one-third were resumed by the government. The purpose of the abolition of revenue-free

Table 3.2
Number of declarants and resumed area under the land reforms regulation of 1959

Province/division	Number of declarants			Area of affected declarants (acres)	Area retained (acres)	Area gifted (acres)	Area resumed (acres)
	All	Unaffected	Affected				
Punjab	2,152	1,844	308	3,637,648	2,306,657	288,715	1,044,276
Multan	838	720	118	2,838,325	1,934,664	225,411	672,250
Sargodha	606	504	102	412,213	165,033	28,701	218,479
Rawalpindi	249	227	22	148,827	53,019	9,947	85,861
Lahore	102	85	17	38,813	25,631	4,008	9,176
Bahawalpur	357	308	49	199,470	128,310	12,650	58,510
Sindh	2,388	1,993	395	1,487,253	655,384	169,803	662,066
Khairpur	1,006	870	136	637,029	368,154	67,903	200,972
Hyderabad	1,375	1,117	258	842,872	281,220	101,900	459,752
Karachi	7	6	1	7,352	6,010	—	1,342
Punjab and Sindh	4,540	3,837	703	5,124,901	2,962,041	456,518	1,706,342
Pakistan	5,064	4,301	763	5,478,945	3,077,738	497,419	1,903,788

Source: Khan, Mahmood Hasan, *Underdevelopment and Agrarian Structure in Pakistan*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1981, p. 163.

lands (*jagirs*) was to transform them into revenue-paying tracts. In 1960, the government realized about Rs3 million from this provision.³⁸

The land reforms allowed farmers to have their lands valued in PIUs, up to a maximum of 36,000 PIUs. The PIU is 'estimated as a measure of the gross value per acre of land by type of soil and was, therefore, seen as a measure of land productivity'.³⁹ However, the measurement of the PIUs was based on pre-partition revenue settlements, which substantially under-reported the true value of the land. Thus, even if we take the 1959 PIU as the correct measure of productivity, the 36,000 limit was far greater than the allotted ceiling of 500 acres of irrigated land. For example, it has been calculated that in the irrigated areas of Sindh the PIU per acre would have been about 20. This meant that each individual could own at least 1,800 acres according to the law which limited holding to 500 acres.⁴⁰ (For a note on PIUs, see Appendix 3.1.).

Mahmood Hasan Khan sums up his evaluation of the reforms as follows:

It is now evident that the land reforms of 1959 could not have reduced the feudal power of landlords. For one thing, the generous ceiling on individual holdings, with transfers and exemptions, defined as they were in PIUs, left the concentration of land in the hands of landlords. If we accept that the average retained area by the so-called affected landlords was the *de-facto* ceiling, then its limit was 7,489 acres in the Punjab, 1,659 acres in Sindh, and the average for the country was 4,033 acres. Further, almost three-quarters of resumed land, at least in the Punjab, was uncultivated and untenanted. This meant that the amount of land available for redistribution (and remember by sale) was even more limited. Further, landlord-tenant relations

were left unchanged, to be governed by the tenancy acts passed in the early fifties and to be supervised by the revenue service.⁴¹

3.2.2 The Bhutto Reforms of 1972

The 1972 reforms were different from those of 1959 in many respects. Firstly, the philosophy behind the Bhutto reforms was based on the social democratic leanings of the Pakistan People's Party. In March 1972, Bhutto gave a speech in which he said that his land reforms would 'effectively break up the iniquitous concentrations of landed wealth, reduce income disparities, increase production, reduce unemployment, streamline the administration of land revenue and agricultural taxation, and truly lay down the foundations of a relationship of honour and mutual benefit between the landowner and tenant'.⁴² The Manifesto of the People's Party laid the premise for this action by stating that 'the break up of the large estates to destroy the feudal landowners is a national necessity that will have to be carried through by practical measures'.⁴³

The main features of the reforms are shown in Table 3.1. A few features distinguished the 1972 reforms from the earlier ones. While ceilings had been further lowered in 1972 and a number of exemptions removed, possibly the most prominent feature of the reforms was that, unlike in 1959, land resumed from landowners would not receive any compensation, and this land was to be distributed free to landless tenants. In addition, all those peasants who had acquired land under the 1959 reforms and had dues outstanding, had their dues written off and were not required to make any further payments.

Of the land declared to be above the ceiling by the landowners, after they had made generous use of the possibilities for getting around the imposition, only 42 per cent was resumed in the Punjab, while the figure in the Sindh was 59 per cent. In all, 0.6 million acres were resumed, far

less than the 1959 figure and constituting only 0.001 per cent of the total farm area in the country.⁴⁴

The problem of the evaluation of the Produce Index Units arose once again. The ceiling of the land was defined both in area and PIUs, and the landowner could retain the larger. However, Mahmood Hasan Khan writes that

the most serious problem of defining the ceiling in PIUs was that their values had remained unchanged, while almost everything affecting their value had changed drastically in most areas of the Indus Basin. The produce value of an area of land was being grossly underestimated in the Indus Basin, thanks to changes in prices, cropping intensities and patterns, irrigation, etc.⁴⁵

The result was that with 12,000 PIUs one could get away with 400 acres in the Punjab and 480 in Sindh. Moreover, with other exemptions for tubewells and tractors, a family could have retained up to 932 irrigated acres in the Punjab and 1,120 in Sindh!⁴⁶ (See also Appendix 3.1.)

Although a lot of propaganda was issued about the success of the 1972 reforms, as the resumed land was far less than in 1959, only 50,548 persons benefited from the redistribution of 308,390 acres during 1972–8. Only 1 per cent of the landless tenants and small owners benefited by these measures. Table-3.3 shows that, of the land resumed in 1959, 6 per cent still needs to be distributed even after 38 years, and 39 per cent of the area resumed under the 1972 reforms is still held by the government despite the presence of a large number of landless cultivators.

3.3 Summary and Further Reading

3.3.1 Summary

It seems that the technological package that resulted in the Green Revolution in the mid-1960s was focused on the more well-to-do farmers in the more prosperous regions. This is factually correct, but fails to highlight the externalities and other repercussions of this important process. The demonstration effect of using the technological package was substantial, but more importantly, a supposedly simple technological intervention let loose many economic and social processes, resulting in migration, labour displacement, the formation of small towns, skilled labour power, and a host of other political outcomes. Our evaluation of the 1959 and 1972 land reforms, however, shows that they failed to make substantial changes in the landowning structure of the country. Shahid Javed Burki argues that the 1959 reforms created the enterprising middle farmers – a view that is contested by Hamza Alavi, who argues that landlordism became more established and entrenched. Of course, given the hold of the landowning class on government and its

institutions, this is not very surprising. The huge loopholes that existed in the 1959 reforms to make intra-family and intra-household transfers meant that the landowning structure remained largely unaltered. Hence, effective land reform in Pakistan will continue to be a problem. Nevertheless, we show in the next two chapters that, even if formal land reforms are not undertaken in Pakistan, other social and economic processes can achieve similar results. Smaller landholdings and more capitalist lines of agricultural production have developed despite a lack of adequate land reform. Demographic and economic changes over the last twenty years have resulted in evolving a different pattern of ownership and production than in the past. While these processes are not a substitute for land reform, it is important to realize their contribution towards achieving somewhat similar ends.

3.3.2 Further Reading

Amongst the books on the two topics covered in this chapter, the following are recommended: Khan, Mahmood Hasan, *The Economics of the Green Revolution in Pakistan*, Praeger, New York, 1975; Khan, Mahmood Hasan, *Underdevelopment and Agrarian Structure in Pakistan*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1981; Stevens, Robert D., et al., (eds.), *Rural Development in Bangladesh and Pakistan*, University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1976; Ali, Karamat (ed.), *Pakistan: The Political Economy of Rural Development*, Vanguard, Lahore, 1986; Hussain, Akmal, *Strategic Issues in Pakistan's Economic Policy*, Progressive Publishers, Lahore, 1988; Ahmed, Viqar and Rashid Amjad, *The Management of Pakistan's Economy, 1947–82*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1984; and Nabi, Ijaz, et al., *The Agrarian Economy of Pakistan: Issues and Policies*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1986.

Table 3.3
Progress of implementation of land reforms up to June 1994 (hectares)

Province	Area resumed	Area disposed of	Balance	Persons benefiting
1959 reforms				
Punjab	511,244	505,082	6,162	109,889
Sindh	346,307	300,091	46,216	46,131
NWFP	112,108	97,287	14,821	24,314
Balochistan	53,268	53,196	72	6,221
Total	1,022,927	955,656	67,271	186,555
1972 reforms				
Punjab	121,593	94,583	27,010	36,017
Sindh	112,920	72,477	40,442	17,167
NWFP	57,415	55,122	2,293	12,811
Balochistan	189,316	73,755	115,562	5,506
Total	481,244	295,937	185,307	71,501

Source: Government of Pakistan, *Agricultural Statistics, 1993–94*, Islamabad, 1995, p. 129.