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## Land Reforms in Pakistan: A Case Study of Ayub Khan's and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Agrarian Policies



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**Abstract:** *This paper examines the progress and effectiveness of land reforms in Pakistan, with a particular focus on the agrarian reforms introduced by Ayub Khan (1959) and the Reform packages introduced by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1972 and 1977. It situates these policies within Pakistan's inherited land tenure structure and argues that, despite persistent, state-led attempts to mitigate the effects of land concentration and improve rural land equity, the reforms produced limited redistribution due to political constraints, administrative shortcomings, and opposition from the elite class. The reforms of 1959 under Ayub Khan imposed ceilings on 500 irrigated and 1,000 unirrigated acres, thereby allowing the resumption and redistribution of surplus holdings, but gaps in implementation and the ability of powerful landholders to effectively limit their reach meant these reforms did not fully address entrenched rural hierarchies, so that entrenched rural hierarchies remained largely intact. Bhutto's reforms in 1972 lowered these ceilings and added more concrete protections for the tenants and cultivators, bringing in legal safeguards and recognizing occupancy and cultivation claims, but landlord evasion, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and legal uncertainties limited enforcement and lessened the impact. The 1977 reforms package further tightened the ceilings (100 irrigated and 200 unirrigated acres), keeping in view the aim of intensifying the redistribution process, but unremitting corruption and continuing resistance from landed elites limited the achievement of its goals. In sum, the paper concludes that while Pakistan's land reforms established important legal and policy precedents and indicated a clear state intent towards agrarian equity, they did not significantly shake long-standing patterns of land concentration. Consequently, land reform remains a most important but unresolved feature of the wider debates on rural development, governance, and inequality.*

**Keywords:** Legal provisions, land reforms, rural development, agrarian policy, Ayub Khan, Bhutto reforms, tenancy rights, rural inequality, land governance, bureaucracy

### Introduction

Agricultural land reform in Pakistan has been a central issue in the country's history, deeply embedded in its economic structure, class relations, and rural development policies. Debates on land reform issues were profoundly

affected by the 1970 Hashtnagar Peasant Uprising, in which peasant communities rose in search of equitable land distribution, thereby revealing old antagonisms between peasants and landowners. This study examines land reforms and their impact on Pakistan's rural landscape.

The initial portion of the paper outlines the agrarian reforms of Ayub Khan, highlighting that these policies consolidated a hierarchical land ownership structure that marginalized peasant farmers. The rising discontent that led to the Hashtnagar Uprising could be attributed, to some extent, to the impact of these policies. The uprising became an important focus of resistance, leading to the partial breakdown of old feudal structures in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly NWFP) and raising stronger demands for a better share of land.

In the wake of the insurrection, successive administrations introduced a series of post-revolution land reform measures. While a number of these policies were aimed at addressing peasant complaints, they were often inadequate at dissolving the influence of powerful landowners. This study also examines the usefulness of those measures in the struggle against land inequality and analyses the wider implications for agrarian politics in Pakistan. The Hashtnagar Peasant Uprising, Sindh Hari Committee, and Anjuman-e-Mazareen (tenant association in Sindh and Punjab) advocacy for reforms had a lasting impact on the state policy and the orientation of land reform movements, beyond ephemeral legislative reforms. These developments underscore the crucial importance of peasant resistance in Pakistan's agrarian development and inform subsequent debates on rural poverty and landlessness, as well as on agricultural sustainability.

After independence of Pakistan in 1947, the agrarian structure was still very much stratified due to the colonial land-tenure system of the British Raj under Zamindari, Ryotwari and Mahalwari. Due to feudal landlords' continued political and economic hegemony, land ownership remained concentrated in a tiny elite class. Large landowners remained to have authority over rural tenants. Due to flaws and opposition from the elite, post-independence land reform initiatives in Pakistan, including those led by Ayub Khan (1959) and Bhutto (1972 & 1977), failed to implement tenancy rights and redistribute land. Since the Patwari system (village-level land administration) continued to permit bureaucratic corruption and

landlord control, the revenue systems of the British period also influenced rural government. Peasant landlessness rose in spite of several land reform initiatives, and landed elites continued to have political and economic influence which continues to affect Pakistan's agricultural conflicts and rural socioeconomic disparities today. (Rahman, 1997)

### **Land Reforms by Ayub Khan**

When Ayub Khan imposed martial rule in 1958, he set out to change Pakistan's socioeconomic structure. Agricultural land reform, which intended to restrict the long-standing feudal structure and promote rural economic development, was one of the main pillars of his modernization plan (Ameen, 2023). Martial Law Regulation No. 64 of 1959 brought about these changes, which were a component of a broader development framework that also included infrastructural initiatives like the Green Revolution and industrialization (Rahman, 1997).

Eliminating absentee landlordism, promoting self-cultivation and fairness by allocating extra land to smallholders, and boosting agricultural output and rural development were the main objectives of the 1959 land reforms. Limits of 500 acres of irrigated and 1,000 acres of unirrigated land per landowner were set up to accomplish this (Rahman, 1997). The government was supposed to reclaim any land beyond these boundaries and divide it among small farmers and landless tenants. Notably, landlords received compensation in the form of bonds, in contrast to subsequent changes (Khan et al., 2001). Of the 2.5 million acres that the government has resumed, 2.3 million acres were allocated to small farmers and 183,371 renters (Rahman, 1997). However, the usefulness of this resumed property was restricted since a significant chunk of it was unusable or lacked infrastructure. Reforms theoretically promised tenants protection and secure tenure, but in practice landlords still exploited them. In order to get around the restrictions, they either registered assets under various names or transferred holdings to family members. Moreover, mechanized farming, HYV seed acceptance, chemical fertilizers, and irrigation

network development were all common throughout the green revolution period, especially when the Tarbela and Mangla dams were built (Ameen, 2023). Consequently, the creation of the Agricultural Development Bank of Pakistan (ADBP), which facilitated ease of access to loans and capital, contributed to the increase of 15% in agricultural GDP during the regime of Ayub Khan (Khan et al., 2001).

Despite these apparent achievements Ayub Khan's reforms ultimately failed to dismantle the entrenched feudal structure in Pakistan. One of the main problems was the loopholes in the implementation as landlords were able to maintain de facto control over large areas of holdings by transferring ownership either to family members or assets registered under multiple names (Malik et al., 2014). A considerable degree of class bias was also apparent, when much of the resumed lands were distributed to civil and military officers at the expense of what was truly landless peasants. This practice coupled with the commercialization of agriculture that more generally resulted in the wealthier elite farmers benefiting at the expense of the traditional tenure (Ameen, 2023).

In addition, political patronage and bureaucratic inefficiencies impeded the effectiveness of the reforms severely. Scholars have called the efforts "half-backed," lacking the revolutionary zeal to break feudal control. The bureaucracy, which was often interlinked with the landed aristocracy, proved to be incapable of achieving redistributive objectives (Malik et al, 2014). Furthermore, the reforms were selectively applied at a regional level as in the East Pakistan where land ceilings were paradoxically increased which were beneficial to large landowners instead of reducing inequality (Ameen, 2023).

The wearing a way of tenancy rights also added to the problem. Mechanization caused by Green Revolution resulted in mass eviction of tenant farmers especially in Punjab and Sindh where landlords were eager to reap direct profit by implementing the new technologies. This process triggered the country's rural-urban migration and the rapid growth of informal

settlements or katchi abadis in urban areas. Lastly, the reforms were often a surface level as only about 3 per cent of total cultivable land was actually resumed (Rahman, 1997). In many cases, peasants had to pay the landlords for the land they were given, thus turning what was publicly billed as a peasant-friendly reform into a secret subsidy for the landowning class.

The legacy of Ayub Khan's reforms is controversial, despite the fact that they were revolutionary for their era, especially in setting land limits and establishing rural banking infrastructure. Ayub's strategy was moderate and accommodating than the subsequent reformations of Bhutto that attempted to restrict the acquisition of property in the military and civil service and take away land without offering compensation (Rashid, 2007). This cautious strategy was condemned as a Band-Aid solution perpetuating the landed elite's sociopolitical hegemony (Rahman, 1997). In the end, the changes failed to significantly change patterns of land ownership. The rural economy in Pakistan remained marked by inequalities; feudal domination prevailed, and the agricultural system remained substantially unchanged (Malik et al., 2014).

### **Land Reforms of 1972 Under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto**

Our rich-poor land imbalance in Pakistan could be traced back to colonial land distribution policies that have institutionalized vast land masses among the elite, and as a result, created a strong landlord class, known as jagirdari. This feudal arrangement continued even after independence and stultified socioeconomic progress (Zahoor, 2018). The earlier reforms, particularly those introduced in 1959 during Ayub Khan's era, were unsuccessful due to elite interference and the imposition of flexible land ceilings that neutralized their impact (Phanwar, 2008). These initial attempts, however rhetoric-laden, lacked the necessary institutional enforcement mechanisms to stir up the existing power structures so as to keep control in the hands of landowners.

Inspired by socialist values and a mandate from the people for equity, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto

initiated the Land Reforms of 1972 an attempt to guarantee the rights of tenants, give land to landless peasants and curb feudal power (Land Reforms Act, 1972). The overall goal of the Land Reforms of 1972, which was carried out under Martial Law Regulation No. 115, was to abolish centuries-old land consolidation practices. These measures amounted to a radical ideological commitment to discard the feudal hierarchies and to develop a more egalitarian agrarian structure. Under the facade of social justice, Bhutto's reforms were part of a whole package of socialist reforms, which included nationalization of banking institutions and other commercial ventures (Malik et al., 2014). The objective was to give land and rights of ownership to the peasantry, but the main purpose was to empower this group and reduce the existing economic differences (Zahoor, 2018). However, despite the utopian rationale behind it, the reforms faced all kinds of obstacles during the implementation process, such as bureaucratic and aristocratic

opposition, and thus that led to the decline of their lasting effectiveness.

### **Legal Provisions of the 1972 Reforms**

The Land Reforms Regulation, 1972 imposed the following key provisions:

#### **i. Ceiling on Land Ownership**

The regulation imposed strict ceilings on the amount of agricultural land a person could legally own. Specifically, no individual was permitted to own more than 150 acres of irrigated land and 300 acres of unirrigated land. Alternatively, the total holding was limited to land valued at 12,000 Produce Index Units (PIUs), a measurement reflecting agricultural productivity. This aimed to prevent land concentration and promote equitable distribution.

#### **ii. Tenant Rights**

The legislation ensured the interests of real cultivators. Any person who had continuously cultivated land before December 20, 1971, was vested with the legal ownership rights to the land. As a result, such tenants were no longer at the mercy of arbitrary eviction by landlords and

were transformed into landowners, securing long-term security of tenure.

#### **iii. Void Transactions**

In order to enforce the ceiling limits, the legislation invalidated all real estate transactions conducted subsequent to March 1, 1967, whenever such transactions were undertaken with the intention of evading the statutory ownership ceilings. This included transfers, gifts and sales where the sole purpose was to avoid land reform laws. The law made null and void those transactions, all intended to block large landholders from holding on to surplus land by legally allocating land to family members or associates.

#### **iv. Government Officials' Limit**

Special provisions were made for the government employees in an attempt to control the misuse of authority. Civil servants could own no more than 100 acres of agricultural land, regardless of its type or productivity. This limitation was intended to maintain equity and avoid the usurpation of influential positions for the accumulation of large landholdings.

#### **v. Redistribution Focus**

The regulation stressed redistribution of surplus land as an instrument to foster social justice while landless tenants and smallholder cultivators who lacked secure land tenure were mainly beneficiaries. Moreover, speculative transfers not enacted by actual intent of cultivation, or done for the sole purpose of profit were strictly banned, thus highlighting the statutory commitment towards substantive land reform and agrarian equity. These provisions reflected Bhutto's insistence on the abolition of 'exploitation of the tiller by the landlord' and also reorientation of the agricultural economy on equitable lines (Phanwar, 2008).

The landed aristocracy opposed the introduction of these measures despite their progressive nature. Benami transfers to family members allowed landowners to avoid limitations on possession of property, and land commissioners were plagued with incompetence and corruption

(Zahoor, 2018). Enforcement was also affected by judicial sympathy for landlords and legal loopholes, and courts sometimes upheld landlord claims, thereby undermining government initiatives (Phanwar, 2008). Enforcement difference was seen in various regions: Baluchistan largely remained untouched due to tribesmen resistance and lack of governance, while Punjab and Sindh have achieved limited success. Concurrently, many renters were forced to enter into informal agreements, which prevented them from enjoying the ownership benefits promised by the reforms (Zahoor, 2018). Subsequent administrations, particularly the military dictatorships, were incapable of the resolve to enforce the changes and began to settle down with the feudal interests.

### **Positive and Negative Outcomes**

The results of Bhutto's land reforms were mixed:

Positive outcomes of the reforms included an improvement in the socio-political visibility of landless peasants, as a segment of them gained access to land. Moreover, tenancy reforms were carried out, which strengthened legal safeguards and promoted agricultural investment among smallholders. These reforms also revitalized peasant movements, which later became crucial in increasing the political involvement of the labor of the rural population.

Despite some progressive reforms, land redistribution efforts in Pakistan had many constraints and shortcomings, chiefly because of the limited extent of implementation and the extent to which feudal order remained largely intact. It can be explained that the stagnation in agricultural productivity has been caused by the glaring absence of indispensable ancillary inputs, in particular credit, irrigation infrastructure, and modern technological innovations (Zahoor, 2018). Moreover, resistance of the elite class and deficiencies in administration facilitated the persistence of domination by the elite class, such as landlords, over large sizes of land holdings (Malik et al, 2014). Consequently, rural disparity continued to prevail and exploitative conditions continued

to prevail for tenant farmers in many parts of Pakistan (Salim, 2008).

Feudal domination persisted in rural Pakistan despite the existence of legal tools, as discussed by Zahoor (2018) and Phanwar (2008). This is because the structural control of land remained concentrated. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's 1972 Land Reforms was a daring and ideologically motivated effort to abolish feudalism and improve the conditions of peasants. Although the reforms were successful in redistributing some property and bringing tenant rights into the legal sphere, their revolutionary potential was severely limited by elite opposition, judicial prejudice, administrative shortcomings, and a lack of political will. Feudal systems mostly persisted, and the changes were insufficient to bring about agricultural justice on a national level.

### **Land Reforms of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, 1977**

After agricultural reforms in 1959 and 1972, the 1977 land reforms by Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto were the third major attempt towards agrarian change in Pakistan. The objectives of the Land Reforms Act, 1977 (Federal Act II of 1977) were to improve tenant rights, reduce landlords' exploitation of legal provisions, and directly address entrenched land inequity. This reform was a further step towards the overall political goal of economic equality held by Bhutto and was based on his socialist ideological framework.

Bhutto tried to enforce tougher regulations after previous reforms failed to deliver significant changes to the agricultural sector. The inadequacies of the 1972 reforms, through which the feudal landlords retained their power by evading their obligations by e.g., fictitious transfer of ownership of land property, etc. (Land Reforms Act, 1977). To overcome these deficiencies and effect good amount of structural transformation, it was envisaged that the 1977 Act should be confined to corrective measures.

### **Core Provisions of the Land Reforms Act, 1977**

#### **a) Land Ceiling Restrictions**

To encourage fair allocation, the allowable land ownership cap was drastically lowered by the Land Reforms Act of 1977. The upper limit was reduced to 100 acres for irrigated property and to 200 acres for unirrigated land. In contrast to the previous policy, which permitted landowners to retain up to 300 acres of unirrigated land and 150 acres of irrigated land, this was a significant change. The Land Reforms Act of 1977 sought to alleviate land concentration and guarantee a more equitable distribution of agricultural resources.

#### **b) Government Acquisition and Redistribution**

The government was supposed to purchase any excess land in surplus of the specified limit and then divide it among landless tenants. According to the Land Reforms Act of 1977, this provision signified the shift from voluntary land yields to compulsory involvement on government grounds.

#### **c) Tenant Rights and Ownership Security**

Ownership rights were given to tenants who had always cultivated the property. The influence of absentee landlords was reduced, and the security of tenure of tenant farmers was increased by prohibiting arbitrary evictions.

#### **d) Restrictions on Land Transactions**

In order to avoid circumventing the land ceilings, the Act put severe constraints upon inheritance, sales and land transfers. So the state can investigate suspicious transactions and invalidate them (Land Reforms Act, 1977).

#### **Implementation Challenges**

Despite its radical goals, implementation was fraught with obstacles:

##### **a) Elite Resistance and Legal Manipulation**

Feudal landowners blocked or delayed the changes through their power in the judicial and bureaucratic institutions. The creation of fraudulent land transfers to relatives and the raising of constitutional challenges to the Act on grounds of alleged infringement of property rights were common strategies.

#### **b) Judicial Obstacles**

The legitimacy of the act was examined by the Supreme Court's Shariat Appellate Bench and the Federal Shariat Court (FSC). The validity and clarity of the regulation were further undermined by landlords who claimed that it went against Islamic teachings respecting private property.

#### **c) Administrative Corruption**

Corruption in land tax agencies hindered the implementation of land reform. Due to bureaucratic collaboration, many land titles were forged, and redistributed land often stayed in the hands of the original aristocracy (Gang & Qiumei, 2022).

#### **Socio-Economic Impact**

These land reform reforms had many beneficial results, especially by creating a legal framework that aimed at weakening feudal dominance. Several tenant farmers had been given the right of ownership as a progressive step towards a more equitable distribution of land. Additionally, the reforms brought out increased national consciousness about all-pervading agrarian inequities pervading the country.

Despite all these efforts, the land reforms suffered from serious shortcomings and eventually failed in major ways: large-scale redistribution did not take place, and there was little to no improvement in agricultural productivity. The implementation of these reforms showed regional differences, with relatively better results in Punjab and Sindh, while Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa showed less progress (Gang & Qiumei, 2022).

Although the 1977 Land Reforms' legislative framework and goal were unquestionably pro-peasant, they were unable to bring about significant change in real life. Effective implementation was hampered by the strong landed aristocracy, who were supported by bureaucratic and judicial supporters. The 1977 reforms, however, are still important because they established the most drastic legal restrictions on landholding in Pakistani history, upheld the idea that the state should redistribute land, and sparked ongoing discussion and

activism about land rights, particularly among leftist and progressive groups. Therefore, elite opposition and the state's inability to execute the changes considerably limited their symbolic impact.

#### Comparative Analysis of Ayub Khan's and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Land Reforms

Ayub Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto both used land reform as a major state project, but they pursued it with different political logics, legal designs, and (ultimately) different trajectories of implementation. A comparative view shows that Ayub's reforms were modernization-oriented and administratively cautious, while Bhutto's reforms were redistribution-oriented and politically radical in intent, yet both struggled against elite resistance, legal-constitutional constraints, and the structural power of large landholders.

#### 1) Political purpose and governing philosophy

Ayub Khan's 1959 reforms were introduced under a "developmental" agenda that aimed to modernize agriculture without fully rupturing the rural power structure. The aim of the policy was to ameliorate the most obvious excesses of landlordism, but the policy also tried to maintain political stability by accommodating powerful landed elites. By contrast, Bhutto's reforms were couched in a wider program of egalitarian reform, often described as Islamic socialism, which made an explicit links between agrarian restructuring and social justice and peasant empowerment.

This ideological divergence not only influenced the ceilings imposed upon the enforcement mechanisms but also determined the nature of the political conflict engendered by each reform.

#### 2) Legal ceilings and the "ambition gap"

A clear difference appears in the stringency of land ceilings.

- Ayub Khan (1959): The West Pakistan Land Reforms Regulation (MLR 64 of 1959) fixed ceilings at 500 acres irrigated and 1,000 acres unirrigated.
- Z. A. Bhutto (1972): The Land Reforms

Regulation (MLR 115 of 1972) lowered ceilings to 150 acres irrigated and 300 acres unirrigated (also linked to PIU-based valuation).

- Z. A. Bhutto (1977): The Land Reforms Act (1977) reduced ceilings further to 100 acres irrigated and 200 acres unirrigated (again with PIU provisions).

This progression shows Bhutto's increasing redistributive ambition as espoused in policy documents. Nevertheless, what empirical results have emerged from implementation show that tighter policy ceilings did not necessarily lead to commensurately larger redistributive outcomes, as compliance was dependent on availability and reliability of land records, capacity of bureaucracy and political will (Brohi, 2010).

#### 3) Compensation, coercion, and the state-landlord bargain

Another important contrast is how each regime positioned the state against landlords.

- Under Ayub, the 1959 framework imposed ceilings but remained relatively "managed" in approach; the regulation created a controlled mechanism of resumption and redistribution while still operating within an order that did not fully sever the state-elite relationship.
- Under Bhutto, the 1972 reforms were notably sharper on the question of power: the program resumed land beyond ceilings and aimed at redistribution to tenants and small owners, while also redefining tenant-landlord relations in law. The 1972 reform package is described as resuming excess land and redistributing it to tenants and small owners, alongside stronger protections against eviction and changes to tenant obligations.
- In 1977, the Bhutto government introduced another change with "new significant features," including the reduction of ceilings to 100 irrigated acres, compensation in bonds, and distribution to tenants without charge; it also reports 1.8 million acres resumed and 0.9 million redistributed among 13,143 persons. (Ahmad & Amjad, 1984)

So, while Ayub's reforms suggest a

bargaining model (reform with elite accommodation), Bhutto's reforms moved closer to a confrontational model (reform against entrenched privilege), even if later political events interrupted enforcement.

#### **4) Tenant rights and "who counted" as a beneficiary**

Both regimes claimed to support cultivators, but Bhutto's reforms more directly embedded tenant protections as enforceable legal provisions and as a political identity ("tiller" and "landless peasant"). The 1972 regulation explicitly framed land reform as improving peasant welfare and preventing the concentration of wealth.

However, a key administrative issue appears that how eligibility was determined in practice: the 1977 program's eligibility was linked to formal revenue registration and cultivating possession during specific periods, which structurally disadvantaged those excluded from records (including many tenants and rural women). This highlights a persistent problem across both eras: legal inclusion did not guarantee administrative inclusion, especially where land records were weak or manipulable.

#### **5) Implementation constraints**

In both periods, the landed elites maintained considerable ability to circumvent ceilings and influence outcomes. Even when reforms were couched in the rhetoric of "land to the tiller," the state reserved wide discretion over allotment. It quotes the government "retaining absolute discretion in selection of grantees." This discretion is important because it makes redistribution from rights-based entitlement to state-administered favor, which is open to patronage. Bhutto's 1977 reform trajectory is also instructive for how political rupture can overpower policy design: the military government that came to power in July 1977 suspended implementation, and later amendments made exemptions; and it provides evidence that subsequent governments failed to revive implementation. (Brohi, 2010)

#### **6) Outcomes and legacy**

Empirical analyses suggest that both sets of reforms triggered marginal structural

transformation, given the magnitude of the agrarian hierarchy of Pakistan. In the case of Ayub's 1959 land-reform initiative, Brohi (2010) documents the initiative as having restored around 2.5million acres and redistributed some 2.3million acres to the tenants and smallholders. Notwithstanding the scale of the program, the reforms were inadequate to permanently break down cases of entrenched rural power relations. Bhutto's land-reform program, by contrast, is often claimed to have induced greater depths of political mobilization and more redistributive intent; nevertheless, the program was undermined by two key factors. First, political disruption, especially after the 1977 military takeover, disrupted the continuity and implementation of reform measures. Second, judicial reversal was also decisive: The Shariat Appellate Bench and the Supreme Court, through the Qazalbash Waqf litigation, declared key components of the 1972 and 1977 land reform frameworks to be inconsistent with Islamic law, thus greatly diminishing the legal possibility and subsequent viability of ceiling-based land redistribution (Qazalbash, 1990).

#### **Overall comparison**

Ayub's land reforms of 1959 were marked by increased landholding ceilings, a modernity framing, and partial redistribution, owing to their intention to manage the problem of rural inequality without the fundamental destabilization of elite alliances. In contrast, Bhutto's land reforms of 1972 and 1977 had introduced lower ceilings with a more pronounced orientation towards tenants (and explicit egalitarianism) with an attempt to distribute redistribution with increased force, however, this was interrupted by political upheaval, and bound by legal challenges, and subsequent judicial judgements weakened the overall reform architecture. Ultimately, as much as Ayub's reforms were institution-building and productivity-focused in a politically conservative sense and as much as Bhutto's reforms were politically ambitious and socially radical in intent, they were occupied with the same structural problem: The rural political economy, in which landownership, bureaucracy

and political power were most deeply intertwined, meant that the most decisive and repeatedly weakest link in the reform process was the capacity to enforce effectively.

## Conclusion

Pakistan's experience with land reform shows a continuous gap between the ideal of reform measures and implementation. The reforms commenced on Ayub Khan's initiative in 1959 and continued by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto promulgating in 1972 and 1977 aimed at mitigating the concentration of land by imposing ceilings, resumption of surplus holdings and redistribution. In Bhutto's time, special focus was also rendered towards strengthening the position of the tenants and the rural poor. Nevertheless, in spite of these stated goals, the goals of deep transformation in the agrarian power relations were still limited as the instruments of enforcement were constantly undermined by elite resistance, loopholes in administrative machinery, poor land record keeping, the favouring of particular land and the ability of big land holders to circumvent the land ceilings through legal and informal routes.

Comparatively, Ayub Khan's reforms had a measured, modernity-oriented character that brought some land ceilings and means of redistributing land but at the same time left significant room for landlord influence and evasion; as a result of this, a significant portion of landless peasants did not benefit from it. Bhutto's reforms, by contrast, had an overtly redistributive character and imposed lower ceilings; they faced even stronger political and institutional opposition. Legal challenges, bureaucratic capture, pervasive corruption and the later political disruptions limited results and delayed a definitive break-out from feudal domination. Accordingly, while these phases of reform set important legal precedents and informed the national dialogue on agrarian justice, they ended up failing to destroy inequalities in landholding structures along with any total success in protecting the tenants.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from such analytical inquiry is that the implementation of meaningful land reform

cannot be limited simply to the articulation of reduced ceilings or the announcement of redistribution. Rather, it requires the growth of strong governance capacities that are capable of implementing the sorts of reforms with the levels of transparency and equity required. In the absence of the adequate land administration and up-to-date recording and strong institutions insulated against elite appropriation, reform is merely symbolic and subject to reversal. Consequently, any future reform agenda for agriculture needs to include a preference for credible modernization of land records, as well as a strictness around transparency and institutionalization of implementations mechanisms, to guarantee that policies aiming at equity are effectively translated into effective changes in ownership, productivity and the livelihoods of the members of rural communities.

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