

REDUCING RURAL POVERTY

By
M.H. Panhwar

There is thinking among some circles and aid-agencies that rural poverty can be reduced by getting tenant-farmers (Haris) security in matters of tenancy act and its enforcement or amendments in the existing acts or enacting new ones to improve his lot. Whatever be the merits of the case, one important factor is always ignored, that though Hari feels secure as tenant on the land, but financially his income is less than that of paid farm labour, in terms of his inputs as man-days or months. The guarantees under the act can only apply if there is chronic un-employment, as then he is better off than an idea labourer employed casually. The other things which can help in reduction of rural poverty are:

- Self cultivation pays more to land owner, due to higher yields than tenant cultivation and therefore he can pay more to labour and engage more persons.
- Value added crops can not be grown successfully in the Zamindar-Hari system as Haris have little training beyond growing conventional crops. Employment of labour and personal supervision has always given better returns per unit of land and water as, employer or his managers have better know how than the tenant.
- An inheritant defect of Zamindar-Hari system of cultivation is low productivity, as system is not geared to optimising of labour efficiency and output per unit of labour hour.
- Zamindar-Hari system is manageable only for conventional field crops, needing low technology, low supervision and low returns per unit of land and water.
- Employment opportunities per unit of land and water are more in self-cultivation of value added crops and therefore reduction in rural unemployment and poverty.
- Climate of Sindh as well as the whole Pakistan shows similarities with that in California (USA), the leading area for value added crops in the World and it also has serious problems of water shortage, land quality and crop management, as compared to Pakistan. With proper emphasis on

agriculture technology, we can achieve multi-fold financial returns per unit of land and water, as well as labour employment.

- The present rural poverty is geared to direct unemployment and also unemployment under disguise in the villages. Cropping patterns, which create more employment opportunities are an answer to reduction in rural poverty and there is no alternative to it, as extra land and water are no more available for low productivity conventional crops.
- It is a general fashion to blame big feudal land owners and call for land reforms. It is not realised that Zamindars having 8-10 family members at the time of the Ayub's first land reform in 1959, have now multiplied ten-folds and even more and even the biggest land owners of Sindh have less than 50 acres to each member of family. With the conventional crops, they are not able to even educate their children properly. The Pajeros (Mitsubishi) or Land-cruiser (Toyota) both vehicle's price is more than Rs.5.0 millions (US\$ 0.1 million) they own are against heavy loans and serve to attract voter by apparent show of their wealth.
- It is little realised that more than 90% of agriculture land in Sindh is mortgaged with the banks against loans for development and cultivation and owners have difficulty in clearing the loans in view of low productivity of their own poverty.
- The future land reforms should aim at increasing productivity and low productivity should be considered as waste of land and water in the eyes of the government.
- It is the time that the government should realise the causes of rural poverty and build their own organisations for introducing, new and value added crops, on large scale to create new employment opportunities in rural areas and income per unit of land and water. Encouraging self-cultivation and training of university educated young persons as farm managers, supervisors and foremen can help in achieving these objectives.