# **STATUS ON LAND**



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## **PREAMBLE**

The guiding principle of the Land Policy of the Government of West Bengal is its determination to enhance the well being of the people of the State, particularly the well being of the working people, the poor, and the socially oppressed and to protect the environment for the benefit of this generation and generations to come. That is to say, whatever the specific use to which land is put, this Government is determined to make land use policy an instrument to improve the livelihood and living standards of the people, while protecting and conserving our rich agro-ecological and environmental heritage.

## THE STATUS OF LAND USE IN WEST BENGAL

At no time in West Bengal has the question of the rational use of land assumed the importance that it has today. The importance that the question has gained today is the consequence of years of socio-economic development and of a new agricultural order and the generation of new agrarian surpluses. West Bengal is poised for further and rapid advance into a new phase of industrial modernisation, urbanisation and diversification into different forms of nonagricultural economic activity.

# General Status of Land Use in West Bengal

Land use statistics in West Bengal at the Block and higher administrative levels are available by the standard nine-fold classification. These data are collected by the Department of Land and Land Reforms under the Establishment for an Agency for Reporting Agricultural Statistics (EARAS) Scheme. Under this scheme, plot-wise information on land use and cropping pattern are recorded by the amins and bhumisahayaks in 15 per cent of the mouzas in each block in the State. The final estimates of area are calculated by the Department of Agriculture.

The total reported area under different categories of land use in West Bengal in 2003-04 was 8.687 million hectares (see Table 1a). Tables 1a and 1b and Figure 1 show the division of land into different land use categories in the State and Districts of West Bengal and the comparative shares of these categories in West Bengal and India.

The main features of the data can be summarised as follows:

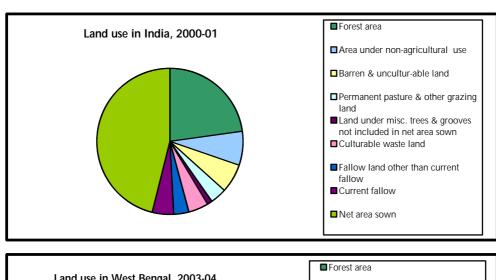
- 1. Net sown area (or area actually under cultivation) predominates greatly in the reported area of the State. The Share of net sown area in the total area reported is about 63 per cent. In India as a whole, by comparison, 46 per cent of total area is occupied by net sown area.
- 2. The share of fallow land, unculturable land and pastures in West Bengal is very low. It is noteworthy that four categories of land use namely, fallow other than current fallows, culturable waste land, permanent pasture and other grazing land and barren and unculturable land- constitute 17.6 per cent of land under different uses in India but only 1 per cent of land under different uses in West Bengal.

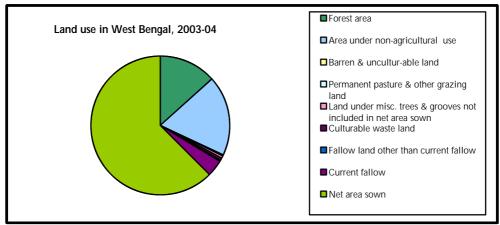
	Table	1a Area unc	der different	land use cate	egories, Wes	Table 1a Area under different land use categories, West Bengal, 2003-04 in '000 hectares	3-04 in '0	00 hectares		
Districts	Total area	Forest area	Area under non- agricultural use	Barren & unculturable land	Permanent pasture & other grazing land	Land under misc trees & groves not included in net area sown	Culturable waste land	Fallow land other than current fallow	Current	Net area sown
Darjeeling	325.47	124.58	33.79	4.93	0.91	1.94	1.38	3.80	11.15	143.00
Jalpaiguri	622.70	179.00	76.44	2.41	00.0	5.07	0.78	0.08	21.46	337.46
Cooch Behar	331.38	4.26	99.99	1.10	0.84	8.97	1.41	0.24	1.26	257.00
Uttar Dinajpur	312.47	0.58	30.55	0.22	60.0	3.23	0.13	0.62	4.47	272.58
Dakshin	221.91	0.93	25.61	0.21	0.01	19.0	0.05	60'0	1.15	193.22
Dinajpur										
Malda	371.05	1.68	84.06	0.00	0.00	3.01	0.09	0.30	49.65	232.26
Murshidabad	532.50	0.77	120.80	2.03	0.04	2.00	0.82	0.40	1.82	403.82
Birbhum	451.12	15.85	90.81	0.40	0.30	0.75	2.92	2.61	26.03	311.45
Barddhaman	698.74	22.27	182.62	2.38	0.62	3.01	9.84	3.33	8.04	466.63
Nadia	390.66	1.22	74.71	0.20	0.10	2.64	0.58	0.02	3.94	307.22
N 24 Parganas	386.52	00.00	117.96	0.00	0.00	8.71	0.00	0.00	2.40	257.45
Hooghly	312.22	0.53	80.54	0.97	0.11	2.30	1.62	0.14	0.84	225.17
Bankura	688.10	147.70	142.18	2.37	0.52	0.88	3.71	1.49	41.12	384.13
Purulia	625.48	75.05	84.75	4.31	0.65	0.82	6.36	3.69	110.71	339.14
Purba Medinipur	396.59	06.0	91.70	1.73	0.07	3.91	90.0	0.15	0.78	297.29
Paschim	928.58	169.69	146.07	2.44	0.65	6.46	4.19	3.82	29.98	565.28
Medinipur										
Howrah	138.68	0.00	43.77	0.75	0.14	0.74	0.14	1.11	4.92	87.11
S 24 Parganas	953.37	426.30	125.95	0.59	0.00	2.76	0.45	0.21	13.66	383.45
West Bengal	8687.54	1171.31	1608.97	27.04	5.05	57.87	34.50	22.13	333.38	5463.67

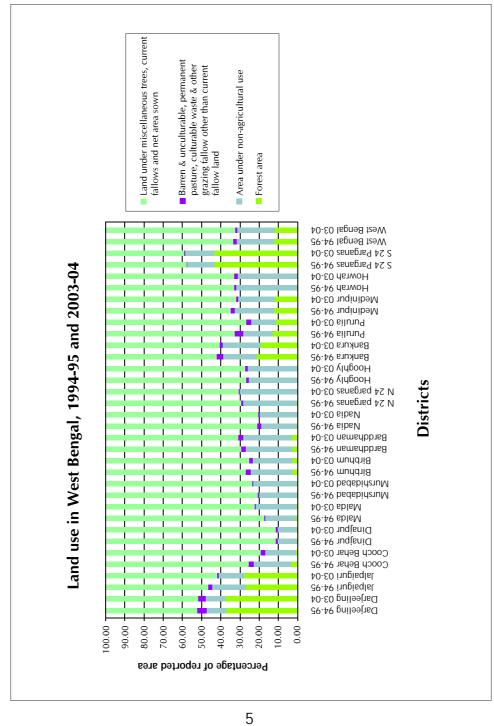
Table	1b Area un	der different	land use cate	egories, Wes	t Bengal, 200	3-04 as per	Table 1b Area under different land use categories, West Bengal, 2003-04 as percentage of reported area	orted area	
Districts	Forest area	Area under	Barren &	Permanent	Land under	Culturable	Fallow land	Current	Net area
		non-	unculturable	pasture &	misc. trees	waste land	other than	fallow	sown
		agricultural	land	other	& groves		current		
		nse		grazing land	not included		fallow		
					in net area				
					sown				
Darjeeling	38.28	10.38	1.51	0.28	09.0	0.42	1.17	3.43	43.94
Jalpaiguri	28.75	12.28	0.39	00.00	0.81	0.13	0.01	3.45	54.19
Cooch Behar	1.29	17.10	0.33	0.25	2.71	0.43	0.07	0.38	77.55
Uttar Dinajpur	0.19	9.78	0.07	0.03	1.03	0.04	0.20	1.43	87.23
Dakshin Dinajpur	0.42	11.54	60.0	00.00	0:30	0.01	0.04	0.52	87.07
Malda	0.45	22.65	00:00	00.00	0.81	0.02	80'0	13.38	62.60
Murshidabad	0.14	22.69	0.38	0.01	0.38	0.15	80'0	0.34	75.83
Birbhum	3.51	20.13	60:0	20.0	0.17	99'0	0.58	5.77	69.04
Barddhaman	3.19	26.14	0.34	60'0	0.43	1.41	0.48	1.15	66.78
Nadia	0.31	19.12	0.05	0.03	89.0	1015	0.01	1.01	78.64
N 24 Parganas	0.00	30.52	0.00	00'0	2.25	00'0	00'0	0.62	19.99
Hooghly	0.17	25.80	0.31	0.04	0.74	0.52	0.04	0.27	72.12
Bankura	21.46	20.66	0.34	80'0	0.13	0.54	0.22	5.98	55.82
Purulia	12.00	13.55	69.0	0.10	0.13	1.02	0.59	17.70	54.22
Purba Medinipur	0.23	23.12	0.44	0.02	66'0	0.02	0.04	0.20	74.96
Paschim	18.27	15.73	0.26	0.07	0.70	0.45	0.41	3.23	88.09
Medinipur									
Howrah	0.00	31.56	0.54	0.10	0.53	0.10	08'0	3.55	62.81
S 24 Parganas	44.72	13.21	0.06	0.00	0.29	0.05	0.02	1.43	40.22
West Bengal	13.48	18.52	0.31	90'0	0.67	0.40	0.25	3.84	62.89

					net area sown					
India	22.66	7.70	6.29	3.56	1.10	4.46	3.33	4.83	46.07	306.26

Figure 1 Land use pattern in India 2000-01 and West Bengal 2003-04







- 3. Fallows and unculturable land in the State are concentrated in specific regions of the State. The district level analysis shows that much of the barren and uncultivable land, culturable waste land and fallows other than current fallow is concentrated in six districts, Birbhum, Bankura, Darjeeling, Paschim Medinipur, Purulia and Barddhaman. Extensive tracts of flat land are, of course, not characteristic of the hilly areas of Darjiling District. In Barddhaman District, the unculturable land is likely to be concentrated in the coal-mining areas (such as Raniganj, Andal, Jamuria, Pandabeswar Blocks).
- 4. The area under forests is limited and concentrated regionally. Of the reporting area, 13.5 per cent is under forest (although, because of the methodology of date collection, this is likely to be and underestimate). As may be expected, forests are concentrated in the Western Districts of Bankura, West Medinipur and Purulia, in the estuarine areas of South 24 Parganas and in the Himalayan regions of Darjiling and Jalpaiguri.
- 5. Interestingly, the extent of land currently under non-agricultural uses is higher in West Bengal than in India. The comparative data show that the share of land under non-agricultural uses in West Bengal in 2003-04 was 18.5 per cent while the corresponding share for India was 7.7 per cent.
- 6. Environments that require special protection occur in all the different categories of land use. These include wetlands, different types of forest and scrub and the mangrove regions of the south, Himalayan forests, riparian tracts, coastal regions and water bodies.
- 7. An inventory of vacant and unutilised lands under all land categories is being compiled by the government. Such land may occur in any of the nine categories of land use. District Administrations have been asked to prepare such an inventory.

## Urban Areas

According to the Census of India, the total geographical area of West Bengal was 88752 sq km, and the total urban area was 3.7 per cent of the geographical

area in 2001. The regional pattern of urbanisation (Table 3) shows that urbanisation is concentrated in the southern districts of Howrah, North 24 Parganas, Barddhaman, Hugli and Nadia. In the rest of the State, urbanisation is low.

Although the Census data appear to underestimate the extent of urbanisation, the fact remains that further urbanisation and the creation of urban spaces in the State are likely to require the conversion of land from other uses.

Table 3 Urban area as percentage of total geographical area in West Bengal, Census 2001 (provisional)

State/District	Urban area as percentage of total geographical area
Maldah	0.68
Bankura	0.89
Dakshin Dinajpur	0.95
Birbhum	1.10
Koch Bihar	1.22
Puruliya	1.27
Uttar Dinajpur	1.41
South Twenty Four Parganas	1.77
Jalpaiguri	2.03
Darjiling	2.39
Murshidabad	2.42
Medinipur	2.74
Nadia	5.38
Hugli	6.15
Barddhaman	11.31
North Twenty Four Parganas	11.93
Haora	14.94
Kolkata	100
West Bengal	3.73

## Criteria for Land Conversion

As has been seen, land use in West Bengal is characterised by its *intensiveness*, with little utilisable waste of unutilised land. The challenge for land use planning

is to achieve concurrently the objectives of protecting and consolidating agriculture, diversifying agricultural production and enhancing rural development and moving firmly towards industrialisation and infrastructural development.

Our policy must also take into consideration new pressures for urbanisation and the development of urban environments.

The main sources of new demand for land at present are industry, housing, urban spaces and infrastructure. The provison of land for each of these purposes will require the conversion of land from other uses. The factors to be considered when land is converted to any of these uses from other current use include the following:

- The current use to which land is being put and the social costs of land conversion. Where land is agricultrual, the factors to be considered are the number of crops grown on the land, irrigation facilities current levels of employment and income generation and the productive potential of land.
- 2. The impact of land conversion on the present users of the land, particularly when they belong to the working poor. Full and just compensation must be provided for any land that is converted to alternative purposes. This is a matter of the people's entitlement.
- 3. The benefits from the alternative uses to which the land will be put, particularly with regard to employment and income generation.
- 4. *Environmental considerations,* particularly with respect to fragile or endangered ecological zones.
- 5. *Identify vacant land first.* As stated, the Govt. has initiated action to create an inventory of land that is not currently in use.

#### Enhance Agricultural Productivity

The demand for land for industrialisation and urbanisation creates a special responsibility with respect to agriculture for the Government. The State can afford to convert land to nonagricultural purposes only if it is able to enhance agricultrual productivity, and to implement an agricultural policy that will

- protect and extend the achievements of the Stage with regard to rice production, thereby contributing to the food and nutrition security of the people of West Bengal.
- improve productivity in food production, thus releasing a significant proportion of cropped area in the Stage for the diversification of crop production, and, in particular, the production of oilseeds, pulses, fruit, vegetables and flowers and other non-food crops;
- protect bio-diversity in West Bengal and develop agriculture and related activities – and, in general, plan land use – in an ecologically sustainable way; and
- ensure that the development of agriculture and related activities is a key instrument of employment-generation, income-enhancement and, in general, qualitative improvement in the living standards of the working people of the countryside.

#### Land Use Data Base

A rational land use policy requires a modern and scientific data base. In particular, the new demands for land in different spheres of development have brought to the fore the need to reform and update the systems of land statistics in West Bengal. The State Government intends to revamp the statistical system with respect to land use, and to undertake a three-pronged medium-term and short-term programme in this regard:

- 1. The Government will establish an information system on the land that is based on annual plot-by-plot verification of land tenure, land use, irrigation and cropping. It has been estimated that such a data base can be built over a period of five or six years, and the Government will organise the administration and the arrangements for a changeover to such a system of consolidated land records in the near future.
- 2. Govt has initiated a programme to create, in the short run, a land bank. All district administrations have been asked to provide information on vacant land in the districts in the stage sector in the first instance, and

- on significant and unused tracts of land in the private sector in the next instance. The objective of the State Government is that, in future, when land is required for industrialisation, housing and infrastructural development the State Government be able to specify land identified through rational criteria as being available for industrialisation.
- 3. The Government of West Bengal will begin an exercise to scientifically evaluate the demand for land in the State for different development activities. Evaluation will be made, in particular, of the demand for land for cultivation and related activity, urbanisation, housing, physical infrastructure, and industry for over a five-year and a ten year period.

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