CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION; SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

This chapter sums up our study on small farmers of Assam. In the foregoing chapters an attempt has been made at a comprehensive study of the problems of small farmers of Assam with particular reference to the small farmers of the seven districts of the Brahmaputra valley. In the study, emphasis has been laid on the major bottlenecks which handicap the economic development of small farmers. Further, the study has also gone through the various reform measures by the state government and their impact on the socio-economic conditions of this weaker section of the agricultural community. What follows in this chapter is, a brief summary of the study and the main findings together with some suggestions of policy prescriptions for raising the status of small farmers of Assam from the status of a social liability to a social asset.

At the very outset, the introductory chapter discusses the profile of Assam, in general, which gives to the reader clear pictures of the topography of the state, land and its people, natural potentiality for agricultural growth, population, literacy, nature of economy, infrastructural conditions, life and means of livelihood of the people. Further, in this chapter various definitions of small farmer have also been critically examined and finally, operational
holding has been taken as the criterion for classifying the farmers into different categories. Farmers having operational holdings between 1 to 2 hectares of land have been grouped into the small farmers class.

The following facts in the chapter clearly show all the characteristics of the economy of the state:

(I) 34.13 percent of the total geographical area of the State is cultivated (1976-77) as against 50 percent of the area for all India.

(II) Nature of economy is agrarian since 77 percent of the workers of the state are engaged in agriculture as against 72 percent for all India.

(III) (a) In Assam road length per lakh population is 115 km as against 235 km for all India.

(b) There is one bank office for each 39 thousand population in Assam as against 1 office for each 27 thousand population for all India.

(c) In Assam 15.6 percent of the villages are electrified whereas 41.8 percent of the villages are electrified for all India.
As per 1971 Census population of Assam was 146 lakh which has increased to 197 lakh in 1981. If we take 1951 as the base year when population of Assam was only 80 lakh, it showed a tremendous rise in population of Assam in 1981 i.e., a rise to the extent of 246.25 percent. In 1951, density of population of Assam was 102 persons whereas for all India it was 110 persons. But the density of population increased to 254 persons for Assam in 1981 against 206 persons for all India. The working force of Assam is 29.03 percent. It shows a heavy proportion of dependents.

As per 1971 Census, in Assam, 82 percent of the land holdings were in the size group of 0-2 hectares, but that 82 percent of the holdings claimed only 43 percent of the cropped area; and the 18 percent of the households claimed 57 percent of the cultivated area.

In our sample survey, conducted in 1981-82, 83.79 percent of the holdings were in the size group of 0-2 hectares but possessed only 41.80 percent of the cultivated land area.

The average size of holdings in Assam, as per 1971 Census was 1.37 percent as against 2 hectares for all India. In our sample survey the average size of holding was 1.74 hectares and the average size of fragment of cultivable land was 0.3 hectares.
Assam's soil is suitable for multiple cropping but only rice accounts for over 75 percent of the cropped area. This unbalanced cropping pattern is symptom of backward economy.

In 1979-80 yield rate for rice in Assam was 869 q. per hectare as against 1082 q. for all India. It is worth mentioning here that the average yield per capita in Assam is 124 q. whereas per capita food requirement is 182 q.

In 1977-78, 52.65 percent of the rural population of Assam was below poverty line as against 50.82 percent for all India.

In the Second Chapter, Socio-economic profile of the small farmers of the sample villages of Assam have been discussed. A total number of 3378 households of 68 villages belonging to 34 Community Development Blocks were directly interviewed with the help of questionnaire and schedule. It was found that out of the total households, 53.59 percent of the households belonged to marginal farmers and agricultural labourers size-group, and 30.20 percent households belonged to the small farmers group. Thus small and marginal farmers together constituted 83.79 percent of the households whereas medium and big farmers accounted for 15.30 percent and 0.91 percent of the households respectively.

The total number of households of small farmers under sample was 1020 with the population of 8854. The
average size of the family was found to be 8.7 persons ranging between 7.5 persons to 9.6 persons. The highest size of the family was found in Nowgong district and the lowest size of family in Lakhimpur district. Sex-ratio has been observed to be 52.47. The percentage of working force, under sample study was found to be 29.65 which is slightly above the working force of the state i.e., 29.3 percent (1971 Census) in which the female working force constituted to be 7.06 percent.

In the sample villages, 56.04 percent of the households were cultivators, 34.41 percent of the households were cultivator cum-agricultural labourer. If we add these two together, they constituted 92.42 percent of the population. And the rest 7.55 percent of the households depended on income like handicraft, service, shop etc.

So far as pattern of land holdings was concerned, 82.77 percent of the operational holdings were owned and operated by the actual cultivators and the remaining 17.23 percent of the operational holdings were operated by small farmers but not owned. They cultivated 1770 hectares of land. The man land-ratio being 0.20 hectare and the average size of holding being 1.74 hectares.

Like other states of the Indian union, share-cropping system is prevalent in Assam also. The prevalent rate of share in the crop between landlord and the share cropper is 50 percent of the produce. It shows that the legislative measures in regard to share cropping has had no effect in
actual practice, it has been found that 39.7 percent of the households of small farmers lease-in land which accounted for 14.29 percent of the total operated area of the small farmers. Moreover, there was a system of mortgage of land also which indicates the unsound credit system in the state.

A reasonable care has been taken so that small farmers belonging to all classes and communities should be represented in our sample. Among the small farmers of the sample households Hindus constituted 76.81 percent which included scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. Muslim and Christian households constituted 21.55 percent and 1.74 respectively.

In the surveyed districts mainly two categories of land have been found viz., (1) land under periodic khiraj and (2) land under annual khiraj, i.e., 76.6 percent of land in the first category and 20.40 percent of land under the other category.

The rate of literacy in the sample households was found to be 31.72 percent in which the rate of female literacy was only 9.78 percent. There was lack of higher and technical education among the small farmer households (1.54 percent only).

In the sample villages household-industries like weaving, sericulture, pottery, and cane and bamboo works of basic nature. As these industries are hardly done on
commercial basis, it is difficult to assess their actual income from these.

The Third Chapter discusses the plan measures taken up by the state government to improve the agricultural conditions of Assam in general and small farmers in particular. In this chapter the role of the Community Development Scheme, Grow More Food Programme, Small Farmers Development Agency and Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Development Agency (SPDA/MFAL) and Integrated Agricultural Development Programme (IADP) have also been discussed. The H.Y.V. Schemes and their implementation too have been assessed in this chapter.

The Grow More Food Programme was originally launched in 1942-43 to make up the food deficiency caused by the second world war. The Grow More Food Programme was formulated with special emphasis on (1) Irrigation; (2) Seed multiplication and distribution; (3) Plant Protection; (4) Manure Production; (5) Better Farming Practices; (6) Reclamation and utilization of waste lands; and (7) Double and Multiple Cropping. This was sought to be achieved through the Community Development Project. However, the various measures taken under the Grow More Food Programme could not bring about the expected increase in the agricultural production in the state.
In the First Five Year Plan of Assam, the total outlay for agriculture was Rs. 20.51 crores which increased to Rs. 251.20 crores in the fifth plan outlay i.e., about 27 times increase over the First Plan. The realised outlay for Assam, in the First Plan was Rs. 4.85 crores which increased to 114.2 crores, showing an increase of about 24 times over the First Plan; whereas for all India the total outlay in the First Plan was Rs. 1960 crores which increased to 15778 crores in the Fifth Plan i.e., an increase of 8.05 times over the First Plan outlay. And the realised outlay for all India in agriculture sector was only Rs. 291 crores which increased to Rs. 4730 crores in the Fifth Plan showing an increase of 16.25 times over the First Plan. But if we assess the increase of outlay in terms of per capita for Assam and all India, it is revealed that the plan outlay for Assam got less than the due share. When we divide the total outlay for all India, during the First Plan, per capita total outlay comes to Rs. 54.30 which increased to Rs. 663.40 in the Fifth Plan. On the other hand, in case of Assam, for agriculture, per capita plan outlay increased from Rs. 23.22 during the First Plan to Rs. 78.08 in the Fifth Plan.

The First Plan of Assam was started with the objectives in line with the National Plan, to increase food deficiency caused by the Second World War and the partition of the Country. Grow More Food Programme was reoriented which was
sought to be achieved through the Community Development Project. Besides, schemes regarding agricultural education and training, development of horticulture and animal husbandry were also implemented during the First Plan period in Assam. Agricultural College of Jorhat and Agricultural School of Khanapara were established during this plan period. Six veterinary hospitals, one veterinary laboratory, 39 veterinary dispensaries, 6 artificial insemination centres and 25 key village centres were set-up. Horticulture Development and Plant Protection Schemes were also taken up. The food production exceeded the target i.e., 4.41 lakh tonnes as against 2.3 lakh tonnes the target.

In the Second Plan, most of the agricultural schemes of the First Plan were continued. However, special emphasis was stressed on the balanced production of food crops and cash crops. The second plan emphasised Japanese methods of rice cultivation. Inspite of all these measures, food grain production fell short from the target i.e., 2.3 lakh tonnes as against 3.82 lakh tonnes. During this plan period 5000 acres of wasteland were reclaimed.

During the Third Plan Schemes of minor irrigation and distribution of fertilizers were taken up. So far as agricultural education and research programmes were concerned, the intake capacity of Agricultural College, Jorhat was
increased from 35 to 80. A training centre for V.L.W. with the intake capacity of 200 persons were setup. In case of animal husbandry the number of veterinary hospitals and dispensaries were increased from 127 to 155. A veterinary Field Assistant Training Institute was setup with intake capacity of 100 persons. The intake capacity of Khanapara veterinary college was increased from 68 to 93. Moreover, a Livestock Research Centre was also established. During the Third Plan period new schemes like IAAP and IADA were taken up. So far as production of food grain was concerned the actual production was only 3.87 lakh tonnes as against the target of 4.20 lakh tonnes. The Ad-hoc Plans reoriented the agricultural schemes of production by increasing the use of modern inputs like new varieties of improved seeds, fertilizers, irrigation facilities, pesticides and the use of modern agricultural implements. Area of H.Y.V. for rice, wheat and maize substantially increased. Ten Development Blocks were brought under Jute Package Programme. The mobile units of plant protection services were strengthened in each district to extend help in outskirts of the sub-division. During this plan period The Assam Seed Corporation and The Assam Agro Industries were setup to help the agricultural growth in the State.

The Fourth Plan in Assam took up several schemes of agricultural development. These schemes included Kharif and
Rabi production programme campaign. During the Fourth plan period H.Y.V. programme for paddy, wheat and maize were intensified. Loans and price subsidy were given to the eligible farmers. During the Fourth Plan period, in addition to the State sector, certain centrally sponsored schemes were also implemented in the State. Under the Central Sector Schemes, Small Farmers Development Agency and Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Agency were notable which were set-up in, Goalpara, Kamrup, Nowgong and Mikir Hills (Now Karbi-Anlong) districts in 1970-71. The main objective of the Agency was to help the small and marginal farmers so that they might become viable farmers. During the Fourth Plan period one lakh farmers were identified and categorised into different groups on the basis of land holdings. Farmers having land between 1 to 2 hectares were grouped into the Small Farmers class and farmers having land holdings upto 1 hectare were categorised as marginal farmers. For disbursement of loans to the small and marginal farmers 20 branches of Commercial Banks were open in the agency areas. As many as 30,000 farmers participated in the development programme and a total sum of ₹76.13 lakh were distributed among the farmers as agricultural credit during 1974-75. The State Government promulgated an act for setting up of Agricultural Farming Corporation in the State. Despite of all these efforts food production was only 21.17 lakh tonnes as against 25 lakh tonnes the estimated target.
The Fifth Plan of Assam started with the following strategies:

(I) To bring about a change in the land use pattern so as to bring greater under H.Y.V. crops.

(II) To raise productivity through the supply of better and improved inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizers, pesticides etc.

(III) Adoption of three crop cultivation between the two major crops.

(IV) Change of cropping pattern specially in the flood affected areas and

(V) To increase greater provision for irrigation facilities to reduce the dependence of agriculture on monsoon and to facilitate production of H.Y.V. and Rabi crops.

In order to bring all types of irrigation schemes under one integrated irrigation department, the minor irrigation scheme was integrated with new irrigation scheme. A special irrigation scheme was taken up for flood affected areas. H.Y.V. ahu paddy was introduced.

In order to help the weaker section of society particularly landless farmers, agricultural labourers,
marginal farmers and small farmers the following land reform measures were taken up in Assam by the government:

(1) Assam Adhikar Protection Act, 1948.
(2) Acquisition of Zamindari Act, 1948.
(3) Assam State Acquisition of land belonging to religious and charitable institutions of Public Nature, Act 1950.

SFDA/MPAL:

The basic objective of the Agency was to ensure and provide for the credit facilities from banks and rest to be supplemented by subsidy from the Agency in favour of the Small Farmers, Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers to improve their economic conditions by use of new technology.

(a) The principal function of the SFDA/MPAL was to identify the eligible i.e., potentially viable farmers to be covered by the project.

(b) to formulate programmes incorporating suitable measures to deal with the programme.
(c) to evolve adequate institutional, financial and administrative arrangements for implementing those programmes.

The following schemes come under the developmental programme of SFDA/MFAL:

(I) Irrigation, (II) Custom Service, (III) Storage,
(IV) Supply of inputs, (V) Live-stock Projects, (VI) Credit,

Altogether 208451 farmers were identified during 1971-72 to 1975-76 by SFDA/MFAL in Goalpara, Kamrup and Nowgong districts. Among the identified farmers 29.23 percent were small farmers, 36.13 percent were marginal farmers and 34.64 percent were landless farmers and agricultural labourers. The important step of the Agency was to investigate the problems of the small farmers. A close observation of the conditions of small farmers brought to light that the small farmers had three major needs. Among these three needs, the prior need was the need for credit. Besides these, they had tenurial problems, the problems of social backwardness, illiteracy and infrastructural inconveniences.

Originally it was decided to execute the schemes of each district (SFDA/MFAL) to the tune of ₹1.50 crores for small farmers and ₹1.00 crores each for marginal farmers and agricultural labourers agencies. But as separate agencies were not set-up for three categories of the rural population,
a programme amounting Rs. 1.26 crores was drawn for each composite Agency. The rest of the amount would be arranged from co-operate and commercial Banks.

The Agency for Goalpara, Kamrup and Nowgong districts, during 1971-72 to 1973-74, allotted Rs. 678 crores but provision was made only for Rs. 166.13 crores (34.76 percent) but only Rs. 32.98 crores (6.9 percent) was actually spent. During the same period, for agriculture, irrigation, animal husbandry, custom service, rural artisans, demonstration training, and strengthening of co-operative allotments were made for Rs. 41.50 lakhs; Rs. 10.99 lakh; Rs. 14.99 lakh; Rs. 13.36 lakh; Rs. 5.77 lakh; Rs. 2.2 lakh (total Rs. 120.05 lakh) respectively, but actual expenditure made for each item was, 7.66 percent, 2.91 percent, 4.27 percent, 0.67 percent, 21.49 percent, 7.5 percent, 49.83 percent i.e., overall 16.69 percent respectively. When we assess the amount allotted, and the amount actually spent, under all these schemes for the three districts, the total amounts to Rs. 112.05 lakh of which only Rs. 18.70 lakh i.e., 16.69 percent of the allotted amount was spent. In the interdistrict comparison expenditures for Goalpara, Kamrup and Nowgong were 9.3 percent, 26.86 percent and 17.56 percent respectively.

During 1971-72 to 1973-74 in Goalpara district, in respect of improved agriculture and vegetable only 15.63 percent
and 5.55 percent targets were achieved. In Kamrup district, during the same period, the achievement in agricultural sector was very poor. In Nowgong district in respect of improved seeds and fertilizers, achievements were only 2.23 percent and 1.01 percent respectively which covered 12 percent of the targeted beneficiaries. The utilisation of low subsidy in agriculture sector for all the three districts were very low.

In Goalpara district, it was observed, that installation of Tube wells and Pump set could reach 15 percent and 35 percent of the targets, respectively. In average 7.5 percent and 37.83 percent farmers were benefited by the above schemes. In Kamrup and Nowgong districts achievements for Tube wells were 2 percent and 4.4 percent respectively when the achievement for pump set was only 1.4 percent.

There was very poor performance in regard to Live-stock and Animal husbandry. For milch cattle out of 1000 estimated target for distribution only 25 cows were given. Similar poor performances were observed in other items also.

under custom service, during 1971-72 to 1973-74, Rs. 2.21 lakh was allotted as against 26.67 lakh in the original budget but nothing could be spent. In Goalpara district 77.85 percent of the allotted amount was spent under this scheme, and the number of beneficiaries reached 5765. In Kamrup district 49.1 percent of the amount was spent benefiting 3050
farmers but in Nowgong district practically no programme was taken up till March 1974, and the entire amount remained unspent. The Agency was to meet 100 percent of the cost of training of such persons and on completion of the training they would be provided with tools and risk fund to the extent of 6 percent of the co-operative, under this scheme, establishment of 5 workshops with capacity of keeping 50 persons was proposed. In Kamrup district only 77 persons were trained. But it has been observed that most of the trades for training farmers under this scheme was not connected with modern techniques introduced in agriculture. Therefore, the scheme could not make any improvement in agricultural sector.

In the Fourth Chapter we have discussed the government reform measures both organisational and technological and their impact on production and productivity, so far as small farmers of Assam were concerned. A micro-study of the economic conditions of the small farmer households which included their housing conditions, possession of agricultural implements, live-stock, durable consumers goods, and their income and expenditures have also been made in this chapter. Further, in this chapter, crop intensity, production and productivity, application of inputs like improved seeds,
fertilizers, irrigation and credit supply, in sample villages have also been discussed. Here a comparison has been shown in respect of use of all the inputs mentioned above between SPDA villages and Non-SPDA villages.

As regards tenurial system in Assam, as a result of post independence land reform measures a major change took place. At present all types of land have been brought under one tenurial system removing the intermediaries. The Assam State acquisition of zamindari Act 1948 was one of the most important socialistic measures. This act aimed at abolition of zamindari system prevalent in Goalpara district and Karimganj sub-division of Cachar district. The Act was brought into force in 1954 but was implemented only in 1956.

Another Act, the Assam Management of Estate Act of 1949 was passed to save the natural wealth of the state from the hands of zamindars and jotadars and to improve the socio-economic conditions of the agriculturists. The scope of Act was extended to (a) the permanently settled areas of Goalpara and Garo-Hills districts and Karimganj sub-division of Cachar district, (b) Lakhiraj estates within the boundary of the permanently settled estates and (c) the acknowledged estates of Bijn and Sidli Duars, settled with the Raja of Bijn and Sidli. All the settled estates of Goalpara and the
acknowledged estates of Rijni and Sidli were acquired by the end of 1966.

The major defect in our agrarian structure is unequal distribution of holdings. As it has been shown earlier that 83.79 percent of households possessed 41.80 percent of land and the rest 16.21 percent of households owned 58.20 percent of land, to bring economic growth but with social justice, the Assam Ceiling of Land Holdings Act was passed in 1956, which fixed the Ceiling on land by an individual family. The Act allowed 150 bighas as the limit but later on it was amended in 1972 and 1976. At present the limit of the Ceiling is 50 bighas (6.67 hectares). The surplus land, above the limit, would be acquired by the state and redistributed among the landless farmers, marginal farmers, and small farmers. As per official report, by the middle of 1976, 53771.8 hectares of land could be acquired and distributed among 1,07004 landless families. Again during 1976-77 to 1979-80, 4,44065 hectares of land was acquired by Ceiling Act and was distributed among the 7,53,978 families in which the percentage of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were 8.59 and 7.01 respectively. In the sample households, 115 households (11.27 percent) received 68,98 hectares of land, but till the time of survey most of them had not got actual possession over the land distributed to them by the government.

Sub-division and Fragmentation of holdings are acute in Assam. In our sample survey it has been observed that the
average size of fragment is 0.3 hectare. The consolidation of Holdings Act was passed in 1960 and was brought into force in 1961. Later on the Act was amended in 1966. As per Act, the government of Assam took up programme to consolidate 6666.67 hectares of cultivable land annually in the circles of Palasbari (Kamrup), Kaliabor (Nowgong) and Golaghat (Sibsagar). But the programme was almost failure, upto 1969-70 only 267.33 hectares of land was consolidated in 41 villages.

The term land tenure is used in a wide sense to cover economic, political, legal and social customs concerned with ownership of land. And the tenancy reform aims at the fixity of tenure, freedom from eviction and fair share in produce. The present agrarian structure of Assam is at par with the Indian agrarian structure with three components namely owner cultivator, lease-holders and share-croppers.

The Assam Adhilar protection and Regulation Act was framed for regulation of (1) the share of the crop payable by the cultivator to the land lord and (II) indiscriminate eviction by land lords. The share to be paid to the landowner was fixed at one fourth of the total produce, incase plough, cattle, etc. were not supplied by the land owner. But it has been observed in our study, that, in actual practice the share-croppers give 50 percent of the produce to the land owner.
The Assam Tenancy Act, 1971 gives to the tenants substantial right on their land by conferring permanent heritable and transferable rights. This Act also gives occupancy rights to the cultivators. The Act was brought into force in 1974.

Raising agricultural productivity is a technique which requires proportionate and timely supply of the required inputs. Technological measures of reform include modern inputs of agriculture like improved seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, irrigational facilities, tools and implements, supply of adequate credit and infrastructural facilities like marketing and storage.

The quality of seed is one of the basic requirements of agricultural production. During the First Plan, 114 seed farms were established. The area covered was 8 percent of the cultivated area. During the second Plan the improved seeds covered 175.2 thousand hectares (10 percent of the cultivated area). Though improved seeds of Jute, Pulses, Sugarcane were also distributed, but paddy claimed the major proportion. In the third Five Year Plan 480 thousand hectares of land were brought under the improved seeds as against 1200 thousand hectares. During the Ad-hoc Plan period, the Assam Seed Corporation Ltd was set-up. The Corporation supplied IRS, Joya, Pusha, Pwasad Bhog etc., seeds. It was observed
that in 1968-69, 5861 quintal of seeds were supplied but later on there was gradual decline in supply of seeds. Under our sample survey 8.14 percent of the SFDA villages were found using improved seeds whereas in NON-SFDA villages 6.46 percent of the households used improved seeds. The total requirement of seeds were estimated to be 672.6 quintal for the sample villages whereas only 43.48 quintal of seeds were supplied.

The application of fertilizer increases the production. In the first plan 681 tonnes of fertilizers were supplied. In the second plan 7700 tonnes of fertilizers were supplied which covered 3800 hectares of land. During the Third plan only 19 thousand tonnes of fertilizers were supplied which covered only 120 hectares of land. Again, the supply of fertilizers increased to 63240 tonnes during the Ad-hoc plan period. During 1976-77 only 1.12 thousand tonnes of fertilizers were supplied. In our sample survey 6.48 percent of the SFDA villages and 5.68 percent of the NON-SFDA villages used fertilizers.

During 1972-73 pesticide worth of Rs 80 lakh was distributed but in 1975-76 it showed declining position. In our sample survey 20.4 percent of the SFDA villages and 19.2 percent of the NON-SFDA villages were found using pesticides.

In spite of Assam being located in heavy rainfall area of the monsoon belt, adequate moisture for crop growth
is not available, all the year round. Moreover, the intensive agriculture through recently developed technology and inputs like H.Y.V. Seeds and fertilizers require adequate irrigation facility which can improve the economic conditions of small farmers because multiple cropping would be possible.

In the First Five Years Plan of Assam out-lay for irrigation was ₹1.34 crores which increased to ₹62.00 crores in the Fifth Plan, whereas for all India, out-lay for irrigation in the First Plan was ₹365.00 crores which increased to ₹8697 crores in the Fifth Plan. But average out-lay for Assam for irrigation was 8.8 percent as against 11.27 percent for all India. In Assam, there is predominance of minor irrigations.

Under our sample survey only 13.89 percent of the cultivated land was irrigated which is less than the state average i.e., 16 percent and much below the all India average i.e., 24.2 percent.

Broadly there are two sources of credit available to the small farmers, viz., (a) Institutional Credit and (b) Non-Institutional credit. The institutional sources of credit consists of the Co-operative Bank, Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks and subsidies and grants by the government. The Non-institutional sources of credit are village money lenders, landlords and relatives.
Agricultural Credit Co-operative Society is the oldest credit institution which was purposely set-up to help the agriculturists. There were 3239 Agricultural credit societies in 1977-78 in Assam, out of which as many as 2922 (77.86 percent) were in dormant condition. It advanced loan of ₹225.12 lakh in 1967-68 the highest amount so far, but in 1976-77 it declined to ₹0.70 lakh only. The decline was mainly because of over due.

Small farmers window facilitate found to Small Farmers since 1978, the Farmers Service Society (F.S.S.) also helps the agriculturists. The Lead Bank Scheme is trying to help the farmers. Moreover, two regional rural Banks viz., Pragjyotish Gaelia Bank and Lakhimi Gaelia Bank supplied loan of ₹93.06 lakhs and ₹7.06 lakhs respectively to the agriculturists. State Bank of India also give direct and indirect loan to the small farmers.

In our sample villages it has been found that 71.74 percent of the credit of the small farmers were from Non-institutional sources and only 28.26 percent of credit the small farmers got from institutional sources.

Cultivators still sell their produce in weekly and by weekly markets in the village area. There is no organised marketing and storage facility for small farmers. The establishment of STATEFED and Assam Co-operative Appex
Marketing has not given any help to the small farmers.

The agricultural tools and implements which are used at present in Assam are of the same type which were being used in the long past. The method of cultivation also remained more or less the same without change of any significant magnitude. The modern improved tools and implements of agriculture are still out of the reach of the small farmers. They cultivate with a pair of bullocks with wooden plough. Their agricultural implements are spade, wooden weeder, harrow, dalimari etc.

Impact of reform measures on Production and Productivity:

So far as impact of organisational reform on production and productivity in Assam in general and on sample villages in particular are concerned, it is very low and much below the expectation, yet it has encouraged the small farmers for higher production by giving proprietary rights on land. As a result of technological reform measures, production of rice increased from 8,148 thousand tonnes in the First Plan to 9,907 tonnes in the Fourth Plan showing an increase of 21.30 percent. During the same period total cultivated area increased by 17.8 percent and the yield rate increased from 955 kg. to 976 kg. Production and Productivity of other crops also fluctuated. The area shown more than once increased from 997 thousand hectares to 632 hectares showing an increase in area by 5.87 percent during 1972-73 to 1976-77.
Livestock of the sample households consisted mainly of bullocks, cows, buffaloes, sheep, goats, poultry birds etc.

The durable consumer goods of the small farmers of the sample villages take the form of utensils, cot, table, chairs, torch etc. Some households possess watches and cycle also. But the quality of the goods are very simple and ordinary which indicate their poor economic condition.

Income of the Small Farmers of the Sample Villages:

Agriculture and allied to agriculture (horticulture and livestock) constitute 89.37 percent of the income of the small farmers in sample. The rest 10.63 percent of the income of the farmers of the sample households is derived from service (4.20 percent) and Miscellaneous (6.43 percent) sources. The whole households of the small farmers under study can be classified into five income ranges i.e., viz., (I) ₹1,000 to ₹2,500; (II) ₹2,500 to ₹5,000/-; (III) ₹5,000 to ₹7,000/-; (IV) ₹7,000 to ₹10,000/-; and (V) ₹10,000/- and above. In each above mentioned categories the production is 10.88, 38.63, 27.45, 20.49 and 2.55 respectively.

Household Expenditures of the Households of the Sample Villages:

Required average expenditure for a households in sample villages is ₹5882, at the rate of expenditure per
adult of ₹ 825 per annum. One this expenditure criterion 60.49 percent of the households of the small farmers under study, live below poverty line as against 52.65 percent the state average and all India average of 50 percent.

Suggestions and Policy Prescriptions:

Since the small farmers of Assam face a number of problems which are causally inter-related, remedies will consequently be of inter-related nature. This implies that rectifying measures should not be isolated and sporadic. In order to bring about a long term development and improvement of the lot of the small farmers as a class, a package of inter-related measures should be undertaken simultaneously so that the maladies affecting the small farmers in Assam be attacked on all sides.

The first and the foremost malady to be remedied is about unequal distribution of land holdings. It has been found in our sample survey that 63.61 percent of the households belong to landless farmers agricultural labourers, marginal farmers and small farmers. But they own only 42.8 percent of the land. The rest of the land is owned by the medium and big farmers. It is a notable fact that most of the medium and big farmers cultivate land with the help of hired
labourers or lease out lands to the tenants. They are not the actual cultivators. No doubt the Assam Fixation of Ceiling Act limited the size of the holdings to 50 bighas (6.67 hectares) at present for individual family but the Act has not been implemented strictly. And it has been observed that many of the medium and big farmers still occupy much more land than the Ceiling limit. Therefore, it is suggested that implementation and execution of the Ceiling Act should be done strictly with a sense of purpose and revolutionary zeal. And the surplus land acquired so, should be redistributed among the landless and marginal farmers. The political will and administrative efficiency which are so essential for the success of this revolutionary measure should also be accompanied by the zealous and purposeful co-operation of the local bodies like village Panchayats. Moreover, the present Ceiling limit of 50 bighas (6.67 hectares) seems too high when majority of the farming households in Assam do not possess either plough unit, or work unit or income unit of land and also because of the fact that the number of big land holders is relatively low in Assam. As such, in this respect we like to suggest 30 bighas of land to be the limit of Ceiling which will certainly reduce the concentration of land in the hands of medium and big farmers.
For classifying farmers into different categories like landless farmers, marginal farmers, and small farmers, operational holding should be considered the appropriate criterion. This criterion would check the absentee landlordism and the cases of other medium and big farmers who do not cultivate land themselves. The system of lease-in and lease-out of land should be totally abolished. This policy would provide necessary incentives to the tillers of the land because they would get the land and at the same time, medium and big farmers would also try to find out a dependable alternative whole-time means of their livelihood.

Another malady in the economies of small farmers is the actuteness of subdivision and fragmentation of holdings. To remove this defect, consolidation of holdings should be encouraged both by the official machinery and voluntary organisations. In this respect, we strongly suggest the formation of co-operative farming among the marginal and small farmers. To our considered opinion, co-operative farming which can satisfy the ownership instinct of the people and also the needs of efficient farming is expected to go a long way to usher in green revolution and also to raise the economic conditions of the weaker section of the farming communities in Assam. One of the major bottlenecks in agricultural development of Assam is inadequacy of irrigational facilities. Though Assam has got enough irrigation potentiality, only 18 percent of the cultivated area of Assam is irrigated...
as against 24.2 percent for all India but in our sample
villages only 13.89 percent of the cultivated areas have
been found irrigated. Besides this, the type of irrigation
available in Assam is not perennial. The Tube-wells and
Shallow filter tube wells have been found having mechanical
defects. Therefore, it is suggested that where there is
river facility, lift irrigation should be provided and in
places where there is no such natural source of water,
shallow filter tube-wells should be provided. Again in many
of the surveyed villages another source of irrigation is
also prevalent, that is the traditional dongs which mean
narrow canals. However, most of the dongs are found to be
silted. The cleaning of dongs is essential not only to
expand irrigational facilities but also to control flood.
In this respect, the village people themselves should take
the initiative, but the irrigation departments should also
provide the necessary help. Credit is one of the most
important needs of the small farmers. But as most of the
small farmers in Assam do not possess the sufficient
creditworthiness to secure credit from the available institutional
sources and the Co-operative Credit Societies have also
misereably failed to provide regular, timely and adequate
agricultural finance, the small farmers have no other
alternative than to falling back on the usurious money
lenders. It is suggested that the Co-operative Credit
societies should be revitalised and its Credit Policy particularly for small farmers should be reoriented. Therefore, as far as possible all economic activities viz., Credit, Supply of inputs, Marketing, Processing, Distribution of Consumers goods, Agro Service etc., should be organised in an integrated way on Co-operative line inorder to overcome insufficiency of creditworthiness, and to ensure social justice to this under privileged size-groups of farmers. To raise the productivity of agriculture, timely supply of necessary inputs like fertilisers, pesticides, improved seeds and other facilities like custom service should be made available at reasonable prices through multipurpose co-operative societies. Moreover, to subsist the income of the small farmers increased amount of subsidy and grants and also other necessary assistance should be provided by the concerned departments for the development of diary, piggy and poultry to the small farmers.

It is hoped, that, if these measures are implemented honestly with the active participation of the small farmers themselves, the socio-economic condition of small farmers would certainly be improved and they would be transformed from a status of social liability to a status of social asset.