



AGRICULTURE LABOURERS IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND POLICY MEASURES.

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture sector plays a vital role in Indian economy. Over 58 per cent of the rural population depends on agriculture for their livelihood and also meet the food and nutritional requirements of 1.3 billion populations. The role of the agricultural sector in alleviating poverty and ensuring sustainable development of the economy is well established. In India agriculture contributes about 14 per cent of total GDP and nearly 11% of total export. Over 60 % of India's land area is arable which makes India the second largest country in terms of arable land. Even though agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy, the contribution of agriculture to GDP has decreased compared to other sectors. As a result of economic growth and structural changes in the economy, the share of agricultural sector to GDP has declined from 19 per cent to nearly 14 percent during 2004-5 to 2013-14. However more than 50 percent people are still depend on agriculture for livelihood.

Sector wise share in GDP at constant (2004-05) price

Year	Agriculture and allied	Industry	Service
2004-05	19.0	27.9	53.0
2005-06	18.3	28.0	53.7
2006-07	17.4	28.7	54.0
2007-08	16.8	28.7	54.4
2008-09	15.8	28.1	56.1
2009-10	14.6	28.3	57.1
2010-11	14.6	27.9	57.5
2011-12	14.4	28.2	57.4
2012-13	13.9	27.3	58.8
2013-14	13.9	26.1	59.9

Source: Central Statistical Organisation

OBJECTIVES

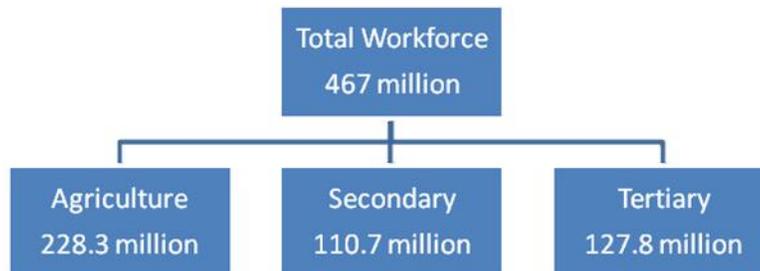
1. To analyses the changes in the proportion of agriculture workforce to total workforce.
2. To study the factors which allow agriculture labours to enter nonfarm activities.
3. To examine the measures adopted by the government for the agriculture labourers.

Agriculture Labour

According to National Commission of Labour an agriculture labour is one who is basically unskilled and unorganised and has little for its livelihood other than personal labour. The first agriculture labour enquiry committee defined as “those people who are engaged in raising crops on payment of wages”. Agriculture generates employment to both males and

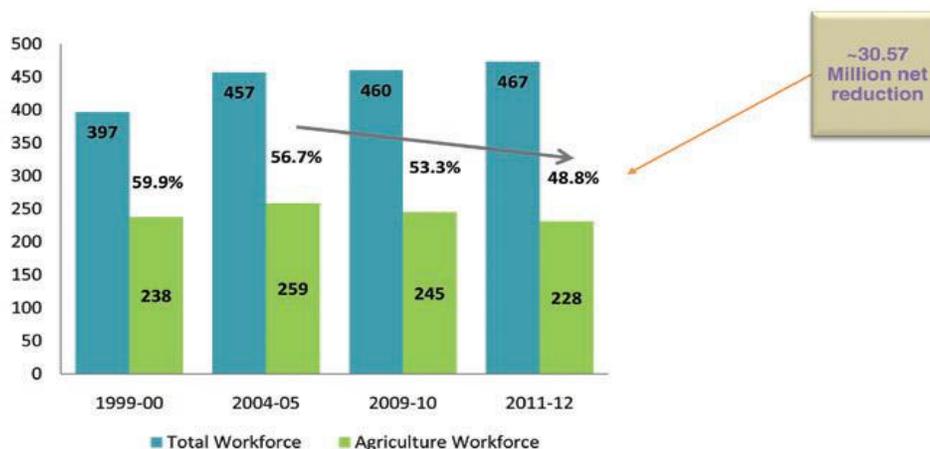
females. Women work extensively in production of major grains, in land preparation, seedling, weeding, threshing and harvesting.

Classification of Total workforce (2011-12)



The data reveals that nearly half of the total workforce still depends on agriculture sector. However the workforce in agriculture has been declining since 2004 onwards. The size of agriculture workforce has declined by 30.57 million between 2004-05 and 2011-12 even though an increase in size of total workforce.

Changes in size of agriculture workforce to total workforce.



Source: www.agricoop.nic.in.

The data shows the India's overall employment growth since 2004-05 has become very less. During this period only 2million people were added to workforce compared to 12 million during 1999-00 to 2004-05. The percentage of people worked in agriculture has been declined from around 60% to 49% during 1999-00 to 2011-12. This reveals that as the economy moves to development, the workforce tend to move away from primary sector of the economy. The reduction in agriculture labour force is visible across the all major states in India. Nearly 80% of this reduction is contributed by only five states – Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal, Bihar and Rajasthan.

Determinants to leave agriculture sector

Excess Supply- As per the data from the ministry of agriculture, Directorate of Economics and statistics shows that the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) food grains yield has increased from 0.1% to 2.5% between 1999-2004 and 2004-2009. The same period



shows a declining rate of agricultural workforce which highlights the high degree of disguised unemployment in Indian agriculture sector.

Seasonal Unemployment-Indian agriculture still heavily depends on monsoon due to inadequate irrigation facilities. As agricultural job being seasonal, labourers remain unemployed during lean season. Varying weather problems are also a reason to compel the workers to seek a regular job which provide them income throughout the year.

More opportunities in alternate sectors-Agriculture workers move from low productivity agriculture to high productivity sectors like manufacturing and services and thus from lower wages to higher wages. Higher wages in other locally available job such as masonry, electrical and plumbing attracted more agricultural labours.

Climate refugee-Dr. Thomas Fingar, Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis and Chairman of the National Intelligence Council current research in Asia has reported that South, Southeast, and East Asia will face risks of reduced agricultural productivity as large parts of the region face increased risk of floods and droughts. The number of peoples who will migrate to other places to save themselves from the harsh extremities of weather due to increasing temperature will be more than from any other type of migration in the coming decades.

Indebtedness- Agricultural wages and income of agriculture labour is very low compared to the wages in other sectors in India. With the advent of green revolution the money wages has increased but the real wages has not increased much more to cope with inflation. Most of the farmers depend on non institutional credit system, where the faces high level of exploitation.

Government Policies to improve the conditions of agriculture labourers.

Minimum Wages Act: In 1948, the Minimum Wages Act was passed and the state Governments was advised to fix the minimum wages accordingly. But due to some practical difficulties most of the states could not fix minimum wages till 1974. At present most of the states excepting Jammu & Kashmir, Nagaland and Sikkim have enacted necessary legislations for fixing minimum wages.

Abolition of Bonded Labours: Since 1975 the concept of bonded labour has been abolished. Under the Bonded labour system (Abolition) Act, every bonded labourer is free and is discharged from any obligation to render bonded labour. The rehabilitation programmes have been initiated to improve the conditions of erstwhile bonded labourer.

Special Employment Schemes: The special employment programmes have been initiated to promote social justice among the poor such as i) Crash Scheme for Rural Employment(CSRE) ii) Pilot Intensive Rural Employment Project (PIREP) iii) Food for works programme (FWP) iv) National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) v) Rural Landless Employment programme (RLEP) vi) Drought Prone Area Programme (It was known as Rural Works Programme). These programmes help in providing supplementary employment to agricultural labourer.

Distribution of Landless Labourers: After passing legislation for fixing ceiling on land holdings, state Government acquired surplus lands and distributed it among the landless labourers. About 74 lakhs acres of land were acquired as surplus land and out of which 45 lakhs acres were distributed among 41.5 lakhs landless labourers. But most of these lands distributed are found unsuitable for cultivation.



Provision for Housing Sites: Various states have passed necessary legislations for providing housing sites (01 sq. metres) to agricultural labourers. The Second and Fourth Plans have undertaken various steps for this purpose.

CONCLUSION

The role of the agricultural sector in alleviating poverty and in ensuring the sustainable development of the economy is well established. In spite of various measures taken by government the condition of agricultural labourers still remained precarious. Higher remuneration and growth of opportunities in alternate sectors is leading to the migration of workforce away from agriculture. This has resulted in labour shortage, increase in wages and consequent escalation of cost of cultivation. Government schemes like MGNREGA are affecting labour adversely and need immediate policy interventions. If adequate measures are not taken to reduce labour requirement, productivity of farms may get affected and this may have spiralling effects on output prices. Key stakeholders like farmers, industry and government need to take adequate steps to tackle the problem of labour shortage. Indian labourers are 4 times more productive in industry and 6 times more productive in services as compared to agriculture.

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