



ROLE OF GOVERNMENT FOR BETTERMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LABORERS IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

India has got rich diversity in its flora and fauna. The annual food grain production increased from 51 million tones in early fifties to 206 million tons in the nineties(*Enabling Agricultural Markets for the small Indian Farmer, IDF-IDEI Collaboration on Rural Markets ,page-14-27*). The darker side of Agricultural system is that agricultural growth has been uneven across different sections of the farming community. The agricultural sector is marked by low levels of productivity and degradation of natural resources in some areas. Capital inadequacy, lack of infrastructure support, demand side constraints like movement, storage and sale of agricultural products are some of the problems. Agriculture is not just about food grains such as rice and wheat. The 4% target growth rate in Agriculture can also be brought about through a 8% or higher rate of growth in Horticulture. While non- cereal and non-crop output has indeed grown, the diversification has not been enough compared to targets. The present system of expenditure on agriculture through input subsidies is inefficient and doesn't help poor farmers. the existence of participatory institutions with decentralization will facilitate collection of right user charges provided the service quality improves. Subsidies need to shift from inputs to investments such as farm improvements, pumps and mechanization. The present system of subsidies focuses on primary stage of processing while discouraging value addition and encouraging intermediation of inputs need to be subsidized; it is possible to think of a system of input stamps that are given to targeted resource-poor farmers, instead of the present system of subsidizing input across the board. The share of agriculture and its subsidiary industries like forestry and animal husbandry in the national income of India is large. This share is about 1/3 of national Income.

India spent a large part of her income on fulfillment of their basic requirement. Agriculture products form a major part of their consumption. Agriculture supplies food to India. As food is basic need of every person, fodder is required for livestock. These livestock are asset of a country and agriculture helps in keeping them alive. The revenue of govt. depends largely on agriculture. The govt. gets directly revenue from the agriculture. The transportation of food grain from one part of the country to other part by railway also brings revenue in the coffers of govt.

Agriculture is the predominant occupation of two-third of working population for their livelihood. 12.9% of the total population in this country own 65% of the cultivable land. India has got 130 million hectares of cultivable land. (*Indian Economy,2004-05,Pratyogita darpan*).

Agriculture is the main sector of Indian economy which is amply powered by the following points:-

- 1. Share in National Income:** The contribution from agriculture has been continuously falling from 55.1% in 1950-51 to 37.6% in 1981-82 & further to 18.5% in 2006-07. But agriculture still continues to be the main sector because it provides livelihood to a majority of the people.
- 2. Largest Employment Providing Sector:** in 1951, 69.5% of the working population was engaged in agriculture. This percentage fell to 66.9% in 1991 & to 56.7% in 2001. However, with rapid increase in population the absolute number of people engaged in agriculture has become exceedingly large.
- 3. Provision of Food Surplus to the Expanding Population:** Because of the heavy pressure of population in labor-surplus economies like India & its rapid increase the demand for food increases at a fast rate. Therefore, unless agriculture is able to continuously increase its surplus of food-grains, a crisis is likely to emerge. Experts foresee that by the end of 11th five year plan (i.e., 2011-2012), the demand for food-grains is expected to increase to 280.6 million tons. Meeting this demand would require 2% growth per annum. The challenge facing the country is clear as during the last 10 years the food-grains have been growing at a meager 0.48%.
- 4. Contribution to Capital formation:** There is a general agreement on the importance of Capital Formation in economic development. Unless the rate of Capital Formation increases to a sufficient high degree, economic development cannot be achieved. Agriculture can play a big role in pushing the Capital Formation in India. Rural sector can transfer labor & capital to the industrial sector which can be effectively used to increase the productivity in the latter.
- 5. Providing Raw Material to industries:** Agriculture provides raw materials to various industries of national importance. Sugar industry, Jute industry, Cotton textile industry, Vanaspati industry are examples of some such industries which depend on agriculture for their development.
- 6. Market for Industrial Products:** Since more than two-thirds of the population of India lives in rural areas, increased rural purchasing power is a valuable stimulus to industrial development.

FEATURES OF AGRICULTURAL LABORERS

- 1. Agricultural Labourers are Scattered:** Agricultural labour in India is being widely scattered over large number of villages in the country and so cannot be effectively organized.
- 2. Unskilled and Lack Training:** Agricultural labourers, especially in smaller villages are generally unskilled workers carrying on agricultural operation at a very low wages. Majority of them are generally conservative and tradition bound. There is hardly any motivation for change or improvement. Since there is no alternative employment, the agricultural labourer has to do all types of work- both farm and domestic for landlord.
- 3. Unorganised:** Agricultural laborers are not organized like industrial laborers. These laborers are illiterate and ignorant. They live in villages scattered all over the country. Hence they could not be organized in unions. Accordingly, it is difficult for them to bargain with the land owners and secure good wages.



4. Low Social Status: Most agricultural workers belong to the depressed classes, which have been neglected for ages. In some parts of India, agricultural laborers are migratory, moving in search of jobs at the time of harvesting with a lot of dislocation of family life, dislocation of education of children and numerous other handicaps.

5. Abundance of Labour: The agricultural labourers are abundant in supply in relation to their demand. It is only during the sowing and harvesting seasons that there appears to be nearful employment. But, once these seasons are over, majority of agricultural workers are jobless especially in areas, where there is single cropping pattern. The problem is further aggravated due to the fact that these labors are generally unskilled and so couldn't find alternative employment.

6. Low Bargaining Power: Due to all the above mentioned factors, the bargaining power and position of agricultural laborers in India is very weak. In fact, quite a large number of them are in the grip of village money lenders, landlords and commission agents, often the same person functioning in all the three capacities. The agricultural labor is the most exploited class of people of India. Thus partly because of factors beyond their control and partly because of their inherent bargaining weakness, the farm laborers have been getting very low wages and have therefore to live in a miserable sub-human life.

CAUSES FOR THE GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL LABORERS

1. Increase in Rural Population: The increase in population is the major cause of subdivision and uneconomic land holding in the rural area as the same piece of land gets distributed among large number of persons in the family which becomes inadequate for their own basic requirements. Thus the rural families have to search for the employment to fulfill their economic needs.

2. Decline of Cottage Industries and Handicrafts: The rural industries are on the decline due to increased competition from modern industries. In the absence of the alternative employment opportunities for workers engaged in these village industries there is an increase of agriculture labor in India.

3. Eviction of Small Farmers and Tenants from the Land: The large scale ejection took place through the device of fictitious surrenders to escape the clauses of laws relating to land reforms has caused an increase in the agriculture labor.

4. Uneconomic Land Holdings: The vast inequality in the distribution of land-holding has resulted in the need to search for the rural employment.

5. Increase in Indebtedness: A very large proportion of rural population is in the grip of non-institutional source of credit especially money-lenders that charge huge interest. In order to pay these debts, poor farmers have to sell their land and look for the employment on other's farms.

6. Break-up of Joint Family System: The economic support system has been reduced with the break-up of the joint family system. This has increased the need to work outside the family's land-holding.

GOVERNMENT MEASURES

The Government has shown awareness of the problems of agricultural workers and suggested ways and means to improve the conditions of agricultural laborers. These are discussed as follows:

1. Legislative Measures: The central government has fixed minimum wages for workers on farm under the Minimum Wages Act, 1948. Subsequently, the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 was enacted to provide certain basic facilities to plantation workers. Many other existing labour laws are applicable or have direct bearing on agricultural labour.

2. Abolition of Bonded Laborers: Since 1975 the concept of bonded labor has been abolished. Under the Bonded labour system (Abolition) Act, every bonded laborer 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 laborer.

3. Providing Land to Landless Laborers: Land reforms in terms of land ceilings and redistribution of land to small and landless laborers have been initiated. The government's fallow and wasteland has been given to agricultural laborers. The state government gives priority to landless laborer especially to those belonging to scheduled castes and tribes in the allotment of government land and surplus land.

4. 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.

5. Welfare Measures: The welfare measures to help the agricultural laborer include provision of house-sites to homeless, primary education for rural poor, rural health services, supply of safe drinking water, educating and organizing rural workers.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL LABORERS

1. Better Implementation of Legislative Measures: The poor laborers are not in a position to bargain for reasonable rewards for their hard work due to lack of organized efforts to implement the legislations.

2. Improvement the Bargaining Position: The agricultural laborers may be organized so that they can effectively bargain for better working conditions and enable better enforcement of legislations.

3. Resettlement of Agricultural Workers: The schemes of land redistribution to small and landless laborers needs to strengthened so as raise their income level and social status.

4. Creating Alternative Employment: The training and skill improvement programmes are required to be developed to allow alternative employment opportunities for rural workers. The public works schemes should be for longer period in the year so as to provide useful employment throughout the year. Non-agricultural industries should be developed so as to absorb surplus labor. The Development of medicinal plants and energy Plantation which have high growth and employment potential should be encouraged. Horticulture, farm management programmes, agri-clinics and seed production are other potential areas for employment generation.

5. Improvements in Agricultural Sector: The rural infrastructure development like better irrigation facilities, warehousing, easy access to agricultural inputs etc, effective

implementation of land reforms and spread of farm mechanization can help to improve economic well-being of agricultural laborers.

6. Better Credit Availability: The financial assistance at cheaper rates of interest and on easy terms of payment for undertaking subsidiary occupation should be provided.

7. Cooperative Farming: The cooperative farming by pooling of land by small and marginal farmers may be developed. This measure would provide better incentive to improve productivity of farm as these farmers will continue to be owners of their land and share the fruits of their efforts. Government should facilitate the smooth working of these cooperatives by providing cheap credit, marketing and inputs.

8. Increase in Public Investment: There is a need to step up public investment in agriculture especially in creating affordable rural social infrastructure like cheap education, health facilities, drinking water etc. This would help in improving the growth potential of rural poor. The subsidies are required to be better targeted towards rural poor. The public expenditure may be directed towards re-generation of degraded forests, watershed development, wasteland development and other highly labor intensive activities.

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