

Agricultural Growth and Social Protection in Context with Assam

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Abstract:

The whole economy of India is primarily dependent on agriculture. In India almost 70 percent of the total population live in villages and engaged themselves in different agricultural activities for their livelihood. Agriculture of rural area plays an important role in the overall growth rate of Indian economy. Assam is also based on agrarian economy and almost 75 percent of the state, total population relies on agriculture as farmers, as agricultural labours or both for their livelihood. Rural development generally refers to process of improving the quality of life in rural areas. Role of agriculture is very much important for rural development in Assam. Many of people of Assam live in villages and engaged them in agriculture as their primary occupation and almost 85 percent from them depend on agriculture for their income and employment. But agriculture of this state is monsoonal type. In this paper an attempt has been made to discuss about the role of agriculture in rural development in Assam along with its issues and challenges.

Keywords: Agriculture, Assam, Rural, Development, Issues and Challenges, etc.

Introduction

Rural Development generally refers to the process of improving the quality of life in rural areas. In rural areas the people are engaged themselves in primary occupation based on natural resources and agriculture. Therefore Agriculture is very important for rural Development. In our Country the economy is primarily based on agricultural sector and almost 70% of the total population live in villages and engaged themselves in different agricultural activities for their livelihood. Agriculture of rural area plays an important part. As a part of Northeast India, Assam is also based on agrarian economy and almost 75% of the state total population relies on agriculture as farmers, as agricultural labors or both for their livelihood.

Assam is still heavily dependent on the agricultural sector. The economy of Assam is largely based on agriculture and Agricultural based activities. Assam's biggest contribution to world in the Agricultural sector is its tea.

Objectives

- To discuss about the role of agricultural sector in rural development.
- To study to analyze the issues and challenges in Agriculture of rural Assam.

Methodology

The present study is based on secondary sources of data. The data's are collected from different sources,

books, journals, Government website etc.

Agricultural scenario in Assam: Agriculture plays a vital role in the economy of Assam. The main food crops produced in Assam are rice, maize, pulses, potato, wheat etc. Besides, other important crops are tea, jute, oilseeds, sugarcane, cotton, oranges, pineapples, coconut, betel, black pepper, mustard, Bananas etc. Total annual production of rice in the state is about 2.02 million tons. Assam excels as number one tea producing state in the country, contributing to over half (215, 157, 000 kg) of the total annual production of the country and the state earns about 11 percent of its revenue from tea production. The National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR) has highlighted the North-East region as being rich in wild relatives of crop plants. Assam is also very rich in medicinal plants and many other rare and endangered species and is characterized by high levels of endemism. Assam's richness of flowering plants is estimated at 3010 and about 293 species of orchids have been reported. In this regard Assam is representing 44.39 percentages of North-East species and 24.42 percent of species occurring in India (Das & Chanu, 2014). The state also holds much bamboo of variety of species. As per the population Census 2001, more than 85 percent of population living in rural area and out of that 52 percent of the total labour force are found to be engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Out of total gross cultivated area only 5.4 % is irrigated and the average cropping intensity of the state is 145.9%. Agriculture is backbone of Assam Economy, which plays a very important role for economic development of the state. The total food grain production in the state is rising since from the year 2011-12 and it was 5683 thousand tons in 2018-19 but then decreased to 5467 thousand tons in 2019-20. There is a fluctuation in the yield rate of rice from 2011-12 to 2019-20. In order to raise the productivity in agriculture, the state agricultural department is distributing High Yielding Variety (HYV) seeds among the farmers at a free of cost. Since, economy of Assam is based largely on rural agriculture which is the principal occupation of the majority of rural population. It generates larger share of employment and livelihood of the state. Presently, agriculture contributes about 20 percent revenue to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in the province of Assam. As per the agriculture census, 2015-20, the total number of farmer's family in Assam is 2741722 and it provides livelihood support to about 70 percent of population. The agriculture census data, 2015-20, reveals that the size of operational holdings on an average is 1.10 hectare and more than 85 percent farmers with average land holdings of just about 0.36 hectares. Apart from that total land under cultivation was 29.77 lakh hectares i.e. 37.95 percent of total geographical land area of the state of Assam up to 2020 (Economic Survey of Assam, 2020-21). The following table shows the land utilization statistics of Assam, from the year 2017-18 to 2019-20. The intensity of crop is calculated as the ratio of net area to the total crop area multiplied by hundred. There is a marginal increase in the cropped intensity of 2019-20 is 0.80 percent over the previous year 2018-19.

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Year	Gross cropped area in lakh hectare	Net area in lakh hectare	Intensity of crop %
2017-18	40.45	27.23	148.54
2018-19	40.04	27.23	147.04
2019-20	40.05	27.09	147.84

Source: Economic survey of Assam, 2020-21

According to various reports and study regarding the agricultural scenario of Assam, the performance and contribution to the GDP is very poor in comparison to that of the other states of the country. In this regard, both the Central and State government have adopted various schemes for the upliftment of agricultural scenario including farmers in the region viz., Sub-Mission on agricultural mechanization (SMAM), Rashtriya Krishi Vikash Yojana (RKVY), Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana (PMKSNY), Pradhan Mantri Krishi Bikash Yojana (PKVY) and so on. Therefore, an attempt has been made in this study to analyze the issues and challenges in Agriculture of rural Assam.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN AGRICULTURE OF RURAL ASSAM

Agriculture places a very important role in the economy of Assam. But the slow growth of agricultural sector is the cause of slow growth of the economy of Assam. However, India lacks behind many other countries as far as agricultural productivity is concern. The reasons are many. Most farmers in India in general and Assam in particular don't have excess to technology driven irrigation tools and practices. Farmers also lack information on finance and marketing tactics to get the best prices for their output . Apart from that average farm size, poor infrastructure, limited usages of technologies and best farming techniques, decrease of soil fertility due to over fertilization and sustained pesticides used are leading contributors to low agricultural development in Assam. Again, population explosion, ineffective Minimum Support Prices (MSP) system, adverse terms of trade, rural indebtedness and inefficient value in agriculture are among those challenges in the agricultural sector. Therefore, this paper is an effort to highlight some of the following acute problems of agriculture facing in the rural Assam and will try to make some suggestions for its betterment.

Natural Calamities: Floods and drought are major challenges in Assam which are considered as the principal natural disasters faced by Assamese farmers every year. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries are the principal sources of flood. The loss of crops, livestock, and houses, cultivable land due to landslide and of course loss of human lives is common during yearly flood which estimated losses of millions of rupees every year. The flood prone area of the state by Rastriya Barh Ayog (RBA) is 31.05 lakh hectares against the total area of the state i.e. 78.523 lakh hectares. The average annual area affected by flood is 9.31 lakh hectares. The flood prone area of the state is four times than the national mark of the flood prone area of the country .

Marketing Problem: One of the main challenges for farmers in Assam is the issue of market. Farmers sell their products to the nearest dealer, in most cases immediately after harvesting when the price is at the lowest instead of trying to find the best markets for their products. It happens basically due to geographical isolation of the remote rural areas where the transportation and communication system is very poor. So far as the role of the government in this regard are more focused on collecting revenues (in the form of tax on daily basis from weekly markets or through check-gates) than facilitating proper marketing system for agricultural products in rural Assam.

Water Supply: Uncertainty, water supply is one of the main problems facing in rural agriculture. After about more than 70 years of the Indian independence, there is lack of infrastructure in irrigation system in the rural Assam which reflects the worse picture of the agricultural development. The Government schemes in regard to irrigation system are found inadequate in most cases due to corruption and low standard of infrastructure. Again, these are found inoperative in most of the times. Therefore, Agriculture in India is largely depends on monsoon and Assam too. As a result production of food grains fluctuates year after year.

Non-Economic factors: Illiteracy, lack of knowledge on the challenging economic conditions, traditional mindset, and prejudiced cultural values are some of the principal non-economic factors that hinder agricultural development in rural Assam. These factors are mostly socio-cultural, which may take time to bring changes to the society and these factors may adversely affect the agricultural sector in the region.

Small, and fragmented land holdings: Fragmented of the holdings is another main cause of our low agricultural productivity and backwardness. A lot of time and labour are wasted in moving seeds, manure and cattle from one place to another. In this regard, irrigation also becomes difficult and lot of fertile agricultural land is wasted in providing boundaries where the farmers get difficulty to concentrate on improvement of the agricultural production.

Lack of Infrastructure: Infrastructure plays a very vital role in every single step right from supply of input to post-harvest management. Investment in infrastructure increases the productivity in agriculture and reduced the losses, which in turn increases the income generation. It includes basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity, pure drinking water, irrigation facilities, hospitals and schools etc. which are lacking in the rural areas. Agriculture and rural development can address the root causes of migration including rural poverty, food insecurity, inequality, unemployment, lack of social protection as well as natural resource depletion due to environmental degradation and climate change⁷. Population Explosion: As we all know that, land is limited and has reached almost the level where more expansion in cultivated area is not possible. The growth in population creates immense pressure on our cultivable land which affects adversely on rural agrarian society. The farm size in India is declining due to population growth especially due to illegal immigration and illegal encroachments in some parts of Assam and competition for land.

INFRASTRUCTURAL CHALLENGES:

Lack of Cold Storage and Food Processing Facilities

One of the critical barriers to agricultural progress in Assam is the lack of adequate cold storage and food processing facilities. These deficiencies result in significant post-harvest losses, particularly for perishable crops such as fruits and vegetables. Without access to cold storage, farmers are forced to sell their produce immediately after harvest, often at low prices dictated by market intermediaries. Furthermore, the absence of food processing units prevents farmers from adding value to their crops through preservation, packaging, or the creation of processed goods, limiting their ability to diversify income streams and reduce waste.

Inadequate Transportation and Market Access:

Assam's challenging geography, marked by rugged terrain and scattered settlements, makes the development and maintenance of efficient transportation networks difficult. Farmers in remote areas struggle to transport their produce to markets, resulting in delays and reduced quality of goods. Many rely on intermediaries to sell their crops, who often exploit their dependency by taking a significant share of the profits. The lack of proper roads, vehicles, and auction centers further restricts direct market access, reducing farmers' ability to negotiate better prices and establish long-term buyer relationships.

Limited Electricity and Water Pump Availability in Remote Areas

The inconsistent supply of electricity and the limited availability of water pumps in Assam's rural areas significantly impede agricultural productivity. Many remote farming regions either lack access to electricity altogether or experience frequent power outages, which hinders the use of modern irrigation

systems and machinery. The scarcity of affordable and efficient water pumps exacerbates the challenge, especially during dry seasons when irrigation is critical. While solar-powered water pumps could provide a sustainable alternative, their adoption remains low due to high upfront costs and limited awareness among farmer

Flood and agriculture in Assam

Assam, situated in the northeastern region of India, is renowned for its fertile plains and abundant water resources. However, these blessings often come with a recurring challenge: floods. The state, crisscrossed by the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers along with their tributaries, experiences annual flooding during the monsoon season. While floods are a natural phenomenon that replenish soil fertility and sustain the region's ecology, their increasing intensity and unpredictability pose significant threats to agriculture, which is the backbone of Assam's economy.

Conclusion:

The problems of agriculture in rural Assam can never be overemphasized. There is a saying that a problem known is half solved. It's time that the government and the top policy makers woke up with possible solutions with some positive outlooks to correct these menace. To reduce farm distress in rural India in general and Assam in particular, we can follow some ways: like increase incomes through agricultural transformation, reducing risks in agriculture, development of Agro - infrastructure and improvement of quality of rural life, generating employment opportunities to reduce mobility of labour to the urban areas, improve on transport and communication network, make land reforms, promote agro-based industries etc. It becomes very important to modernize the agricultural sector in Assam, to make the agriculture economically viable. It is an urgent need that farmers must adopt the new farm technology for raising agricultural productivity in rural Assam. Moreover, agricultural production and productivity are important to promote and sustain rural development of the state. In order to increase agricultural production, farmers should try to modernize the agricultural sector by adopting modern implements such as – high yielding variety of seeds, applying adequate quantity of fertilizers etc. Adequate organizational steps must be taken for the development of the agricultural sector of the state and the agricultural trade relation should be widened as well. Being an agrarian economy, the state can earn a good amount of revenue out of economic liberalization through diversification of its agricultural exports. Finally, development and expansion of agricultural industries can lead to a boost in rural development of Assam.

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