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III Seminar on
An Anthology on Agricultural Labour Crisis

The importance of agriculture in the context of the Indian economy is paramount. Not only it is a pivotal component in achieving several of India's goals-attaining food security, an eight per cent GDP growth rate and enhancing rural income, but it is also the sector with highest share of workers in the country. It is an established trend that as an economy matures, there is a movement of agricultural workers from low productivity agriculture to higher productivity sectors. Likewise, a comparison across two time periods, 2004-05 and 2011-12, indicated that while there was an increase in the size of the total workforce in the country, the size of the agricultural workforce reduced by 30.57 million people. The share of agricultural workforce in total workforce declined from 56.7 per cent to 48.8 per cent in the same period. Therefore, it is imperative to question how agricultural sector would continue to sustain and prosper, if the agricultural workforce is diminishing. With this notion, the objectives of the seminar have been formulated as –

- To elucidate the concept of agricultural labour
- To analyze the recent trends of agricultural labour and its implications
- To enlist the various interventions for mitigating the problems of agricultural labour crisis
- To present related agricultural labour research reviews

Concept of agricultural labour

Agriculture labour may be defined as '*labour who works in agriculture or allied activities for the whole or part of the year in return for full-time or part time work*'. According to the National Commission on Labour '*an agricultural labourer is one who is basically unskilled and unorganized and has little for its livelihood, other than personal labour*'. Similar to that of developing and under developed countries the agricultural labourers in India have the characteristics such as: 1) Widely scattered, 2) Unorganised, 3) Unskilled, 4) Low social status, and 5) Have less bargaining power. While on the other hand, the types of agricultural labourer can be broadly classified as – 1) Landless Agricultural Labourer, and 2) Small and Marginal land owners.

Trend of agricultural labour

As per the census the agricultural workforce has been diminishing, the current agricultural labour force as per the modelled International Labour Organization estimation 2020, stands at 41.91 per cent out of the overall workforce population. When this data is further disaggregated, it can be observed that male agricultural workers comprises of 38.47 per cent, while female totalled up to 53.60 per cent. The major implications of the labour outmigration is feminization of agriculture, reduced productivity and jobless growth due to the unskilled nature of agricultural labourer out migration.

Interventions and efforts for mitigating labour crisis

The Government of India has shown awareness regarding the problems of agricultural workers and suggested ways and means for mitigating labour crisis. Some of the efforts are : 1) Legislative measure 2) Abolition of bonded labour 3) Provision of land to landless labours 4) Welfare measure 5) Special agencies for development 6) 20-Point Programme 7) Anti-poverty & employment schemes. Furthermore, some of the extension efforts that helps to mitigate the problems of labour crisis are: 1) Timely training to agricultural labourer to skill the unskilled 2) Promotion of value addition activities 3) Attracting rural youths to agriculture 4) Facilitate agricultural labour group formation 5) Awareness creation for agricultural labourer to ensure employment in off-farm season and 6) Strengthening extension services with special target to outreach female farmers.

Agriculture labour related Research reviews

Gayathri Mohan *et al.* (2015), in their study on '*Supply-demand analysis of agricultural labour in Dharwad district*', comprising of a total of 120 farmers. It was found that the major reasons for the labour scarcity as opined by the sampled farmers are as follows - Existence of MGNREGA, higher wages in other locally available jobs, shift to regular/ permanent job since agriculture is seasonal, agriculture labour presumed to be a low self-esteem job migration to nearby cities for higher wages and migration due to improvement in educational status.

Satish Kumar and Umesh (2018), in their study on '*Farmers strategies to cope labour shortage in Northern and Southern Dry Zones of Karnataka, India*', carried out opinion survey in Raichur and Mandya districts of Karnataka state, revealed that mechanization of agricultural operations, shifting towards less labour required crops, hiring labour from outside the village and intensive use of family labour are the major strategies adopted by farmers to overcome labour shortage. It was also stated that mechanization in agriculture helped to solve the labour shortage.

Conclusion

The importance of agriculture in the context of the Indian economy is paramount. Not only it is a pivotal component in achieving several of India's goals-attaining food security and enhancing rural income but it is also the sector with highest share of workers in the country. Recent labour trend reflects that workforce in the agricultural sector is declining. The decline in workforce may lead to various implications in the agricultural sectors which if not mitigated may impose negative effects on the productivity of the sector. Therefore, it is important to formulate and implement transformative interventions such as mechanisation and gender sensitive extension services to retain the agricultural es\workforce in order to ensure productivity and prosperity of the agricultural sector.

References

- GAYATHRI MOHAN, KUNNAL, L.B. AND KANAMAD. S.V., 2015, Supply-demand analysis of agricultural labour in Dharwad district. *Intr. Res. J. Agri. Econ & Stats.*, **6**(1):182-185.
- SATISHKUMAR, M. AND UMESH. K.B., 2018, Farmers strategies to cope labour shortage in Northern and Southern Dry Zones of Karnataka, *Indian. Curr. Res. J.*, **6**(2): 206-212.