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Socio-economic survey of operational holding of farmers and status of small and marginal farmers in India

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Abstract

Farming remains the centre of Indian economy and major source of business for rural family, predominantly by small and marginal farmers, and securing the nourishment and nutritional security. These farmers face a few issues of credit, input supply, transport etc. Small and marginal farmers are slacking behind in adopting the drudgery reduction technologies taken after by health and sustenance of cultivate families. . So to move forward the condition of small and marginal farmers and to twofold the salary of them by 2022, Government ought to intercede within the production-centric approach to farmers' income-centric activities, with center on way better and modern mechanical arrangements.

Keywords: farmers, marginal, social

Introduction

Agriculture is the centerpiece of Indian economy and major source of livelihood for farmers. These farmers face severity of credit, lack of market linkage etc. which push them into poverty. One of the main reasons responsible for the poverty of Indian farmers is the very small holdings on which they are operating and hence they are called small and marginal farmers. They alone form 85% of the farmers in India. Their problems are manifold and to solve them and to improve their conditions fairly good investment is required.

However their life situation does not seem to be highlighted enough for anyone to have a comprehensive understanding of the possible solutions to be evolved in our attempt to alleviate their sufferings and to improve their living conditions. This article is a modest attempt, based on the survey of indian villages to present certain important findings which are also true for all the small and marginal farmers in our country as far as their life situation is concerned.

Identification of Small & Marginal Farmers

The farmers cultivating small holdings of land cannot to produce enough to meet even their basic requirements of their families. They fall mainly under two categories namely small and marginal farmers (SMFs). A number of factors are considered in identifying the (SMFs). They are: (1) the size of farm, (2) the needs of the farm family at its subsistence level, (3) the size of the family, (4) the type of the soil, (5) availability of sufficient moisture through irrigation or through rain, (6) marketing facilities, (7) availability of infrastructure facilities like transport, communication, credit institutions, storage etc., (8) sources of other income and (9) the main source of income. In our country out of these nine factors the first three are considered more important than all other factors in identifying the SMFs. However the size of the family holding is considered as the single-most important factor based on which we generally decide whether a family is marginal or not. In the table the size and distribution of the operational land holdings under various categories of the farmers in India are given. This is also known as the operational land distribution or land ownership pattern in India. Table also provides the classification of land holding based on the size of the farm being cultivated or a family is operating on. Therefore in all our further discussion on the situation of the small and marginal farmers is mainly on the basis of amount of land they own or operate and live on.

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Table 1: Size and distribution of operational holdings of farmers in India

S. No.	Category of holdings	Size group (ha)	No. in (%)	Area (%) Total	Aver. Size (ha)
1	Marginal	< 1.0	68.4	24	0.38
2	Small	1.0 - 2.0	17.6	22.9	1.4
3	Semi- medium	2.0 - 4.0	9.8	23.8	2.69
4	Medium	4.0 - 10.0	3.7	20.1	5.72
5	Large	> 10.0	0.5	9.2	17.07
	All		100.0	100.0	1.08

(Source: Agricultural census 2015-16)

From the table it becomes very clear that all those who are operating on less than one hectare of land come under the marginal farmers who alone form more than 65% of the total land holdings but have access to only 24% of the cultivable land in our country. Similarly all those have operational holdings between one and two hectares are grouped under the small farmers' category. They form the next largest group of farmers (17.6%) and operating only on 22.9% of the cultivable land. However their average holding is becoming closer to one hectare (1.41) indicating that within few years' time they also will fall under the category of marginal farmers.

The next category namely the Semi-medium farmers have holdings between 2 to 4 hectares and their number is 23.8% of the total land holdings in our country and operate on nearly 9.8% of the cultivable land. At present their average land holding is around three hectares but under the present law of equal and inheritance eventually most of them will slide down to small farmers and then to marginal farmers' status.

The medium farmers having 4 to 10 hectares form 3.7% of the total number of farm holdings operating on nearly 20% of the cultivated land though their average holding is 5.72 hectares. The large farmers who operate on more than 10 hectares are only 0.57% of the total number of the farm holdings. However they too control more than 9% of the cultivated land having an average size of 17.07 hectare. It is evident from the table that 53% of the cultivated land is under the control of semi medium, medium and large farmers and only 4.7% is available to the small and marginal farmers. In other words 85% of the land holdings belonging to small and marginal farmers have access only to about 47% of the cultivated land. When planning rural development of a country, improving the socio-economic condition of the rural population is important. In an agricultural dominant economy, the landless laborers, marginal and small farmers are treated as target group, who should receive a high order of priority in the strategy of planning for rural development.

Agricultural sector is the dominant sector of the Indian economy

1. GDP contribution is 15.4%.
2. Arable land is 159.7 in ha.
3. Farm holding is about 146 million Agriculture census 2015-16
4. Average size of holding is 1.08 ha.
5. The small and marginal farmer's holdings constitute around 85% of the total holdings in our country.
6. Small farmers have increased due to sub-division of medium sized holdings by their heirs.
7. Marginal farmers have also grown in number when small farmers are shared by the heir.
8. Large holdings have become medium sized holdings due to the operation of land ceiling act under land reforms.
9. Agricultural work force of 299 million in India (1931) which is reduced to 166 million in 2019.

10. The landless labourer has no self-employment; they depend entirely on daily wages for their living. This category constitutes the core of the employment problem in the rural sector.

Status of Small and Marginal Farmers in India

Small and marginal holdings agriculture is important for raising agriculture growth, food security and to improve the economy in India. These holdings contribute to 85% of Indian agriculture. In direct words, the future of sustainable agriculture growth and food security of the nation depends on the performance of these small and marginal farmers.

In India's economy, a major anomaly is that the decrease in the share of agricultural workers in the total number of workers was slower than the decrease in the share of agriculture in the total GDP.. The share of agriculture in the GDP declined from 57.7% in 1950-51 to 15.4% in 2019-20. That means in a tenure between 1961 and 2019, there was a decrease of 42% points in the share of agriculture in GDP. This resulted in an increase of gap between labor productivity in agriculture and non-agriculture. After Independence, the crop output growth of around 2.57% per annum was much higher than the negligible growth rate of around 0.4% per annum before independence.

Indian small and marginal farmers are also facing varieties of problems, some of which are natural while others are manmade. Some of these problems are discussed below

1) Structure of land holdings

The average size of marginal holdings in an all India level is just 0.38 hectares and that of small holdings is 1.41 hectares. The average size of marginal holdings varies from 0.14 hectare in Kerala to 0.63 hectare in Punjab.

2) Irrigation Access

For certain groups of farmers, access to irrigation has increased. But it is still a very serious issue for some marginal farmers. For large farmers, the percentage of area under irrigation increased from 16 percent to 34 percent between 1980-81 and 2011-12. On the other hand, it grew from 40 to 51 percent over the same time for small farmers. This is because canals are mostly capitalized on by major farmers. Almost 40% of the irrigated land of large farmers was from canals while it is less than 25% in case of marginal and small farmers.

3) Fertilizer Access

The fertilizer needed per hectare is related inversely to the size of farm for both non irrigated and irrigated areas. It increased from marginal farmers in irrigated areas from 100 kilograms to 168 kilograms in between 1980 and 2016.

4) Cropping Patterns

There has been a misconception that small and marginal farmers cannot grow high value crops. But some reports suggest otherwise. Studies provide conclusions that small and marginal farmers allocate larger proportion of their cultivated land to high value crops like fruits, and vegetables. They seem to have a comparative advantage in growing vegetables than fruits knowing the fact that vegetables provide quick returns. Also, small and marginal farmers allocate lower proportion of land to pulses and oil seeds and higher proportion of land to rice and wheat when compared to other farmers.

5) Productivity

A study states that small and marginal farmers possessed 46.1% land but they contributed 51.2% to the total output at all India level in the year 2002–03. This proves that the output contribution is higher for small and marginal farmers when compared to their share in area.

6) Water Problems

As we know, water is the most important input in agriculture. In order to raise the living quality in rural areas, Irrigation and water management needs to be developed. As we have mentioned above, large farmers have access to canal water for irrigation purposes. But small and marginal farmers mostly depend on ground water and are going to face more problems regarding water in future.

7) Climatic Changes

Climate changes have been a major challenge for food security, agriculture and livelihoods for millions of people including rural farmers and poor people in India. People like farmers, fishers and forest-dependent people who are vulnerable and face food insecurity, are expected to face adverse impact on their living conditions. Rural communities who live in fragile environments, face an immediate and ever-growing risk of loss of livestock, increased crop failure and reduced availability of aquaculture, marine and forest products.

They would have adverse effects on livelihoods of small farmers and food security in particular. There is a significant potential for small farmers to isolate soil carbon if exact policy reforms are implemented. Research and practice state that collective action institutions are very vital for technology transfer in agriculture and natural resource management among resource dependent communities and small land holders.

8) Low Level Education

In order to improve investment, productivity and farming practices, modern technology based machinery, education and skills are very important. Studies state that literacy and mean years of education are lower for small holding farmers compared to medium and large farmers.

Conclusion

Small farmers is an important component in society.. It is also observed that the socio-economic condition of the farmers dependent on social as well as economic status. The social condition of the farmer can be improved by adopting various social schemes for the upliftment of down trodden masses. The money is not only the solution for solving the problems of farmers but mindsets is needed for the uplift of the masses. So to improve the condition of Small and Marginal farmers and to double the income of farmers by 2022, Government

should intervene in the production-centric approach to farmers' income-centric initiatives, with focus on better and new technological solutions

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