Impact of Government Programmes on Agricultural Labourers in Rural India

M. Raja* and D. Elango
Post Graduate and Research Department of Economics, Govt. Arts College (Autonomous), Coimbatore, TN, India
kurinjiraja.m@gmail.com*; +91 9597044493

Abstract

Agriculture is an important sector which is a great boon to Indian economy. Wages is an important factor which influences the status of the agricultural labourers. The lack of stagnant wages will result in the migration of labourers to other sectors and it will lead to unpredictable poverty not only in rural areas but also impact the urban population. It is necessary and an urgent need to sustain the labourers in the agricultural sector with secure wages to meet their basic amenities. This review article analyses the programmes initiated by the government regarding agricultural labourer’s welfare and the role of government for the upliftment of agricultural labours. The Indian government formulated various programmes and has passed several laws and acts to improve the quality of life of the agricultural labourers. The State as well as Central government has been revising the wages to the labourers periodically. Several reports has been published based on the survey on the life of agricultural labourers, their wages and numerous awareness programmes are also carried out periodically to impart knowledge to the labourers on their rights and welfare. The main aspect of this review article is to analyse the reaching of the programmes and schemes and to examine whether it has been grasped accurately and utilized effectively.

Keywords: Agriculture, wages, rural population, agricultural labourers, awareness programmes.

Introduction

The best possible definition can be seen in 1981 Census which defines agricultural labourer as a person who works in another person’s land for wages in money, kind or share. He or she has no risk in the cultivation but merely works in another person’s land for wages. An agricultural labourer has no right for lease or contract on land on which she or he works. Socially, a large number of agricultural workers, it is alleged, belong to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. They are not only a suppressed class, but also unorganised, failing to fight for their rights. Because of all these reasons, their economic condition has remained unchanged even after six decades of planning. Way back in 1966, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, in her speech emphasized that we must give special consideration to the landless agricultural labourers. Although there has been tremendous progress in India since Independence, this is one section, which has really a very hard time and which deserves very special consideration. However, till date, nothing concrete worth mentioning has materialized. Seasonal unemployment is a characteristic feature of agricultural industry and underemployment of man power is inherent in the system of family farming. Agricultural workers constitute the most neglected class in Indian rural structure. Often, they are not in a position to earn to meet their basic needs and are frequently exposed to the hazards of unemployment and irregular employment and have neither private nor social security. Being unorganized, they do not have the most needed muscle to seek better living and working condition.

Their income is low and employment irregular. Since they possess no skill or training, they have no alternative employment opportunities either.

Significance of agricultural labourer

The second agricultural labour enquiry published in 1960, which states that agricultural labour families constituted nearly 25% of all rural families. Among them, more than 85% of the rural workers are casual, they will serve to any farmer who is willing to engage them and only 15% of agricultural labourers are attached to specific landlords. More than half of the workers do not possess any land and the rest of them own only very little land. Agricultural labourers predominantly belong to the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. According to an estimate, between 75 and 80% of all agricultural labourers belong to the scheduled castes. The 7th Rural Labour Enquiry (1999) announced that the average wage employment for men and women was 222 days and 192 days respectively. This was lower than the average wage employment of Rural Labour Households with 235 days and 203 days when compared to the 6th Rural Labour Enquiry (1993). This decline in the days of employment did produce an adverse effect on the earnings and liability conditions of agricultural labour households. The District level report says that 589 persons out of 1000 persons were involved in the Labour force participation rate in Coimbatore District. About 67% of the household reported having no wages/salaries in their household.
The wage rates for the year 2013-14 report that average daily wage rates varied widely for agricultural occupations. The variation was Rs. 178.82 for male animal husbandry labourers, Rs. 304.72 for male labourers engaged in loggers and wood cutters, Rs. 133.80 for female animal husbandry labourers, Rs. 185.39 for female labourers engaged in ploughing activities and Rs. 77.51 for child animal husbandry labourers and Rs. 150.48 for harvesting occupation. Loggers and wood cutters with the average daily wage rates ranged between Rs. 301.49 to 310.57 which was the highest paid occupation for men. Plant protection workers with average daily wage rates of Rs. 281.67 to 348.00 and Rs. 276.85 to 288.94, ploughing and tilling workers fetched the highest wages for women followed by harvesting and sowing occupations. The all-India average daily wage rate for women in ploughing and tilling workers was in the range of Rs. 175.89 to 195.75.

### Table 1. Agricultural Development Programmes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Benefits/Achievements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Development Programme</td>
<td>Year: 1960, Improved crop yield obtained in IADP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intensive Agriculture Development Programme (IADP)</td>
<td>Year: 1964, To develop special harvest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intensive Agriculture Area Programme (IAAP)</td>
<td>Year: 1966, To increase productivity of food grains by adopting latest variety of inputs for crops</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Yielding Variety Programme (HYVP)</td>
<td>Year: 1966, To increase the food grains and especially food production</td>
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<tr>
<td>Green Revolution</td>
<td>Year: 1969, To provide loans for agriculture, rural development and other priority sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nationalization of Banks</td>
<td>Year: 1973, For technical and financial assistance to marginal and small farmer and agricultural labourer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marginal Farmer and Agriculture Labour Agency (MFALA)</td>
<td>Year: 1974, For technical and financial assistance to small farmers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small Farmer Development Agency (SFDA)</td>
<td>Year: 1974, To increase the productivity by popularising the use of newly released hybrid/high yielding varieties/hybrids</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minikit Programme for Rice, Wheat and Coarse Cereals</td>
<td>Year: 1974, To increase the production and productivity of coconut, bring additional area under coconut in potential non-traditional areas, develop new technologies for product diversification and by-product utilisation, strengthen mechanism for transfer of technologies, elevate the income level of small and marginal farmers engaged in coconut cultivation, build up sound information basis for coconut industry and market information, generate ample employment opportunities in the rural sector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coconut Development Board</td>
<td>Year: 1981, The main functions of the NOVOD Board are very comprehensive and cover the entire gamut of activities associated with the oil seeds and vegetable oil industry including production, marketing, trade, storage, processing, research and development, financing and advisory role to the formulation of integrated policy and programme of development of oil seeds and vegetable oil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farmer Agriculture Service Centres (FASC)</td>
<td>Year: 1983, To popularize the use of improved agricultural instruments and tool kits</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Oil seeds and Vegetable oils development Board (NOVOD)</td>
<td>Year: 1984, To increase the production of pulses in the country to achieve self-sufficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td>National Pulses Development Project (NPDP)</td>
<td>Year: 1986, For insurance of agricultural crops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural and Rural Debt Relief Scheme (ARDRS)</td>
<td>Year: 1990, To exempt bank loans up to Rs. 10,000 of rural artisans and weavers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oil Palm Development Programme (OPDP)</td>
<td>Year: 1992, To promote oil palm cultivation in the country</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accelerated Maize Development Programme (AMDP)</td>
<td>Year: 1995, To increase maize production and productivity in the country from 10 million tonnes to 11.44 million tonnes and from 1.5 tonnes/hectare to 1.80 tonnes/hectare respectively up to the terminal year of 9th Plan i.e., 2001-2002 (revised)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensive Cotton Development Programme (ICDP)</td>
<td>Year: 2000, To enhance the production, per unit area through technology transfer, supply of quality seeds, elevating IPM activities/and providing adequate and timely supply of inputs to the farmers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Drawbacks of agricultural development programmes

Agricultural development programmes implemented by Indian government is shown in Table 1. The following points summarize the main draw backs of the agricultural development programmes.

1. There was immense corruption, misuse and malpractice in the implementation of the programme at every level—from selection of beneficiary families to the distribution of loans.
2. The poor people were not conversant with the programme. They took less interest in the programme because they were afraid of being cheated. Moreover, they were unable to fill up complicated forms and find the ‘guarantors’ for themselves.
3. The bank officials, through whom loans were to be given, were often indifferent in their attitude towards poor borrowers.
4. It was found that this scheme also could not make any significant impact in the generation of employment for agricultural labour in rural areas.
5. The labourers were unaware of wages declared by the state/central government. Even if they know, they are not ready to negotiate to their landlords.
6. Several studies indicated that IADP loans neither raised the living standard of the beneficiaries, nor it had any impact on the alleviation of rural poverty for which this scheme was launched.

Salient findings of the Review

The following points summarize the salient findings of the present review:

1. In rural India, agricultural labourers constitute 80% of the total labour force and all of them are in Below Poverty Line (BPL).
2. Benefits of millions of rupees invested in irrigation, tube wells and fertilizers have gone to big farmers. Cooperative and rural banks have also helped the rich farmers.
3. In the name of agriculture development, landlords and rich farmers are enjoying the benefits from the government.
4. Agricultural labourers predominantly belong to the Scheduled Caste (between 75 and 80%).
5. The Indian social system assigns low social status to agriculture workers through Indian Varna system.
6. Agricultural workers are unorganized, helpless, ignorant and illiterate.
7. Agricultural workers are having only seasonal employment.
8. Agricultural labourers financially depend upon the landowners or money lenders.
9. Agricultural labourer’s wages are very low and the rate of interest on loans were high often 25 to 50% of the total loan.
10. Agricultural workers have no social security.
11. In the rural areas, landlords, rich farmers and money lenders form only 15% and 85% are agricultural labourers and artisans and finally all the agricultural labourers are bonded slaves of landlords.

Suggestions for development of agriculture labourers

The following are the suggestions for possible development of agricultural labourers:

1. For abolishing the bonded slavery system and upliftment of agriculture labourer, the government of India should follow some stringent measures.
2. The Government of India should constitute national and state level Commissions on agriculture labour.
3. The Government of India should constitute national and state level ministries on agriculture labourers.
4. The Government should start social banking in the place of profit banking for financial assistances to agricultural labourers.
5. Banks should provide insurance schemes to agricultural labourers.
6. The Government of India have passed legislation fixing ceiling on agricultural land. The surplus land of rich is to be distributed to the landless labourers.
7. Maximum of 365 working days are to be provided in the year through national rural employment and maintain the minimum wage.
8. The Government should create a separate Board for the agricultural labourers.
9. Development Index of Rural India to be divided into two broad areas namely, a) agricultural labourers and b) landlords, rich farmers and money lenders.
10. Government of India’s policies or schemes to rural agriculture are categorized into two areas namely, a) agricultural labourers and b) landlords, rich farmers and money lenders.
11. The Government of India must constitute a Committee for supervision of implementation of schemes, policies and loans to agricultural labourers.
12. Educational and social awareness camps must be conducted among the agriculture labourers to create awakening on Constitutional Rights, schemes and policies of government of India.

Conclusion

The Indian social system assigns very low status to agricultural labourers who are socially and economically, exploited and educationally handicapped. Indian social system denies the rights of economy, education, freedom and human rights to weaker sections. Moreover, Indian Constitution provides all rights to depressed classes and the Five Year Plans allot a solid amount for upliftment of agriculture labourers. But the allotted amount is diverted to other sectors. The Government of India has to take necessary action for development of agriculture labourers and implement schemes for development of weaker sections in the rural areas.

References


