

## A Case Study on Socio - Economic Conditions of Agricultural Labourers in Idaikal Village in Tirunelveli District

Dr. T. Vijayanthi

Assistant Professor of Economics, Rani Anna Govt. College for Women, Tirunelveli, India

Corresponding Author Email Id: drtvijayanthi.tvl@gmail.com

### Introduction

Even after more than six decades of planned development, nearly about 60 per cent of the work force depends on agriculture sector. Agriculture labourers constitute the largest chunk of the labour force. Agricultural labourers are mostly landless depending purely on wage paid employment in agriculture. Most of the agriculture labourers are illiterate, unskilled and hail from depressed communities. During the lean period, they have to depend on cultivators who generally exploit them. Agricultural labourers form the most unorganized and neglected section of the rural society is the victims of low wages, seasonal unemployment, low incomes, poverty and indebtedness. The low income causes them to have low standard of living which ultimately results in low labour productivity in agriculture.

The poor socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourers affect the agricultural production on the one hand and economy as a whole on the other hand. In this study, an attempt is being made to investigate the socio-economic and political problems of the agricultural labourers in Tirunelveli district which hinders the development of the economy. Agricultural labourers play a very important role in the development of agriculture.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the Socio-Economic conditions of agricultural labour.
2. To estimate the consumption and expenditure pattern of the agricultural labourers.
3. To understand the working conditions and problems faced by the labourers.
4. To understand the saving habits among the agricultural labour.

### Hypothesis

1. Majority of the agricultural labourers in Idaikal village belong to landless labourers who are personally independent but who work exclusively for others.

2. The low wage rates are primarily responsible for the poor Socio-Economic conditions of agricultural labourers.

### Methodology

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. The primary data was collected from the agricultural labourers selected from this village. The population figures were collected from the Village Administrative Officer. Random Sampling Method is used to select respondents and samples of 60 members were collected. There are 19 blocks in Tirunelveli District of these 19 blocks, Ariyanayagipuram block is purposely selected. The respondents are located from this preliminary survey and with the help of a pretested questionnaire, the necessary data is collected. The Research on Socio-Economic conditions of Agricultural labourers also requires the secondary data. These data are collected from office of the Panchayat Idaikal. In measuring the Socio-Economic conditions of Agricultural labour, the statistical tools such as the averages, percentages, tables, diagrams were used.

### Location and Area

The Tirunelveli District has been located at the Southern end of the country just before the Kanyakumari District. This District has essentially a triangular shape. It has a total area of 6810 sq.kms. The annual rainfall in this district is 965 mm.

### A Brief Description of Idaikal Village

Idaikal is attached with Mukkudal town panchayat union, Ariyanayapuram Block in Tirunelveli District. To study the Socio-Economic conditions of agricultural labourers, a sample survey of 60 households were taken out of 327 households from this village. The village is inhabited by agricultural labourers. A narrow mud road leads to the village with paddy fields on either side. The total population of the village is 1760 of which 755 are males, 725 are females and 290 are children. Nearly 87 percent of the population are engaged in agriculture.

Paddy is the primary crop cultivated here. The other seasonal crops include pulses like black gram, green gram and groundnut. Besides agriculture, the labourers are also involved in subsidiary occupations like beedi rolling, cattle rearing and whitewashing. About 42 percent of the people own lands. Apart from working in their own fields they also go for work in other fields as labourers. They work for seven to eight hours a day and the wages paid for men is Rs.60 and for women Rs.40 per day. Only 6 percent of the people are employed in Government jobs.

The percentage of punjai land is 62.88% which is higher than Nanjai land which constitutes only 37.12 percent in this village. It is also one of the reasons for the poor economic conditions of agricultural labourers. The Nanjai land is covered by canal irrigation where as punjai land depends on seasonal rainfall.

## Socio-Economic Status of Agricultural labour in Idaikal village

The socio economic status of the family in general is assessed by the size of family, marital status of the worker, number of earning members in the family, educational status of the head of the family and family members, leisure time activities, income earned by them, expenditure and savings pattern, indebtedness, causes for indebtedness etc.

### Size of the Family

As is well known, the standard of living of a family is determined by the size of the family. Larger the size of the family, given the income to be spent on the family, the standard of the family is determined by the number of members on whom this money is to be distributed. The family size wise distribution of our respondent is presented in Table 1.1.

**Table No.1.1: Distribution of respondents on the basis of the size of the family**

S.No.	Family Size	Number of Households	Percentage
1	1-3 members	5	8.33
2	4-6 members	39	65.00
3	7 and above	16	26.67
	Total	60	100.00

Source: Data collected from respondents

The normal size of the family is only three members as per the government of India. In our study only 8.33 percent of the respondents are in this group. In this case of all other respondents the number of members in the family is above this national limit. Sixteen of our respondents informed that the size of their family is seven or even more. The larger number of members in the family poorer in general will be the standard of living of the family.

**Table No.1.2 Sex - wise Distribution of the Respondents**

S.No.	Sex	Number of persons	Percentage
1	Male	180	51.42
2	Female	170	48.58
	Total	350	100.00

Source: Data Collected from Respondents

Among the respondents the Female population is somewhat less than the number of male population. From this we may come to the conclusion that the numbers of dependents are less than that of the earning members.

### Age-wise Distribution

Another important indicator of the socio economic status of the family is the age wise distribution of the members of the family. The simple hypothesis is that the larger the proportion of population above the age of 15, greater is the chance of earning an income for the family. If the children below the age of 15 are larger, the dependents ratio is high. Here an attempt is made to distribute the number of members of the respondent's families on the basis of age. Table 1.3. shows the age-wise distribution of the population of the respondent's family.

**Table No.1.3:Distribution of members of the family of the Respondents**

S.No.	Age group	Number of male	Persons female	Total	Percentage
1	Below 15	26	48	68	19.42
2	15-25	58	40	98	28.00
3	25-58	48	38	86	24.58
4	58 and above	48	50	98	28.00
	Total	180	170	350	100.00

Source: Data collected from Respondents

It is clear that 19 per cent of the members are dependents and 52 percent of the members come under the category of earning members. 28 per cent of the members of the respondent's family are above the age of 58 and they too are dependents. Thus altogether 47.42 per cent of the members of the family are in the age group of dependents.

### Economic Status

Economic status of the people can be judged by the number of dependents who may be fed by the income of a person. The worker has to meet the expenses of his family members too. This may be due to the fact that the earning of the agricultural labour is too low that the earning of a single member may not be enough to meet the requirements of the family. The total members of the families of our respondents are divided into two categories namely earners and dependents. A person who is unable to earn his livelihood due to crippled physical conditions, age, mental retardation or who depends on some other persons for his well being can be called a dependent.

A person who fetches a reward for his existence is termed as an earner. An attempt is made here to divide the total number of members in the families of our respondents into earners and dependents and it is presented in Table 1.4.

**Table No. 1.4: Distribution of the members of the family of respondents**

S. No.	Economic Status	Number of Persons	Percentage
1	Earners	184	52.58
2	Dependents	166	47.42
	Total	350	100.00

Source: Data Collected from Respondents

Table no.1.4 brings out that out of 350 members of the respondent's families 184 persons (52.58 percent) are earners and the remaining 166 persons (47.42 percent) are dependents. In rural area, there is a tendency on the part of the people to bring even children to the field to earn a livelihood during peak seasons. That is why as high as 52.58 percent of the members are the earning members. They contribute to the total earning of the families whenever they are able to get any paid job.

### Educational Status

Educational status of the people determines the economic status of the people. Expenditure on education is to be treated as investment and consumption expenditure. Literacy rate is very low in this study area also. Literacy position of the members of the family of respondents is given in Table 1.5.

**Table No.1.5: Distribution of the family members of the respondents on the basis of educational status**

S.No.	Educational Level	Number of Persons		Total	Percentage
		Male	Female		
1	Illiterates	70	82	152	43.42
2	Primary level	35	68	103	29.42
3	Middle School level	30	11	41	11.72
4	High school level	35	9	44	12.58
5	College	10	-	10	2.86
	Total	180	170	350	100.00

Source: Data Collected from the Respondents

Table 1.5 reveals that 152 person (43.42 percent) had not been educated. 103 persons (29.42 percent) have been educated upto primary level, 41 persons (11.72 percent) have been educated upto middle school level and 44 persons (12.58 percent) have been educated upto high school level and 10 persons (2.86 percent) have been educated upto the college level.

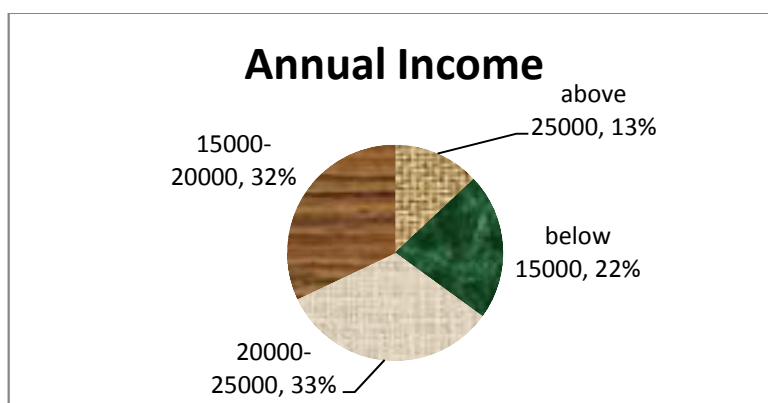
### Income Distribution

An agricultural labour is one who get more than 50 percent of his income from agricultural wage related work. There are instances in which they go out for their paid job to add to their income earning capacity. An attempt is made to divide the income of the respondents into two categories, (ie) income from agricultural labour and other subsidiary occupation. The distribution of workers on the basis of income from agricultural labour is presented in Table 1.6.

**Table No.1.6 : Distribution of respondents on the basis of Annual income from Agricultural labour**

S.No.	Annual Income	Number of Households	Percentage
1	Below 15,000	13	21.67
2	15,000 - 20,000	19	31.67
3	20,000 - 25,000	20	33.33
4	25,000 and above	8	13.33
	Total	60	100.00

Source: Data Collected from Respondents

**Distribution of respondents on the basis of Annual income from Agricultural**

The annual income of 13 respondents (i.e.) 21.67 percent was below Rs.15,000/-. 19 respondents (31.67 percent) were getting income between Rs.15,000 - 20,000 per annum. 20 respondents (33.33 percent) got income between Rs.20,000 - 25,000. The remaining 8 respondents (i.e. 13.33 percent) were receiving an annual income of Rs.25,000 and above.

### Income from Subsidiary Occupation

The respondent informed that they get additional income from subsidiary occupations such as Cattle-farming, Beedi rolling, Whitewashing and so on. Some respondents are able to get income below Rs.5000/- per annum only from such subsidiary occupations. Not even a single respondent earned more than Rs.10,000 from subsidiary occupation. The distribution of respondents on the basis of their income from subsidiary occupation is presented in Table 4.7.

**Table No.1.7. Income from Subsidiary Occupations**

S.No.	Annual Income	Number of Households	Percentage
1	Upto 5000	18	45.00
2	5000 - 10,000	22	55.00
3	10,000 and above	-	-
	Total	40	100.00

Source: Data Collected from Respondents

From this table, it is clear that only 40 respondents have subsidiary occupations. Among them, 18 respondents (45.00 percent) have been getting an annual income upto Rs.5000 and 22 respondents (55 percent) have been getting an annual income of Rs.5000 to 10,000. This may be partly extend they rely on their other occupations. This may be partly due to the non availability of opportunities and partly due to the non competence of the respondents. As the literacy level of the respondents is very poor they are not able to place themselves in high paid occupations.

### Indebtedness of Respondents

An important feature of Indian Agricultural labourers is that they generally remain indebted for a larger part of their life. It can be said “They are born in debt, live in debt and die in debt”.

### Loan Borrowed by the Respondents

**Table No.1.8. Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Loan Amount Borrowed**

S.No.	Amount Borrowed	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Upto 5000	5	14.28
2	5,000 - 10,000	10	28.58
3	10,000 - and above	20	57.14
	Total	35	100.00

Source: Data Collected from Respondents

From this table, it is clear that 20 respondents (57.14 percent) have borrowed an amount of Rs.10,000 and above, 10 respondents (28.58 percent) have borrowed an amount of Rs.5000 to 10,000 and only 5 respondents (14.28 percent) borrowed upto Rs.5000.

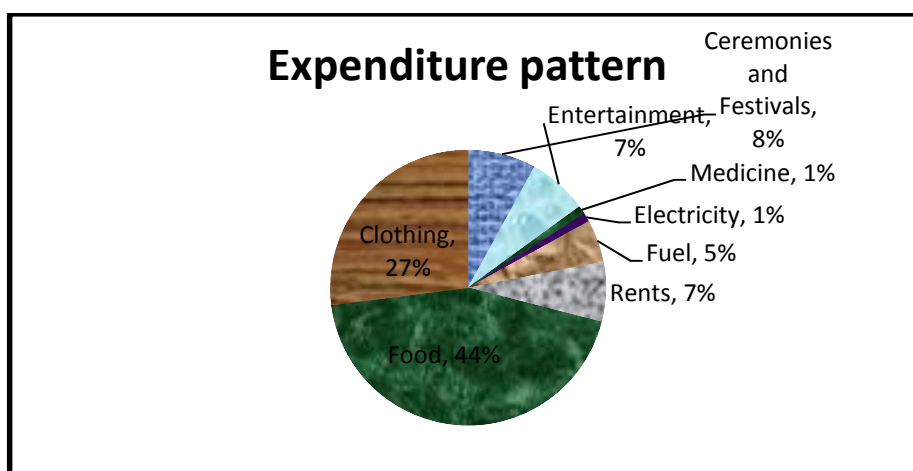
### Expenditure pattern of the respondents

Every expenditure is decided by the amount of Income earned. Expenditure is a function of income. To acquire things necessary for daily life one has to spend. The expenditure exhibits one's economic position. Table No.1.9. reveals the expenditure pattern of the respondent.

**Table No.1.9. Distribution of respondents on the basis of their expenditure pattern**

S.No.	Items	Amount Spent	Percentage
1	Food	46,750	43.36
2	Clothing	29,000	26.90
3	Rents	7750	7.19
4	Fuel	5250	4.88
5	Electricity	1400	1.30
6	Medicine	1600	1.49
7	Entertainment	7500	6.95
8	Ceremonies and Festivals	8550	7.93
	Total	1,07,800	100.00

### Distribution of respondents on the basis of their expenditure pattern



Expenditure on necessary items like food and clothing has been occupying the primary place. These people make use of the government hospital facility available and so out of the total expenditure of our respondents are spent on medical purpose. Some of the people have their own houses; others have to spend 7.19 percent of their Income as rent. For entertainment purposes they were spending 6.95 percent of their Income - 7.93 percent of the Income is used for ceremonies and other festivals.

### Conclusion

Based on the analysis and interpretation of the socio-economic conditions of agricultural labourers, the researcher has found some certain important findings. The literacy level in this village is low. Most of the people in this locality are illiterates and highly ignorant. Most of the people in this village (i.e.) 80 percent are favouring Nuclear family system. The money spent on food and nutritious items, is far from satisfactory level. The intake of food is very low both in quality as well as in quantity. Measures must be taken to improve the diet habit of the people.

The annual income earning is very low in this village. That is, many persons are getting around Rs.15,000 - 20,000 and Rs.20,000 - 25,000 per annum. This is highly pathetic. They are not in a position to meet their basic needs and further they are highly indebted. Agricultural labourers are also engaged in other activities like cattle rearing, loading, white washing etc. But the average income derived from such works is meagre. One of the most important results extracted from this study is related with the consumption pattern. Major portion of their income i.e.43% is spent on food items. Their working condition is not conducive for improving their productivity.

There is no Agricultural Labour Organisation. The local leaders and Government should come forward to organise union in these areas. This will help them to secure a better life.



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