



Major Constraints of Agricultural Labourers in India; Policy Recommendations and Remedial Measures

^{1*}Dr.A.Gunasekaran and ²Dr. T.Selvakumar

¹Teaching Assistant, Department of Commerce, MK University College, Madurai, India

²Assistant Professor, PG and Research Department of Economics, The American College (Autonomous), Madurai, India

*Corresponding Author Email Id: draguna6@gmail.com

Abstract

Agriculture plays an important role in the economic development of India. Agriculture is the source of livelihood of more than 65 per cent of the population in India and contributes less than 20 per cent to Gross Domestic Product, with a sizable share of exports. To meet the requirement of the growing population and rapid developing economy, agriculture has to grow fast and get modernized. This requires the use of high pay off inputs, adoption of high yielding varieties, fertilizers, plant protection chemicals, modernized equipments and machineries which need huge investment. This paper reveals that the broad study of essentials of agricultural workers and their rights, Agricultural labour, Child labourers in agriculture, Child labour and sustainable agriculture and food security, Hazardous child labour, Why focus on waged agricultural workers?, Workers and their trade unions in agriculture and the food industry/food chain, Sustainable agriculture and rural development policy brief , Guide to International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions, Conclusions and recommendations respectively.

Keywords: Agricultural workers, Child Labour, ILO, WHO, FAO, constraints, Food security, Workers Unions, National commission on labour

Putting farmers first

“To those who are hungry, God is bread” – Mahatma Gandhi, 1946

“Everything else can wait, but not agriculture”- Jawaharlal Nehru, 1947

”Agriculture is a high-risk economic activity”

“Agriculture not just as a food producing machine for the urban population”

Prof.M.S.Swaminathan

Introduction

Agricultural workers suffer high rates of poverty, food insecurity, death, and injury and illness. They are also often denied basic human rights. Policies targeted to improve the livelihood security and working conditions of agricultural workers will benefit rural communities and their economies and will also have flow-on benefits for regional and national economies.

Objectives of the Study

The following main objectives has formulated in this study area are

- ❖ To analyze the importance of the agricultural workers and their human value in different nations among the world.
- ❖ To find out the various problems faced by agricultural workers and Child labour in agriculture sector.
- ❖ To analyze the various policy measures taken by International Organizations respectively.

Did you know?

- Globally, there are 450 million agricultural workers. This group constitutes more than 40% of agricultural labour and is increasing in number and proportion of the agricultural workforce.

- In many countries, more than 60% of agricultural workers live-in poverty.
- Agriculture is one of the three most dangerous industries: 70,000 deaths resulted from workplace accidents in agriculture in 1997 and about 7 million agricultural workers died from HIV/AIDS between 1985 and 2001.
- Fewer than 20% of agricultural workers have basic social security.
- 70% of the children engaged in labour that is detrimental to their Development and well-being working agriculture.
- 20-30% of agricultural workers are women, who are a marginalized group in most rural areas

Agricultural labour

Agricultural labour households (ALH) are defined according to Rural Labour Enquiries as those that derive over 50 percent of their total household income from wage paid manual labour in agricultural activities. Overall, there was a significant increase in the proportion of such households over the two decades '73-74 to '93-94 in the 11 major states. Less than half the rural labour households have land, and of those who do, only 13 percent own above one hectare. In states like Punjab and Haryana where the green revolution has taken place and the areas most likely to go global, the proportion of rural labour owning land is as low as 6 and 12 percent respectively, as compared to so called backwards states of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and UP, where over 50% own land. The state's remarkable rise in agricultural production is a common knowledge: total food grains production has increased steadily since the beginning of the eighties and has continued to do so in the nineties as well. But despite such bountiful agricultural production, the agricultural laborers in the state are fighting a grim battle for survival where wages are concerned. The Left Front claims this achievement in agriculture as the result of successful implementation of the land reform policy.

The average daily real wage for the State has increased by a marginal 6.5 % from Rs 13.78 in 1986-87 to 14.67 in 1991-92 - an increase of 89 paise over five years, not proportional to increased agricultural prosperity. Non Agricultural rural employment increase by 63 per cent from 22.42 lakhs in 1980 to 36.47 lakh in 1991. Share of agricultural labourers in the total main workers in the State has declined from 25.2 Percent in 1981 to 24.5 percent in 1991. The unorganized sector is made up of jobs in fields in which the Minimum Wage Act is either not enforced at all or only marginally. There are no unions in the unorganized sector and therefore no collective bargaining.

Major Problems Faced by the Indian Agriculture

- 1) Knowledge deficit and infrastructure deficit, especially in the rural areas.
- 2) Problems related to irrigation infrastructure, market infrastructure and transport infrastructure add significant cost to farmers' operations
- 3) like any other business enterprise, agriculture is subjected to high risks because of the volatile nature of the factors involved. For instance, weather is often a problem - you have droughts in one year and heavy rains in the next. In both cases, farmers lose out; hence they have to look for a normal period to make money.
- 4) Presence of a chain of middlemen through whom most agricultural commodities must circulate before finally reaching consumers. Many SHGs have, with great success, arranged cooperatives that bypass such middlemen and sell directly to wholesalers. The government should learn from the success of such initiatives and try to help streamline the agricultural commodity supply chain.
- 5) The pressure of increasing population and the practice of dividing land equally among the heirs has caused excessive sub divisions of farm holdings. Consequently, the holdings are small and fragmented. The small size of holdings makes farming activity uneconomical and leads to social tension, violence and discontentment

Problems faced by the farmers of India

1. Indiscriminate raining pattern. This nature

2. Manmade. River disputes. Inputs you have to buy in open market at market price but produce government or other cartel will decide the price.
3. No proper insurance plan so loss finishes his life. a farmer never earns his due share of profit for his produce only the middle man or the first buyer loots him.
4. No proper financing pattern for his investments he goes to unorganised sector so he ends up in debit trap.
5. No good cooperative system to pool land area and modern costly techniques. so a small farmer die as a small farmer. Because of no profit the younger generation educated migrates

Child labourers in agriculture

Child labour is a worldwide phenomenon. An estimated 246 million children¹⁸ around the world carry out work that harms their well-being and hinders their education, development and future livelihoods. Child labour is work which, by its nature and/or the way it is carried out, harms, abuses and exploits the child or deprives the child of an education.¹⁹ Child labour takes many different forms, and whilst the long-term goal is the elimination of all forms of such labour, a priority is to eliminate without delay the worst forms of child labour as defined by the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No.182).

In this Convention, the term “child” applies to all persons under the age of 18. ¹² Seventy per cent of all child labourers work in agriculture. While many children have traditionally been employed in family enterprises, children also work in large-scale commercial plantations and in agriculture as migrant farm workers. They usually work alongside their parents, often in situations of indirect employment where only the head of the family is actually employed, but where he or she is paid according to the amount of fruit or vegetables that are turned in at the end of the day. With more hands to help, the family makes more money.²⁰ Participating in home-based agriculture helping the family is completely different situation from working during harvesting on a piece-rate basis, as a member of a migrant worker's family in a foreign country. These migrant children work

long hours, sometimes over 60 hours a week.²¹In the Philippines, for example, child labourers work 10 hours per day from Monday through Saturday with only short breaks and half a day on Sunday. The children earn less than one dollar daily. They weed, cultivate, turn soil, fix canals, harvest and apply pesticides. Children weed, cut cane and apply fertilizers on sugar plantations. Sometimes, they are as young as 7-8 years old and begin to cut the cane at age 12. Children are injured by using sharp knives, and are poisoned by the use of dangerous fertilizers.²²

Why focus on waged agricultural workers?

Waged agricultural workers are a very large occupational group.

- There are an estimated 450 million waged agricultural workers out of a total workforce in agriculture of some 1.1 billion. They account in fact for over 40% of the total agricultural labour force and play a major role in feeding the world and in fiber production.
- Waged employment is now a central feature of employment in rural areas, and the number of waged workers is increasing in most regions of the world.
- Women waged agricultural workers account generally for 20-30% of the waged workforce, rising to 40% in Latin America and the Caribbean. The numbers of women in waged employment are also increasing in most regions. New jobs are usually in export-orientated agriculture like cut flowers and vegetable growing and packing. These jobs are often classed as temporary or seasonal even if there is, in reality, continuous employment.
- Waged workers are often poorly paid, with wages well below those earned by industrial workers. They and their families often live below the poverty line, and they form part of the core rural poor in many parts of the world. Millions of these workers earn the lowest wages in the rural sector, lower even than the amount required to subsist
- Their employment is often unstable and temporary. Employment problems have increased as the impact of globalization has led to less and less permanent labour and a

more casual zed and marginalized workforce (often hired through labour contractors or subcontractors). Migrant workers face particular difficulties.

- Working and living conditions are often poor.
- Agricultural workers earn their living in an industry ranked as one of the three most hazardous along with mining and construction. They face wide variety of hazards at work ranging from, for example, dangerous machinery, unsafe electrical wiring and appliances, livestock-transmitted diseases and falls from heights, to exposure to toxic pesticides. Every year, large numbers of waged agricultural workers and farmers are killed(170,000 in 1997 according to ILO estimates), injured or made ill as a result of their work.
- In many parts of the world, agricultural workers are denied fundamental human rights: the rights to freedom of association, to organize and to collectively bargain with employers. Rural workers are more subject to forced labour than other categories of workers. Yet decent conditions of work and respect for the fundamental rights of agricultural workers are essential to sustainable development.
- Agricultural workers in many countries are typically excluded from active participation in decision-making processes with employers and government. HIV/AIDS is also devastating the agricultural labour force in many parts of the world. HIV/AIDS is a workplace issue. The disease not only affects the workforce, but also results in loss of agricultural productive capacity, undermining farms, plantations and the national economy
- The prevalence of child labour in agriculture undermines sustainable agriculture and food security as it maintains a cycle where household income is insufficient to meet the needs of families. Most children work because their parents do not earn enough to support the family and to send them to school

Workers and their trade unions in agriculture and the food industry/food chain

A trade (or labour) union is an organization created and run by workers to protect and promote their livelihoods and labour rights in workplaces. A free trade union is independent of patronage. It is not a workers' organization established openly or secretly by an employer to control the actions or demands of the workers or an organization promoted by the elite or the authorities for the same purposes. Through collective bargaining (see page 28) with employers, trade unions work to improve their members' remuneration and conditions of work, and to ensure their security of Employment. Unions also lobby and work with governments to maintain and improve labour rights, standards and policies.²⁹ Workers' membership dues provide the financial basis of unions. Union policies are democratically decided at conferences and congresses by delegates elected by the members. Unions also provide workers with a means of expressing their views on wider societal, economic, ethical and political issues. The trade unions, federations and confederations found in agriculture include:

National level

- National agricultural trade unions having a membership composed solely of agricultural workers on commercial farms and plantations. This type of union is normally found in developing countries where agriculture is still the dominant economic activity. Such unions may organize workers across all agricultural sectors, or only have membership in specific crop sectors, e.g. tea, sugar, tobacco. These unions are often the largest workers'

Organization in a country. Plantation agriculture is often synonymous with large unions. Examples include the National Union of Plantation and Agricultural Workers in Uganda, and the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union in Kenya.

Global union federations work in turn with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which is made up of national trade union centres. The ICFTU has 233 affiliated organizations in 154 countries and territories on all five continents, with a membership of 148 million workers. It has three major regional organizations, APRO for Asia and the Pacific, AFRO for Africa, and ORIT for the Americas. It also maintains close links with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and Global Union Federations. Two other international trade union organizations

made up of national centre also exist. The World Confederation of Labour (WCL) is an international trade union confederation uniting 144 autonomous and democratic trade unions from 116 countries with over 26 million members. Its head office is located in Brussels, Belgium. (WCL 2004). Merger talks are now underway between the ICFTU and WCL to create a new international trade union organization. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) is located in Prague

Sustainable agriculture and rural development policy brief

Exclusion Agricultural workers are often excluded from decision-making processes as they are not always recognized as distinct group with specific needs and interests, and they are not organized. Agricultural workers must participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives to achieve positive outcomes for their well-being and maximize their potential to contribute to SARD. Signatories to the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (1992) have committed to achieving SARD (Chapter 14 of Agenda 21) and to strengthening the role of agricultural workers' unions (Chapter 29). These commitments have been re-enforced in follow up agreements such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002), the World Food Summit: Five Years Later (2002) and the Millennium Development Goals. Agriculture and rural development cannot be sustainable unless those employed in agriculture can maintain sustainable livelihoods (i.e. meet their everyday needs), are treated equitably and are guaranteed basic human rights.

Guide to International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions

No. 11 – Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921

No. 29 – Forced Labour Convention, 1930

No. 81 – Labour Inspection Convention, 1947

No. 87 – Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948

No. 98 – Right to Organize and Collectively Bargain Convention, 1949

No. 100 – Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951

No. 105 – Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957

No. 111 – Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958

No. 129 - Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969

No. 138 – Minimum Age Convention, 1973

No. 182 – Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999

No. 184 – Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001

Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS

Conclusions and recommendations

For agriculture and rural development to become truly sustainable and for global food security to be increased, the women and men who work daily to produce the world's food have to play even greater and more participative roles. The role of farmers in sustainable development is well recognized, and is firmly established as part of Agenda 21, Chapter 14. However, in the processes of sustainable agricultural development and improvement of world food security, both the needs and the contributions of the 450 million waged Agricultural workers have been virtually overlooked to date. They are a huge and, in most regions of the world, a growing group of workers who account forever 40 per cent of the total agricultural labour for production system. Yet these working women and men remain largely invisible to policy and decision-makers in governments, agricultural and rural development agencies, intergovernmental organizations, science and research institutions, agricultural banks and credit institutions as well as in many civil society organizations and groups.

1)To improve the economic viability of farming by ensuring that farmers earn a “minimum net income”, and ensure that agricultural progress is measured, by the advance

made in improving that income. Focus more on the economic well-being of the women and men feeding the nation than just on production.

2) TO ENSURE NATION'S FOOD SECURITY AND SELF SUFFICIENCY.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS:

MSP TO BE AT LEAST 50% MORE THAN C2

1) The Commission on Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) should be an autonomous statutory organization with its primary mandate being the recommendation of remunerative prices for the principal agricultural commodities of both dry-farming and irrigated areas. The MSP should be at least 50% more than the weighted average cost of production. The "net take home income" of farmers should be comparable to those of civil servants. The CACP should become an important policy instrument for safeguarding the survival of farmers and farming. Suggestions for crop diversification should be preceded by assured market linkages. The Membership of the CACP should include a few practicing farm women and men. The terms of reference and status of the CACP need review and appropriate revision.

The scope of the MSP programmed should be expanded to cover all crops of importance to food and income security for small farmers. Arrangements should be made to ensure MSP at the right time and at the right place, particularly in the areas coming within the scope of the National Rain fed Area Authority. Assured and Remunerative Marketing Opportunities The Minimum Support Price (MSP) mechanism has to be developed, protected and implemented effectively across the country. MSP of crops needs to keep pace with the rising input costs. A Market Price Stabilization Fund should be established jointly by Central and State Governments and financial institutions to protect farmers during periods of violent fluctuations in prices; as, for example, in the case of perishable commodities like onion, potato, tomato.

Commodity-based farmers' organizations like Small Cotton Farmers' Estates, Small Farmers' Horticulture Estates, Small Farmers' Poultry Estates and Small Farmers' Medicinal Plants Estates should be promoted to combine decentralized production with

centralized services such as post-harvest management, value addition and marketing, for leveraging institutional support and facilitating direct farmer consumer linkage. An efficient marketing system with farmer's organizations as main players could significantly add to farmer's income from his produce. As a matter of fact farmer's organizations are needed at various levels of the value chain. The small and marginal farmers suffer loss of income due to distress sale immediately after harvest and are also on receiving end against the Commission agents/traders etc.

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