



Socio-Economic Constraints towards Agricultural Development in Morigaon District of Assam

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is the basis of economic structure of the district, where 75.20 percent of the total population are directly engaged in agricultural activities. The annual growth of population has exerted ever increasing pressure on land. As a result agricultural density in relation to the available land has been increasing. The regional pattern of agricultural growth and level of development is affected by various socio-economic constraints. In order to understand the level of agricultural development in different parts of the district, it is necessary to analyse these constraints so that they can be removed as far as practicable to achieve desirable goal of development.

STUDY REGION

The present Morigaon district, centrally located in the state of Assam, covering 16 mouzas was upgraded from sub-division to a new district carving out of the old Nagaon district in 1989. It is bounded by the mighty Brahmaputra and Darrang district in the north, Nagaon district in the east, Karbi-Anglong and Meghalaya in the south and Kamrup district in the west and south-west.

Its landmass extends between $26^{\circ} 2' 24''$ N and $26^{\circ} 28' 12''$ N latitudes and between $91^{\circ} 58' 57''$ E and $92^{\circ} 34' 48''$ E longitudes. The total geographical area of the district is 1559 sq. km. accounting for 1.99 percent of the state's total geographical area. According to 2011 census, the total population of the district is 9,57,853 of which 50.67 percent are males and 49.33 percent are females. About 92.35 percent of the total population of the district are rural while the remaining 7.65 percent are urban population.

OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this study are:

- i) To identify and analyse the socio-economic constraints towards agricultural development of the district.
- ii) To formulate future development of agriculture of the district.

METHODOLOGY AND DATABASE

The data for the present study has been collected from both the primary and secondary sources. To see the constraints of agricultural development some of the important socio-economic indicators of agricultural development are selected. To cover these indicators a socio-economic field survey has been conducted with the help of schedules taking purposive stratified random sampling, selecting 80 households of different villages of 16 mouzas dominated by different social groups of the district. The secondary data have been collected from Census of India (2011) and Rural Primary Abstract of Morigaon district. Besides few important information have been collected from different government offices like Economic and Statistics Department, Agricultural Department, Irrigation Department and Circle offices of the district. The data collected so are processed statistically and analysed and interpreted accordingly.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

There are numerous socio-cultural, economic, political, technological and infrastructural constraints which varying from mouza to mouza determines the level of agricultural development of the district. The major socio-economic constraints affecting agriculture are distribution and density of population, land tenancy, labour, market, transport facilities, linkage with different Governmental organizations, traditional outlook of the peasants, religious attitudes, etc. The impact of these factors on the decision making processes of agriculture has been illustrated in the present paper.

DISTRIBUTION AND DENSITY OF POPULATION

As per 2011 census the total population of Morigaon district was 9,57,423 of which 50.67 percent male and 49.33 percent female. The distribution and density of population in the district is quite uneven due to the variation of physiographic conditions, fertility of the soil, economic condition, transport accessibility and other environmental conditions. The built-up plain areas towards north and central part of the district are considerably thickly populated while the southern hilly parts are sparsely populated. About 92.35 percent of the total population of the district live in rural areas, scattered over 632 villages and derive their livelihood mainly by tilling the soil. The remaining 7.65 percent are urban population scattering in six urban centres namely, Morigaon Town (MB) (3.05 percent) Jagiroad (CT) (1.85 percent), Tegheria (CT) (0.85 percent), Nakhula Grant (CT) (0.40 percent), Bhuragaon Revenue Town (CT) (1.03 percent) and Moirabari Town (0.75 percent).

According to 2011 census, Laharighat mouza records the highest population (1,27,391 persons) among all the mouzas in the district containing 13.31 percent of the district's total population followed by Moirabari mouza with 1,26,227 persons accounting for 13.18 percent. A very low concentration of people is found in the mouzas of Niz-Ghagua (27,067 persons) and Tetelia (31,838 persons) with 2.83 percent and 3.35 percent respectively.

The population density of the district is 614 persons per sq.km. It is very uneven within the district. So far the variation in density of population is concerned, it is as high as 1297 in the Moirabari mouza followed by Laharighat mouza with 876 persons per sq km. and as low as 292 in the Niz- Ghagua mouza.(Table 1). Thus it is seen from the table 1 that the density of population in the district as a whole

is much higher than the state's average density of 397 and it is higher than the state's average in 14 mouzas out of the total of 16 mouzas of the district. In 8 mouzas, the density is higher than 600. Such an abnormally high rural density is rarely found elsewhere. This fact clearly indicates that the pressure of rural population on primary occupation is very high.

Table-1
POPULATION DISTRIBUTION AND DENSITY
MORIGAON DISTRICT, 2011

Mouzas	Area (in sq. km.)	Total Population	Density	Percentage of District Population
1. Dandua	71.29	37,670	528	3.93
2. Morigaon	78.58	65,579	835	6.85
3. Tetelia	105.96	31,838	300	3.32
4. Uttarkhola	130.24	64,927	499	6.78
5. Charaibahi	56.53	44,034	779	4.60
6. Mikirbheta	58.75	38,837	661	4.06
7. Silpukhuri	87.79	54,342	619	5.68
8. Laharighat	145.49	1,27,391	876	13.31
9. Moirabari	97.30	1,26,227	1297	13.18
10. Bhuragaon	110.22	85,539	776	8.93
11. Bokani	121.86	37,894	311	3.96
12. Gova	100.37	77,227	769	8.07
13. Manaha	94.27	43,463	461	4.54
14. Mayang	103.51	43,897	424	4.58
15. Niz-Ghagua	92.57	27,067	292	2.83
16. Pokaria	104.27	51,491	494	5.38
District	1559	9,57,423	614	100

Source: Calculated from census data, 2011

LAND TENANCY

One of the basic causes of insufficient development of agriculture in Morigaon district is the disadvantageous land tenancy and land tenure system. The farmers and cultivators could plan the agricultural activities if they would have the right to the land for its proper utilization. But the tenants who till others' land cannot do so.

From the field study, it is found that in the villages of the Morigaon district, a three-tier structure characterizes the land tenure organization comprising owner cultivators, tenant cultivators and lease cultivators.

The owner cultivators have the incentive to make full use of their land, as any benefit from improved farming will go into their pockets. The tenant cultivators are not very much interested to increase their production. It is seen that such cultivators are rather careless in preparing the land for crops because of insecurity. The big land holders sometimes hire part time or whole time labour or lease out a portion of his land to the tenant. In such cases, the hired labours may not be interested to increase

the crop production or if leased period is very short the farmers may not be willing to invest money in farm improvement feeling insecurity.

The field study reveals that among the peasants of indigenous general society, the tenancy of leased out land is generally common and the land lord himself may be employed in a tertiary job or service. In such a situation, the absence of land lord is the major constraint against agricultural development. Among the people of immigrant community there is a significant number of landless farmers and big land holders on the other hand.

LABOUR

The shortage of skilled labour is another constraint of agricultural development. In Morigaon district, out of the total population, 75.20 percent are engaged in agricultural activities. On the other hand from the field study it is found that out of the total agricultural population only 37.45 percent are literate while 62.55 percent are illiterate. It is also observed that out of the literate cultivators, there is a very insignificant number of qualified agricultural workers having technical skill. Thus the quantity and quality of agricultural labour forces have great influence on decision making process of the farmers. Moreover, it is also cleared from the field study that most of the mouzas have actuate shortage of labour even in the peak period of crop showing and harvesting which directly affect the agricultural activities of the farmers.

The cultivators of different mouzas especially indigenous general community dominated mouzas are increasingly dependent on immigrant landless cultivators.

CAPITAL

Capital plays an important role to bring land under improved cultivation. All agricultural activities and inputs like the livestock, seeds, irrigation facilities, insecticides, pesticides, labour, and various agricultural equipments require cash money. The decision making of the farmers is determined by capital which cannot be purchased by poor cultivators.

In the field study, it is found that the investment of capital on agriculture is very insignificant. The development of irrigational facilities and adoption of seeds of high yielding varieties (HYV), use of chemical fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides, modern machinery, etc are not quite satisfactory. This is due to the lack of money of the farmers. Therefore, the agriculture of the whole district has remained to be still traditional.

MARKET

The accessibility to market with assured price is the best incentive to motivate farmers to adopt modern technology for enhancing crop production. It is very common that the intensity of agriculture and the production of crops decline as the location of market centres are away from the crop field. In most of the remote areas, the agricultural markets are controlled by the buyers rather than the producer-sellers. Moreover, in most of the cases, the market prices of the agricultural commodities are manipulated by the middle men. Therefore, the consumers have to pay higher price on the one hand and the farmers are deprived from the reasonable prices for their products on the other.

TRANSPORT FACILITIES.

Transportation is the key factor for agricultural development. The inadequate facilities of transport and communication are the most serious constraint against agricultural marketing in Morigaon district. Many villages are not well-connected with market centres. The village roads of the district are still in deplorable conditions which are usually remained dusty in the dry season and muddy tracks in the rainy season. Therefore, the peasants prefer to sell their products in the village itself where prices they receive are much lower.

The total road length of the district is only 736.902 km. The National Highway No. 37 passes through the southern part of the district covering only 33.25 km length. The Broad Gauge Railway line has connected Jagiroad in the west and Dharamtul in the east only for 26 km between them. A Broad Gauge Railway line with few kms is extended to Moirabari. Thus the National High way and Railway line are far away from the main crop field.

LINKAGE WITH DIFFERENT GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

One of the basic causes of slow agricultural development is the absence of intra-and inter-departmental linkages between Department of Agriculture and input supply agencies like AAIDC, ASC, STATEFED, Irrigation Department, Bank, etc. The State Agricultural Department and many other development agencies have implemented various plans and programmes for agricultural development. Besides, the District Agricultural Department of Morigaon, Irrigation Department, Community Development Blocks and Panchayats guide and help the peasants through the implementation of various plans and programmers. But success of any production programme implemented by these Government organizations depends very much on the strength of linkage of the farmers with these organizations.

Moreover, there are some Agricultural Extension Officers and Village Level Extension Workers (VLEW) who guide the rural people in various activities of agricultural development. But most of the farmers are still ignorant and not interested to link with them. Similarly training for orientation and development of skill and soil testing programmes are totally absent.

TRADITIONAL OUTLOOK OF THE PEASANT

The agricultural development of a region is also controlled by the traditional outlook of the peasants. Most of the peasants are poor and illiterate. So, they do not know how to adopt the modern method of cultivation. They prefer to use traditional seeds and are not interested to use any scientifically improved seeds. Most of the peasants are traditionally rice growers and do not give more importance to grow commercial or cash crops. Even in the drought and flood season, when it is not possible to cultivate rice, the peasants either keep the land fallow or wait till the time of recovery of the field from drought or flood. Yet they are not interested to cultivate other crops. Hence, the agricultural production becomes low.

Religious attitudes

The religious attitudes directly or indirectly affect the agricultural development in the study area where the people of different communities belonging to different religions have been settling since time immemorial. Each of the religion has certain interdictions and taboos. For instance, pig-farming is totally absent among the Muslim communities. Even among the people of high caste of Hindus, piggery and poultry farming are still prohibited. The people of Hindus are interdicted by their religion to establish public slaughter house. Besides, the religious rites and ceremonies also adversely affect the process of agricultural development of the study region. Among the peasant communities, the Hindus are greatly affected by a number of religious rituals. Keeping into mind the religious sentiments, the Hindu farmers have a number of days prohibiting ploughing which reduces the total number of working days even in the peak time of crop season.

On the other hand, among the Muslims there is no such type of prohibition except the month of Ramjan. If it occurs in the crop season, it badly affects agricultural works. Thus the influence of religion on the agricultural development in Morigaon district is quite significant.

CONCLUSION

The forgoing analysis is concluded with following findings and suggestions.

- (i) The socio-economic constraints of the district play an important role in the agricultural development and modernization.
- (ii) The peasant society in the whole region is not uniform but divided in to various groups or communities. Each of these communities has their separate socio-cultural traits and socioeconomic behaviours. Therefore, separate planning strategy should be adopted for each group of the peasant community.

Proper education and training and motivation of the peasants by efficient extension work are very much essential in the cases of all groups of peasants. Sufficient helpline should be provided by the Government. Regular field visit should be made by the department officials so that they can guide the peasants in the implementation of the different agricultural programmes. The control of the middlemen and the private traders of the agricultural marketing system should be replaced by an efficient state controlled marketing system. Besides the individual and fragmented small farming system should be organized into cooperative farming system, so that agricultural innovation and modernization programmes can be easily adopted.

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