

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC
CHANGE MONOGRAPHS**

60

**Contemporary Issues in
Indian Agriculture**

Edited by
Meenakshi Rajeev



**INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL AND
ECONOMIC CHANGE**

Bangalore

**(ISEC is an ICSSR Research Institute,
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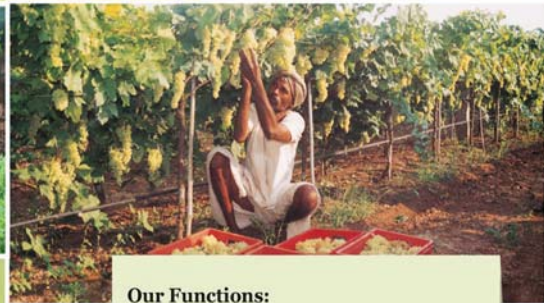
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Taking Rural India >> Forward

Foreword

Despite strong advances over the past three decades since liberalisation, poverty still remains a matter of concern for India. Most farmers are small and marginal landholders earning incomes that often cannot cover basic necessities. These farmers are further faced with the management of several challenges to agriculture, including market and weather based risks, and lack of access to sufficient credit. In conjunction with agricultural risks, farmers operating in dry and semi-arid zones face water shortages, and this is a serious problem since a lack of access to water can lead to crop failure and other issues. Water management becomes a critical issue in this context to be taken up and studied.

Research and suggestions for policies to adequately and swiftly tackle the myriad issues plaguing agriculture are of paramount importance at this juncture. Such research has to address the concerns to agriculture in the context of modern India and provide valuable inputs to policy makers. In order to facilitate the dissemination of such work, the Development Convention-2018 was organized at the Institute for Social and Economic Change on the 24th-25th April, 2018 under the theme “India at Seventy – New Development Challenges”. This convention was successful in attracting research work in a variety of topics related to development, among which development of agriculture and water resources were at the forefront. To bring better awareness of this issue to policy makers and action groups, the following monograph has been compiled from selected and pertinent papers presented at the convention.

After external review of the papers, five papers were selected to be included in this monograph. The introduction chapter of this monograph summarizes the papers that have been presented in this volume. The first paper on Oil Palm cultivation talks about the progress of the Oil Palm Development Program and shows how it has the potential to increase farmer incomes and reduce outflows of foreign exchange by satisfying domestic demand. The program has been implemented in Karnataka presently, and the measures taken in the state can be imitated in other regions as well. By increasing incomes through satisfaction of domestic demand, this can effect improvements in farmer welfare.

When talking about farmer welfare, nutrition is an important topic, which has been taken up by Ravula, Pramanik, and Kasala. In their paper, they find that while increasing farm incomes had reduced the prevalence of underweight individuals, the prevalence of overweight individuals had simultaneously increased. A focus on diversifying agriculture towards fruits

and vegetables, and encouraging home production of these items, can be beneficial in tackling issues of obesity. Awareness programs for rural youth are crucial in this regard. By improving the dietary composition, the prevalence of malnutrition can be averted while reducing the risks obesity at the same time.

Given the prevalence of small landholders in India with negligible savings, sustainable improvements in farmer welfare requires increasing their income generating ability. Credit is essential in this regard, both for the expansion of farm cultivation and the development of non-farm activity. The paper by Sarvanabhavan and Rajeev looks at the issue of accessibility to credit for farmer households and derives policy implications to improve accessibility. Channelling credit for non-farm sector development can be especially beneficial for reducing rural poverty and improving farmer welfare, especially given the small average size of landholdings in India.

Expansion of the non-farm sector must be done in a careful and informed manner, and in this regard, C R Yadu provides an exposition into the drivers of agrarian change towards non-farm activities in India, and finds that local industrialization, social institutions, interventionist state, and people's political mobilization are the key drivers of agrarian change in India, and are interlinked in some way or the other. The author further argues that environmental changes such as the digging of deep tube wells are environmentally unsustainable and lead to water crises for farmers, which are concerning as the farm sector is particularly dependent on water.

To weather water crises and ensure stabilization in agriculture, management of water resources in an equitable and efficient manner is important, and in this regard, Sivasubramanyan discusses the traditional water management practices followed in two areas of Tamil Nadu. The author advocates the revival of community level water management institutions owing to their historical efficiency and equitability, and ability to quickly resolve community level disputes, in areas where they have fallen into decline.

This monograph outlines some of the important issues that agriculture is faced with today, and is undoubtedly a valuable addition to the literature in this field. Dr Meenakshi Rajeev and the contributing authors deserve strong credit and appreciation for their work and efforts.

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Bengaluru*

*M G Chandrakanth
Director*