

**A CASE STUDY :**

Youth participation and agriculture: Issues and challenges

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SUMMARY : The present study is a short note on rural youth participation in agriculture for sustainable development. The study address the issue and challenges of retaining youth in agriculture. The various schemes, plans and programmes for attracting and retaining youth in agriculture was discussed. The importance of youth in agriculture for sustained development was highlighted in the study.

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Agriculture, Rural youth, Sustainable development, Issues, Challenges

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

India is mainly an agricultural country. Agriculture is the most important occupation for most of the Indian families. Agriculture plays a vital role in the Indian economy. Over 70 per cent of the rural households depend on agriculture. Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy. Though, with the growth of other sectors, the overall share of agriculture on GDP of the country has decreased. Still, Agriculture continues to play a dominant part in the overall economic scenario of India. As per estimates by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), the share of agriculture and allied sectors (including agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishery) was 15.35 per cent of the Gross Value Added (GVA) during 2015–16. India is the largest producer, consumer and exporter of spices and spice products. India's

fruit production has grown faster than vegetables making it the second largest fruit producer in the world. India's horticulture output, comprising fruits, vegetables and spices, has reached a record high of 283.5 million tonnes (MT) in 2014-15. It ranks third in farm and agriculture outputs. Agricultural export constitutes 10 per cent of the country's exports and is the fourth-largest exported principal commodity. The agro industry in India is divided into several sub segments such as canned, dairy, processed, frozen food to fisheries, meat, poultry, and food grains. The agriculture sector in India is expected to generate better momentum in the next few years due to increased investments in agricultural infrastructure such as irrigation facilities, warehousing and cold storage. Factors such as reduced transaction costs and time, improved port gate management and

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better fiscal incentives would contribute to the sector's growth. Furthermore, the growing use of genetically modified crops will likely improve the yield for Indian farmers. According to the National Institution for Transforming India Aayog (NITI Aayog), India's agriculture sector is expected to grow 6 per cent in FY 2016-17

Every third person in an Indian city today is a youth. In about seven years, the median individual in India will be 29 years, very likely a city-dweller, making it the youngest country in the world. India is set to experience a dynamic transformation as the population burden of the past turns into a demographic dividend. By 2020, India is set to become the world's youngest country with 64 per cent of its population in the working age group. With the West, Japan and even China aging, this demographic potential offers India and its growing economy an unprecedented edge that economists believe could add a significant 2 per cent to the GDP growth rate. Nearly 70% of India's population is below the age of 35 years, making India the youngest nation in the world and interestingly 70% of them live in rural areas. According to 2011 Census, the youth population in the country including adolescent youth is around 550 million. In 2020, the average Indian age will be only 29-year-old, whereas in China, and the United States of America the average age is estimated to be 37 years. We may utilize this demographic dividend for taking Indian agriculture to a new height by channelizing the creative energies of the youth through development of skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Lal Bahadur Shastri later gave the slogan "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" to stress that Jawans and Kisans are the two pillars of our freedom. For young people to take to agriculture, farming must be both intellectually satisfying and economically rewarding. This will call for a technological and managerial upgradation of farm operations. During his recent visit to India, US President Barack Obama pointed out that India is fortunate to have over half of its total population of 1.2 billion under the age of 30. Out of the 600 million young persons, over 60 per cent live in villages. Most of them are educated. Migration of educated youth from villages to towns and cities is the most serious form of brain drain adversely affecting rural India's development. Steps should be taken to end the distance between intellect and labour in rural professions. The National Commission on Farmers stressed the need for attracting and retaining educated

youth in farming. The National Policy for Farmers, placed in Parliament in November 2007, includes the following goal- "to introduce measures which can help to attract and retain youth in farming and processing of farm products for higher value addition, by making farming intellectually stimulating and economically rewarding". At present, we are deriving very little demographic dividend in agriculture.

Issues and challenges:

Youth are the primary productive human resource of socio-economic development. It is therefore, essential to locate the role of youth in mainstream development. The youth of India is diverse in ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Such a diversity necessitates customized initiatives to meet needs and activate their untapped potential. Agriculture and its allied sectors is unquestionably the largest livelihood provider in India, more so in the vast rural areas. It contributes significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of our country. Sustainable agriculture, in terms of food security, rural employment, and environmentally sustainable technologies such as soil conservation, sustainable natural resource management and biodiversity protection is essential for holistic rural development. In the past, Indian agriculture and allied activities witnessed a green revolution, a white revolution, a yellow revolution and a blue revolution leading to livelihood enhancement of the farming community in rural areas. The rapid growth and diversification of development activities resulted in much needed expansion of employment opportunities; but, at the same time have triggered rural to urban migration. This trend has inadvertently resulted in shifting of farm labour to non-farm sectors. To sustain food security, it is imperative to encourage farmers to continue with agriculture, where the rural youth have a crucial role to play. At present, there exists a formidable challenge in retaining youngsters in agriculture and it could be due to various socio-economic factors, including profitability in agricultural pursuits. It is imminent to reorient agricultural practices to make them intellectually satisfying and economically rewarding for the youth. India has the largest youth population in the world and is poised to increase further in the coming decade. Today, agriculture and allied sectors are facing several challenges like aging farmer population, climate change resulting in high incidence of pest and diseases and most importantly the escalating cost of production. To address this trend, the

Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has always been endeavoring to empower youth with appropriate technologies. 'Rural Entrepreneurship and Awareness Development Yojana' (READY) programme has been envisaged in the Twelfth Five Year Plan which aims at entrepreneurship development among the rural youth. It combines both Rural Agricultural Work Experience (RAWE) and Experimental Learning courses to make students equipped with the grass-root level experience and entrepreneurship skills; besides, it has also been proposed to initiate a programme entitled 'Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture' (ARYA). This initiative aims at analyzing the current policy environment and identifying supporting policies that can check the rate of migration of youth from rural areas. An information and technology intervention with youth inclusion offers greater opportunities for changing the present scenario. The youth has far more exposure, willingness and capacity to adopt and adapt to technology than the older generation. In the recent past, both private and government organizations have launched various ICT enabled programmes, for instance, the Government of India initiated the Digital mandi/ e-mandian electronic trading platform for agrocommunities, to bring agricultural information to the mobile phones of the farmers. While the virtual support extended by the Government to the farmers could be seen as a positive step, the uptake would have increased dramatically if the youth were also brought into this process to establish the link between technology and the end beneficiaries. Rural youth stakeholdership in agriculture where opportunities are many is a gradual process and an appropriate approach ensuring manifold contribution from the sector is needed to increase the overall growth and development of the country.

Large scale migration of rural youth from farming to urban areas and non-farm has caused a concern among the country's agricultural policy makers. When such a trend goes unchecked, it is likely to affect agricultural activities in the future. In a bid to address this trend, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has constituted a seven member Expert Committee to suggest ways of attracting youth to agriculture. The committee with a theme on Attracting and Retention of Youth in Agriculture (ARYA) will come out with region-wise recommendations regarding the measures to be taken to attract the youth. The concern is mainly about the school and college dropouts who migrate to cities in search of

menial jobs. It has become a social problem as most of these youth find it difficult to sustain their families with the pittance they earn in cities. They need to be convinced through concrete examples that they can earn much more than they earn in cities if they continue in farming. Issues such as providing training on innovative and sustainable agricultural practices that helps to make agriculture a profitable venture will be addressed. This would involve a series of activities, including creation of infrastructure facilities in various aspects of farming, providing marketing linkages and exploring opportunities in secondary agricultural operations such as value addition and hiring and servicing of mechanized farm implements

Conclusion:

Youth participation all along the value chain is vital to the growth of the agriculture-based economies of most states in India, from agricultural research and development, to food production, storage and handling, to agro processing, through to marketing and distribution in local, regional and international food markets. Indian youth present an unprecedented opportunity to deal with the constraints and challenges holding back improvements in agricultural productivity. Channeling the energy, strength, and dynamism of India's youth into productive, competitive and profitable agribusinesses (including food production) will boost agricultural productivity, ensure sustainable food production system, create jobs and generate incomes. The impact of youth involvement and participation in agriculture and food systems will be seen in sustainable economic growth, and in the reduction of poverty and malnutrition across the country.

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