

EMPOWERING YOUTH FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRIBUSINESS: A STUDY OF KERALA

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Abstract *There are clear signs of people moving away from agriculture sector in India. Same trend can be seen in the state of Kerala where youth are not ready to take up agricultural activities and are opting for white collar jobs. The paper analyses the current situation in Kerala state where the social development indicators are remarkable, but industrial development is not in a desirable way. Unemployment is in the severe form in Kerala. At the same time the dependence of Kerala on imports of food materials from elsewhere is increasing which are cultivated using chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The youth, of course, holds immense promises and potential which have been remained untapped in our country. The paper tries to give recommendations as to what can be done to attract youth towards agriculture and increase the number of agripreneurs in the state.*

Keywords: *Agriculture, Agripreneur, Agri- business, Agriculture education, Unemployment, Youth*

INTRODUCTION

Kerala, the ever flourishing land of exquisite beauty and plethora of nature's gifts, known for its lush green landscape, its dense forest cover, long coast line, abundant water bodies and environment friendly culture, claims its own unique place in vast country of India. The much acclaimed Kerala model of development is well known and hardly needs a detailed explanation. Kerala stands out in terms of high literacy, favourable sex ratio, health, life expectancy, low population growth. Its level of social development is almost at par with the level of development in the highly industrialized countries including the United States (Economic Review, 2011). Kerala is a beacon of hope for the rest of the country in terms of what can be achieved in the social sector. But a proportionate level of achievement is not found in the industrial development. It can be rightly said that the state had no idea how to utilize the capital for industrial development. The agricultural sector in the state, however, is afflicted by a fairly long period of stagnation similar to the rest of the country. The fact that the state has a very low land-man ratio and shortage of labour makes the challenges to rejuvenating agriculture in Kerala different from those in other parts in India (Mohandas, 2005).

If an assessment is made about the achievements of the state in the last 50 years we can understand that after recording relatively high growth rates in the initial years the Kerala economy has entered a stage of stagnation. If the state was

able to go in line with the first stages of growth then now it would have become one of the best developed states in India. There is a significant decline in the primary and secondary sectors. There is a shift towards tertiary sector as it faces less international competition. This change has brought about considerable decrease in the revenue earning of the state. In spite of all these allegations against Kerala, the reality is that now also no one can write off the state. The powerful spark of development is still in Kerala.

YOUTH OF KERALA

Youth represents the future and hope of a country. Kerala is in fourth position in unemployment level among states, with an unemployment level of 9.9 percent. Structural changes in employment caused by decline or disappearance of several labour intensive activities such as rice cultivation and traditional cottage industries have led to decline in the work participation rate, particularly of women. According to the live register of the employment exchanges in the state, there are 45 lakh unemployed persons, of which 27.4 lakh are women. The contradiction here is that about 40 lakhs of these unemployed persons have been registered for government's employment guarantee programme in which per day salary is Rs. 180. But they are not willing to be an entrepreneur, turn to farming or work in paddy or plantation fields. Many of the youth are working in private sector for low monthly income. It is not possible for the

government to provide jobs for everyone. Remittances are a key source of income for Kerala's economy (Wikipedia). About 2.5 million keralites are working in abroad. Migration patterns and their socio-economic impact have significantly influenced the culture and political process in Kerala. High remittances helped decrease unemployment and poverty which also paradoxically giving rise to a consumerist culture and commoditisation of public services such as education and health. (John Samuel, 2003). The recently implemented Nitaqat law by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has raised much concern in Kerala, because with the arrival of the gulf-returns the unemployment problem in the state will become aggravate in the coming days. As of now the labour sector mainly comprises of other state workers and because of the low wage, willingness to work for long hours, unawareness about the labour laws, obligations, lack of unionism, they are more preferred by the employees. The existing scenario of the state shows the problems with the youth, how the huge power is wasted without being properly used for the socio economic change of the country. The immense power of youth if properly utilized can contribute to the overall development of the state.

MIGRATION

As of early 2013, there are close to 2.5 million (7.5% of state population) migrant workers from other states of India in Kerala. In some places like Perumbavoor in Ernakulam district they outnumber the locals. These increased figures of migration can be said as a replacement for the jobs which expatriate keralites have left behind and the rest are not willing to do.

AGRICULTURE IN KERALA

Till seventies agriculture was having a steady growth. The most notable feature of Kerala's agricultural development is the emergence of cash crops as a dominant sector over the last four decades. Today Kerala has given up agriculture and has not able to gain much in industries. As development dreams focus only on IT and tourism, the significance of the name "karshika keralam" is almost lost. But as a service industry the limitations of IT and tourism have been understood by keralaites. The underlying force behind world financial system is production. The most important in it is agricultural production. But in Kerala most of the farmers are withdrawing from agriculture saying that agriculture is not profitable and attractive. Those farmers who continue in the field against the adverse situations has to face problems such as non-availability of workers, water, manure, no market for their products.

MEANING OF AGRIPRENUER

The term *Agripreneur* is not found in dictionary but generally it is used for the entrepreneur who is indulged with the activities of agriculture. Agripreneurship is entrepreneurial quality which can enhance the good opportunities for one involved in agriculture. As we know that agriculture is mainstay of India hence the good promotional strategies for agriculture is must to ensure the wellbeing of farmers. Agripreneurship can be better known as promotion and value added services for agricultural products. Now a days farmers are becoming real agripreneurs as they are working hard themselves on marketing skills for promotion of good quality agro products. They are educating themselves so that they don't have to depend on others. As per the need of India, we need good agripreneurs to stay with the world pace as far economy is concerned. Contribution of agripreneurs would count on India's economy as a whole.

Emerging Trend: Why Agriculture to Agri-business?

- Increasing demand for organic/quality food both in India as well as abroad. Market growth of around 15-25 percent per year.
- Competitive advantages for many primary production activities in agriculture. Rain-fed farming, tropical fruits and vegetables, livestock, animal husbandry, aquaculture, wild craft, etc. are produced through real low cost production methods.
- Private sector is willing to enter into agri-businesses at all levels of operations. Changing consumer demand and retail revolution have open the doors for investments by private sector in agri-agribusinesses like Reliance, Bharati, Pantaloon, Carrefour, etc.

Key Challenges for HR Skill Development in Transforming Agriculture to Agri-business

- Agriculture to agri-business potential has neither been recognized by the academic/s nor is being promoted as a career making opportunity among practitioners.
- Region-location specific agri-business opportunities need to be identified and accordingly suitable human resource training programs should be launched.
- Learning processes for human resource to be engaged in agri-business enterprises should be designed to suit the candidates as per the job requirements.
- The focus to upgrade the skills of conventional practitioners of agriculture into agri-business human resource will provide the missing links

AGRIPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT: NEED OF THE DAY

About 60 percent of the people of our country are depending on agriculture for their livelihood. There is no doubt that the market for food products will be increasing day by day. Kerala is home to 2.76 percent of India's population; at 859 persons per km², its land is nearly three times as densely settled as the rest of India, which is at a population density of 370 persons per km² (Census, 2011). Population is increasing day by day and so the demand for food products is increasing daily. It will lead to a great disaster if food production does not increase along with the population increase. Demand is increasing for organic products. Even now the state is depending on the neighboring states for almost all the products. The ever widening supply gap in food grains has grown to alarming proportion of 90 percent. This not only created irreversible threat on Kerala's food security, but also aggravated the adverse ecological consequences due to increasing conversion of low – lying paddy lands for non-agricultural purposes after filling the land. The filling of paddy lands and over exploitation of irrigation facilities have affected water conservation vary adversely and a growing tendency is also aroused to leave the paddy lands as fallow due to low income from cultivation (Mohandas, 2005).

The old type of farming will not at all be profitable and viable these days. What can be done is to completely modernize the system and structure. We need to mould the existing farmers to the level of an agripreneur or agricultural mechanic or agritechnician. Then the youth of our state will be interested to be a part in it. For such youth who are interested in new experiments in farming can take to hi-tech farming or green house farming, a new opportunity to convert farming to money. For over all social and economic development it is imperative that agriculture sector must be revamped.

Factors Affecting Youth Involvement In Agriculture

The factors were identified through review of literature and the researcher's personal experience in an NGO working for rural youth. The economic based constraints seem to be the most important factor. The main issues are discussed here:

Financial Problems

Agribusinesses' biggest problem during economic stress is to create revenues to meet current financial obligations (Parcell, 2001). Especially the high rate of interest and lack of hand holding support from the training institutes, bankers' resistance to finance and NABARD and other commercial

banks non willingness to give correct picture about the rate of interest, subsidy and collateral security were the major problems faced by majority of the entrepreneurs. Financial problems are of significant nature and are predominantly related to working capital management and capital expenditure type (Karjagi et al., 2009). High costs along with government duties and taxes make the agro products less competitive in world markets. The high cost of raw material, machinery and packaging material; poor technology in processing, packaging and distribution; inadequate and expensive air- cargo and shipping and port facilities, etc.; all these factors inhibit the growth of this industry (Goyal, 2006). This industry is badly affected because of existence of a large number of small farmers (the main and initial component of value chain) who are poor, undernourished, poverty stricken, depend on monsoons and, practice subsistence agriculture. As their risk-taking abilities are low, productivity declines. Also presence of large number of intermediaries in the agricultural supply chain leads to limited scale of financing as well as higher risk, because of lack of control each of the players has on the supply chain.

Furthermore financing is largely dependent on unorganized sources of credit due to bottlenecks in access, timeliness in availability and adequacy of credit from organized sources. This is because of the hurdles faced by banks in financing farmers due to their inability to provide adequate collateral as security and potential for default in the absence of an assured market for their produce.

Labour Shortage

In Kerala as all of the people are educated, no one is interested to work in plantations and paddy fields. Now most of the labourers available in Kerala are from other states. The agrarian sector in the state is characterized by high wages due to trade union bargaining power and 'pull' factors from secondary and tertiary sectors and also due to high income opportunities in the Gulf countries (K.P. Kannan, 2011). Because of high wages and labour shortage farmers are shifting to lower labour-intensive crops like coconut or rubber. Even at this high rate of wage, state is facing acute labour shortage.

Lack of Agricultural Education

Primarily, a major challenge to young people of our country is the lack of information and initiation of agricultural long-term activities, which aids in rural development. It is essential to stimulate the interest in agriculture from childhood itself. Present status of the educational sectors is mainly dominated by the technical and corporate studies only, because of which our young people are being unaware about the basic agricultural trends and opportunities. Further, our second

challenge is to ensure that policies are designed to make the most of the opportunities in providing measures to upgrade technology in farming, raise productivity and in establishing and distribution channels throughout the countries. The youth needs to be taught skills in agribusiness. Our schools and colleges should offer more programme in agriculture. A relevant and pragmatic curriculum needs to be developed, which will meet the needs of our nation. The relevant government ministries need to work together to formulate the curriculum. Most of youth in the village lack the ambition of involving in long term agricultural activities that would develop the livelihood of individuals and a community as a whole. Most young subsistence farmers and non-farmers regularly participate in domestic agricultural activities. However, the majority does not depict crop growing and farming to be of higher status and important to the overall development of the community, simply because they do not possess such knowledge required. There is lack of information needed by an enthusiastic young person having abilities to a sustainable farming that would not only enable him to earn sufficient revenue, but play an integral part in the development of food security and improvement in the community. Moreover, the lack of constructive ideologies on how to implement traditional knowledge into commercial agricultural projects alters the perception of most rural youth as to how important crop growing and farming practices are to the development of not only the rural community, but also the nation and region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be adequate and proper methods to attractive packaging and marketing of the products made by these farmers. Then only the farmer will get the required profit. If one cultivates more quantity of products then he can think of exporting it. In abroad, usually three types of vegetables are available. One is normal vegetables at low price. The second type is safe to eat vegetables in which they will put artificial manures but not fertilizers. The third type is organic vegetables in which there is not any type of fertilizers but there is 30 percent increase in price. There is the chance of exporting organic and safe to eat vegetables.
2. There is immense scope for forming many greenhouses by a cluster which includes 10 -12 people. They can try different types of vegetables according to their interest.
3. Government can help them to make a processing unit where all the products are collected and to test the quality and the content of pesticide in it and then pack them in a neat way then can sell it under one brand in Kerala or outside Kerala. As it is functioning under a group it is not difficult for the entrepreneur to search for market and will get the best price also. NABARD has special funds for making godowns, cold storages

in the processing field but it has not been properly used by the government.

4. Among the unemployed persons, many are ladies without any knowledge of skilled work. It is the responsibility of the government to mould them according to the need of the labour market.
5. To increase agricultural production the government has to take the necessary action to convert the 1000 of acres of barren land for agricultural purposes. Every panchayat and krishi bhavan should make the data of the barren land and make an analysis of how much agricultural land is not used properly. Measures must be made to give these lands in lease to the needed agriculturalists. Government must also ensure that the land is given back to them after the time of lease. There is a lot of land under various government departments. By giving these land to the joint liability groups like kudumbashree, janashree we can utilize it properly.
6. By making the suitable business projects for an area and with the cooperation of the banks we can strengthen the agricultural activities.
7. There are immense opportunities available in systematic yield enhancement used in agricultural production, precision farming in vegetables, fruits, spices and organic farming.
8. The main problem is that the activities conducted in isolation for increasing agricultural production won't work. The best example is the case of the slaughtering unit in Wayand founded by Agricultural protection department in Wayand with the support of NABARD. It is not functioning due to the lack of required animals. There is no proper system to supply the needed animals.
9. It is not possible for the Government to provide employment to the returned migrants. The focus must be on for giving the support and training for becoming an entrepreneur, especially agriprenuer as it has immense opportunities today.

CONCLUSION

So agriprenuers have a wide world of market before them. There is a generation which says that farming is not profitable but our vision must be to make farming a profitable sector by using modern techniques. For greenhouse farming, as it is expensive the Nation Horticulture Mission gives 50 percent as subsidy whereas state government gives 25 percent as subsidy for implementing it. Thus the total subsidy will be 75 percent. At the same time focus must be given towards accumulation, processing and marketing of the agro products which will help the farmers and consumers. Till now the farming sector was an unattractive one which needs lots of effort and hard work with less profit. Now we have some notable examples of highly educated youth turning towards

agriculture, the fact itself is enough to dispel the gloom. We need more agripreneurs for the development of the state of Kerala.

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