

Impact of Corona Pandemic on Agricultural Labourers

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ABSTRACT

In 2020-21, The Corona pandemic put a global humanitarian challenge to the world. It has led to a great loss to human life and has created a global crisis in the field of public health, food systems and the livelihood opportunities, through which it had devastating impacts on the world economy – both directly and indirectly. The Corona induced lockdown in India was a huge economic shock. The Agricultural labourers are important to our country in improving the production of Agricultural products. Millions of agricultural workers, regularly face high levels of poverty, malnutrition and poor health, and suffer from a lack of safety and protection measures as well as different types of abuses. With low and irregular incomes and a lack of social support, many of them are impelled to continue working, often in unsafe conditions, thus exposing themselves and their families to additional risks. Further, when experiencing income losses, they may have to choose negative coping strategies, such as distress sale of assets, predatory loans or child labour etc.

Key Words : Corona pandemic, Agricultural labourers, Wages, Economy, Informal sector

INTRODUCTION

The Corona pandemic is the greatest global humanitarian challenge that the world has faced since World War II. It has caused great loss to human life and has created a global crisis in the field of public health, food systems and the livelihood with devastating impacts on the world economy – both directly and indirectly. The Corona induced lockdown in India was a huge economic shock. It started across the country on 24 March 2020 and still exists in one or the other form. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is profound. Millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the undernourished people have reached to frightening numbers.

Millions of enterprises have suffered existential threats. Nearly half of the world's workforce is at risk of losing their livelihoods. Informal sector workers are particularly vulnerable because the majority lost their livelihoods, lack social protection and access to quality

health care and have lost access to productive resources. Losing all the means to earn income during lockdowns are disturbing and many are not capable to feed their families.

Agriculture is the backbone of any economy. It is the primary sector which generates employment. Without Agriculture human beings will be unable to live and agriculture in India still supports vast population. The Indian economy was badly hit by the the corona virus pandemic and resultant lockdowns.

Agricultural labourers are those persons who work on the land of others on wages for the major part of the year and earn a major portion of their income as a payment in the form of wages for works performed on the agricultural farms owned by others. The Agricultural labourers are important to our country in improving the production of Agricultural products. Millions of agricultural workers, regularly face high levels of poverty, malnutrition and poor health, and suffer from a lack of safety and protection measures as well as different types of abuses.

With low and irregular incomes and a lack of social support, many of them are impelled to continue working, often in unsafe conditions, thus exposing themselves and their families to additional risks. Further, when experiencing income losses, they may have to choose negative coping strategies, such as distress, sale of assets, predatory loans or child labour etc., Migrant agricultural workers are particularly more vulnerable, because they face risks in their transport, working and living conditions and struggle to access the support measures put in place by governments. The agricultural labourers are one of the most exploited and oppressed classes in rural hierarchy.

Review of Literature:

This paper includes a review of literature about present study from different sources such as articles, journals, and online sources.

The definition of an agricultural labour household adopted by second ALE (Agricultural Labour Enquiry) (1956-57) was operationally different from and more convenient than that used in the first ALE (1950-51). In the first ALE, a household in which either the head of the household or 50 per cent or more of earning members who reported agricultural labour as the main occupation was deemed to constitute an agricultural labour household. In the second ALE, a household deriving 50 per cent or more of its income (after imputing the value of home-grown and self-consumed products) from agricultural labour was defined as an agricultural labour household. The Try-out on Agricultural Labour Enquiry revealed that the two definitions were co-terminus (Som, 1961).

The agricultural and allied sector has an immense importance for the Indian economy. It contributes nearly one-sixth to the Indian national income and provides employment to nearly 50% of the workforce. It is fundamental for ensuring the food security of the nation and also in the growth of secondary and tertiary sector of the economy through its forward and backward linkages. The performance of agricultural sector greatly influences achievements of other sectors. For instance, World Development Report 2008 released by World Bank emphasizes that growth in agriculture is, on average, at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth outside agriculture. Agricultural growth reduces poverty directly, by raising farm incomes, and indirectly, through generating employment and reducing food prices. In other words, a thriving agricultural sector is a boon for most

sectors of the Indian economy (NABARD, 2020).

Various studies revealed that seasonal employment, low wages are the important problems of agricultural labourers (Gade, Purohit&Kaktikar,2019)

The daily wage earned by the casually employed adult male worker decreased by 11 per cent from Rs 1.09 in 1950-51 to Rs 0.97 in 1956-57, and that of the casually employed adult female worker by 11 per cent from Rs 0.66 to Rs 0.59.(Som,1961)

The study revealed that the workforce in agriculture (cultivators and agricultural labourers) was 97.2 million in 1951 and this rose to 185.2 million in 1991. Number of agricultural labourers rose from 27.3 million in 1951 to 74.6 million 1991 (ibid).

Grant Thornton (2020) points out the report of a study about lockdown and its impact on Agriculture Sector. The agricultural value chain in India has been adversely affected by the Covid-19 crisis and the resultant lockdown. Grant Thornton has laid out the challenges and offered recommendations.

It is observed that over time that as economies progress and move towards development, workforce tends to move away from primary sectors of the economy. Consistent with this empirical evidence observed worldwide, even in India, the percentage of people employed in agriculture has been consistently declining, from around 60% in 1999-00 to 49% in 2011-12(FICCI, 2015).

International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates an increase of 5.3 million ("low" scenario) and 24.7 million ("high" scenario) in unemployment from a base level of 188 million in 2019 because of the current crisis (FAO, 2020)

RadheshyamJadav's(2020) study briefly explains how COVID 19 emptied the bowls of farm labourers. In his study he states:

The economic crisis following the pandemic has pushed thousands of agriculture labourers reeling under debt. Big farmers prefer to make a one-time investment in machinery rather than spend on human labour.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology of the research indicates the general pattern of organizing the procedure of gathering valid and reliable data for problem under the investigation. The main purpose of the research is to discover answer to the problems through application of scientific procedure.It is goal directed and involves a clear cut methodology. It

is scientific description of a particular study that has been carried out. Research methodology is considered as one of the important aspects because it explains the whole process of the study adopted by the researcher. The present study is ‘the impact of lock down imposed in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic on agricultural labourers’. The research design, scope of the study, sampling and data analysis and interpretation are explicated below

Aims of the study:

The main aim of the study is to analyze the impact of lockdown on agricultural labourers during the corona pandemic period. This study constructed following objectives

Objectives:

- To study the availability of work for agricultural labourers during corona pandemic
- To know the difference in wages before the pandemic and during pandemic
- To know the number of people from each family working as agricultural labourers.

Sampling:

40 individuals are selected for data collection using simple random method and data was collected through survey method.

Sources of data:

Primary and secondary data is used for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. Primary data is collected through survey method using Questionnaire and interview schedule as data collection tools. Secondary data is collected through journals articles, books, websites etc.

Data analysis:

Data collected were codified, tabulated and analyzed using tables and charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Table 1 and Fig. 1 presents the wages obtained by the respondents during the times of Corona pandemic. 25 per cent of respondents have gained the same wages during corona pandemic as much as they were getting earlier. 35 per cent of respondents did not get the same wages as much they were getting earlier and 40 per cent of respondents were not able to express whether there was difference their earnings during pandemic clearly.

Sr. No.	Do You find differences in wage during pandemic	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Yes	10	25%
2.	No	14	35%
3.	Cannot say exactly	16	40%
	Total	40	100

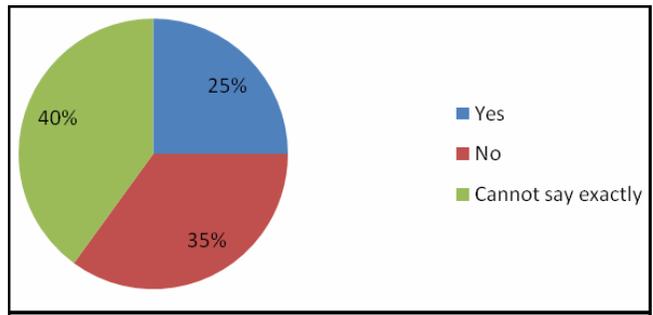


Fig. 1 : Differences in gaining wage during pandemic

The Table 2 and Fig. 2 presents the number of respondents who get work during the time of corona pandemic. 10 per cent of respondents have got work for whole week and 10 per cent of respondents got work twice a week. 7.5 per cent of respondents fetched work for 4 to 5 days in a week during corona pandemic. 70 per cent of the respondents could not get work regularly

Sr. No	Availability of work	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	2 days in a Week	4	10 %
2.	3days in a Week	1	2.5%
3.	4 to 5 days	3	7.5%
4.	Whole week	4	10%
5.	Irregular	28	70%
	Total	40	100%

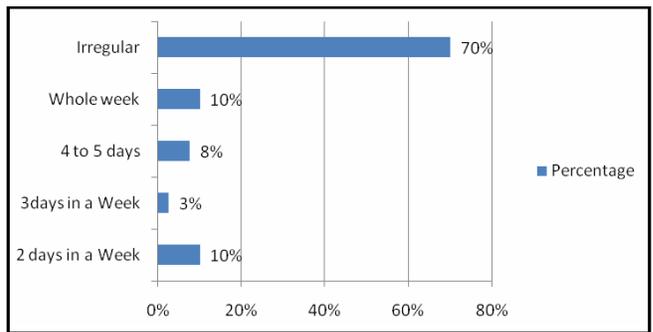


Fig. 2 : Availability of work

during corona period.

The Table 3 and Fig. 3 presents the variations in getting wages during corona pandemic. Majority *i.e.*, 37.5 per cent of respondents were gaining the wages based on the availability of work. 30 per cent of respondents were gaining the same amount of wages during the pandemic and earlier, 32.5 per cent of respondents were not able to gain the same wages which was provided before the pandemic period.

Sr. No.	Respondents Getting Same Wages	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Yes	12	30%
2.	No	13	32.5%
3.	Wages based on work	15	37.5%
	Total	40	100%

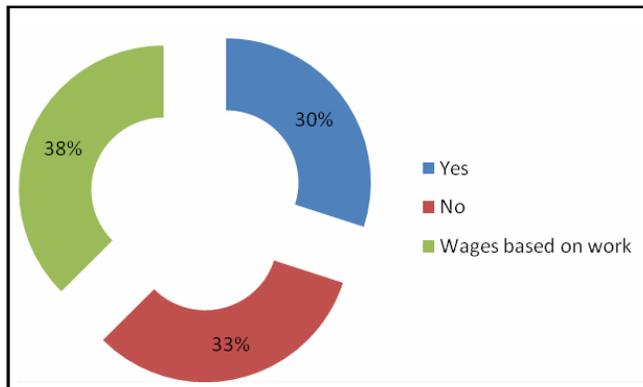


Fig. 3 : Getting same wages during the pandemic and earlier

The Table 4 represents the availability of work during lock down period during corona pandemic. It shows that the respondents were completely unemployed during the times of lockdown period.

Sr. No.	Availability of Work	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Yes	0	0
2.	No	40	100%
	Total	40	100%

This Table 5 and Fig. 4 depicts the number of family members of the respondents working as agricultural labourers. Majority *i.e.*, 42.5 per cent of respondents' family consists of 1-3 members who are working as agricultural labourers. 40 per cent of respondents have

expressed that 3 to 5 members of their family are working as agricultural labourers, 10 per cent of the respondents have said that 5 to 7 members of their family are working as agricultural labourers and 7.5 per cent of respondents' family consists of more than 7 members who are working as Agricultural labourers.

Table 5 : Family members of the respondents working as agricultural labourers

Sr. No.	No of family members	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	1-3	17	42.5%
2.	3-5	16	40%
3.	5-7	4	10%
4.	7 and Above	3	7.5%
	Total	40	100%

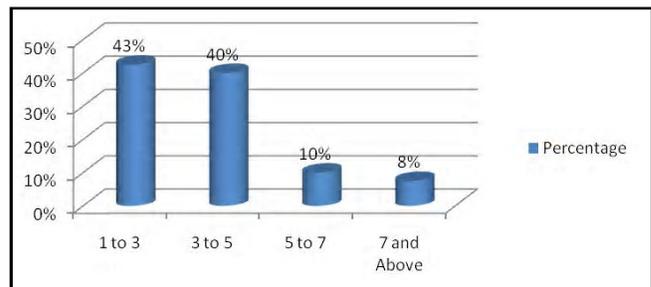


Fig. 4 : Family members working as agricultural labourers

Conclusion:

Agriculture is the backbone of India's economy. It is considered as the primary sector which generates food and employment. When we speak about the Indian economy, the majority of the population is involved in agricultural sector. The Indian economy was severely affected from the corona pandemic and resultant lockdowns. The COVID-19 crisis has posed unprecedented economic challenges for governments across the world with certain sectors being more vulnerable to this pandemic. In India, lack of planning and preparation by the state for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic has created a massive blow to India's economy and has caused enormous hardships to the lives of the people.

This study is taken up to assess and understand the plight of Agricultural labourers during corona pandemic. COVID 19 has spread rapidly all over the world and impacted the people on such aspects as social, economic, personal, educational, etc. The problem of unemployment,

variations in wages, uncertainty in the availability of their daily work were some of the important problems which caused problems and stress on the agricultural Labourers.

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