

Livelihood Problems of Small and Marginal Farmers of Assam

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Abstract: Agriculture is the backbone of Assam's economy. According to the Agriculture Census (2010-11), marginal farmers (67.31 per cent) and small farmers (18.25 per cent) account for 67.31 per cent and 18.25 per cent, respectively. Due to various factors, small and marginal farmers in Assam continue to face difficulties in their livelihood. As a result, this survey was conducted to determine the various problems faced by Assam's small and marginal farmers. The survey was done in three (3) districts of Assam, namely Majuli, Jorhat, and Golaghat, with a sample of 300 respondents chosen at random. The study relied on primary data gathered through a structured schedule by personal interviews with chosen farmer households in the study area. The survey found that respondents aged 37 to 52 years old were more likely to respond in three Assam districts (46.33 per cent). Around 74.67 per cent of those polled were men, and roughly 35 per cent had only completed primary school. In terms of marital status, 85 per cent of respondents were married, 82.67 per cent were in a joint household, and 48.67 per cent were SC/ST. The small landholdings themselves were ranked first in terms of problems, with annual high floods coming in second. On the other hand, distress sales and insect pest infestation were also the major problems for small and marginal farmers, ranking third and fourth, respectively. These findings imply that government policies and programmes should target small and marginal farmers and that employment options be made available to improve their income, livelihood stability, and living standards in rural areas.

Keywords: Livelihood; Small farmers; Marginal farmers; Problems; Assam

I. INTRODUCTION

In India, more than 50% of the population, Agriculture is the prime source of livelihood. About 44 per cent of the area is under small and marginal holding farmers and produce 60 per cent of the total food grain production (49% of rice, 29% of coarse cereals 27% of pulses and 40% of wheat) (Agricultural census, 2014). In their study, Chand et al. (2011) reported that in terms of cropping intensity and per hectare output, small and marginal farmers are generally more competent than the large farmers. However, they are much poorer concerning food and nutrition when compared to others. Dev (2017) revealed that about an average of 0.38 ha of land was possessed by small and marginal farmers compared to large farmers (17.37 ha), which unable to increase income from cultivation and generate employment. In India, small farms are the foundation for labour employment and food security but face various challenges. The livelihood of the people is at risk and vulnerable. Small and marginal farms produced specialized crops but prone to risk due to price fluctuation and uncertain weather conditions. Small and marginal farmers are vital for India's as well as Assam agriculture and rural economy. Small and marginal farmers experience limited access to capital and input. According to the Agriculture census (2010-11), 67.31 percent belongs to the marginal farmers (67.31%) and 18.25 percent small farmers. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including material and social resources), and activities required to live. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from shocks and stresses while maintaining or enhancing its capabilities. Lack of land inheritance documentation and lack of adequate land due to land fragmentation were two major factors contributing to collateral shortfalls among farmers in Assam (ASRLM, nd). Already farmers of Assam reluctant to adopt farming as a source of livelihood and become a non-profitable source for small and marginal farmers' livelihood. Nowadays, rural youths are not interested in taking up agricultural farming as a source of livelihood option. The ground reality is that most of the farmers in Assam own as little as two acres of land. The farmers may not even own the land, making profitable cultivation impossible. Their income goes towards the payment of lease for the land. Under this situation, different questions may arise about what are the different problems they have faced? Hence, the present study was conducted to identify different problems faced by the small and marginal farmers related to livelihood security.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in three Assam viz., Majuli, Jorhat and Golaghat, which were selected randomly in the year 2020-2021. Six villages were selected from each district, and only small and marginal farmers were selected, and the total sample was 300. The samples farmers of the study were categorized, based on their operational holding, as marginal (<1ha) and small (1-2 ha).The study was based on primary data and collected using a structured and pretested interview schedule. This study used the after-the-fact research design. Statistical tools include frequency, percentages, weighted mean scores, and ranking.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 indicates that 46.33 percent respondents were found the age group of 37 to 52 years, followed by above 52 years (35.33%) and below 37 years. On the other hand, about 74.67percentof respondents were male and 25.33 percent female with the highest education up to primary school (35.00%) followed by up to high school (30.00%), secondary (13.67%), illiterate (12.33%) and graduate (8.67%). The table also presents that 85 percent of respondents were married and 15 percent unmarried, where the majority of them lived in a joint family (82.67 %). The study also argued that most of the respondents belonged to SC/ST (48.67%), and others belonged to OBC (29.67%) and General category (21.67%). The study affirmed that 83 percent of respondents were marginal farmers, and only 17 percent were small farmers.It is clear from the data presented in Table 2 that in problems related to the livelihood of small and marginal farmers viz., 'small land holdings' ranked the first problem with the highest weighted mean score (4.38). Similar findings were reported by Jodha and Dahiya (2018). They identified small landholdings as the first major problem of small and marginal farmers in their study. The other problems in the order of severity were 'annual heavy flood' ranked second major problem with the weighted mean score (4.33) and 'distress sale'ranked the third problem with the weighted mean score (4.29).As stated by Gohain and Singh (2017).The majority of farmers, marketing of maize and cotton were a major problem because there are no public procurement and remunerative prices,

It was found that'insect pest infestation' ranked the fourth problem with a weighted mean score (4.21), followed by'large family size'and 'poor extension person contact'ranked fifth major problem with the weighted mean score (4.16). The study also found that 'High cost of inputs' ranked the sixth problem with the weighted mean score (4.15). The findings of the study again explored that 'crop damage due to heavy rainfall'ranked seventh (3.96), followed by 'lack of improved seed and fertilizers (3.81), declining soil fertility (3.79). The table also showed otherproblems likepoor access to a resource (3.67), lack of capital (3.63), lack of farm implements (3.58), no timely procurement (3.57), secured rank astenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth. The further table also indicated that high production cost (3.55), low productivity of livestock (3.47) and post-harvest loss (3.42). It also depicted that lack of higher education (3.31) ranked eighteenth, followed by lack of natural water resources (3.28) and attack of wild animal (2.98).

Table 1: Socio-personal characteristics

Sl. No	Variable and category	Majuli (n=100)		Jorhat (n=100)		Golaghat (n=100)		Total (n=300)	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Age								
	Below 37 Years	18	18	22	22	15	15	55	18.33
	37-52 Years	47	47	48	48	44	44	139	46.33
	Above 52 Years	35	35	30	30	41	41	106	35.33
2	Gender								
	Male	74	74	81	81	69	69	224	74.67
	Female	26	26	19	19	31	31	76	25.33
3	Educational qualification								
	Illiterate	13	13	10	10	14	14	37	12.33
	Up to primary school	33	33	32	32	40	40	105	35.00
	Up to high school	23	23	36	36	32	32	91	30.33
	Up to secondary	20	20	13	13	8	8	41	13.67
	Graduate and above	11	11	9	9	6	6	26	8.67
4	Marital status								
	Married	86	86	90	90	79	79	255	85
	Unmarried	14	14	10	10	21	21	45	15
5	Type of family								
	Joint	77	77	82	82	89	89	248	82.67



	Nuclear	23	23	18	18	11	11	52	17.33
6	Caste								
	SC/ST	69	69	55	55	22	22	146	48.67
	OBC	21	21	19	19	49	49	89	29.67
	General	10	10	26	26	29	29	65	21.67
7	Operational land holding								
	Marginal	76	25.33	89	29.67	84	28	249	83
	Small	20	6.67	13	4.33	18	6	51	17

Table 2: Constraints faced by the small and marginal farmers of Assam in their livelihood

(n=300)

Sl. No	Category	SAF (5)	AF (4)	NF (3)	SDF (2)	DF (1)	Total	MS	RANK
1	Small land holdings	173 (57.67)	100 (33.33)	8 (2.67)	7 (2.33)	12 (4)	1315	4.38	I
2	Annual heavy flood	98 (32.67)	202 (6.67)	-	-	-	1298	4.33	II
3	Distress sale ⁴	161 (53.67)	102 (34)	12 (4)	12 (4)	13 (4.33)	1286	4.29	III
4	Insect pest infestation	76 (25.33)	211 (70.33)	13 (4.33)	-	-	1263	4.21	IV
5	Poor extension person contact	139 (46.33)	109 (36.33)	28 (9.33)	10 (3.33)	14 (4.67)	1249	4.16	V
6	Large family size	155 (51.67)	90 (30)	18 (6)	23 (7.67)	14 (4.67)	1249	4.16	V
7	High cost of inputs	138 (46)	112 (37.33)	22 (7.33)	12 (4)	16 (5.33)	1244	4.15	VI
8	Crop damage due to heavy rainfall	91 (30.33)	144 (48)	37 (12.33)	18 (6)	10 (3.33)	1188	3.96	VII
9	Lack of improved seed and fertilizers	88 (29.33)	140 (46.67)	20 (6.67)	30 (10)	22 (7.33)	1142	3.81	VIII
10	Declining soil fertility	84 (28)	149 (49.67)	10 (3.33)	33 (11)	24 (8)	1136	3.79	IX
11	Poor access to resource	44 (14.67)	190 (63.33)	22 (7.33)	10 (3.33)	34 (11.33)	1100	3.67	X
12	Lack of capital	78 (26)	134 (44.67)	28 (9.33)	20 (6.67)	40 (13.33)	1090	3.63	XI
13	Lack of farm implements	105 (35)	84 (28)	22 (7.33)	59 (19.67)	30 (10)	1075	3.58	XII
14	No timely procurement	52 (17.33)	160 (53.33)	22 (7.33)	38 (12.67)	28 (9.33)	1070	3.57	XIII
15	High production cost	70 (23.33)	123 (41)	43 (14.33)	30 (10)	34 (11.33)	1065	3.55	XIV
16	Lack of skill	134 (44.67)	46 (15.33)	15(5)	39(13)	66(22)	1043	3.48	XV
17	Low productivity of livestock	120 (40)	56 (18.67)	10 (3.33)	72 (24)	42 (14)	1040	3.47	XVI
18	Post harvest loss	111 (37)	68 (22.67)	33 (11)	12 (4)	76 (25.33)	1026	3.42	XVII
19	Lack of higher education	54 (18)	138 (46)	31 (10.33)	-	77 (25.67)	992	3.31	XVIII



20	Lack of natural water resources	55 (18.33)	145 (48.33)	14 (4.67)	-	86 (28.67)	983	3.28	XIX
21	Attack of wild animal	23 (7.67)	131 (43.67)	46 (15.33)	16 (5.33)	84 (28)	893	2.98	XX

IV. CONCLUSION

According to this study, the livelihood of small and marginal farmers is affected by small landholdings and annual severe floods. The land is shrinking every year due to high floods and erosion, and fragmenting landholdings within the family. It is critical to raise the income of small and marginal farmers within the constraints of limited land and other resources. The state government must play a critical role in improving the livelihood situation of small and marginal farmers to achieve this goal. Different modern agricultural technologies, market linkage by market information based crop planning, mapping of producers and buyers should be introduced to develop their land all year with the help of appropriate technology and market information service. In summer, there is heavy rainfall, so rainwater needs to be captured and stored for winter crop cultivation to avoid water scarcity. These findings imply that government policies and programmes should target small and marginal farmers. Employment options should be made accessible to improve their income levels, livelihood stability, and living standards in rural areas. Increased agricultural output can improve farmer living circumstances and promote non-farm businesses via forwarding and backward linkages, resulting in a more sustainable life.

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