



FACING THE FIELDS: NAVIGATING THE ISSUES FACED BY SMALL AND MARGINAL FARMERS PERTAINING TO INDIAN FARMING-

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays a significant role in the Indian economy. Agriculture contributes around 18.3 % to the total GDP and provides employment for approximately 58% of the population. It is still the largest source of livelihoods along with its allied sectors. About 70% of its rural households still depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihood. The total number of operational holdings has increased from 138.34 million in 2010-11 to 146.45 million in 2015-16 showing an increase of 5.8 percent. But the average size of operational holding has been steadily declining over the years. The average operated size of holding which was 1.15 ha in 2010-11 has declined to 1.08 ha in 2015-16. According to agriculture census, the operational holdings are classified into five size classes among which small and marginal farmers constitute the greater part. A total of 89.4% of agricultural households own less than two hectares of land (NSO,2019).

FARMING SITUATION IN INDIA-

Small and marginal farmers are important for raising agriculture growth, food

security and livelihoods in India. In terms of production, small and marginal farmers are making larger contribution to the production of high value crops. Small farms play a well-known role in development and the fight against poverty (Lipton, 2006). GDP growth originating in agriculture is at least twice as successful in decreasing poverty as GDP growth originating outside of agriculture, according to the global experience of growth and poverty reduction (WDR, 2008). They are also contributing 60% of the total food grain production and even multiple cropping index is higher for marginal and small farmers than that for medium and large farmers. Hence, small and marginal householdings are crucial to advancing agricultural growth and reducing poverty. In spite of having majority in the total holdings, their share in the operated area stood at 46.94% in 2015-16 as against 44.58 % in 2010-11 which shows significant land inequalities.

THE ISSUES FACED BY THEM-

There are some specific issues which are faced by small and marginal farmers solely and not affecting the other categories of

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farmers.

1. FRAGMENTED LAND- The arable plot size is decreasing with each successive generation mainly due to its inheritance laws. The land owned by the parent is inherited by his or her wards and get divided into fragments. These lands eventually become economically unviable in terms of agricultural produce. It decreases agricultural productivity and diminishes the economic opportunities available. Further the variety of crops a farmer can produce is severely limited due to the small piece of land. The farmland does not get appropriate time to recuperate from the ongoing crops season, leaving little scope for harvest after each cycle.

fragmentation, which is a fairly common form of a property dispute. About 25% of all cases decided by the supreme court are centred around land disputes. Again, 66% of all civil cases in India are related to land disputes.

2. CREDIT AND INDEBTNESS- The independence for the smallest marginal from formal institutional sources is lower than large farmers and the reverse is true in the case of informal sources.

3. LACK OF CUSTOMIZED MACHINERY- The implements are basically designed interested for large land areas. Most of the farm machinery are not suitable for small and fragmented land holdings.

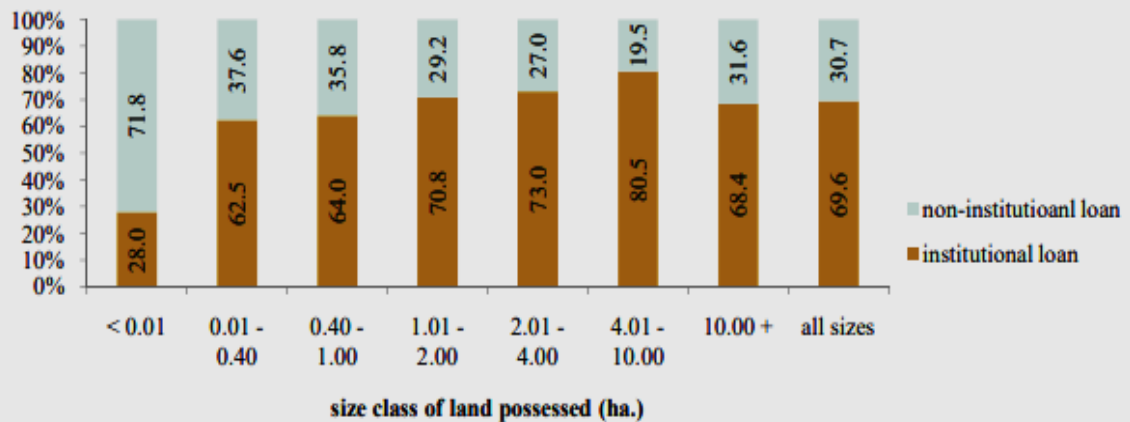


Figure- Percentage distribution of amount of outstanding loans per agricultural household by sources of loan taken for different size class of land possessed (ha.)

Besides the cultivation issues, there are hurdles of farmer has to face outside the field. One of which is litigation due to

4. LOW LEVEL OF FORMAL EDUCATION AND SKILLS- The literacy rate for marginal farmers is 48.1

% and for small farmers, it is 55.9% which is less as compared to medium and large farmers. Similarly, mean years of education for males among marginal farmers was 3.9 as compared to 5.3 for medium and large farmers. It is important for farmers to have a reasonable level of awareness regarding information on agriculture. The low level of farmers education limits public dissemination of knowledge. The NSS farmer survey depicts that awareness about bio-fertilizers, minimum support prices and WTO is associated with education levels which are lower for marginal and small farmers.

of produce, aggregation of which becomes essential for even a trolley-load to be carried to an Agricultural produce Market committee (APMC) Mandi or a nearby market. Due to small holdings caused by fragmentation, small and marginal farmers are forced to sell their produce for minimal rates.

6. DIS- SAVINGS- When comparing marginal and small farmers to medium and big farmers, the monthly income and consumption numbers across different size classes of land holdings reveal that the former had dis-savings. According to NSS 2003 data, the monthly consumption of marginal farmers was

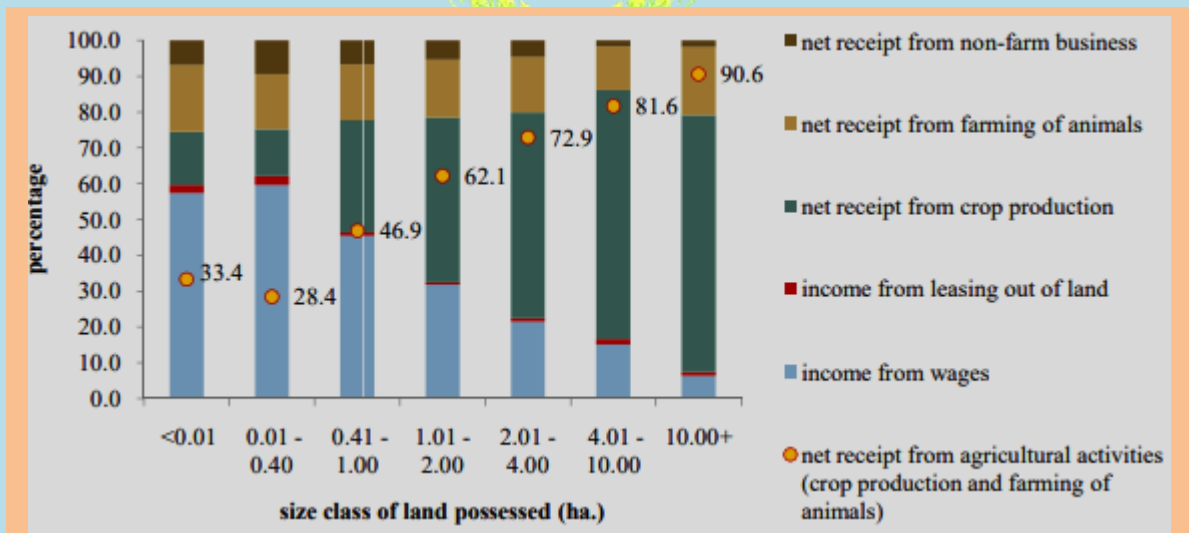


Figure- Percentage distribution of average monthly income (where net receipt is obtained considering ‘paid out expenses’ approach) per agricultural household by their sources for each size class of land possessed during July 2018-June 2019

5. FORCED SELLING- Smaller land holdings farmer produce smaller pockets

Rs.2482 and monthly income was Rs.1659 (Table 14 and Fig 4.1). It shows

that they have dis-savings of Rs.823. The dis-savings for small farmers were Rs.655. On the other hand, for large farmers, monthly income and consumption respectively were Rs.9667 and Rs.6418 with savings of Rs.3249. According to NCEUS (2008), small-holding farmers have much greater rates of poverty compared to other farmers.

7. INSTITUTIONS FOR MARKETING OF SMALL HOLDINGS-

For small and marginal farmers marketing of their products is main problem apart from credit. Dependency on Wage- Most of the small and marginal agricultural households depends on wage work. Data also shows that net receipt from crop production is lower as compared to medium and large farmers.

8. LACK OF EXTENSION SERVICES-

Small and marginal farmers have smaller access to suitable extension services restricting suitable decisions regarding cultivation practices and technological know-how.

9. LOW BARGAINING POWER-

The share of marketable surplus on marginal farms (64.8 per cent) and small farms (72.2 per cent) is much below than the average while the proportion of larger farmers (85.4 per cent) is higher than the average (Sharma, V.P, 2016). Since

small and marginal farmers have low marketable surplus, they lose their bargaining power.

CONCLUSION-

The success of Indian agriculture depends on sustaining small and marginal farmers by providing them with the required support system for accumulating more knowledge and adoption of scientific method of farming according to their needs. Several strategies have been introduced by government but are not being utilized at ground level. Moreover, the inadequacy of the basic resources is also a major concern. To improve the condition of small holders, the government and the farmers themselves must work together to devise a well-coordinated plan of action. Quality of education and awareness should be ensured along with implementation of proper land reforms and providing remunerative prices of agriculture produce according to consumer indices. It will enhance production and will in aid in total income of small and marginal farmers.

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