



E-ISSN: 2278-4136
P-ISSN: 2349-8234
JPP 2018; 7(5): 3412-3416
Received: 07-07-2018
Accepted: 09-08-2018

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Generating livelihood for tribal youth through agripreneurship development: Prospects, retrospect, constraints and strategies

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Abstract

Tribal youth comprise of an entirely different segment, potentially resourceful and adventurous segment of the population and they are the unlucky cousins of urban and rural youth. Agriculture and allied activities support the livelihoods of nearly 70 per cent of India's rural population. In recent years, land based livelihoods of tribal farmers are increasingly becoming unsustainable. Young people from tribal areas are currently entering the labour force as the tribal agriculture is primitive and backward resulting in low productivity. Several studies emphasized about poor and inadequate agricultural production from tribal lands accentuated the problem of maintaining tribal households at the subsistence level. The rural agrarian economy of tribal India rests on the shoulders of the young farmers and agriculture as vocation is uniquely positioned to absorb them. For appealing tribal youth and delivering good job opportunities, agriculture must break through a number of constraints that impede growth and competitiveness.

Keywords: Tribal youth, agriculture, vocation, livelihood, training needs

Introduction

There is always a common perception that youth are not interested in agriculture because of agriculture's image problem followed by toiling labour, low economic pay-off, employment crisis and low levels of agricultural productivity. This statement is almost valid for all the third world countries where majority of the youth population are engaged in non-agricultural occupations than choosing agriculture as livelihood. An excellent and profitable agricultural vocation requires a superior stand by the younger generation possessing juvenile attire. In order to make agriculture as their vocational aspiration, the sector should possess certain opportunities which will make them skilful enough to become self-employed. The youth in any nation is responsible for steady economic development and demographic evolution. India is an agrarian country and is having the largest democratic dividend as compared to other developing nations. There is an urgent need to provide directions to this section of population awaiting guidance in the field of agriculture. Constructive utilization of youth energy for progress and prosperity of our country is the need of hour. History is full of examples where trained and disciplined youth have revolutionized the whole nation in every field. India has the largest population of tribal people after Africa. According to 2011 census, the Scheduled Tribes comprise about 8.6 percent of India's population and tribal population in India constitutes over 104 million. On the whole, as per rough estimates, the prominent tribal areas constitute about 15 percent of the total geographical area of the country (Banothu, 2016) [2]. Tribal youth constitute a numerically dominant, potentially resourceful and also adventurous segment of the population. Tribal youth can be defined as the community of youth belonging to the age group of 15-35 years and have a commonality in terms of name, culture, dialect, territory and taboos. They follow their own method of living through hunting, fishing and practicing subsistence farming. A tribal youth comes from an egalitarian society bounded by traditional norms and technological level with less urban impact (Narayan, 1986) [8]. Though tribal youth have different fields of activities, they have not been involved and motivated to convert their might in the social contribution. This is due to several reasons, such as lack of nation-wide youth programmes of training and guidance, lack of interdependence, lack of an appropriate network for youth organizations and efficient programmes in tribal sectors. One of the neglected segments of youth population i.e. tribal youth still resides in interior villages or forests where communication and transportation facilities are poor. They are the custodians of indigenous knowledge utilized in agriculture and allied sectors. This knowledge is believed to be passed from age old generations to the present generation. The indigenous knowledge of

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farmers are considered as important sources of information about the local farming systems, experiences, institutions, culture etc. It is also proved that this knowledge system plays significant role in designing formal and efficient extension services (Sharland, 1991) ^[10]. Indigenous population use this knowledge for maintaining their sustainable livelihood

system. Policies and programmes exclusively focus on rural youth and very few programmes are directed towards betterment of tribal youth. In the Indian context, agriculture is the fulcrum of country's economy and therefore, youth as major stakeholders should decide the survival of such system.



Fig 1: Involvement of Buxa Youth in agricultural activities in Uttarakhand: (a) Self Help Group run by Buxa Youth carrying out organic farming in a village, (b) Youth involved in poultry farming and (c) Poly house cultivation by several youth in village Buksaura in Uttarakhand. (Dash, 2016)

Tribal youth and agriculture

Situation of tribal youth in India

The representation of tribes in the Indian society is quite small and at the same time it is culturally effective and significant (Vyas and Mann, 1980) ^[19]. Indian culture is rich in tribal heritage and their identification is still a question mark in the exploration of Indian social system and cultural heritage. Xaxa (2001) ^[20] clearly indicated that tribes in India are not a homogeneous category. They differ widely among themselves in terms of languages spoken, displaying physical features, inhabiting geographical terrain, economic mode of living, levels of development at which they are placed and size of community they represent. Tribal communities living in the inaccessible regions maintain their own 'little world' struggling in the natural habitat and getting dependent over the bounty (Sharma, 1984) ^[14]. Oraon (2012) ^[9] in a study on changing patterns of tribals found that they have a unique tradition and lifestyle. It is related to the utilization of particular natural resource and particular type of work. The forest provides them with food and livelihood security. Tribal communities share closer relations with nature and they have evolved certain indigenous knowledge which provided their basis of livelihood. It is also mentioned by Stevens (1997) ^[17] that Indigenous peoples' knowledge, conservation beliefs and values, environmentally adaptive and sensitive land use, resource management practices, and determined defense of territory and natural resources have enabled many of them to inhabit in the natural habitats for centuries without destroying their ecosystems and biodiversity. Tribal economy is mainly hunting, collecting and fishing or a combination of hunting, collecting with shifting cultivation (Purkayastha, 2016) ^[10]. In National Youth policy 2014, the broad lagging indicators are: create a productive workforce, develop a strong and healthy generation, instill social values and promote community services, promote participation and civic engagement and ensure inclusion and social justice (National Youth Policy, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2014). So, knowledge, education and training have become important in effective tribal youth development and to convert such youth

development into societal contribution activities. However, a Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework might be able to provide the template for building successful and active tribal youth that will produce resilient, educated, fully capable youths and social contributors. Tribal areas are in the nature's lap and agriculture has unique potential to absorb these youth creating opportunities for employment. Tribal youth are tomorrow's entrepreneurs, responsible citizen, innovator, contributor and indeed leaders. Thus, there is now a growing awareness through the world about the role of youth in economic development. Some scholars have attempted to do research on tribal studies, but studies on youth, particularly tribal youth has not received much attention from the researchers and no major work has been done till now in Indian context. In this backdrop, there is a need for undertaking a study particularly in relation to the risk behaviours that can give comprehensive information on tribal youth (Suman and Verma, 2017) ^[11].

Constraints faced by tribal youth in pursuing agriculture as livelihood and strategies to mitigate it

The tribal agriculture is primitive and backward resulting in low productivity. Numerous development plans like Tribal sub-plan and Tribal block development have been in operation for tribal agricultural development. However, most of these plans were directed towards more resourceful areas. Among tribal farmers, big farmers living near urban centers are benefitted from the facilities of government programmes and schemes. Tribal agriculture is characterized by small land holdings, improper land utilization, poor farming techniques, over grazing of pastures, low capital investment and low production inputs. Many of the studies emphasized about poor and inadequate agricultural production from tribal lands accentuated the problem of maintaining tribal households at the subsistence level. Insufficient irrigation resource and inadequate marketing facilities in the tribal vicinity create impediment in the process of tribal agricultural development. The young people belonging to tribal communities are finding themselves at cross-road of life. Tribal youth are yet to be

distinguished from their rural and urban counterparts. Socio-economic profile of the above said categories of youth vary in several aspects. This clearly indicates that needs of tribal youth is different from other distinct groups. Absence of employment opportunities in agriculture sector keeps them unemployed during the year. Poor educational, communicational and transport facilities deprive them from accessing modern agricultural know how and improved inputs. The problem of indebtedness and bonded labour still prevails. Strong traditional caste hierarchy, acute poverty and cruelty of moneylenders perpetuated the system of bonded labour in several states of the country.

The rural agrarian economy of tribal India rests on the shoulders of the young farmers. High and rising level of unemployment among tribal youth is a severe concern. Despite unemployment, they face numerous constraints and challenges in accessing support services, especially extension services that are offered by the state and/or private organizations. Rokonuzzaman (2013) ^[12] in a study on Training needs of tribal people in carrying out income generating activities found that tribal people faced different constraints like lack of capital, lack of irrigation facilities, lack of training, lack of knowledge of disease/insect control, lack of land/suitable soil, attack of wild elephant, lack of marketing facilities and lack of resources. The findings are in line with the study conducted by Angaitkar *et al.* (2013) ^[1]. Tribal youth lag behind their urban and rural counterparts with respect to education and training as they reside in hilly and undulating forest areas. Dwelling amidst hills, forests, coastal areas and deserts, tribals over the centuries have gained precious and vast experience in combating environmental hardships and leading sustainable livelihoods. Their wisdom is reflected in their water harvesting techniques, indigenously developed irrigation channels, construction of cane bridges in hills, adaptation to desert life, utilization of forest species like herbs, shrubs for medicinal purposes, meteorological assessment etc. Such invaluable knowledge of theirs needs to be properly documented and preserved lest it should get lost in the wake of modernization and passage of time. For this reason, the National Policy on Tribals wants to train tribal youth in areas of traditional wisdom and help in preserving and documenting the same.

Tribal farmers are adopting traditional agricultural techniques such as wooden plough, ox and sickles for manual field operations. They have insufficient agricultural land, meagre capital and unmatched skills for practicing modern agriculture. The reasons behind the same are unawareness, illiteracy, insufficient capital and government aids, lack of land tenure ship and lack of resources. As a result, they have low agricultural productivity. They are not interested in cultivating superior crops because of crop failure and loss. They mainly depend on production of millets crops like maize, jowar, bajra, kodo, kutki etc. for their livelihood and they avoid using modern hybrid seeds, fertilizers and chemicals. Tribal youth are unable to produce sufficient resources to fulfil their livelihood requirements; and they migrate towards urban centres searching jobs in unorganized sectors.

Agripreneurship development among tribal young farmers

Opportunities for vocational guidance is limited to a large extent due to which they are forced to enter many unorganized sectors or practice manual labour in agricultural field. Agriculture in India has enough potential to create jobs

and the government of those states having maximum tribal population has stressed on increasing employment opportunities and eventually eradicating unemployment. The large cohort of tribal youth can still reap the benefits of agricultural enterprises through appropriate education and training. Involvement of tribal youth in agriculture can be facilitated through livelihood generation programmes, entrusting more and more integrated farming system to combine agriculture with other enterprises like horticulture, fisheries, animal resources, sericulture etc. Several micro-enterprises like medicinal and aromatic extracts, apiculture, livestock, vermiculture, poultry, horticulture, forestry etc. have aesthetic livelihood potential in tribal areas of India. These areas are entirely based on potential available resources and technologies in the locality. Agriculture and allied sectors should run hand in hand in order to ensure better livelihood of tribal young farmers. Therefore, there is a need to develop a strategy which can reduce unemployment and can generate livelihood. In order to improve the status of tribal youth in agriculture related activities, there needs to be investment and encouragement in agricultural extension services targeting these young farmers, setting up several agricultural credit schemes, encouraging food production using modern techniques in agriculture, enhancing incentives for providing need based leadership skills and vocational trainings. This will facilitate a match between the skills possessed by tribal youth and current demands in the field of agriculture. Identifying the training needs of tribal youth in agriculture related areas can help in development of training modules in agricultural enterprises. The training module so designed will improve the entrepreneurial skills and decision making ability of tribal youth in their family and society. It will also help in augmenting self-improvement, new lines of production, knowledge of business marketing, managerial skills, entrepreneurial competencies development and marketing strategies in any agricultural enterprise.

Agripreneurship development in organic farming in tribal belts of Odisha: A Case

The National Mission on sustainable agriculture and horticulture development along with the Govt. of Odisha is developing the Organic Farming Policy for 15 districts, which can strengthen the production systems, supply chain and marketing systems by creating an enabling environment, required infrastructure, regulations and providing necessary incentives and support (Singha, 2017) ^[15]. The state has full potential for organic agriculture with careful exploitation of existing opportunities. Odisha has large area under spices *viz.*, Turmeric, Ginger, Black pepper, Chillies cultivation, which have high export value. The fruit crops *viz.*, mango has highest export potential. The Jeypore tracts of Odisha are known for being Centre of origin and Diversity for rice where even now traditional varieties are cultivated, which provide a rich source of biodiversity. Further in several districts, particularly the tribal districts of Mayurbhanj, Koraput, Keonjhar, Malkangiri, Balangir *etc.*, where paddy, millets, mango and turmeric are being grown organically. Under the Organic Farming Policy the government plans to promote the following crops of fruits (mango, banana and citrus), spices (turmeric, ginger, chilly), food grains (rice, millets, oilseeds and pulses), medicinal and aromatic plants, plantation crops (cashew and coconut), cash crops (cotton and jute) and vegetables. According to the business standard reports Odisha Govt. in collaboration with United Nations Environmental Programme introduced organic millet cultivation in 14, 000

farming households and further planned to promote organic maize cultivation which, has a net worth of Rs. 1000 crores annually (Solheim, 2017) ^[16]. Organic dairy farming has been taken up by the Koraput Dairy in Koraput district of Odisha because of the increasing demand for 100% pure hygienic and organic cow milk both in the state as well as district with a new scheme of “own a cow and get returns” (Bhubaneswar buzz, 2015). Koraput dairy is an example of integrated dairy unit that also focuses on organic compost, vermicompost, biofertilizer, urea and green fodder enterprises.

Training needs of tribal youth in agriculture related areas

The perception of youth towards farming is like doing an unprofitable business and the stereotype of taking agricultural enterprise as the activity of old show that they lack interest in agriculture. They are still into this enterprise because of several reasons. In rural areas relatively few quality jobs are available for young people because of mis-match of skills. According to Chinonso (2010) ^[3], technical and vocational education are the only alternative forms of education and training that can guarantee entrepreneurship development and job creation for youth. Involvement of youth in agriculture can bring positive innovation adoption in agriculture. Agriculture and allied sector is very vast and identification of vocational training needs in this sector is the first step towards achieving higher feet in developing tribal youth potential. Deshmukh (2000) ^[6] in a study on tribal youth beneficiaries under TRYSEM programme from Ambegaon block of Pune district found that majority at tribal youth beneficiaries received training in bee keeping, dairy, tailoring, cycle repairing, welding and as electricians etc. Ulman (2010) ^[18] in a study on training needs related to occupation of tribals in Thane district of Maharashtra found that in farming, the highest training priority was given to “major pest and diseases of crops and their control”. In agriculture labour, the tribals preferred to get trained in “doses of organic and chemical fertilizers”. In dairy operation, the preference was for “general information regarding various diseases of dairy animals”. In collecting forest products, the most important training need was found to be, “manufacturing furniture and crafts”. Dash and Kumar (2017) ^[5] in a study on Investigative Analysis of Characteristics and Vocational Training Needs of Rural Youth in Agriculture Related Areas reported that maximum need of training in major agricultural vocations was found to be in fruit and vegetable production followed by cattle farming, Mushroom Production, Floriculture (Protected Cultivation), Poultry, Vermi-culture, Fishery, Bee keeping, Rabbit farming and Sericulture. The agriculture sector needs dynamic youth force for maintaining sustainability in the long run preventing migration from rural and hilly areas to urban areas.

Conclusion

Looking at the following reviews, it can be emphasized that “tribal youth” is entirely a different segment which needs an extensive study on their personal, social, socio-psychological and economic characteristics. Few programmes were implemented for tribal youth with little success. It is because government fails to consider the tribal youth as unique in characteristics and different from other youth population. The needs and requirements of tribal youth is entirely different from other youth population. Therefore the effectiveness of the programmes and policies regarding tribal youth can also be highlighted. Where will the large cohort of tribal youth currently entering the labour force find employment?

Agriculture is uniquely positioned to absorb these workers, although farming does not often occur to policy makers as a solution to the challenge of job creation. Tribal areas are still predominantly hilly and secluded, most young people are born into farm families. But to appeal to tribal youth and deliver good job opportunities, agriculture must break through a number of constraints that impede growth and competitiveness. Therefore, efforts to accelerate agricultural growth and improve food security have been separated conceptually from efforts to create jobs for tribal youth. Shifts on the demand side create new opportunities for changes in supply. Youth perception about benefit of choosing agriculture as an option for livelihood can be the burning issue as majority of them preferred agriculture as the first vocational choice. Thus, it’s a high time to have a thorough idea about the status of tribal youth in India as majority of the studies excluded this segment because of several unprecedented reasons. Tribal youth development needs urgent attention of the government in planning several programmes having practical utility at the grassroots level. The prospects and retrospect of tribal youth in choosing agriculture as livelihood will definitely pave the path for pondering over the solutions through better youth development models.

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