

Impact of Small Land Holdings on Rural Economy: A Case Study of Kandi Areas of Kashmir Valley, Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

Kandi refers to an area which is upland or sub montane having scarcity of water, undulating topography, steep and irregular slopes, erodible and low water retentive soils with terrain dissected by numerous gullies. Production of crops is low in these belts. Cultivation of maize, pulses, paddy on terraced farms, oilseeds, fodder plus rearing and keeping of cattle are the dominant economic activities in the Kandi areas. The type of agricultural practices chosen by an individual in Kandi belts depends not only on the geographical location, but is a function of the culture, education, technology and income of the people. The poverty exists in all economies of the world in general, however, being more prevalent in such areas. The present study conducted in the rain fed 'Kandi' areas of Kashmir valley (Jammu and Kashmir), was a primary survey based on structured questionnaire, aimed to find out the impact of small land holdings on the economy of people living in these areas. It was found that people were mostly involved with primary sector having marginal land holdings (with average land holding size of 7.27 kanals) due to which their income was low and hence poor living standard.

Key words: *Kandi, undulating topography, terraced, land holdings*

Introduction

The Indian agriculture is characterized by millions of marginal and small farmers forming the backbone of its agriculture who face several constraints including landlessness, small land holdings, facing difficulties to operate the high risk of farming and declining agricultural productivity. Small and marginal farmers are generally poor (Mavi and Kaur, 2014) due to low yield from small holdings (Thapa and Gaiha, 2011).

The increase in population, subdivision and fragmentation of land holdings due to breakdown of joint family system encouraging conversion of large and medium group of farmers into group

of small and marginal farmers, which result in un-economic land holdings in general (Singh, 2012) and the rainfed Kandi areas in particular. However, the future of sustainable agriculture growth and food security in India depends on the performance of small and marginal farmers. Small holdings play important role in raising agricultural development and poverty reduction. Due to undulating slope, low soil fertility, harsh climate and use of traditional implements and farm practices the agricultural yield from the Kandi areas is low which enhances the poverty. Thus agriculture not only contributes to overall growth of the economy but also reduces

poverty by providing employment and food security to the majority of the population in the country and thus it is the most inclusive growth sectors of the Indian economy (Dev, 2012). Adoption of improved agricultural technology in Kandi areas is poor. Among different income sources primary sector which involve agriculture and its allied activities have the highest share to the total income (Borah, 2010) and is very low due to low returns from this sector.

Study area

The Kandi areas of Kashmir valley, covering an area of about 1659 km² which make a total of around 10% of the total geographical area of the valley, are found along foothills and sloping Karewas with undulating topography, scarcity of water, poor soils with high sand and low organic matter content and steep slope ranging from 0° to 30°. The area is mostly drained by 1st to 4th order streams (like Hamal Nalla, Birnal Nalla, Konsarnag Nalla etc), which during splash and torrential rains accelerate soil erosion and thereby further leads to loss of nutrients. The altitudinal range varies from 1600-2400 metres above mean sea level. Since most of the people are involved in agriculture, horticulture, livestock rearing, handicrafts etc there are a lot of problems faced by them like small land holdings, low income, poor technological know-how, low yields etc in the cultivation of their fields. Agriculture in these areas is mostly rainfed.

Objectives

In the present study an attempt was made to study the average land holding size, occupational structure and income levels of

farmers and the employment opportunities available in Kandi areas of Kashmir valley.

Data base and methodology

The study is based on data collected from primary and secondary sources. The data has been collected from Kandi areas of eight districts of Kashmir Valley namely Kupwara (14.29%), Baramulla (10.77%), Budgam (20.62%), Ganderbal (9.22%), Pulwama (10.65%), Shopian (14.92%), Kulgam (15.57%), and Anantnag (4.48%). As very negligible portion of Kandi area lies in districts of Bandipora and Srinagar so these districts have been excluded from the present primary survey. A stratified random sampling procedure is followed for the present study by using structured questionnaires. A total of 2040 households were surveyed in 102 villages of the study area and its district-wise break-up is given in Table 1. Secondary information has been collected from research journals, reports from government as well as semi-government organisations.

Findings

Land holdings in the marginal category (less than 20 kanals) constitute 67% of the operational holdings in the country. The average land holding size of J and K is 12.4 kanals and that of India is 23.2 kanals (NABARD Rural Plus, 2014). The present study reveals that the average land holdings in Kandi areas of Kashmir valley is 7.27 kanals which means that the land holdings of farmers lie in marginal category. Out of this 70% is the unirrigated land and only around 30% is irrigated (Table 1). So in addition to small land holdings the farmers suffer from

many problems like poor irrigation, low nutrient level in soil, low yields, undulating topography and other climatic extremes in their agricultural fields.

The marginal and small holders are engaged in primary occupational structure which involves agriculture and its allied activities. People generally go for subsistence farming and grow low value crops. The farmers mostly devote their land to maize, pulses, paddy and somehow commercial crops like saffron, but the yields are not good enough. The average size of holdings of small and marginal farmers in these areas is so low that it cannot generate adequate employment and income for their sustenance. In addition to this, farmers also use only traditional technology having local, low yielding plant varieties and low value subsistence agriculture which further enhances the problem. Although these have undertaken other farm and non-farm activities like horticulture, handloom industry, animal husbandry, etc but due to their poor financial conditions have not improved so much.

They suffer from adoption of innovative technologies, inadequate access to physical inputs and credit, disguised unemployment, food and nutritional security, price risk and low income. As a result their livelihood security is at stake and ultimately they suffer from poverty. In the present study it was found that 67.17% of households are involved in primary sector, which include agriculture and allied activities, 23.52% are involved in secondary sector and 9.31% in tertiary sector. Since most of their income source is related to primary sector and that too from marginal land holdings so they suffer from poor

annual income (around 45% have annual income of less than 100000) which is clearly significant from the given table 2

Conclusion

From the present study it can be concluded that people living in Kandi areas of Kashmir valley are the marginal land holders with average land holding size of 7.2 kanals. The people are mostly involved in primary sector with very low income and hence poor standard of living. Hence it is the need of the hour that various developmental strategies and programmes should be undertaken for employment generation of people either in this sector or some alternate sources should be developed for the development of these areas. The small and marginal farmers also need to be educated to manage their living and consumption expenditure within their means.

Serious steps should be taken to create employment avenues for smallholders outside agriculture, but within the countryside so that the workforce in small farms gets work and income from rural non-farm activities without leaving the farms (Chand *et al.*, 2011).

The lives of smallholding families can be improved only by improving their agricultural fields so that there would be increase in productivity and by promoting non-farm rural employment like small scale industries, dairy farming etc.

Agriculture contributes to poverty reduction because it provides employment to the poor, who have also generally low skills and education, as well as supporting the growth of non-agricultural employment in rural areas (Grewal *et al.*, 2012).

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