

Agricultural Productivity and Economic Development in Barak Valley of Assam

Abstract

Agriculture is called the primary sector because development of an economy to a large extent depends upon the development of the sector. It is the key sector of development. It is the most important sector in Indian economy. Agricultural productivity is a measure which indicates the primary role of agriculture in the economic life of a nation. It indicates the ratio between total output to its inputs used wholly or separately. It can be viewed as a measure of efficiency with which the agricultural system works. In Barak Valley of Assam, agricultural productivity takes the dominant role in supplying food to the growing population.

Keywords: Agriculture, Primary Sector, Productivity, Barak Valley, Population, Development, Horizontal Expansion, Farmers

Introduction

Agriculture is the primary sector in almost all the under-developed countries of the world. It is called the primary sector because development of an economy to a large extent depends upon the development of the sector. In most economies it is called the key sector of development which if developed properly may open avenues of development of other sectors of the economy. The main differences between underdeveloped and developing countries lie in the existence of surplus labour in Agriculture. The countries which successfully utilise these surplus labour succeed in their effort at economic development. Agriculture not only supplies food and shelters to the majority of the people of underdeveloped countries, it also provide the necessary means for the industrial development of the country. In India also agriculture is the most important sector in the economy. It is called the backbone of the Indian nation. Rostow (1962) has observed that agriculture plays a distinct, but multiple roles in the transitional process of the "take off" stage to a self sustained growth of an economy.

Agricultural productivity is the index upon which the entire agricultural system depends. It is a measure which indicates the primary role of agriculture in the economic life of a nation. It is however significantly different from agricultural production. While the later indicates total amount produced the former indicates the ratio between total output to its inputs used wholly or separately. In areas where agricultural production cannot be possible through horizontal expansion of land, it is possible to increase production by increasing land vertically, which closely indicates the increase of productivity by using more land area under HYV seeds, fertilizers and within the purview of such other modern ingredients of production. Productivity may also be increased by using less input. But the former method has an edge over the latter. Thus by increasing productivity total output may increase the system which is gainfully applied in the present day area of high density of population.

The importance of agricultural productivity can hardly be overemphasised. It plays a vital role in the economic development of a nation. It can be viewed as a measure of efficiency with which the agricultural system works and hence variation in agricultural productivity reflects the variation in the use of agricultural resources of any region. In areas where majority of the population is engaged in agricultural activities, differences in agricultural productivity indicate differences in economic progress.

Physical Setting of the Area under Study

As the study is primarily devoted to the role of agricultural productivity in Barak Valley, it is pertinent to highlight the physical setting of the area of Barak Valley.

The state of Assam is divided into three broad physiographic unit viz. Brahmaputra Valley, Hills region and Barak valley. Brahmaputra valley is an alluvial plain surrounding on all sides by hills except in the



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west. It covers most of the areas of the state; the percentage of land area of the valley being 71.65%. The Hills region comprises two Hills districts of the state covers about 19.53% of the total land area of Assam. Barak valley is situated in the southern part of the state of Assam. It consists of the flat plain areas of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts which is about 190 km long and 96 km wide covered by the hills on the three sides. The valley is named after the principal river of the region namely the Barak.

Barak valley covers a land area of about 6922sq km which is about 8.82% of the total land area of the state of Assam. It is surrounded by several provinces of the nation as well as international boundaries. In the western part, the valley is surrounded by Bangladesh. In the south- east corner, there is Manipur. In the south- west of the valley, there is Tripura. In the south of the valley, there is Mizoram and in the north, the North Cachar Hills (Dima Hasao) district of Assam.

Agricultural Productivity in Barak Valley

Agriculture is the primary source of income of the people of Barak Valley of Assam. The vast majority of the people depend directly as well as indirectly upon agriculture for their livelihood. Therefore, agriculture plays not only an economic role but also an important role in the overall development of the valley. As per 1971 census, the population of the valley was 17.13 lakhs which stood at 24.92 lakhs in the 1991, 29.96 lakhs in 2001 and 36.5 lakhs in 2011. With 8.82% of the total land area of the state of Assam, the valley supports about 11.12% of the total population and about 9.98% of the growing population of the state of Assam.

Thus, the unusually high growth of population has made it all the more necessary to increase the food production in order to feed the rising number of population. Since horizontal expansion of land to increase production has little scope in the valley due to limited availability of land, agricultural productivity takes the dominant role in supplying food to the growing population. Since the pace of industrialisation in the valley is very low in comparison to the state as a whole, agriculture provides employment to such a high proportion of population of the valley. However, as the pressure on land has been increasing with the growth of population, labour productivity is declining over the years. Therefore, to provide at least a reasonable return to the farmer, it is necessary to increase agricultural productivity.

Agricultural productivity and hence production is of utmost important in so far as the growth of industrialisation is concerned. Basing on the abundance of agricultural product, the valley supports about 9.7% of the total food product manufacturing industries of Assam in the year 1993 and 14.27% of the tea industries of Assam. These industries directly depend upon agricultural output and hence agricultural productivity of the region.

A look to the annual indices of Assam and of the valley reveals that the number of these industries has been declining over the years. As for example, in 1990, the number of food product manufacturing industries was 1062 and 101 respectively of the state of Assam and of the valley. But, it declined to 978 and 94 respectively in the year 1993 which is a very disturbing feature for the future development of the state and of the valley. On the other hand, the valley possesses sufficient quantity of jute, coconut, sugarcane etc., which may help in the growth and development of some more medium and small scale industries in the valley.

Conclusion

It, thus, appears from the above discussion that despite enough potentialities for the growth and development of agro-based industries in the valley, the valley lacks in adequate number of degree of agro-based industries. Among other factor, shortage in agricultural production and productivity is responsible for such a low degree of industrialisation in the valley. Hence, to expedite the pace of industrialisation in the valley one of the main factors that needs to be paid immediate attention is an increase in the agricultural productivity in the valley. Efforts in this direction will not only help to make the valley self- sufficient in food, but will also go a long way in easing the serious unemployment problem of the valley by providing employment opportunities not only in the agricultural sector directly but even by providing scope of employment and entrepreneurial ventures in the related agro-linked industries.

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