



NATURE OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR SCARCITY IN GROWING PRINCIPAL CROPS IN DAVANAGERE DISTRICT OF KARNATAKA: AN ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Economics

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ABSTRACT

This study conducted in Davanagere district of Karnataka state, has identified the problems of labour scarcity. This study is based on primary data collected from the 200 selected farmers of four villages from four taluqs. These farmers have reported that they were facing acute labour scarcity during peak Paddy and Mize planting and harvesting. The labour scarcity was higher in Paddy than Mize. The main reasons for labour scarcity were availability of non-farm work in the locality, education and migration of younger generation to urban area for better education and job. The study has suggested that mechanization should be encouraged in agriculture to tackle growing supply-demand gap in agriculture labour.

KEYWORDS

agricultural labour scarcity, reasons for labour scarcity, Principal Crops

1. Introduction

Agricultural labour has become the most important production component in Indian agriculture. Census of India (2001) defined 'agricultural labour as any person who worked on another person's land only as labourer, without exercising any supervision in cultivation, for wage in cash or share such as share of produce' (GOI 2001). The participation of agricultural labour in crop cultivation is seen right from the operation like preparatory cultivation to sowing, fertilizer application, irrigation, weeding, intercultivation, plant protection measures etc. Several studies have reported that cost on agricultural labour constitutes about 40% to 50% of the total cost of cultivation for various crop enterprises and more than 50% for labour intensive crops like sugarcane (*Ashwini K. Sharma*). Till not very long ago, Indian agriculture was marked by abundant supply of farm labour and sizeable portion of workforce was absorbed in it even it was not actually required. This labour remained under-utilized due to residuary nature of agricultural occupations. (*Akhi Altha 2011*). The phenomenon of under employment is manifested in daily lives as a large proportion of labour demand is met by wage labour, due to the skewed land distribution and seasonality of demand in agriculture. They usually get low wages, undertake laborious jobs and have highly irregular employment (*Padhi, 2007*).

Over the past couple of decades there is a growing concern that the farm labour has been decreasing which has been caused by occupational change, people mindset, government policies and reforms, education and etc. At the same time non-farm employment has been increasing in the secondary and tertiary sector. Particularly education plays a crucial role in selection of employment. An average agricultural labourer of the present day is an elderly male worker above forty years of age with low level of school education. The main reason for existence of such a large proportion of elderly person is the fall in the rate of entry of young workers to the agricultural sector. Youngsters who have passed high school education are hesitant to take up manual work even if they do not have any gainful work, nor do their parents like to send their for manual work after providing them with high school education (*Mahesh, 2004*). Rural – urban migration, urbanization and MGNREGS and other public works played an important role in shifting of labour from agriculture to non-agriculture employment in rural area (*Akhil Altha et al, 2011*). One of the important reasons for scarcity of farm labour is the availability of non-farm employment in semi-urban and urban areas within or outside the state along with this, the implementation of various self employment and social welfare programmes by the state and central government (*Tapen Kumar Roy et al 2011*). Both farmers and workers agreed that there is a relative labour shortage in the rural areas, particularly for farm work. When there is a very high demand for labour, the supply has not been elastic enough respond to the increasing demand. There are reasons between labour supply and demand, such as market imperfections, information asymmetries, adverse selection in the labour market, operation the backward sloping supply curve, market supervision

costs, etc (*Sukumarn Nair; 1997*). As a result agricultural labour market witnessing a paradoxical situation in which acute labour shortage particularly during the peak season on the one hand and high wage rates in agriculture on the other hand.

The simple question is India is the 2nd populous country in the world where agriculture is the main occupation. 68% of the total population lives in rural areas and agriculture provides livelihood to 65% to 75% of the population and also provides employment to 58% of country's workforce (*GOI 2011-2012*). In addition, various government reports and statistics proved that there is high rate of unemployment and abundant labour supply co-exists in the rural areas. In this situation how labour scarcity can occur amidst high rural unemployment? With this background the present study was planned to examine the paradoxical behavior of agricultural labour market particularly with respect to growing principal crops in Davanagere district of Karnataka. The specific objectives of the study were:

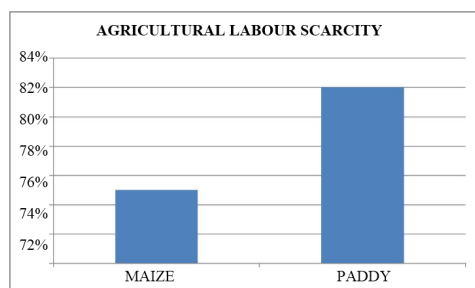
- 1) To estimate the scarcity of labour in principal crops in Davanagere district
- 2) To identify the reasons for labour scarcity

2. Methodology

The present study was based on primary data. Primary data was collected from 200 respondent farmers (100 from Paddy growing farmers and 100 from Mize growing farmers). The study was conducted in Davanagere district of Karnataka. A multistage random sampling procedure was adopted for the selection of the district, taluqs, villages and farmers. Tabular analysis, percentages and Garrett's ranking technique were used to analyse the data to estimate the percentage of labour scarcity and the reasons for labour scarcity in the agriculture sector of Davanagere district of Karnataka.

3. Results

Percentage of labour scarcity in principal crops grown in the study area was presented in Table 1. The study revealed that 70% of the farmers in Doddamagadi village reported labour scarcity in Maize cultivation. Whereas, 60% of the farmers in M R Halli reported labour scarcity in Maize cultivation. Both the villages were non-irrigated villages. On the other hand, In Paddy cultivation, 90% of the farmers reported facing labour scarcity in Yakkanahalli village. Whereas 74% of the farmers reported facing labour scarcity in Nanditavare village. These two Paddy growing villages were irrigated villages. If we compare labour scarcity in Paddy (irrigated villages) and Maize (Non-irrigated) growing sample villages, labour scarcity was found very high in Paddy (irrigated) growing villages. Labour scarcity was 75% in Maize (Non-irrigated) growing villages and 82% in Paddy (Irrigated) growing villages. Total labour scarcity in both Mize and Paddy (irrigated and non-irrigated) villages was 74 % (Figure-01).

Figure-01**Table 1: Farmers reporting Agricultural labour scarcity in the study area**

Taluk	Villages	Principal Crops	No. farmers Reporting Labour scarcity		Total
Davanagere	Doddamagadi	Maize	35 (50)	70%	75%
Jagalur	M R halli	Maize	30 (50)	60%	
Honnali	Yakkanahalli	Paddy	45 (50)	90%	82%
Harihara	Nandi tavare	Paddy	37 (50)	74%	
TOTAL					74%

Availability of non- farm work in the locality was ranked 1st among the labour scarcity reasons. Farmers reported that high wage rate in non-farm work caused labour scarcity. In recent years educated youths not ready to work in any agricultural operations. Even their parents not ready to send them to agricultural operations. Therefore Education was also major reason for labour scarcity. Migration of younger generation to urban areas for better education and job was very high in sample villages. Most of the male youths were migrating to Davanagere and Bangalore for job and education. Farmer opined that rural youths not ready to spend their time in villages. They want to take up job in cities and wanted to settle their only. In addition low esteem of work in agriculture, uncertainty of work and seasonality were also the reasons for labour scarcity. (See table-02)

Table 2: Garrett's ranking for the reasons for agricultural labour scarcity in farmers' view

Sl. No.	Reasons	Mean Score	Rank
1.	Education	57.08	II
2.	Seasonality	37.50	VI
3.	Uncertainty of work	44.11	V
4.	Low esteem work	50.04	IV
5.	Migration of younger generation to urban area for better education and job	51.10	III
6.	Availability of non- farm work in the locality	62.97	I

4. Conclusion

It is very clear from the above observations that both the Paddy and Mize growing farmers, though in different magnitude, are facing acute agricultural labour scarcity. If adequate measures are not taken to reduce labour scarcity in agriculture, productivity of farms may get affected and this may have effects on output prices. Following policy suggestions are suitable to reduce labour scarcity in agriculture.

- Mechanization should be encouraged in agriculture to tackle growing supply-demand gap in agriculture labour.
- Farmers has to use machineries for transplanting and harvesting of paddy to meet labour scarcity and also to reduce cost of cultivation
- Famers should be encouraged to adopt suitable labour-saving cultivation practices like chemical weed control, conservation agriculture, etc. to cope with the problem of labour scarcity and reduce cost of production.

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