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Sustained and Inclusive Agricultural Growth in Char Villages of Morigaon District of Assam - A Study at Lahorighat Development Block

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Abstract: The goal of sustainable development requires inclusive growth for both rural and urban population of India. The char areas or the riverine areas has population which are frequently affected by floods and hence, such natural disasters affects their economic and social growth. The goal of inclusive growth will not be fulfilled unless the development of people living in the char villages is taken into account. In the light of the above view, this article will focus on the present agricultural practices and difficulties of char village farmers and initiatives taken by the government for overall inclusive and sustainable growth. The study will focus on the char village farmers of Assam which is one of the most flood affected state of India.

Keywords: Sustainable Growth, Inclusive Growth, Char Areas.

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INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development goals have been a buzz word now-a-days in the midst of the impact of climatic changes. The world leaders in 2015, had agreed upon 17 global goals, officially known as Sustainable Development goals (SDGs), which have the power to reduce poverty, inequality and provide solution to climatic changes. In India, the NITI Aayog has been given the responsibility to oversee the adoption and monitoring of SDGs in the country and promote competitive and cooperative federalism among states and union territories. In the light of the above goals, the Government of Assam published a document 'Assam 2030: Our Dream, Our Commitment,' for achieving these goals.

The char areas of Assam which are frequently affected by floods need a special mention in this regard. As per the Directorate of Char Areas Development under the Government of Assam, the riverine areas (islands) of the river Brahmaputra are locally known as 'Char/Chapori.' These riverine areas (islands). The goal of inclusive growth will not be fulfilled unless the development of people living in the char villages of Assam is taken into account. In the light of the above view, this article will focus on the present agricultural practices of char village farmers and initiatives taken by the government for overall their inclusive and sustained growth. It will also study the difficulties faced the char farmers and the means through which problems faced by the farmers can be solved.

Statement of the Problem

The riverine areas (islands) of the river Brahmaputra, locally known as 'char/chapori' are subjected to frequent soil erosion due to floods. This has affected the area and location of chars during floods every year in Assam. Due to limited accessibility and other administrative constraints, development in these areas is lagging behind. Absence of financial institutions, adequate transportation facilities, proper drinking water facilities, electricity and education have restricted economic development in such areas.

Moreover, 80% of the char population are below the poverty line. The government of Assam has formed a separate department i.e, 'Department of Char Area Development,' which formulates schemes and plans for upliftment of these people. It is seen that inspite of the measures adopted by the government for the upliftment of these people, they are not able to avail the benefits of the schemes due to lack of proper communication and awareness. In this context, this study will analyze the condition of the people living in char areas. It will also try to identify the difficulties faced by the people of char areas and initiatives adopted by the government for inclusive and sustainable development.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the study:

- To study the different agricultural practices in char areas of Morigaon.

- To study about the difficulties faced by the farmers of char areas of Assam.
- To study about the initiatives adopted by the government for sustained and inclusive agricultural growth of char areas of Assam.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the char areas of Lahorighat Block under Morigaon District. Morigaon district is situated in the middle part of the state of Assam. Majority of the population of this district is engaged in agriculture and allied activities.

The lahorighat Development is one of the five development blocks of Morigaon district. This block is one of the backward development blocks of Assam as the impact of flood in this block is immense. Many villages under this block suffer from the impact of floods every year out of 179 villages under this block, 83 villages are directly affected by floods during the summer and rainy season.

For the purpose of the study, 10 char villages under Lahorighat Development Block were selected randomly and from these 10 char villages, 50 farmers were selected through convenience sampling method. Data for the study was collected through personal interview and schedule.

Limitations of the Study

The study has the following limitations;

- The population of char area is scattered.
- There has been a linguistic barriers while conducting the interview.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following literatures were reviewed for the study:

Barua & Singha (2020) in their article, 'Agricultural practices and sustainability among the char inhabitants of Sipajhar Development Block of Darrang District, Assam,' stated that the people residing in the char areas are aware of environmental problems but have no idea to tackle them.

Nayak & Panda (2016) in their report, 'Brahmaputra and the socio- economic life of the people of Assam,' suggested that since the char settlers suffer from the vicious circle of poverty and under-development, external intervention through Government and the civil society agencies are necessary especially in the field of education and health.

Akond & Dutta (2013) in their article, 'Technical efficiency of rice producing farms : a case study of char-chapari areas of Assam,' suggested that in order to increase rice productivity in char –chapari areas of Assam, policies regarding development of small irrigation projects and more investment in formal and

informal education as well as distribution system of fertilizers is much required.

Nath (2020) in his article, 'Exploring char dominated Blocks of Assam: A study of socio-economic dimensions,' found that the settlers of char chapari areas of Assam are comparatively poorer than the rest of the people of Assam. The frequent floods and soil erosion is a very critical problem in char areas and as such the researcher suggested that proper vegetation should be maintained in char areas to prevent further soil erosion.

Nath *et al.* (2021) in their article, 'Socio economic status of farming community of char area of Dhubri District, Assam,' stated that good reliable transport and communication facilities should be provided for the char dwellers. The farmers must be provided with infrastructural support for meeting inputs, credit and marketing needs.

Talukdar *et al.* (2009) in their article, 'Crop suitability for char area of Nalbari District, Assam,' stated that the actual choice of a crop for a particular char area depends on the type of soil, the preference of the farmers and the anticipated market demand for the crop.

Kumar & Das (2019) in their article, 'Livelihood of the char dwellers of western Assam,' found that land ownership is an important factor in determining income of the char dwellers. Moreover, education and health are also other important factors for economic growth of the people of char areas of western Assam.

Different Agricultural Practices in Char Areas of Morigaon District

The people of char areas of Morigaon district are mainly farmers in nature though they are also engaged in different business activities and labour works as an alternative livelihood. The main crops that the farmers cultivate are maize, peanuts black lentins, jute, sesame and mustard oil. The period of cultivation of these crops are mentioned below:

- **Maize:** In the char villages of Morigaon, maize, locally known as Makoi in Assamese language have two variants-one that is cultivated for three to four months and the other for six months. This crop is cultivated in the Assamese month of Fagun (February- March) and continues till the month of Aahar (June-July) before the start of floods in Assam.
- **Peanuts:** Peanuts, also known as badam in Assamese are cultivated by a large number of farmers in char areas of Morigaon district. The cultivation of this crop starts during the Assamese month of Aahin (September-October) and takes about three to four months to grow. The crop is

ready for sale in the market at the month of Magh (January – February).

- **Black Lentins:** Also known as ‘Mati Mah’ in regional language, this crop is cultivated in the month of Aahin (September- October) and are ready for sale in the market at the time of Puh month (December- January). It is one of the main crops in char areas of Assam.
- **Jute:** Named as ‘Mora Pat’ in char areas and the rest of Assam, this crop is cultivated in the month of Sauth (March – April) and are ready for sale in the market by the month of Bhado (August-September).
- **Mustard Oil:** the mustard oil crop also known as ‘horiyoh’ in Assamese language is cultivated in the month of Kati (October- November) and is raised till ‘Magh’ (January- February).
- **Sesame:** Also known as ‘Til’ in local language, this crop is cultivated in the char areas during two different period of time based on their types. The ‘Aahariya Til’ is cultivated in the month of Bhado (August- September) upto Aaghun (November-December) and the ‘Aahu Til’ is cultivated in the month of Sauth(March – April) upto the month of Jeth (May- June).

Difficulties Faced by the Farmers of Char Areas of Morigaon District

From the study it was found that that the farmers of char areas of Morigaon District faces the following difficulties:

- The major difficulty faced by the farmers are the unexpected impact of floods. It was seen that the flood in the Brahmaputra River sometimes completely destroys a char land and at times also bring soil to form an extended char area.
- There is a problem of electricity in such areas. The solar energy used is not always sustainable as the farmers lack enough fund to build large solar plants in their area.
- Once the crop is ready for sale in the market, the farmers faced the problems in transportation of their goods to the market. The farmers of such areas still use bulls or buffaloes to transport their goods to the market.
- There is no systematic market structure available in the markets near the char areas. Lack of proper storage facilities lead to a huge wastage of goods which resulted in heavy losses for the farmers.
- Most of the farmers are not aware of the government incentives provided to them. Incentives in the form of free agricultural seeds for cultivation do not fully reach the needy farmers as they are hoarded by local distributors.
- It is also found that the ration cards provided for people below the poverty line are sold to other people and as such they are deprived of this facility by the government.

Initiatives Adopted By the Government for Sustained and Inclusive Agricultural Growth of Char Areas of Assam

The government of Assam has been providing incentives in the form of schemes for overall growth of agriculture in the state. These schemes are in the form of yearly financial assistance to farmers, crop insurance, providing seeds as well as easy availability of loans. Some of the central as well as state sponsored schemes which can contribute immensely for the growth and development of farmers in char areas are discussed below:

- **Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana:** This scheme was initiated in the year 2007 as an umbrella scheme to ensure holistic development of agriculture and allied sectors by allowing states to choose their own agriculture and allied sector development activities as per the district/state agriculture plan. The major focus of this scheme is on the pre and post harvest infrastructure, agri-entrepreneurship and innovations.
- **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana:** This scheme was initiated in the year 2016 as an insurance service for the farmers for their crop production. It aims to support production in agriculture by providing affordable crop insurance against all non-preventable natural risks from pre-sowing to post-harvesting stage on an ‘Area Approach Basis’.
- **Soil Health Card Scheme:** Launched in 2015, under this scheme, the government plans to issue soil cards to farmers which will show the result of their soil sample test and provide suggestion regarding the required amount of nutrients and fertilizers in their farms every once in three years.
- **Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi:** Through this scheme the government provide financial assistance of Rs 6000/- to small, marginal and other farmers.
- **Kisan Credit Card:** Kishan Credit Card was launched by the government to meet the comprehensive credit requirements of agricultural sector by giving financial assistance to farmers.
- **NAEP III:** It was implemented by the government for distribution of inputs for pulses, cereals and oil seed crops.
- **Mukhya Mantri Krishi Sa-Sajuli Yojana:** This is a financial assistance scheme from the government of the State of Assam which provides Rs. 5000/- to the small and marginal farmers.
- **Rural Infrastructure Development Fund:** This fund was created by the government for distribution of solar pump @ 85% government subsidy and diesel and electric pumps to farmers at 75% subsidy.

The government of Assam has been partially successful in providing benefits of the schemes for the development of the farmers of Assam. However, it is seen that there has been some misuse of the funds as

there are instances for use of funds by people other than farmers.

CONCLUSION

From the study it is seen that though the government has been providing various incentives in the form of schemes, still at the ground level it is a partial success. There has been corruption in distribution of government facilities to the farmers. Also, the farmers of char areas lack awareness as most of them are not aware of the incentives provided to them. So, in order to achieve the government's sustainable and inclusive development goal, it is suggested that there is need for proper co-ordination between the government and the farmers and also proper awareness campaigns must be conducted for overall and inclusive growth of agriculture in the district.

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