

IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND POTENTIAL FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH AGRICULTURAL LABOUR

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The overwhelming growth of population has created more labour force and the number of unemployed rural women has been increasing. Unemployment has created serious problems in Indian society. The increasing unemployment and underemployment in families have accentuated poverty. Women become doubly underprivileged as members of rural poor and as women. Likewise, youth being a group with low status, tend to become easy victims of exploitation, discrimination and oppression and they suffer due to problems of unemployment. Moreover, the work involved in agriculture is seasonal in nature and agricultural labour have few avenues of employment during off season when they are unemployed or underemployed. The dwindling monsoon and its failure, seems to be the major reason for unemployment in Irrigated Agro Eco System, where the main source of irrigation is through canals. To enhance the quality of life of rural poor, they must be economically viable. Keeping these facts in mind, the present study was attempted with the objective of formulating strategies to improve the employment status and potential of farm women and youth agricultural labour.

Methodology

The study was conducted in the Lower Bhavani Project (LBP) command area of Cauvery River basin in Erode district of Tamil Nadu. Considering the maximum area under sugarcane two taluks viz. Sathiamangalam from head end and Perundurai from tail reach were selected. Based on the same criteria, multistage sampling process was adopted to select blocks, firkas and revenue villages from these two taluks. Accordingly, four revenue villages viz., Ukkaram and Sathiamangalam from Arasur firka of Sathiamangalam block (head region) and Pethampalayam and Kanchikoil revenue villages from Kanchikoil firka of Perundurai block (tail region) were selected.

For the study another 17 hamlets were selected from the four revenue villages considering the following criteria viz., maximum agricultural labour population and maximum area under sugarcane. A sample of 180 agricultural labourers comprising 90 each from head region and tail region were drawn randomly by following proportionate random sampling technique. The sample of 90 labourers

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included an equal sample of both farm women and youth from each region. Participatory rural appraisal techniques such as Venn diagram, matrix ranking, daily routine diagram and seasonality diagram, case studies and interview schedule were employed to collect the relevant and pertinent data wherever needed. Percentage analysis was used to draw meaningful conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Present employment status of women agricultural labourers

Employment status of women and youth agricultural labourers in sugarcane based production system was measured. Data were collected on the number of days employed by the respondents in a year in sugarcane based production system. It was collected separately for the crops raised in sugarcane based production system like Sugarcane, paddy, turmeric, groundnut and gingelly. From the pooled data, average mandays employed in a year for the above five crops was calculated. The results are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Employment status of women agricultural labour in sugarcane based production system

(n=90)

Sl. No	Month	Agriculture (Average mandays/year)						Agriculture Average mandays/year	Off-seasonal avocation (Average mandays/year)	Grand total (Average mandays/year)
		Sugarcane	Paddy	Turmeric	Groundnut	Gingelly	Other crops			
1.	January	5.24	19.28	1.32	0.70	0.13	-	26.67	-	26.67
2.	February	6.00	6.08	8.51	0.55	2.59	3.35	27.08	1.05	28.13
3.	March	2.02	3.68	4.34	0.70	2.82	1.45	15.01	2.38	17.39
4.	April	0.27	4.01	6.32	0.71	2.14	1.20	14.65	3.96	18.61
5.	May	8.22	-	1.76	-	-	-	9.98	1.66	11.64
6.	June	8.30	-	-	0.52	0.71	0.70	10.23	2.75	12.98
7.	July	5.83	3.24	1.47	1.96	2.46	-	14.96	0.78	15.74
8.	August	4.82	14.11	0.45	1.10	0.84	-	21.32	0.94	22.26
9.	September	-	7.78	0.91	1.15	1.22	-	11.06	-	11.06
10.	October	-	1.20	0.22	4.75	3.26	-	9.43	0.53	9.96
11.	November	-	0.76	0.25	7.24	-	-	8.25	0.60	8.85
12.	December	1.24	4.62	1.06	2.90	-	0.54	10.36	2.21	12.57
	Total	41.94	64.76	26.61	22.28	16.17	7.24	179.0	16.86	195.86

A perusal of Table 1 indicates that women agricultural labourers were employed for 196 mandays in a year. Of these, agricultural operations offered employment opportunities for 179 man days and off-seasonal avocation contributed employment opportunities for 16.8 man days in a year. Paddy contributed maximum employment opportunities (64.76 man days/year) to women agricultural labourers followed by sugarcane (41.94 man days/year). Farm women were able to secure maximum employment opportunities during January (26.67 man days), February (27.08 man days) and August (21.3 man days) by performing various agricultural operations in sugarcane based production system. On discussion, it was understood that women agricultural labourers were mainly involved in the detrashing operations in sugarcane. They were involved in harvesting and post harvesting of the first season paddy during August. Majority of the women were engaged in harvesting and post harvesting of turmeric during February. In Groundnut farm, women agricultural labourers obtained more employment in harvesting and stripping operations which coincided during October and November. A majority of the women agricultural labourers were found to be engaged in harvest and post harvest operations in gingelly crop.

Present employment status of youth agricultural labour

Employment position of youth agricultural labour in sugarcane based production system was assessed. Data were collected regarding the number of days employed by the respondents in a year in sugarcane based production system. It was collected separately for the crops raised in sugarcane based production systems like Sugarcane, paddy, turmeric, groundnut and gingelly. From the pooled data, average man days employed in a year for the above five crops was calculated. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Employment status of youth agricultural labourers in sugarcane based production system

(n=90)

Sl. No	Month	Agriculture (Average man days/year)						Agriculture Average man days/year	Off-seasonal avocation (Average man days/year)	Grand total (Average man days/year)
		Sugarcane	Paddy	Turmeric	Groundnut	Gingelly	Other crops			
1.	January	13.95	17.18	0.80	0.55	1.07	-	33.55	0.22	33.77
2.	February	15.37	3.75	10.78	0.11	0.90	1.62	32.53	1.06	33.59
3.	March	16.68	-	6.74	-	0.91	2.85	27.18	2.94	30.12
4.	April	9.12	4.28	1.97	0.66	1.61	0.30	17.94	2.23	20.17
5.	May	6.31	-	0.95	1.16	-	0.72	9.14	3.65	12.79
6.	June	5.82	1.78	1.98	0.45	1.02	-	11.05	4.60	15.65
7.	July	3.07	7.21	0.77	1.25	1.17	-	13.47	1.10	14.57

8.	August	2.12	9.24	0.87	0.37	1.04	0.48	14.12	1.38	15.50
9.	September	1.11	0.91	0.96	0.54	0.40	-	3.92	2.51	6.43
10.	October	0.37	0.86	0.35	3.78	2.65	-	8.01	2.00	10.01
11.	November	0.78	0.72	0.26	5.83	-	0.50	8.09	1.30	9.39
12.	December	3.80	6.65	0.38	3.54	-	0.54	14.91	2.57	17.48
	Total	78.50	52.58	26.81	18.24	10.77	7.01	193.91	25.56	219.47

It was assessed that in sugarcane based production system, a total of 219 man days of employment was available to youth agricultural labourers in a year. Agriculture offered employment opportunities for 193.9 mandays and off-seasonal works contributed employment opportunities for 25.5 mandays in a year. In sugarcane based production system, sugarcane crop offered maximum employment opportunities (78.5 man days/year) to youth agricultural labourers followed by paddy (52.28 man days/year). In sugarcane based production system, youth labourers secured maximum employment opportunities during January (33.55 man days/year), February (32.53 man days/year) and March (27.18 man days/year) by engaging themselves in various agricultural operations. The youth respondents opined that they were found to be higher than other months. Youth agricultural labourers are involved in harvesting and post harvesting operations of the first season paddy during January and paddy field preparation during August which provided almost 50.00 per cent of the employment for them. On turmeric farm, youth obtained maximum employment opportunity by performing harvesting and post harvesting operations. In groundnut farm, youth were employed for 18.24 man days/year. Gingelly crop offered only 10 days of employment for youth because a majority of the operations in gingelly were performed by farmers themselves.

Employment potential assessment (EPA)

It is clear from the study that in sugarcane based production system, women agricultural labourers were employed for 196 man days in a year. Out of 196 mandays of total employment, agricultural operations offered employment opportunities for 179 man days and off-seasonal avocation contributed employment opportunities for 16.80 man days in a year. Employment position of youth agricultural labourers revealed that in sugarcane based production system a total of 219 man days of employment were available to youth agricultural labourers in a year. Agriculture offered employment opportunities for 193.90 mandays and off seasonal works contributed employment opportunities for 25.50 mandays in a year. Women agricultural labourers were idle for a period of 110 days, whereas youth agricultural labourers for 90 days in a year. Thus their free time could be effectively managed to increase their employment opportunities, and subsequently their socio economic status and standard of living.

Migration Behaviour

Data collection was done relating to outward migration behaviour of women and youth agricultural labourers aimed at providing non farm employment to bring down the migration. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Outward migration and employment pattern of Agricultural labour

Sl.No	Category	Outward migration	
		No.	%
1.	Farm women (n=90)	19	21.11
2.	Youth (n=90)	40	44.44

It is clear from the table that the respondents (21.11 per cent of women and 44.44 per cent of youth agricultural labourers) of the study area migrated outside their resident villages during lean season in search of employment avenues. The respondents opined that a majority of the women respondents migrated to places about 16-30 kilometers away from the study area and they travelled upto 60 kilometers. Youth respondents travelled more than 16 kilometers and upto 90 kilometers. The respondents stayed and worked for their earnings for a period of two months during lean season. The respondents viewed that they could not find a comfortable stay during migration as there was no proper place for stay available for them. However, they need to migrate to nearby places to earn their living, because of scarce off seasonal avocations in their own villages. Therefore, a lot of employment opportunities need to be created for the agricultural labourers by launching programmes to train them in self employment ventures.

Off Seasonal avocational activities of agricultural labour

During slack periods, both women and youth agricultural labourers were found to be involved in non-farm activities in order to earn money for their daily food. These non farm activities of female agricultural labourers were thatty making, construction work, separation of thread from cloth, embroidery work, mat weaving and selling of snacks.

Youth agricultural labour were engaged in non-farm activities such as construction work, pandhal making, thatty making, digging pits for cable wire, digging of wells, cutting and selling of firewood, loading and unloading of soil, agrochemical shops, coconut dehusking, desilting of wells and collection of egg and provision of seed in poultry farm.



Table 4. Employment status of Farm women agricultural labour in off seasonal avocation

Sl. No.	Operation	Average mandays employed /year	
		Farm women	Youth
1.	Construction work	4.56	8.88
2.	Separation of thread from cloth	4.28	-
3.	Thatty making	3.52	2.72
4.	Dyeing of threads	1.50	-
5.	Embroidery work	1.15	-
6.	Mat weaving	0.98	-
7.	Selling of snacks	0.66	-
8.	Digging pits for cable wire	-	2.54
9.	Digging of wells	-	2.46
10.	Poultry farm work (Provision of feed and collection of eggs)	-	1.75
11.	Pandhal making	-	1.50
12.	Transporting of bags in agro chemical shops	-	1.42
13.	Coconut dehusking	-	1.21
14.	Selling of fire wood	-	1.12
15.	Desilting of wells	-	0.85
16.	Loading and unloading of soil	-	0.66
17.	Tailoring	-	0.22
18.	Working in powerloom factory	-	0.22
	Total	16.65	25.55

Table 4 shows that the women and youth agricultural labourers obtained employment opportunity through off seasonal avocation for about 16.65 man days and 25.55 man days in a year respectively. Hence, there is scope for increasing employment opportunities of agricultural labourers in off seasonal avocations by training and encouraging them to start enterprises on a small scale.

Employment Potential Assessment for Erode district

Sugarcane based production system comprises of crops like sugarcane, paddy, turmeric, groundnut and gingelly. Hence these crops have been taken into consideration for assessing employment potential. Relevant secondary data like average cropping area of five years from 1997-98 to 2001-02, labour requirement per hectare, population of agricultural labourers and cultivators for Erode district were collected. Average mandays employed per year by the respondents in sugarcane based production system was taken from the primary data collected for the revenue village. Since the selected villages represent the agro climatic area of Erode district, it was taken as a proxy for calculation of Employment Potential for Erode district.

Calculation of Employment Potential:

Labour requirement = Area under crops x Per hectare labour requirement

Labour availability = Population of agricultural labourers + 30 % of cultivators
(assuming that 30 % of cultivators is also engaged as labourers) x Average man days employed/year.

Potential = Labour availability - labour requirement

Labour requirement :

Sugarcane : 30496 x 328 = 10.002 lakh man days/year
Paddy : 57536 x 162 = 9.320 lakhs man days/year
Turmeric : 12167 x 325 = 3.954 lakh man days/year
Groundnut : 52026 x 102 = 5.306 lakh man days/year
Gingelly : 17512 x 50 = 0.875 lakh man days/year

Total labour demand = 29.460 lakh mandays/year

Labour availability :

Average man days employed by the agricultural labourers in sugarcane based production system: 186.90 (men) + 85.88 (women) = 272.778 mandays/year (270 approximately)

Labour availability = 576712 x 270
= 155712240 man days/year
= **155.71 lakh man days/year**
Potential = availability – requirement
= 155.71 - 29.46
Potential = 126.25 lakh man days/year

126.25 lakh man days/year is available in excess and there is potential to create additional employment opportunities to engage these labourers.

Summary of Findings

The study revealed that in sugarcane based production system, women agricultural labourers were employed for 196 man days in a year and youth were employed for 219 man days in a year. Hence they were unemployed for 4-5 months in a year.

During lean season the respondents either migrated (21.11 per cent of women and 44.44 per cent of youth) outside their resident villages or were found to be involved in non farm activities in their own villages to earn money for their daily food. The results on employment potential assessment revealed that 126.25 lakh man days/year of labour was available in excess and there was potential to create additional employment opportunities to engage these labourers. Based on the findings of the study, the following policy recommendations can be made for the development of agricultural labourers involved in sugarcane based cropping system.

- Adequate training can be given on the feasibility of establishing income generating subsidiary occupations such as Dairy, Poultry, Sericulture and Mushroom cultivation etc. Technical support may be provided by the extension agencies and financial support may be provided by the Government.
- Establishment of agro-based industries would create employment opportunities for agricultural labour to earn adequate income. Hence, Government should make intensive efforts to establish agro-based industries.
- The food for work programme should be implemented in rural areas by engaging agricultural labour during off season so as to enhance the participation of agricultural labour in the programme as well to provide employment opportunities.
- Appropriate post-harvest technologies suitable to the existing farming conditions may be generated which will enhance the employment opportunities for women and youth agricultural labour.