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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FOOD SECURITY IN KERALA- NEED FOR A NEW DIRECTION AND POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

Objective

- To bring out the insufficiency in food production in Kerala
- To examine the factors behind fragmentation of land holdings and low food production.
- To highlight the need for a reformulated land on lease system.

Food security in kerala- need for a new direction and policy: Food security has an important role in man's development irrespective of time and place. From vedic times "Annam Brahmam" has been our faith and culture. The ability of a ruler to ensure food security of his subjects was regarded as an index of his success even in olden times. Food security is now an international index which measures the development of a Nation. Rice is the most widely consumed staple food for large part of world's human population, especially in Asia. FAO states that it is the agricultural commodity with the third highest worldwide production. Regions with low labour costs and high rainfall find it the most suitable grain with regard to human nutrition and calorie intake.

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ABSTRACT

Food security is a challenge faced by all developing nations today. It is accepted internationally as the index of welfare and prosperity. For a Nation like India which also faces the problem of population explosion, the maintenance of a balance between food production and population becomes a Herculean task. In states like Kerala, there is the multiple challenge of shrinking paddy fields, increasing density of population and shift to other occupations and migrations in search of jobs. To encourage sustainable agricultural productivity in Kerala, land-on-lease system should be reformulated in accordance with the needs of sustainable agriculture production.

India accounts for about 20% of world rice production (103.5 million tonnes in 2016-FAO). The country has the largest area under rice cultivation (46.46 million hectares). KERALA SCENARIO – The State of Kerala has a proud tradition of paddy cultivation. Rice is the most important staple food of Kerala. Area and production of paddy has been declining from 1956-57 to 2016-17. Kerala accounts for 2.76% of India's total population and has a density of population of 860/sq.km as compared to India's average of 382. It has important implications for Kerala's ecological, social and economic development. Today rice has only third place among Kerala's agricultural crops with respect to area under cultivation, behind coconut and rubber. Economic Review (GOK) states that food grains produced in the state account for only 15% of the total consumption of food grains (GOK 2010 P 106). Demand for rice is 40 lakh tones / year where as production of paddy in 2015-16 is just 5.49 lakh tones. Rice is imported from other states and price of rice has spiraled during the period 2016-17. Area under paddy cultivation has decreased from 7.62 lakh hectares in 1956-57 to 2.02 lakh hectares in 2016-17.

The recent decision of the government to prohibit by law the tendency to keep cultivable land fallow and unutilized is a remedial measure in the right direction. New estimate by the government reveal that cultivable waste land in 2014-15 is 1,00,676 hectares (Mathrubhumi, Sep 19, 2017, p.8). It was 58,297 hectares in 1999-2000 which has doubled in 15 years. It reveals a popular and growing conscious effort to keep cultivable land uncultivated for a continuous period so that it could be used for other non-agricultural and economically more prospective possibilities. The land owners who were

traditionally engaged in agriculture and who inherited land in succession, are no more engaged in agriculture and socio-economic changes have led to their migration to cities and towns and to other non agricultural occupations.

Table No.1. Area and production of Paddy(1956-2017)

Year	Area (in lakh hectares)	Production (lakh tones)
1956-57	7.62	8.87
1961-62	7.52	10.04
1966-67	7.99	11.24
1971-72	8.75	13.76
1976-77	8.54	12.95
1981-82	8.07	13.06
1986-87	6.63	10.33
1991-92	5.41	10.60
1996-97	4.31	8.71
2001-02	4.22	7.04
2006-07	2.64	6.42
2007-08	2.29	5.28
2008-09	2.34	5.90
2009-10	2.34	5.98
2010-11	2.13	5.28
2011-12	2.08	5.68
2012-13	1.97	5.08
2015-16	1.96	5.49
2016-17	2.02	N.A

(Dept. of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Kerala, and Economic Review)

Table No. 2. Rice average under paddy in different districts of Kerala (Area in hectares)

District	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Thiruvananthapuram	2395	1816	2001
Kollam	2097	1387	1363
Pathanamthitta	2802	2280	2468
Alappuzha	36251	36195	37402
Kottayam	21410	17571	15746
Idukki	1264	1176	661
Ernakulam	7731	3940	4052
Thrissur	21172	23098	22275
Palakkad	83998	79201	82896
Malappuram	7528	6674	7548
Kozhikode	2920	2511	2433
Wayand	8995	10230	11481
Kannur	5740	6684	5079
Kasargode	3857	3514	4206
Total	208160	198277	199611

The Hindu Oct 2015

The average landholding in Kerala is just 54 cents now where as it was 67.5 cents before 15 years. The number of land holdings increased from 62.9 lakh in 95-96 to 68.31 lakhs in 2010-11. The number of land holdings increased and average land holding decreased (P. Indira devi, Mathrubhumi, Sept 19, 2017). 96% of Kerala's population have a land holding below 1 hectare. They own 1/3rd of the total land in Kerala. The number of such marginal holdings have increased and the average land area under marginal holdings have decreased. In the case of land holdings, number of such holdings have decreased and average land area has increased. The fragmentation of land holdings is a challenge faced by the small and marginal farmers and is an obstacle to profitable agricultural production. Large scale land owners who own majority of the land area have withdrawn from agricultural activities and the small and marginal farmers who are interested in agricultural operations cannot avail cultivable land at affordable rates for earning reasonable income.

Though official estimates are rare, cultivation of land on lease is prevalent in many states including Kerala. During the period 2009-10, Kudumbasree had cultivated approximately 25,062 hectares on lease. Such land lease system is most often for a short span of time ranging from 4 months to 4 years and cultivation is on a commercial basis, but sustainable agricultural practices are not followed by the farmers and even adversely affects the fertility of the soil. Commercialisation and extensive use of fertilizers and insecticides cause social and environmental problems. Farmers who engage in cultivation on leased land also face problems in availing financial help from government and also agricultural loans, crop insurance or any other financial aid. The NSSO Report 2006 points out that 56% of households in Kerala offer land on lease and this highlights that associated problems of land leasing exist in Kerala.

Conclusion

There is need for the formulation of policies which are oriented towards sustainable agricultural production and which take into consideration both ownership rights and farmer's rights. Agricultural practices which ensure sustainable agricultural production should be made mandatory under policy formulation. A coordinated effort involving the land owners, farmer and local self governing bodies is highly desirable to ensure this sustainable transition. This system can decide the lease term and amount and rights and powers are to be clarified accordingly so that any uncertainty in the system can be overcome. This locally formulated coordination system can ensure the comprehensive and sustainable development of agriculture and can go a long way in achieving the goal of self sufficiency in food production.

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