

Agricultural Economics Research Association (India)

Conference Outline

About the Conference

Agricultural Economics Research Association (India) is organizing its 27th Annual Conference on “Changing Landscape of Rural India” during 25-27th September 2019 at Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology of Kashmir (SKAUST (K)), Srinagar. The main emphasis of this Conference is to understand the changing landscape of rural India the trends, impact and factors contributing to the change.

Conference Theme: “Changing Landscape of Rural India”

Indian economy is poised to leapfrog to higher level of development phase. It is exhibiting some interesting socio-economic outcomes. For instance, as expected the share of agriculture and allied activities in the Gross Value Added (GVA) is declining and witnessing a growing service sector. Unfortunately, the manufacturing sector remains almost stable, which needs to be revitalized for more jobs. Unemployment has become a major political, social and economic issue, especially in rural areas where majority of youth is living. Therefore, development of rural areas will play an important role in reducing poverty and unemployment at national level. Government of India has put greater efforts and energy in this direction as is witnessed by its flagship program, such as MGNREGS, that has not only created rural infrastructure but also has increased wage earnings. That in turn has empowered poor rural households by enhancing their purchasing power and pulling them out from the clutches of poverty.

Rural non-farm growth reduces financial and spatial inequalities and creates economic opportunities with enhanced incomes. The rural non-farm sector has been the most important outlet for self-employment that further contributes in bringing down the unemployment at national level. This sector can be

attributed to be most potential source of income growth of rural households particularly the landless and poor living in backward areas. The smallholders which constitute the bulk of rural population in India derive their maximum income from wages and salaries, and non-farm business activities, as against the large farmers. With the tremendous untapped potential, the sector has absorbed gainfully some farmers especially youth. It is reported that this sector has selectively absorbed not only the young males into wage employment but also has encouraged farmers to go into rural non-farm self-employment particularly women. It is also important to encourage the rural households to get engaged in the allied activities such as livestock and fisheries pertaining to its multifarious contributions to the society in various forms, such as nutrient-rich food products, clothing, draught power, income, employment etc. These sectors are growing at appreciable rate and ahead of the crop sector. The livestock and fishers sector act as buffer or shock absorber for natural calamities, like drought, and also minimize the income losses under worst situations. Thus, ensuring and developing the sustainable livestock and fisheries programmes and services, which help the resource poor farmers to augment the income, must be in forefront of development agenda.

Accelerating investment and productivity growth in agriculture will require much accelerated technical change, diversification to high value crops, expansion of irrigation, and further diversification of farmers into non-farm sector. However, the farm sector has certain inherent characteristics and constraints related to economies-of-scale, mechanization and credit. The rural incomes can be enhanced through adoption of modern technology, further diversification towards higher valued crops and use of modern machinery. The level of farm mechanization in India, agriculture is still at nascent stage and restricted mainly to the few operations run by tractor and harvester. Ever increasing population

and limited land area has led to fragmentation of land in rural areas. Agricultural extension can help the rural communities in a significant way in improving access to technology, information, markets and programmes. Many organisations have entered agricultural extension, natural resources management, fostering of linkages of farmers to market opportunities, and micro-finance.

The disparity in India between a farm and non-farm worker remains high in the country. Studies report that this wide variation in worker productivity arises due to composition in rural output, overdependence on agriculture sector and nature of the work performed by different categories of workers. The disparity in worker productivity between farm and non-farm sectors increased manifolds by the year 2004-05. This may be a distress factor for a farm worker. Consumption inequality has recently increased in urban areas but stayed almost constant in rural areas. Over the past two decades, share of food in total expenditure (as explained by the monthly per capita expenditure, MPCE) has fallen in rural India, roughly from two-third to one-half, signalling a clear shift in expenditure behaviour. The physical consumption quantities display consistent decline in cereals in both rural and urban India, and the trend holds true for pulses as well. Rather, rapid improvement in consumption of allied agricultural products is observed, especially in urban India. Thus, a shift from consuming staple crops and pulses towards allied agricultural products is evident, in both physical as well as in value terms.

Rural and social development programs are transferring significant purchasing power into the rural economy and are likely to enhance the demand for food and non-farm goods and services. It is reported that MGNREGA has directly led to the creation of more than 1000 crore person days of work since its inception in 2006 07. It has also raised the negotiating power of agricultural labour, resulting in higher agricultural wages. The evidences show that withdrawal of workforce is primarily from the female workers. The increasing de-feminization of agriculture sector is attributed to factors like enrolment in education, engagement in household activities, farm distress-related factors, etc.

In rural areas, encouraging farmer's aggregation and also linking them with remunerative markets would help enhancing their share in consumer rupee. Various marketing and price support schemes intended to compensate farmers when price fall below certain specified level. Raising MSP and Price deficiency scheme may be a partial solution to farmer's distress. A sustainable solution and long-term policies, like creation of competitive, stable and unified national market is needed for farmers to get better prices. Existing constraints on agricultural marketing via regulated markets will have to be eliminated, and marketing and value chains will have to be modernized at an accelerated pace from the farm to the retail outlet. Rapid policy and institutional change will be required to improve the outreach of many government programs. In addition to this, various rural institutions such as Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Farmer producer organisations (FPO), SHGs etc. can play a pivotal role in implementation of various government schemes by acting as key implementing agency. There is a need to strengthen these institutions so as to follow a bottom-up approach and efficient implementation of concerned programs.

Thus, considering the above, the paper writers may focus on the following with objective evidences.

1. Evidence revealed that rural economy is heading towards transformation, albeit at slower pace. The studies may focus on the key structural changes taking place in the rural and Indian economy with respect to the contribution in output, employment, poverty etc. Role of improved agricultural technologies along with agricultural extension also need to be highlighted in bringing the structural changes. The role of rural non-farm sector needs to be highlighted in terms of integrated impacts in generating income and employment to the rural households.
2. Rural areas are witnessing varied experiences in terms of feminization of agriculture. Micro-level studies are required to analyse the dynamics of woman employment in agriculture and its implications.
3. Education and skill development play an important role in absorption capacity of non-farm sector.

Research on mapping of skill requirement at sub-national level, evaluation of on-going skill improvement schemes, etc is required. The studies may also focus on how agriculture and agribusiness education along with creating rural entrepreneurship can enhance rural livelihood opportunities.

4. Various rural and social development programs, especially MGNREGS, have contributed in reducing distress, creating infrastructure and accelerating the rural livelihoods. The evidences may be provided how these programmes have direct or indirect role in increasing wages & employment. The studies may also focus on how implementation of agricultural and rural development programs could be significantly improved.
5. The success stories of viable farm mechanization for smallholders and institutional innovations like custom hiring centre, app-based start-ups, drone-based spray of fertilizer, pesticides, etc need to be documented and included in the mainstream planning process. Both positive and negative externalities of farm mechanization need to be examined in the framework of sustainable agriculture.
6. Markets and logistics play extremely crucial role in building the rural connectivity and monetisation of agricultural output. Efficient functioning of markets will help driving enhanced welfare for the rural masses. Further, the information dissemination pertaining to technology, price, market, inputs, services etc. have yielded rational/optimal decision making on the farm. The studies need to draw objective evidences on these. The studies also need to focus on how different price support programme and market intervention in terms of integrated supply chains & value chains have resulted in realisation of better gains?
7. Linking processing to production through efficient value chain, contract farming and direct linkage between factory and farm offers considerable scope for rural employment generation as well as raising farmers' income. Considerable efforts are directed on improving secondary agriculture through value addition, cold chain development, etc. The studies may highlight the use of advanced

technologies like artificial intelligence; block chain technology, etc in addressing the emerging issues in changing environment. The studies may provide success stories by developing and promoting new farm models based on knowledge and skill-based agriculture and post-harvest on farm value addition.

8. The role of rural institutions like Farmers' Associations, FPOs, SHGs etc may also be highlighted. Studies may also be done to assess temporal and spatial aspects of agro-processing sector in formal and informal sectors with respect to commodities, capital flow and employment generation.
9. Various governance initiatives related to land ownership, land leasing, tax etc. enthruse and stimulate other services into rural areas. Studies may highlight that what has been the impact of governance initiatives in terms of land management, GST implementation etc.
10. A shift from consuming staple crops and pulses towards allied agricultural products is evident, in both physical as well as in value terms. This also indicates that the nutritional status in rural areas is also undergoing a change. The studies may focus on the consumption and nutrition dynamics in rural India.
11. Rural credit remains a priority agenda of the government. The studies may focus on the facilitative role of credit in changing rural landscape. The impact of loan waivers on rural and farm economy may also be highlighted.
12. Recently Government of India has announced '*Prime Minister Kissan Samman Nidhi*' for small and marginal farmers as a direct cash transfer. Earlier, similar types of schemes were announced and implemented in Telangana and Odisha. Some empirical analysis of these schemes on assessing constraints in their implementation and their impact on farmers' income will be helpful for future decision making.

Last Date and Mode of Submission of Papers

The papers should be submitted by 30th June 2019 to the Chief Editor, Agricultural Economics Research Review online at: ceditoraerr@gmail.com, and a copy at: aeraindia@gmail.com.

One hard copy should also be sent by post to AERA Office (F-4, A Block, NASC Complex, Pusa, DPS Marg, New Delhi-110 012). The length of paper should not exceed 15 pages, including abstract, tables, figures, annexures, etc. The abstract of the paper should be in 200-250 words only. The papers received by the due date only shall be considered for publication in the Conference Issue of Agricultural Economics Research Review either as

a full paper or in Abstract form, as recommended by the Review Committee.

Dr R.T. Doshi Foundation in consultation with the Agricultural Economics Research Association (India) awards two prizes for the best and second-best papers presented during the Conference. All the accepted papers are considered for presentation and facilities for power point presentation will be made available at the Conference Venue.