

**PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY SMALL FARMERS DURING  
PANDEMIC PERIOD – FARMERS’ PERSPECTIVE.  
(CONCERNING SIVAGANGAI DISTRICT)**

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**Abstract:** *According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare's 2020 report, nearly one in two Indians are self-sufficient through agriculture. There are approximately 120 million smallholder farmers in India, and these farmers make up more than 40% of the country's grain production. The Indian economy relies heavily on agriculture. According to a survey conducted by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD 2018), wages account for approximately one-third of the income of agricultural households. The issues that small farmers face in India are the focus of this paper. The study's primary objective is to describe the financial impact from the farmers' point of view. It also looks at how their wages and livestock income changed during the pandemic. Also explains how their way of life has changed as a result of the government's schemes and loans.*

**Keywords:** *Small farmers, income, pandemic, schemes*

## Introduction

The Indian economy relies heavily on agriculture. Even though it only makes about one-sixth of the country's GDP, it employs 56% of the Indian workforce. As a result, agriculture not only helps the economy as a whole grow, but it also helps alleviate poverty by creating jobs. It is also the most inclusive growth sector in the Indian economy because it provides food security for the majority of the population.

India's agricultural efficacy, favourable climate, and abundance of natural resources are all documented in its history. On the international market, India is also a leading producer of milk, pulses, and spices. It is a global agricultural powerhouse with a strong backbone of farmers and other related workers.

Despite the fact that India's constitution makes agriculture a state subject, the Central Government has a significant impact on agricultural policy. India's private ownership and the policies implemented by the government have had a significant impact on the country's pace and character.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To explain the concept of evolution and status of small farmers in the Sivagangai District.
- To understand and identify the socio-economic conditions of selected small farmers in the Sivagangai District.
- To examine the issues and challenges of small farmers during the pandemic period in the selected study area.

### **Sampling Design**

A sample of 100 has been selected for the study using the random sampling method.

### **Methodology**

The study will base on primary and secondary data; the primary data will be collected by the method of personal interview coupled with a structured questionnaire scheduled among the selected farmer households in the study area. The researcher has selected 100.

### **Evolution and status of farmers**

This district has a total population of 13,39,101, with 6,68,371 males and 6,70,730 females, according to the census taken in 2011. The district's total cultivated area is 1,04,690 hectares. 96% of the horticultural workers dwell in Rustic regions. The district experiences an average annual rainfall of approximately 861.8 mm. approximately 988.6 mm. Drought frequently strikes the district. The district is home to six important rivers. However, the rivers do not last forever.

There are five different types of land. They are marginal (less than one hectare), small (less than one hectare), semi-medium (less than two hectares), medium (less than ten hectares), and large (more than ten hectares). In the Sivagangai District, the majority of farmers (85%) have less than one hectare of land, making up 9% of the total area. Paddy, millets, and pulses are the district's crop varieties. 90% of the developed region is covered by paddy crops.

### **Results and Discussion**

The study presented here is the result of interactions with small farmers in the selected area.

#### **Background of the respondents**

Demonstrates the gender distribution across the district where the survey was conducted. The overall representation of males is 69.5% whereas 30.4% are female respectively. The table indicated that a good number of females are involved in the farming activities

## 2. Socio-economic profile of the Respondents:

| Economic Status of the Respondents |            |    |
|------------------------------------|------------|----|
| Category                           | Number (N) | %  |
| Above Average                      | 25         | 25 |
| Average                            | 40         | 40 |
| Below Poverty                      | 35         | 35 |

Table.1 describes the economic status of the respondents in the Sivagangai District. 40% of them are average whereas 35% are surviving below the poverty line.

| Average Family Size |            |    |
|---------------------|------------|----|
| Category            | Number (N) | %  |
| 1-4                 | 27         | 27 |
| 5-7                 | 52         | 52 |
| 7 and Above         | 21         | 21 |

Table 2 spells out that 52% of the respondents' family size is 5 to 7 members are there in their families. 21% of them are big families i.e. the members in the family are above 7.

## 3. Respondent's knowledge of COVID-19 and benefits received:

The right amount of knowledge on symptoms, remedial measures, and government support measures are essential to address the impact of COVID-19 in any individual's life. But it was a significant challenge in rural areas to make them aware of rapidly changing information and updates about COVID-19. It was found that 82% of small farm families are aware and have adequate information on the symptoms and preventive measures of COVID-19.

**4. Accessibility of Govt. Services:** Considering the pandemic situation, orientation was provided by the survey volunteers to the respective small farm families on COVID-19. 56% of the respondents received support from both Govt. and NGOs. 8% of the respondents have not accessed any support either from the Government or NGOs. 26% received benefits only from Government while 10% received only from the NGO sector.

## 5. COVID-19 impact on farming and production:

COVID-19 is disrupting activities in agriculture and supply chains.

- Some harvesting activities are being disrupted by the absence of migrant labour;
- Transportation issues and other issues are disrupting supply chains. Wheat, vegetables, and other crops have seen their prices drop, but consumers are frequently paying more.

- India's \$14 billion (Rs.1trillion) poultry market has begun a culling exercises as consumers have started keeping off chicken products for fear of catching coronavirus
- Feed prices have also fallen sharply as a result of weak demand from the poultry industry. In the past two months, soybean and maize prices have decreased by close to 25%.
- The mango season has just begun, and nearly 40% of the produce is shipped abroad. Farmers will lose a lot of money as a result of exports being stopped.

### **Issues faced by Indian farmers**

- Numerous issues that directly or indirectly affect the lives of farmers are prevalent in Indian agriculture. A farmer's efforts and time are taken up by Indian farming practices and other agricultural activities. However, throughout the entire process of extracting food and harvesting crops, their issues went unnoticed. Among them are:
  - The inadequacy of current farming equipment and the lack of familiarity with cutting-edge technology.
  - The loss of agricultural land, making it challenging to produce the quantity of food required to feed the expanding human population.
  - Due to exorbitant prices, most farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers, cannot afford high-quality seeds.
  - When biocides, manures, and fertilizers are used, the soil becomes depleted and exhausted, which reduces productivity.
  - Issues with irrigation as a result of rainfall and water availability
  - Little utilization of machines is made in furrowing, seed planting, flooding and pruning, weeding, reaping, and it is prudent to move the yields. It doesn't waste a lot of money or people's time.
  - Farmers were forced to sell their produce right after the harvest at the current market prices, which are listed below, due to a lack of or insufficient storage facilities.
  - The majority of the time, marginal and small farmers are compelled to sell their produce to the lender from whom they typically borrow money.
  - Private traders and middlemen dominate agricultural product marketing and trading in the absence of a structured marketing structure.
  - Polluted soil as a result of the rising pollution of rivers and canals, primarily brought about by toxic metals and high levels of industrial effluents each day.

### Problems faced by farmers during the lockdown period

- A lack of human sources as a result of farmers fleeing to their homes in fear of the pandemic.
- The farmers were impacted by criticisms of the relief package that the Indian government announced.
- Inaccessibility of transient workers, blocking the reap and post-gather crop activities.
- The lockdown prevented transportation, resulting in a stagnant harvest.
- The cultivators and professionals who are related to them lose money while dealing with the wrath of unemployment.
- Due to their dependence on agricultural raw materials, small and marginal farmers, landless farm labourers, and small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) faced severe obstacles.

### Conclusion

Due to the district's extensive efforts to educate farmers about the disease, farmers in Sivagangai District were spared any direct harm. Instead, the sudden lockdown decision made by policy affected them. They were confronted with a number of issues, including a lack of market access for perishable crops, a decline in market demand for milk production, and investment decisions being halted. The difficulties and challenges that the farmers have encountered as a result of the lockdown cannot be undone, but they may be saved from further harm. Their health issues need to be addressed, and their livelihoods need to be protected from further harm.

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