

RURAL LIVELIHOOD

In rural India, agriculture is the main occupation for most of the people. Apart from farming, there are some other means of livelihood as well.

Farming

Farmers in rural India can be divided into three categories, viz. big landlords, small farmers and landless farmers.

Large scale farmers

Small Farmers

Landless Farmers

Big Landlords: A very small number of farmers are big landlords. They own a major portion of farmland in a village. The produce enough to take care of their family needs. The sell surplus produces in the market. Many big farmers also carry out related businesses; like flour mill, shops for fertilizers and seeds. They also rent out their farm equipments; like tractors and threshers to other farmers. Big farmers do not need to work on their farms rather they hire labourers for various works.

Small Farmers: A significant number of farmers come under this category. Their land holdings produce just enough to meet their family needs. Most of the small farmers work on their fields. Some of them may hire labourers. Some of them may also work on others' farms to sustain their income.

Landless Farmers: The number of landless farmers is very high in most of the villages. Such farmers usually work on others' farms. They get poorly paid. All the family members of such farmers are engaged in manual work. Their earning is meager and is never enough to sustain the family.

Farming in India generates employment on a seasonal basis. Workers are busy only during certain months of the year. Work is available during ploughing, sowing, weeding and harvesting times only. For the remaining months, the farm workers are without job.

Many landless farmers go to nearby towns in search of work during the lean period. Many of them also migrate to big cities in search of work. Due to employment generation programmes of the government, many poor people get some work during construction of roads and check dams in nearby villages.

- **Animal Husbandry**

- Some farmers also rear cattle in order to supplement their income. They usually sell milk to the nearby milk cooperatives. Some may travel to nearby towns to sell milk. Some farmers may also be engaged in poultry farming.

- **Other Occupations**

- Many other occupations are also seen in villages. One can see provisional stores, medicine shops, cloth shops, small eateries, etc. in big villages. Some people are also engaged in cycle repair shops, jiggery making, carpentry, etc.

- **Fishing**

- Fishing can be the main occupation in some villages; especially in coastal villages. Most of the fishermen own small boats and primitive equipments. Some fishermen may own large catamarans which are fitted with motors. Large catamarans enable them to fish in deep waters. Fishing is a difficult job and involves long hours of working offshore.

Situation of Market for Farm Produce

The farm produce do not fetch attractive prices during the harvest season. Farmers are usually forced to sell their produce at throwaway prices. Sometimes, the middlemen force them to sell at cheaper rates. Sometimes, the moneylenders also force them to sell at cheaper rates. Lack of proper storage facilities is another major reason that farmers are forced to sell at lower prices. Government tries to help out farmers by offering MSP (Minimum Support Price) for farm produce. During harvest season, the FCI (Food Corporation of India) buys the farm produce at MSP.

Situation of Debt in Rural Areas

Farmers often need to borrow to buy farm inputs; like seeds, fertilizers and farm equipments. While big farmers easily get loan from the banks, this is not easy for small farmers. Small farmers are at the mercy of moneylenders and landlords for loans. In this situation, the interest rates are very high. This usually forces the small farmers into debt trap. More often than not, a major portion of the earning goes into repayment of loans. If the crop gets destroyed due to some natural calamity, the situation can become worse for the small farmers.