

Socio-economic Status of Hill Farmers: An Exploration from Almora District in Uttarakhand

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Abstract

Socio-economic status (SES) is a combined measurement of economic and social position of an entity compared to others in society. It influences the accessibility to the resources, livelihood pattern, food & nutritional security etc. It often predicts the psychological and behavioural components of a sample viz. knowledge, attitude, perception, adoption, change-proneness, level of aspiration, risk bearing ability, economic motivation etc. Present study tried to investigate SES of hill farmers to correlate it with their adoption of improved farm practices which were meant for higher yield, return, proper utilization of natural resources, sustainable livelihood security and food & nutritional enrichment. The study was conducted in Bhagar Tola and Maniagar villages of Dhauladevi block in Almora district of Uttarakhand during 2011-12. Sixty farmers were selected randomly. Ten variables viz. category, age, education, occupation, social participation, landholding, herd size, farming experience, annual income and material possession were selected to assess the SES. Data was collected through a structured interview schedule by personal interview method. The study showed that 58 percent of the respondents were in SC category and rests were in unreserved category. The average age of the respondents was 42 years and most were having medium education level (63.33%). Agriculture was the sole occupation of 25 percent farmers whereas others had subsidiary occupations like labour, shop keeping, driving etc. Majority were found having medium level of social participation (78.34%). The average landholding was 0.40 ha and most were having a medium herd size (66.67%). The respondents had an average farming experience of 19 years. Most of

the farmers had medium levels of annual income (55%) and material possession (60%). In totality, the study revealed that 26.67 percent of farmers belonged to low SES category, 55 percent of farmers belonged to medium SES category and 18.33 percent farmers belonged to high SES category.

Keywords: Socio-economic status; hill farmers; socio-economic variables; adoption.

1. Introduction

Socio-economic status (SES) is a combined measurement of economic and social position of an individual or a group in relation to others in the society. It has a profound role in determining one's accessibility to the common resources, livelihood pattern, household food & nutritional security etc. It also guides the psychological and behavioural components of a sample *viz.* knowledge, attitude, perception, adoption, change-proneness, level of aspiration, risk bearing ability, economic motivation etc. There are a lot of social and economic variables which cumulatively define SES. The selection of these variables under SES largely depends on purpose and subject of the study.

The SES of hill farmers is an important subject for study as farmers in hills are dwelling in a complex, diverse and risk-prone situation. They are usually practicing traditional ways of cultivation which adds very little to the input. A hill farmer who is only dependent on agriculture hardly secures his family food and nutritionally. There are several improved farm practices *viz.* improved varieties of cereals, pulses, millets, vegetables and fodders; water conservation; protected cultivation; vermin-composting; light traps for insect control; improved farm implements like iron plough, drillers and threshers; honey bee rearing; mushroom cultivation etc. which can provide higher yield, return, proper utilization of natural resources, sustainable livelihood security and food & nutritional enrichment. These are being demonstrated before the farmers for establishing its credibility to them. The reason behind these practical demonstrations is to make aware the farmers of the multifarious benefits of these improved farm practices so that the faster adoption of these interventions can be possible.

Adoption is not only dependent on the practical realization of the superiority of an innovation. There are some latent variables inside the human which largely affects his/her adoption behaviour. These variables are knowledge, attitude, perception, change-proneness, level of aspiration, risk bearing ability, economic motivation etc. As said earlier these variables are often guided by one's socio-economic status. It not only influences the adoption behaviour but also influences the factors which affect the adoption behaviour. Rooted from the above discussion the present study tried to investigate socio-economic status of hill farmers to correlate it with their adoption of improved farm practices.

2. Methodology

2.1 Locale of the study

The study was conducted in Almora district of Uttarakhand State in India during 2011-12. Uttarakhand is one of the hilly states besides Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir which constitutes the North-Western Himalayan Region of the country. The state Uttarakhand has two divisions- Kumaon and Garhwal. There are 13 districts in Uttarakhand of which six districts are in Kumaon division and seven districts are in Garhwal division. Among these 13 districts, 10 districts are predominantly hilly districts. Almora which is situated on 29.62°N-79.67°E and 1800 m amsl is one of the hilly districts of Uttarakhand.

2.2 Sampling plan

There are 11 blocks in Almora district. Among these 11 blocks Dhauladevi block was randomly selected. Two villages namely Bhagar Tola and Maniagar from Dhauladevi block were randomly selected. A total of 60 farmers (30 farmers from each village) were randomly taken as sample.

2.3 Selection of variables

Ten variables *viz.* category, age, education, occupation, social participation, landholding, herd size, farming experience, annual income and material possession which constituted the socio-economic profile of a farmer were selected purposively to assess the SES of hill farmers.

2.4 Tools and techniques of data collection

A pre-tested structured interview schedule was prepared. Data was collected by personal interview method.

2.5 Statistical tools used

Simple statistical tools like frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used for analysis and interpretation of data. The respondents were divided into low, medium and high categories on the basis of mean and standard deviation of the total score.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Socio-economic profile of the hill farmers

A perusal of Table 1 showed that 58 percent of the respondents were in SC category and rests were in unreserved category. Ananthan *et al.* (2002) in their study reported majority of the respondents under backward caste category. Majority of the farmers were in middle-age category (70%). The average age of the respondents was obtained 42 years. Kannan (2002) and Sah (2005) in their research reported that majority of the respondents belong to the medium age groups (37 – 48 years). Most of the farmers had medium level of education (63.33%). Murali *et al.* (2003) reported majority of

respondents under medium level of education. Agriculture was the sole occupation of 25 percent farmers whereas others had subsidiary occupations like labour, shop keeping, driving etc. Majority were found having medium level of social participation (78.34%). Mishra (1979) and Sah (2005) in their study found that majority of the respondents were having medium level of social participation. Most of the respondents were medium farmers (66.66%). The average landholding was calculated to be 0.40 ha. Mishra (1979) and Kannan (2002) in their respective study reported that majority of the respondents were having medium size of land holding. Majority of the farmers were found to be having medium herd size (66.67%). The average herd size was found to be four animals. Chauhan (1979) and Sah (2005) in their study reported that majority of the respondents were having medium herd size. Das (2003) reported that large percentage of respondents had either small or medium herd size ranging between 4-7 dairy animals. Most of the respondents had medium level of farming experience (75%). The average farming experience of the respondents was calculated as 19 years. Most of the farmers had medium levels of annual income (55%) and material possession (60%).

Table 1: Socio-economic Profile of Hill Farmers (N=60).

Sl. No.	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Category	SC	35	58.33
		ST	0	0.00
		OBC	0	0.00
		Unreserved	25	41.67
2	Age	Young	8	13.33
		Middle	42	70.00
		Old	10	16.67
3	Education	Low	13	21.67
		Medium	38	63.33
		High	9	15.00
4	Occupation	Agriculture	15	25.00
		Agriculture & Others	45	75.00
5	Social participation	Low	8	13.33
		Medium	47	78.34
		High	5	8.33
6	Landholding	Small	10	16.67
		Medium	40	66.66
		Large	10	16.67
7	Herd size	Low	11	18.33

		Medium	40	66.67
		High	9	15.00
8	Farming experience	Low	5	8.33
		Medium	45	75.00
		High	10	16.67
9	Annual income	Low	12	20.00
		Medium	33	55.00
		High	15	25.00
10	Material possession	Poor	11	18.33
		Medium	36	60.00
		High	13	21.67

3.2 Socio-economic status of the hill farmers

The socio-economic status of the respondents was obtained by summation of scores of all the 10 items. Table 2 revealed that 26.67 percent of farmers belonged to low SES category, 55 percent of farmers belonged to medium SES category and 18.33 percent farmers belonged to high SES category. Roy *et al.* (2008) reported majority of the respondents in lower-middle and middle socio-economic status (46.55% and 31.03% respectively).

Table 2: Socio-economic Status of Hill Farmers (N=60).

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Low	16	26.67
Medium	33	55.00
High	11	18.33

3.3 Correlation of socio-economic variables with adoption

Correlation of socio-economic variables with adoption was worked out in a further study and it was found that variables like caste, landholding, annual income, material possessions and social participation were significantly correlated at 1% level and education was significantly correlated at 5% level. Age was found to be having no relationship with adoption level of the farmers.

4. Conclusion

One of the major goals of agricultural development in hills is to persuade farmers to adopt new profitable technologies. An understanding of the socio-economic status of the hill farmers and its determinants will help in accelerating the process of effective transfer of technology as because it largely affects the adoption process. The above study provides a glimpse of socio-economic profile of a sample of hill farmers and

ascertains their socio-economic status. It also indicates the socio-economic variables which are associated with the adoption behaviour. The highly correlating socio-economic variable have to be considered first before offering any technology for adoption and technology should be developed in such a manner so that it creates a symphony with the existing socio-economic status of the intended people.

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