

Challenges, Options and Strategies for Doubling Farmers' Income in West Bengal – Reflections from Coastal Region

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Abstract

Despite leading in production of many important agricultural commodities, the income of agriculture-dependent households remained one of the lowest (₹ 3980/ month per households) in West Bengal and far below the national average (₹ 6426/month/household). The paper has analysed the past performance of agriculture sector in the state's economy from the available secondary data and also has looked into effectiveness of the existing price policy. Besides, technology options, agricultural market scenario/linkage have been analysed through primary information from the most vulnerable group of farmers in the coastal region to understand how far doubling of income was achievable. However, the micro-level households' data analysis has indicated ample opportunities to increase farmers' income through enhancing cropping system intensification. Technology options are also available for increasing cropping intensities. The agriculture sector needs policy thrust like attracting private investment, value addition to agricultural commodities and marketing innovations. The paper has concluded that doubling of farmers' income in West Bengal is a challenging tasks, particularly due to low agricultural growth (< 2%), lack of market innovations and private investment, but is achievable. The real concern for the farmers in the state was not only to achieve higher (double) income for farmers but also to sustain the enhanced farmers' income which is inclusive across the farmers' groups.

Key words: Doubling farmers' income, coastal agriculture, West Bengal

JEL Classification: Q18, Q12

Introduction

The agriculture sector received an unprecedented 84 per cent hike in budget allocation (₹ 47,912 crores) during the financial year 2016-17 and the goal was to look beyond food security to doubling farmers' income by 2022. First time '*Krishi Kalyan Cess*' @ 0.5 per cent on all taxable services has been proposed in the budget (GoI, 2016). The farm sector deserved the allocation towards achieving 'income security' of the millions of smallholder farmers in the country. The economy of West Bengal largely depends on the agricultural output as nearly half (44%) of the active workforce thrives

on agriculture being either primarily cultivators or agricultural labourers¹ (NSSO, 2014). Over the years

¹ Cultivators were defined as an agricultural household for this survey was defined as a household receiving some value of produce more than Rs.3000/- from agricultural activities (e.g., cultivation of field crops, horticultural crops, fodder crops, plantation, animal husbandry, poultry, fishery, piggery, bee-keeping, vermiculture, sericulture etc.) and having at least one member self-employed in agriculture either in the principal status or in subsidiary status during last 365 days. Agricultural labourers were defined as a person is considered to be engaged as agricultural labour, if he/ she follows one or more of the following agricultural occupations in the capacity of a wage paid manual labour, whether paid in cash or kind or both: (i) farming (ii) dairy farming (iii) production

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