

Constraints in implementation of land reforms policies as perceived by agricultural labourers of Erstwhile Cannanore district of Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

Kerala state was formed in 1956 by the amalgamation of three political units Travancore, Cochin and Malabar and agrarian relations were developed independently in these three units. The term land reforms refers to the redistribution of agricultural land from existing public or private landowners to tenant farmers and agricultural labourers who work on such land without owning it. The land reforms implemented in Kerala is considered and propagated as a model one. Land reform resulted in the end of feudalistic production relations and reduction in caste inequality. But the fact is that actual tillers of the soil failed to get benefits from the land reform policies. The present study was conducted in Erstwhile Cannanore district of Kerala state (Present Kannur, Kasargod and North Wayanad). Thirty agricultural labourers each from five selected blocks of three districts (Kalliasseri & Taliparamba from Kannur, Kanhangad & Nileswaram from Kasargod and Panamaram from North Wayanad.) were identified randomly and the total number of respondents was 150. A well-structured interview schedule was used for collecting data from the respondents. Delphi technique was used to identify the constraints. The data were tabulated and inferences were drawn after appropriate statistical analysis. The results shows that constraints like 'Most beneficiaries of land reforms were from upper part of the society' is having highest total score (297) among the others and it is considered as the most severe constraint perceived by the agri. labourers followed by 'Agricultural labourers are not much benefitted by the law' (283) and 'During tenancy reforms, bigger share of benefits went to richer sections than the actual tillers of soil' (273).

Key words: Land reforms, Erstwhile Cannanore district, Constraints, Agricultural labourers

INTRODUCTION

Land reforms involve the restructuring and redistributive elements of land, aiming to empower those cultivating the soil by granting them ownership rights. The overarching goal is to promote social justice and enhance agricultural production. In India, the issue of land reforms was brought into the mainstream of rural development actively under seventh five year plan. The Kerala Land Reforms Act was implemented with effect from 1st January 1970 and it was the first and the last most comprehensive agrarian legislation ever enacted in Kerala. Land reform in Kerala had three major components. The first component involved ending the burdensome system of tenancy. The second component involved giving ownership rights to homestead land (kudikidappu) occupied by the rural poor and the third component of land reform concerned the imposition of limits on land ownership and the distribution of land identified as surplus to the landless. The land ceiling in Kerala, which was imposed on household landholdings, varied with the size of the household, which should

not exceed 25 standard acres. It is hailed as the most important legislation that transformed the complex legal, economic and social relations that characterized the feudalistic structure in the agrarian economy of Kerala. Its objectives were to put an end to all feudal relations, abolish exploitation inherent in the Jenmi system (Jenmis were the landowners), confer ownership of land to the tillers, prescribe ceiling on land holdings, distribution of land among agricultural labourers and to increase agricultural growth and productivity. According to Herring (1983), Kerala land reform was the 'most comprehensive and far reaching reform' which led to a 'radical shift in the balance of rural power'. Balakrishnan (2015) pointed out that the land reforms marked the transition of Kerala's agriculture from feudalism to capitalism. One of the important impacts of land reform was the reduction in between the land and caste based inequalities immediately after the land reform. The major landlord castes namboodiri brahmins and other upper castes were the worst affected by the land reform and land concentration in their hands weakened considerably (Franke, 1992; Ramakumar, 2006).

In India, Kerala is actually a model in the implementation of land reforms. But there is a growing discussion on the disjuncture between land reforms and equity in land ownership (Krishnaji, 2007; Rammohan, 2008; Raman, 2002). According to Harilal and Kumar (2014), land reforms act did not increase agricultural production and rural employment in the state and one of the visible results of the land reform was the extreme fragmentation of land. Most of the new landlords were shifted to less labour-intensive crops or they were forced to other sectors that could generate additional income. So there was a tendency to leave the land as fallow that resulted in rise in farm wages and drastic fall in employment in the agricultural sector.

The present study was conducted in ex-post facto design at five rice growing tracts (two from Kannur district, two from Kasargod district and one from north Wayanad) were selected based on the maximum area under rice cultivation through proportionate sampling to identify and analyse the major constraints and problems faced by the agricultural labourers after implementation of land reforms in Kerala. The data was collected through pretested interview schedules, questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The findings of the study will be helpful for the policy makers for the development of labour friendly land policies.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in erstwhile Cannanore district (present Kannur, Kasargod and North Wayanad districts) of Kerala state. Five rice growing tracts (two from Kannur district, two from Kasargod district and one from north Wayanad) were selected based on the maximum area under rice cultivation through proportionate sampling. Thus, a total number of five blocks namely Kalliasseri and Taliparamba from Kannur district, Nileswaram and Kanhangad from Kasargod district and Panamaram from North Wayanad were selected for the study. Thirty agricultural labourers were selected randomly from each of the five blocks.

So the total number of respondents was one hundred and fifty. The data was collected through pretested interview schedules, questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

Constraints in implementation of land reform policies as perceived by agricultural labourers

After discussion with experts, a list of constraints was identified and, delphi technique was used to find out the most significant constraints which influence the respondent. Delphi is a forecasting process framework based on the results of multiple rounds of questionnaires sent to a panel of experts. After conducting Delphi, out of 22 statements, 16 statements were selected for final data collection.

These 16 statements were depicted in table 1.

Table 1. Constraints identified

SI No	Constraints	
1	Long delay in the implementation of law	
2	Plantations are not included in the ceiling limits	
3	Landlords got time to escape the ceiling provisions by converting the land to plantations, private forests etc.	
4	Administrative delay in distribution of govt. poramboke and forest lands.	
5	Provisions contained for payment of huge compensation to landlords	
6	Absence of adequate allocation for the rehabilitation of landless poor	
7	During tenancy reforms, bigger share of benefits went to richer sections than the actual tillers of soil	
8	Working of land reform implementation machinery was not satisfactory	
9	The expenditure incurred on the administrative side was high	
10	Agricultural labourers are not much benefitted by the law	
11	Most beneficiaries of land reforms were from upper part of the society	
12	Lack of coordination among the administrative members/ personnel involved in the implementation	
13	Wide gap between the proclamation and actual performance of land reform programmes	
14	Lack of proper assessment by the government about the impact of land reforms.	
15	Conflict among the political parties about the formulation and implementation of land reform policies.	
16	Only a fraction of land has been declared surplus and even less actually distributed.	

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Constraints in implementation of land reform policies as perceived by agricultural labourers, its total score calculated and ranks were listed in table 2.

Table 2. Constraints perceived by agricultural labourers

SL NO	CONSTRAINTS	TOTAL SCORE	RANK
1	Most beneficiaries of land reforms were from upper part of the society	297	1
2	Agricultural labourers are not much benefitted by the law	280	2
3	During tenancy reforms, bigger share of benefits went to richer sections than the actual tillers of soil	273	3
4	Plantations are not included in the ceiling limits.	269	4
5	Only a fraction of land has been declared surplus and even less actually distributed	257	5
6	Landlords got time to escape the ceiling provisions by converting the land to plantations, private forests etc.	253	6
7	Absence of adequate allocation for the rehabilitation of landless poor	237	7
8	Lack of proper assessment by the government about the impact of land reforms	200	8

The major constraints perceived by agricultural labourers were 'most beneficiaries of land reforms were from upper part of the society with total score 297, 'agricultural labourers not much benefitted by the law' with score 280, 'bigger share of benefits to richer sections than the actual tillers of soil'(273), 'plantations are not included in the ceiling limits'(269), 'only a fraction of land was declared surplus and even less actually distributed'(257), 'landlords escaped the ceiling provisions by converting the land to plantations, private forests etc.'(253), 'absence of adequate allocation for the rehabilitation of landless poor'(237) and "Lack of proper assessment by the government about the impact of land reforms'(200). Agricultural labourers were the actual cultivators in the jenmi's land but the results shows that they were not much benefitted by the land reform policies. Bigger share of benefits were go to the tenant farmers than agricultural labourers. Distribution of surplus land among the landless households was not made scientifically and systematically.

CONCLUSION

The present study summarises that the major constraints perceived by agricultural labourers were 'most beneficiaries of land reforms being from the upper part of the society', 'agricultural labourers not much benefitted by the law', 'bigger share of benefits to richer sections than the actual cultivators' and 'plantations are not included in the ceiling limits'.

The significance of land reforms in Kerala is twofold, encompassing both intrinsic and instrumental aspects. Intrinsic importance lies in its role in dismantling an oppressive agrarian system, liberating workers from various forms of unfreedom. On an instrumental level, the post-land reform society that emerged proved conducive to improving the social and economic conditions of the less privileged. Kerala's land reform stands as a unique initiative in South Asia, closely resembling the "land to the tiller" model. However, the intended beneficiaries did not realize the anticipated benefits from the redistributive land reforms. Strategies like legalization and liberalization of land leasing, involvement of women collectives in farming, and small and marginal farmer-friendly agriculture should be well planned and implemented to overcome the negative impacts of land reforms.

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