

Original Research Article

CONSTRAINTS FOR TRIBAL FARMERS IN THE MELGHAT REGION: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

Abstract :

The present study explores the constraints faced by tribal farmers in the Melghat region of Amravati district, Maharashtra. An exploratory research design was adopted to systematically investigate the challenges impeding agricultural and livelihood development among tribal communities. The study was conducted in Dharni taluka, selected purposively for its high concentration of tribal populations. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed, involving the random selection of 12 villages and 120 tribal farmers actively engaged in farming and allied activities. The study identified four major constraints: lack of market intelligence and regulated markets (91.66%), absence of agro-based and rural industries (87.50%), inadequate education systems (81.66%), and limited awareness of developmental schemes (63.33%). Based on these findings, the study proposed actionable suggestions to address these challenges. The top-ranked recommendation was the development of regulated markets to reduce the interference of middlemen (93.33%), followed by enhancing tribal infrastructure, particularly in education and subsidiary occupations (86.66%), establishing employment-focused agro-industries (77.50%), and conducting awareness campaigns about government schemes (65.00%). This research underscores the critical need for targeted interventions to enhance the socio-economic conditions of tribal farmers, emphasizing the role of government support and community-based strategies in fostering sustainable agricultural and livelihood development.

Keywords : *Constraints, Tribal farmers, market intelligence, socio-economic condition, livelihood*

Introduction :

India is home to a diverse array of tribal communities, collectively referred to as Scheduled Tribes (STs), officially recognized under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution. These groups are often considered the autochthonous inhabitants of the country, with the term "Adivasi" (derived from the Sanskrit words *Adi*, meaning "ancient," and *Vasi*, meaning "inhabitant") highlighting their indigenous identity and long-standing association with their ancestral lands. According to the 2011 Census, the tribal population in India stands at 10.43 crores, constituting 8.6% of the nation's total population. Of these, 89.97% reside in rural areas,

with agriculture serving as their primary occupation (Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, 2011). The Constitution of India has grouped these ethnic communities under the designation "Scheduled Tribes" to focus on their social and economic development. Articles 366(25) and 342 define STs and empower the President of India to specify the communities recognized as such. These groups inhabit diverse geographical terrains, with a significant concentration in Central India and the northeastern states. Central India, in particular, accounts for over half of the tribal population, predominantly in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, 2022). In Maharashtra, tribes such as the Bhils, Gonds, Mahadeo Kolis, Pawras, Thakurs, and Varlis are primarily located in hilly regions like Sahyadri (comprising districts such as Dhule, Nandurbar, Jalgaon, Nashik, and Thane) and forested areas like Gondwana (spanning Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Gondia, Nagpur, Amravati, and Yavatmal). These communities rely heavily on natural resources to sustain their livelihoods, with a socio-economic structure distinctly different from non-tribal populations. Their simple, ecologically adaptive technologies and practices enable them to meet basic needs while coexisting harmoniously with their environment (Xaxa, 1999).

Despite their cultural richness and ecological harmony, tribal communities face numerous challenges, including socio-economic marginalization, limited access to modern technology, and infrastructural deficits. Melghat, a tribal-dominated region in Maharashtra, exemplifies these issues. This study aims to explore the constraints faced by tribal farmers in Melghat while identifying strategic opportunities for sustainable development. Through an analysis of their agricultural practices, socio-economic dynamics, and ecological interactions, the research seeks to propose actionable insights to alleviate their hardships and enhance their quality of life.

Materials and Methods :

The research design for the present study was structured as an exploratory research design to systematically investigate the constraints faced by tribal farmers in the Melghat region. This design was chosen to ensure the study's validity, reliability, and meaningful outcomes by providing a comprehensive framework for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The study was conducted in the Melghat region of Amravati district, Maharashtra purposively as it is known for its substantial tribal population and its dependence on agriculture and allied activities for livelihood. Amravati district comprises fourteen talukas, among which Dharni taluka was purposively selected due to its high concentration of rural tribal populations. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for the selection of respondents. In the first stage, Dharni

taluka was purposively chosen. In the second stage, twelve villages were randomly selected within Dharni taluka based on the criterion of having the highest tribal population. From each selected village, ten tribal farmers who were actively engaged in farming and allied activities were randomly chosen, making the total sample size 120 respondents. The list of tribal farmers was obtained from the local Talathi (village revenue officer) of the respective areas. The primary data were collected through structured interviews using a pre-tested interview schedule. The interview schedule was developed based on the objectives of the study, ensuring its relevance and clarity. The data collection process involved direct interaction with the respondents to capture their perspectives, challenges, and opportunities related to farming and allied activities. The collected data were systematically coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential techniques. This approach enabled the identification of key constraints faced by the tribal farmers and the exploration of strategic opportunities for improving their agricultural practices and livelihoods. The study identified and ranked the primary constraints faced by tribal farmers in the Melghat region based on their frequency and percentage of occurrence

Results & Discussions :

Constraints faced by tribal farmers regarding farming :

These findings highlight critical areas requiring intervention to improve the livelihoods of tribal farmers. The detailed results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to constraints faced by the farmers regarding farming

Sr. no	Constraints	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	Not having proper education system	98	81.66	III
2	Lack of agro based and rural industries for the income generation and employment to tribal farmers	105	87.50	II
3	Lack of awareness about various developmental schemes and benefits of government.	76	63.33	IV
4	Lack of market intelligence, interference	110	91.66	I

	from middlemen and lack of regulated market			
5	Limited contacts with the officials of development departments scientists/ extensionists	72	60.00	VI
6	Lack of opportunity to participate in different extension activities	75	62.50	V
7	Lack of time and mobility to meet scientists and extensionists	40	33.33	VIII
8	Low literacy levels	45	37.50	VII

The lack of market intelligence, interference from middlemen, and absence of regulated markets is the most critical constraint faced by tribal farmers, with 91.66% of respondents identifying it as a primary challenge. These constraints stem from a systemic lack of access to reliable market information and structured trading channels, leaving tribal farmers at a significant disadvantage in the agricultural value chain. Limited access to market information prevents tribal farmers from making informed decisions about when, where, and at what price to sell their produce. This information asymmetry undermines their ability to negotiate effectively and secure fair prices. Without timely and accurate data on market trends, demand-supply dynamics, and pricing structures, farmers are often compelled to accept suboptimal prices for their crops. The dominance of intermediaries further exacerbates the problem. Middlemen play a pivotal role in the current supply chain, often acting as the primary link between tribal farmers and end markets. However, their influence creates a skewed pricing mechanism. Middlemen typically purchase produce at lower-than-market rates, leveraging the farmers' limited bargaining power and lack of alternatives. This practice not only reduces farmers' profit margins but also perpetuates economic inequities within the agricultural sector. Furthermore, middlemen frequently manipulate weights, measures, and quality assessments to their advantage, further diminishing the returns to farmers. The absence of regulated markets compounds these issues.

Regulated markets are designed to provide a transparent and structured environment for trading agricultural produce, ensuring fair pricing mechanisms and reducing exploitation. For tribal farmers, the lack of access to such markets means they are forced to rely on informal trading systems dominated by intermediaries. These unregulated channels lack oversight, transparency, and fairness, leaving farmers vulnerable to exploitation. Moreover, the absence of government-regulated market yards or electronic trading platforms limits farmers' ability to reach broader markets or directly connect with buyers, further restricting their economic opportunities. This dependence on informal channels not only reduces profitability but also increases economic vulnerability. Tribal farmers, who are often already marginalized and lack financial resilience, face significant hardships due to the unpredictable and exploitative nature of these informal systems. The cycle of dependency and exploitation perpetuates poverty and hinders their capacity to invest in better farming practices or diversify their income sources.

The above findings were in accordance with Sarika Khot (2011) studied impact of ecotourism under Gullar Ghat project on livelihood of the people and states that the respondents faced lack of transportation facilities, lack of guidance and proper training about biodiversity conservation, lack of encouragement from society and Government in the ecotourism program.

Based on the responses from the tribal farmers in the Melghat region, several actionable suggestions were identified and ranked. These suggestions provide insights into potential strategies for improving the socio-economic conditions of tribal farmers. The findings are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Suggestions of respondents according to constraints faced by the farmers

Sr.no	Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1	Government should focus on enhancing the tribal infrastructure, especially in the domains of education, subsidiary occupation.	104	86.66	II
2	Efforts should be made by government agencies to set up employment based agro industries.	93	77.50	III

3	On campaign mode awareness should be given on different schemes and benefits of government	78	65.00	IV
4	Development of regulated market to reduce the interference of middlemen	112	93.33	I

Development of regulated markets ranked as the top priority (93.33%), respondents emphasized the need for regulated markets to minimize the role of middlemen, ensure fair pricing, and create a more transparent marketing ecosystem for tribal farmers. It is imperative to establish robust market linkages and enhance the accessibility of regulated markets for tribal farmers. Introducing market intelligence systems, such as mobile-based applications providing real-time price updates and demand forecasts, can empower farmers with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions. Strengthening cooperative marketing structures and promoting farmer producer organizations (FPOs) can help reduce the role of intermediaries, enabling farmers to collectively bargain for better prices and access larger markets. Additionally, expanding the reach of government-regulated markets and integrating them with digital trading platforms like e-NAM (National Agriculture Market) can provide a transparent and inclusive marketing environment, ensuring fair pricing and improved profitability for tribal farmers.

Enhancing infrastructure in education and creating opportunities for subsidiary occupations was suggested by 86.66 per cent of respondents. Better infrastructure could support skill development, education, and diversification of income sources. The setup of employment-based agro-industries was suggested by 77.50 percent of respondents. This would provide employment opportunities, promote value addition to agricultural produce, and stimulate economic growth in the region. About 65 per cent of the respondents suggested launching awareness campaigns on a mission mode to educate tribal farmers about various government schemes and benefits, enabling them to access available resources effectively. These suggestions provide a roadmap for addressing the challenges faced by tribal farmers. Prioritizing these recommendations could significantly improve their livelihoods and promote sustainable development in the Melghat region.

Conclusion :

The study highlighted critical constraints and actionable suggestions for addressing the challenges faced by tribal farmers in the Melghat region. The findings underscore the pressing need for systemic and targeted interventions to improve the socio-economic conditions of tribal

farmers. The lack of market intelligence and regulated markets emerged as the most critical constraint followed by absence of agro-based and rural industries. Establish regulated markets with transparent pricing mechanisms to empower tribal farmers and reduce dependency on middlemen, facilitate the establishment of small-scale agro-industries, particularly in high tribal-density regions, to create employment and diversify income sources and launch focused awareness campaigns on government schemes and benefits through community outreach, workshops, and local media are the key policy recommendations which should be implemented in a collaborative and sustained manner to address the identified constraints and unlock the potential of tribal farming communities, paving the way for inclusive development in the Melghat region and beyond.

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