

International Journal of Agriculture Extension and Social Development

Volume 7; Issue 8; August 2024; Page No. 379-382

Received: 05-06-2024
Accepted: 13-07-2024

Indexed Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal

Agricultural stagnation and migration in Tamil Nadu: Challenges and policy implications

¹M Jegadeesan and ²Hidetoshi Miyazaki

¹Associate Professor, Department of Agricultural Extension, ICAR-KVK, Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu, India

²Senior Researcher, Global Environment forum, Tokyo, Japan

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26180723.2024.v7.i8f.951>

Corresponding Author: M Jegadeesan

Abstract

Agricultural stagnation and migration are critical issues in Tamil Nadu, a state renowned for its agricultural heritage. Over the past few decades, Tamil Nadu's agricultural sector has grappled with challenges such as erratic rainfall, depleting groundwater levels, soil degradation, and limited access to modern technologies, leading to significant declines in productivity and growth. This stagnation has adversely affected the livelihoods of farmers, catalyzing a substantial migration of rural populations to urban areas in search of better opportunities. This study aims to elucidate the dynamics of agricultural stagnation and migration, providing insights into their socio-economic implications and proposing sustainable policy interventions. This research, conducted across four villages in Thanjavur and Thiruvavur districts, employs a mixed-method approach, combining survey data collected from January to June 2023 with qualitative insights from farmers and local experts. Findings indicate that increased cultivation costs, market volatility, and water scarcity have pushed rural households to explore non-farm employment opportunities. Education has emerged as a critical factor, with higher educational attainment motivating migration both domestically and abroad. This study advocates for comprehensive rural development programs that promote education, skill development, and non-farm employment to mitigate migration pressures and enhance rural livelihoods, aiming for a balanced socio-economic development in Tamil Nadu.

Keywords: Agricultural stagnation, migration, remittance and development, Tamil Nadu

Introduction

Agricultural stagnation and migration are critical issues in Tamil Nadu, a state with a significant agricultural heritage. Over recent decades, the agricultural sector has faced numerous challenges, leading to a slowdown in productivity and growth. This stagnation has profound implications, affecting the livelihoods of farmers and prompting substantial migration from rural areas to urban centers. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by the region.

Tamil Nadu's economy has traditionally been anchored in agriculture, which provides employment and sustenance to a large portion of its population. However, the sector has been beset by problems such as erratic rainfall, depleting groundwater levels, soil degradation, and limited access to modern agricultural technologies. These issues have compounded the economic vulnerability of small and marginal farmers, resulting in declining agricultural incomes and increasing rural poverty.

Recent studies have highlighted the complexities of these issues. For instance, Chand, R. et al. (2020) ^[1] discuss how climate change has adversely affected agricultural productivity in Tamil Nadu, citing increased frequency of droughts and unpredictable weather patterns as significant factors. Similarly, Venkatesh, K. and Srinivasan, S. (2021) ^[2] examine the socio-economic impacts of rural-urban

migration, illustrating how the movement of rural populations to cities has reshaped labor markets and urban demographics.

The migration of rural inhabitants to urban areas is both a consequence of and a response to agricultural stagnation. As rural residents move to cities in search of better employment opportunities and living conditions, the agricultural workforce dwindles. This migration alleviates some pressure on rural economies but strains urban infrastructure and services. Furthermore, the exodus of agricultural laborers and knowledge exacerbates the stagnation in rural areas.

The intricacies of agricultural stagnation and migration in Tamil Nadu have been explored in several recent studies. For example, the Tamil Nadu State Action Plan on Climate Change (2022) ^[3] outlines strategies to enhance agricultural resilience through improved water management, adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices, and support for smallholder farmers. This plan underscores the importance of sustainable practices to combat the adverse effects of climate change on agriculture.

A comprehensive report by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR, 2021) ^[4] delves into the technological and infrastructural deficits in Tamil Nadu's agricultural sector. It highlights the need for improved irrigation systems, soil health management, and access to

modern agricultural equipment to boost productivity. These measures are crucial for reversing the trend of stagnation and ensuring the sustainability of the agricultural sector.

Another significant study by the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR, 2020) ^[5] focuses on the patterns and impacts of rural-urban migration in Tamil Nadu. The study reveals that migration is often driven by distress and lack of opportunities in rural areas, leading to a concentration of labor in urban informal sectors. This shift has implications for urban planning and the provision of services in cities, necessitating policies that address both rural development and urban management.

Significance of the Study

Addressing agricultural stagnation and migration in Tamil Nadu is essential for sustainable socio-economic development. Effective policy interventions must tackle the root causes of stagnation, such as water scarcity, soil degradation, and limited access to technology. By revitalizing the agricultural sector, policymakers can improve the livelihoods of rural populations and reduce the economic disparities between rural and urban areas.

Moreover, comprehensive rural development programs are needed to create sustainable livelihood opportunities that can mitigate the pressure of migration on urban areas. Initiatives that promote education, skill development, and non-farm employment in rural regions can help achieve a more balanced regional development.

This research aims to provide an in-depth analysis of the factors contributing to agricultural stagnation and migration in Tamil Nadu. By drawing on recent literature and empirical data, the study seeks to offer insights that can inform policy decisions and foster sustainable agricultural growth and equitable socio-economic development in the region.

Methodology

Study villages were selected based on the following criteria.

1. Two villages from old delta and two villages from new delta.
2. Villages which have Scheduled Caste (SC) population of about 20 per cent.
3. Villages which has 100-

200 households with multiple castes. Based on these criteria villages were short listed. We visited many villages in the list to pre-test our hypothesis and had group discussion with farmers and local experts and collected basic information on various aspects of local livelihood. Finally, four villages were selected, two from upper command (old delta) and two from lower command area (new delta). Administratively, one each village was selected from Thiruvaiyaru Block and Pattukottai Block (from Thanjavur District), and from Needamangalam Block and Kottur Block (from Thiruvallur District). Data were collected through survey questionnaires, following extensive preliminary qualitative inquiries. Survey conducted from period of January to June 2023.

Story of Migrant Households

The livelihoods of farmers in Tamil Nadu have been significantly impacted by various factors, including increased cultivation costs, greater reliance on machinery, market fluctuations, yield stabilization issues, and water scarcity, as highlighted in the *Farmer Status Report (2023)*. These challenges have made it difficult for farmers to sustain their families solely through agriculture. Household expenditures are on an upward trend, exacerbating financial pressures on rural households (*Report 12*).

In response to these pressures, rural households have increasingly sought employment opportunities outside of agriculture. Most villages, with the exception of Vaikalathur (V2), have invested heavily in education. This has led to a notable increase in the average educational years among the working population (*Ref*). Higher education levels have motivated many to seek non-farm employment opportunities, both domestically and internationally, due to the limited availability of such opportunities locally.

Table 1: Migration details of households in the study villages

Migration type	Caste				
	OC	BC	MBC	SC	Total
Domestic	1	17	3	34	55
International	0	38	22	16	76
Total	1	55	25	50	131

Table 2: Pattern of domestic migration in the study villages.

Domestic Migration						
Village	No. of HH	Age	Average Education in years	Caste	Reason for Migration	Salary
Puliyakudi (V1)	18	26.1	12.61			
BC	8	24.0	14.87	Devar	Employment	218,500
MBC	3	20.3	12.00	Mutharaiyar	Employment	128,000
SC	7	31.0	10.28	Paraiyar	Employment	168,000
Vaikalathur (V 2)	5	26.3	14.32			
OC	1	26.0	15.00	Bramin	Employment	100,000
MBC	0					
SC	5	24.6	14.20	Pallar	Employment	120,000
Ponvarankottai (V3)	9	28.8	11.33			
BC	2	21.5	15.00	Devar	Employment	325,000
MBC	0					
SC	7	21.7	10.28	Paraiyar	Employment	175,000
Swayam (V 4)	25	26.9	12.04			
BC	7	26.0	14.14	Devar	Employment	226,571
MBC	3	20.3	12.66	Mutharaiyar	Employment	128,000
SC	15	28.7	10.93	Paraiyar	Employment	174,666

The data shows that approximately one-fourth of households (25.4%) have at least one migrant, either domestically or overseas. Notably, BC and MBC households tend to migrate internally, while SC households predominantly migrate domestically. This trend may be attributed to the high costs associated with international migration, previous migration experiences, and established networks. Additionally, villages located at the tail end of the Cauvery canal have higher migration rates compared to those positioned at the head and middle of the canal.

The average age of domestic migrants hovers around 25-30 years, indicating that the youth population is opting out of agriculture and rural life. The average educational attainment among migrants is notable, with all having a minimum of 10 years of education. Importantly, SC households, despite being predominantly landless (33.6%), have invested in education on par with other communities. The Government of Tamil Nadu has supported SC households with free boarding and lodging facilities from primary to college education (Table 12).

Increased education levels among youth have incentivized them to seek better opportunities in urban areas through networks or job portals. Almost all domestic migrants reported migrating for employment. Table 15 provides details on the types of employment available to them in urban centers, the locations to which they migrate, and the associated costs and salaries.

Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, is the most preferred

destination for domestic migrants, with around 50% (17.2%) migrating there for various employment opportunities, ranging from construction to engineering. Additionally, approximately one-third of respondents (34.5%) migrated to the state industrial corridor of Tirupur-Coimbatore for jobs in cotton mills, garments, and textile industries. About 14% of the migrants moved out of the state, with some finding employment in Kerala as JCB operators and others in Bangalore in the automobile and call center sectors.

Table 3: Place and type of employment of migrants

Domestic migration: occupation sector and place			
S. No	Occupation Sector	No	Places
1	Garments	13	Tirupur
2	Construction	7	Chennai and Coimbatore
3	Engineers	5	Chennai
4	Sales & Supervisor	5	Chennai
5	Driver	4	Chennai
6	Hotels	4	Chennai
7	Mechanic	4	Chennai and Bangalore
8	JCB Operator	4	Kerala
9	Manager	3	Chennai and Coimbatore
10	Agriculture	2	Perambalur
11	Travels	2	Chennai
12	HR	2	Chennai
13	Priest	1	Chennai
14	Automobile Shop	1	Bangalore
15	Call centre	1	Bangalore
	Total	58	

Table 4: Profile of overseas migrants in the study villages

Profile of overseas migrants										
	No of HH	Age	Average Education in years	Caste	Investment Cost	Source of Funding	Salary	Remittance	% of Remittance to the salary	Destination countries
Puliyakudi (V1)	30	32.4	13.1		113,747		247,666	205,466	83.2	Singapore, UAE, Kuwait
BC	14	34.1	13.8	Devar	103,214	Saving	256,000	200,000	78.1	
MBC	11	33.7	12.6	Mutharaiyar	116,363	Borrowing	260,214	216,400	83.2	
SC	5	29.5	12.8	Paraiyar	121,666	Land Mortgage	226,785	200,000	88.2	
Vaikalthur (V 2)	6	28.1	11.8		106,505		257,500	190,990	75.6	Malaysia, Saudi, Singapore
BC	3	31.6	12.9	Devar	124,610	Saving	300,000	201,380	67.1	
MBC	0									
SC	3	24.5	10.6	Pallar	196,400	Gold Loan	215,000	180,600	84.0	
Ponvarankottai (V3)	26	30.4	12.0		197,957		233,603	190,333	82.7	Singapore, UAE, Kuwait
BC	13	32.1	11.6	Devar	166,538	Saving	281,710	200,000	71.0	
MBC	6	32.6	11.1	Kammalar	218,333	Relatives	210,000	186,000	88.6	
SC	7	26.6	13.3	Paraiyar	209,000	Borrowing	209,100	185,000	88.5	
Swayam (V 4)	14	27.7	11.0		184,899		261,823	205,000	79.0	Oman, UAE
BC	8	30.2	11.3	Devar	134,760	Saving	330,470	245,000	74.1	
MBC	5	28.5	11.0	Kallar	210,500	Borrowing	245,000	195,000	79.6	
SC	1	24.5	10.6	Pallar	209,437	Land Mortgage	210,000	175,000	83.3	

In the study villages it is also observed that households also moved of the country in searching for jobs. Data related to overseas migration were also collected and presented in Table 4.

Profile of overseas migrants

Migration studies revealed that the ability to migrate is not only dependent on network and economic capability but also on the socio-ecological context of the place in which the people live. Villages located in the tail end of the command area (V1 and V3) produced larger number of

overseas migrants (73 per cent of total migrant) when compare to villages located in the upper command area. Lower command area, locally called new canal area were provided with canal water later than upper command area. Last twenty years, amount and timing of water available for cultivation from Canal is drastically reduced. Initially households in this villages were changed their area from three to two times paddy and now forced to one-time paddy cultivation. It increased the uncertainties among the rural households both farmers and landless laborers. Paddy cultivation, labor intensive crop, when losing it charm due

to lack of water, farmers slowly changed to coconut plantation. Coconut cultivation does not require as much as labor as paddy cultivation, labor were ended with jobless. So, they forced to migrate. It is the neighboring districts like Pudukkottai and Ramanathapuram already had traditions of overseas migration. In following their path, study villages also started to move out of the country for employment.

Education and age of migrants

Tamil Nadu has long history overseas migration since colonial period. British mobilised Tamil laborers for tea plantation and sugarcane plantation in their colonies. Following the tradition, earlier, households in the study villages went for low profile labor work in Southeast Asian countries and the Middle East countries. Experiences accrued through their work, they learn that skilled labor is better paid than non-skilled labor. In that experience, households in the study area invested in children education in line with demand of international work. Youth from the study villages went after completing 10 years of schooling, they joined with technical institutes which provided them with diploma in electrical. Plumber, fitter and construction. That is reason in the sample most of the respondents had education over 12 years. Immediately after getting diploma or degree, they went for local job to train and upskill themselves. In the mean time they kept their eye open in the opportunities abroad. They maintained close contact with earlier migrants and also watch the newspaper advertisement for employment opportunity abroad. And also they had used this earning to save for meet migration expenses. In that process, households in the study villages depending up on their education and family commitment spend two to five years. Hence, the average age of overseas migrants are around 30 in the study villages.

Source of funding, salary and remittance

It is important to note that while all the BC households used their savings to meet migration expenses, MBC and SC households were not in the position to use their savings. They borrowed money with interest and mortgaging land and jewels to mobilise needed money for migration. All the migrants have their own family commitment back home. Average salary for migrants were around Rs.190,000. All the migrants irrespective of their community, send remittance about 75-80 per cent of their earning. Living expenses and others managed through opting for over time. As mentioned earlier, the villages prefer to migrate to Southeast Asian countries and Gulf countries.

Conclusion

The interplay between agricultural stagnation and migration in Tamil Nadu presents a complex challenge that requires a multifaceted approach. All the households invested in their children education and with support of government policy like free access school education, access to 20kg of rice and subsidised access to other food items they started move out from the agriculture. Unfortunately, excess labor pulled out from agriculture were not absorbed locally due to inadequate industrial development in the Cauvery Delta. So, both farm households and landless households migrated to the cities like a Chennai, Bangalore, Tirupur, Coimbatore and Kerala. An extension of domestic migration, rural

households in the study villages started overseas migration. To diversify their livelihood and chosen migration path, rural households needed credit support. But access to the credit is unequal among the respondents, it is skewed based on their caste status. Based on our field work and interaction with local experts, there was an ample evidence to say that Cauvery Delta farmers were in distress situation. Possible intervention to save the farmers and landless households in the Cauvery Delta were provide an assurance over consistency in the distribution of water on time and development nonfarm employment in the Cauvery Delta districts considered as viable options. Understanding the underlying causes and effects of these phenomena is crucial for developing effective solutions. Through this research, we hope to contribute to the ongoing discourse and support efforts to create a more resilient and prosperous future for Tamil Nadu's agricultural sector and its people.

References

1. Chand R, Gupta S, Kumar S, et al. Impact of climate change on agricultural productivity in Tamil Nadu. *J Clim Stud*. 2020;15(3):45-60.
2. Venkatesh K, Srinivasan S. Socio-economic impacts of rural-urban migration in Tamil Nadu. *Econ Polit Weekly*. 2021;56(21):78-85.
3. Government of Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu state action plan on climate change. Chennai: Department of Environment and Climate Change; c2022.
4. Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Technological and infrastructural deficits in Tamil Nadu's agricultural sector. *ICAR Res J*. 2021;32(4):120-135.
5. National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR). Patterns and impacts of rural-urban migration in Tamil Nadu. *NIRDPR Working Paper Series*. 2020;10(2):200-215.