

CHALLENGES IN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN BANGLADESH

Course
Bangladesh Studies (GEN 201)

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INTRODUCTION

Farming is the ancient and the most common profession in Bangladesh. Most of the people of Bangladesh live in village and most of the villagers (62% *manpower in agriculture*¹) are involved in farming. One of the main reasons of having common interest to farming is: the land is very fertile and most of the part of Bangladesh is plain. Another interesting thing is Bangladeshi people naturally good in farming. Agricultural sector is the single largest contributor to GDP. The crop sub-sector dominates the agriculture sector contributing *about 72% of total production. Fisheries, livestock and forestry sub-sectors are 10.33%, 0.11% and 7.33% respectively*². Though government has many positive steps for that sector but still agriculture has some present and future challenges as well.

PROBLEMS & LIMITATIONS

Financial Problem

Bangladesh is not such a rich country that has adequate money to spend at any time for any sector. Sometimes some major and emergency agricultural decision needs a good amount of money that is not possible all the times to provide for that sector.

Natural Disaster

Natural disaster like flood, drought, excessive rain and other natural disaster are barrier to meet the expected level of production. Specially the natural disasters mentioned above are mostly harm crop production. The flood of this year (2007) destroys huge area of crop fields.

Improper Distribution of Seed & Fertilizer

This problem has recently found by a research by *Media Personality & Agriculturist Shaikh Siraj*, that is our seed and fertilizer is not properly distributed and only because of that each year farmers face acute crisis having adequate stock.

¹ See Ref – 9

² Source: BBS, 2004 and Handbook Agricultural Statistics, MoA See Ref - 11

Mono-crop Production

Farmers are more interested to produce some few crops like: rice, because of less risk. And for this reason other cash crops and non-rice crops are in risk because of non-production. Rice uses four or more times more water than crops like wheat and maize, and the lack of adequate water will be a major impediment to future agricultural productivity.

Accessibility to Weather Report

The farmers don't have the accessibility to weather report that creates serious problem in crop production. The most dangerous crisis occurred in 2007's rice production. That year because of cold wave and not reporting to farmers about it the national rice production faced a serious crisis; the farmers got "*Chita*" rice¹.

Higher Input Cost of Production

The problem is that compared with many neighboring countries (where input subsidies frequently exist), the farmers in Bangladesh are at a disadvantage in terms of lower productivity and higher cost of production due to higher unit costs of such inputs as seed, fertilizer, water and labor. Higher production, marketing and distribution cost combined with lower output prices have resulted in a non-profit pursuit.

No Formal Road Transportation System

To sell and transport agro-products to city or other areas there is no formal or planned road transportation system that creates problem for distribution of goods.

Products and production²

There is no testing lab, certification, quality management and monitoring excess costs, small and medium sized enterprise (SMEs) in Bangladesh. Lack of cost-benefit analysis (market analysis/research) and product diversity are also bottlenecks in that sector.

¹ See Ref – 1

² Challenges, Page: 2, Ref – 4

Coordination Between Government & Private Stakeholders

Government and other NGO's those who are working in agriculture sector are not well coordinated, that's why expected return is not visible. Even related ministries are not well coordinated at-all.

Crop Pest Control

From the available statistics it has been found that about *10% to 15% crops¹* are destroyed in the field each year due to insect pests. It has been estimated that the amount of crops damaged is nearly double the amount of food grain imported in this country each year.

CHALLENGES

Over Population

Bangladesh actually produces a lot of agricultural products but because of over population we cannot enjoy the output of that production. So over population is another problem in that sector.

Lack of Agricultural Labor

The number of agricultural labor has decreased from *14.5 million (1983-84) to 11.1 million (1996)²*. For this reason in rural areas many rich land owners face that problem during the peak season

Less Land More Production

The challenge in front of Bangladesh is now to increase output from same stock of land as land is used in many other purposes. And to meet the challenge the productivity rate of land have to *increase up-to 50%³*

¹ Banglapedia, under heading "Crop"

² Agricultural Sector: On the Threshold of Twenty-First Century by M.M. Akash, Page: 108, See Ref – 13

³ Agricultural Sector: On the Threshold of Twenty-First Century by M.M. Akash, Page: 99 See Ref – 13

Irrigation and Electricity and Fuel

The pump irrigation cost is US\$ 51¹ per hectares and the Diesel cost is high especially during the irrigation season where 90%² pumps are run by diesel.

Lowering Ground Water Level In Dry Season

During the months of March, April and May³ (dry season) the ground water level goes down. This is also the “critical period”⁴ for rice and wheat when they are in seed formation stage. So it creates serious problem for irrigation for that season.

Loosing Fertility & Excessive Land Use

As we have less land and more population so the land gets excessive pressure on it. More cultivation is done in a single piece of land that is a reason of loosing fertility of land. On the other hand because of too much population the land is divided into many parts that also decrease productivity.

Excessive Use of Fertilizer & Pesticides

Farmers use more pesticide and fertilizer that harms environment and land loses its natural fertility. If the process goes in that way finally we will lose the fertility of land which is alarming. At the same time we are loosing many fishes as the pesticide mixed land water finally mixes with the water of river, canals and ponds.

Poverty Alleviation for Agriculture

To ensure proper agricultural development poverty alleviation and overall economic development is a pre-requisite where the rural people still live below the poverty line.

Continuous Deforestation

Continuous deforestation in costal area of Bangladesh (*Barisal, Noakhali and Chittagong coasts*)⁵ is creating trouble. The agricultural land on those areas can easily now be destroyed by cyclone.

^{1, 2, 3, 4} Page: 10 of Ref – 2

⁵ CHAPTER 5, Part I, AGRICULTURAL GROWTH AND ENVIRONMENT, by Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad & S.M. Hasanuzzaman, See Ref – 7

Hybrid Seed

Because of higher productivity farmers become interested to hybrid seed rather than other high food valued seed category like *Aush* and other natural country seed.

RECOMMENDATION

Here there are some recommendations that may help to come out from these challenges and problems.

1. To avoid environmental degradation government can take more initiatives and farmers should be encouraged to use natural fertilizer and for this government can take support from NGO's or other voluntary organizations.
2. Government can encourage more for production of cash crops like: jute production, by which we can earn foreign currency.
3. Government & private organizations can arrange short term or long term loans for farmers for risk taking.
4. Weather report should accurate and accessible of weather & report for farmers.
5. To develop *Monga* crisis in north-west, government can encourage small and cottage industry during that unemployment period or can take other economic project.
6. Government should rationalize public expenditure allocation, increasing public investment in infrastructure and public good services and promoting private investment in agriculture.
7. Inter-ministry coordination and collaboration is needed.
8. The fisheries and live-stock sectors are benefited by private sector and for this reason it needs more concentration from respective authority.
9. Agricultural growth should come from efficiency in the use of inputs, not from the expansion of input use¹.
10. More concentration to better seed and agricultural research is needed.

¹ Recommended by Dr. Hossain in a Dialogue program by CPD, See Ref – 12

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