

Green Army - A Labour Bank Experiment in Kerala

S. Darsana¹ and V. Ravichandran²

ABSTRACT

The inadequate labour supply and high wages are the major constraints influencing food production which make farmers to migrate from farming sector. The society must recognize these workers as the service men for agricultural lands. Green army project in Wadakkanchery block of Kerala state is a successful labour bank model. The present study on impact of labour bank was conducted on 30 agricultural labourers of selected block. Results indicate that majority respondents were of middle aged category with secondary school education, with minimum of two trainings attended under the Green army. The results further revealed that empowerment in leadership, social recognition, stabilised income and decision making were observed more.

India with second largest manpower in the world is affected by labour scarcity in agricultural sector. As labourers constitute a vital input of agricultural production, their migration for earning a better livelihood, enhances the existing imbalance between demand and supply of labourers (Deshingkar, 2003). The 2001 Census of India defined agricultural labour as any person who worked on another person's land only as labourer, without exercising any supervision in cultivation, for wage in cash or share such as share of produce (GoI, 2001). Even though many labour saving implements and technologies are released, the availability of skilled labourers who have operational knowledge on maintenance of machineries is in great question. Rural to urban migration, public work schemes like MGNREGS and increased women wages are also the other causes for labour scarcity (Alha and Bijoyata, 2011). In such a situation, there is an ample

scope for any institutions or project which would solve the issue of labour scarcity in agriculture with capacity building of labourers to improve their livelihood. Labour bank is an attempt to mobilize rural man power potential in a useful manner to benefit the society as a whole (Lijo and Siddayya, 2011). Agricultural development policy for Kerala state has included a policy for labour bank (Policy No.45) during the year 2011. According to the policy, labour bank is considered as the source support for agricultural labourers at panchayath level. Labourers are expected to work for 100 days in a year in the field with life insurance and pension.

Green army is one of the successful labour bank models in Kerala state functioning at Wadakkanchery block of Thrissur district since 2008. It has 259 trained agricultural labourers. It is registered under Indian Charitable Societies Act. The study was conducted with the following objectives

1- PG Scholar and 2-Professor (Agrl.Extension), Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology, TNAU, Coimbatore.

1. To study the perception of agricultural labourers on activities of Green Army
2. To analyse the impact of Green Army on agricultural labourers' livelihood
3. To elucidate the constraints and suggestions of agricultural labourers to improve Green Army as an agricultural work force

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Wadakkanchery block of Thrissur district of Kerala state as this block is the initiator in green army project. A sample size of 30 agricultural labourers with equal proportion of male and female respondents were randomly selected. Data were collected through pretested interview schedule. Cumulative frequency method and percentage analysis were used for data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study on impact of labour bank on agricultural labourers found that majority (53.33%) of green army workers belonged to middle aged category. Even though education was not a criterion for selection, 36.67 per cent had secondary school education followed by middle (30.00%) and primary education (20.00%). Trainings were conducted by green army on agricultural activities, functioning, assembling and maintenance of agricultural machineries. Nearly half of the respondents (49.25%) attended minimum of two trainings.

Perception of agricultural labourers on activities of green army

Perception of agricultural labourers on activities of green army was measured through fifteen empowerment items under psychological, sociological, economic and political dimensions.

Perception under psychological dimension revealed that leadership development (2.70) among the members was the most prominent item of empowerment. Activities of green army were scheduled in groups. Labour teams of five members were organized under ward with team leader, deputy leader and helpers. Teams unite to form labour groups at panchayath level and labour bank at block level. Leaders at each level were selected among the labourers. This would motivate the leadership ability of members. Members had strong we feeling (2.46) in the group. Training sessions and workshop made them to be more cooperative and cohesive in the group. This also made the members to be self confident in various activities. Mechanised farming was adopted by the group. Intensive training has been motivated the members to operate the machines, find out the fault and to repair it. Higher social recognition (2.76) and status (2.60) in society were found to be the improved items in sociological dimension. Group action made the workers to be recognized by the society. Monthly salary through bank, peculiar uniform in the field, pattern of work and scheduled time table had raised the status of agricultural labourers. As the members of

Table 1.
Perceived Attributes in Various Dimensions **(n=30)**

Sl.No.	Category	Total score	Mean score	Rank
I	Psychological dimension			
1.	Improvement in self-confidence	69	2.30	III
2.	Increase in leadership skill	81	2.70	I
3.	Development of self respect	62	2.06	IV
4.	“We” feeling among members	74	2.46	II
II	Sociological dimension			
5.	Social recognition	83	2.76	I
6.	Improvement in social status	78	2.60	II
7.	Gender equity	68	2.26	IV
8.	Better planning in family maintenance	72	2.40	III
III	Economic dimension			
9.	Stabilized income	86	2.86	I
10.	Increased ability to support family financially	74	2.46	II
11.	Development of saving habit	70	2.33	III
12.	Debt clearance	66	2.20	IV
13.	Improvement in standard of living	59	1.96	VI
14.	Access to credit	62	2.06	V
IV	Political dimension			
15.	Strong decision making power	63	2.10	I

green army labourers could easily avail loan from bank and cooperative society.

Stabilized income (2.86) and ability to support family financially (2.46) emerged under economic dimensions. Green army had succeeded in ensuring regular job and fixed wage for agricultural labourers. Members were earning monthly salary of about Rs.8000 to Rs.12000 per month according to their work attendance. Monthly salary system would help the members to plan their family budget.

Various activities like vegetable production and fallow land cultivation were also undertaken by the members during off season. Members were also found to be developing their saving habits. Green army could encourage the members to take individual decisions at home and work.

Impact of green army

A significant difference in the average income per month was observed before and

Table 2.
Constraints Faced by Agricultural Labourers (n=30)

Sl.No.	Constraints	Number	Percentage (%)
1.	Farmers attitude towards workers	12	40.00
2.	Lack of managerial experience for farmers	11	36.67
3.	Accidents while using machine	4	13.33
4.	Inadequacy in operation of machines	3	10.00

after joining in the green army (Rs.4116 and Rs.9666 respectively). Increased employment generation of labourers results in increased man days. The man days before and after joining green army was 96 and 147 days per year respectively.

Constraints and Suggestions

Major constraints faced by labourers include the wrong attitude of farmers towards working force (40.00%), poor managerial experience of workers (36.67%), accidents while using machine (13.33%) and malfunctioning of machines (10.00%). Farmers consider the green army men as mere labourers and had an unfavourable attitude towards their work. Farmers never consider them as service men for their field. Labourers lack experience in managerial aspects. They faced difficulty to solve the problems in the field and in the group. Improper maintenance causes the poor performance of machines and accidents for labourers. Even though accident claims were provided to members the amount was found to be very low.

Members made suggestions to improve the work force. As green army concentrate their work on paddy production, members could

not get year round work. The problem could be solved through diversification of activities (45.00%). New schemes like vegetable production and coconut climbing could be included under diversification. Well structured performance appraisal system (27.00%) would help to find working capability of labourers and could be effectively utilized in identification of leaders. Convergence of local body (28.00%) with the farmers and labourers would motivate the labour force and could find out more financial sources for activities.

CONCLUSION

The study emphasis the importance and impact of green army among the agricultural labourers. As labourers perceive the economic and sociological empowerment through green army, the impact was found to be observable. Constraints and suggestions given by members should be accounted by authorities for future programmes. Thus, green army could be collectively called as a participatory approach which emphasis in initiation of new technology and professional competence of labourers. More than that project, it would decrease the rate of migration from agriculture. Thus, tremendous change in

production sector can be expected with new trends in sustainable agriculture and food security through labour bank experiments.

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