

RURAL YOUTHS' PARTICIPATION IN WINTER VEGETABLES CULTIVATION PRACTICES AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIO-PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YOUTHS

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ABSTRACT

The youths are a potential source of labour and skill that can effectively be used in the field of agriculture. The farming sector yields vast opportunity for employment of a sizeable proportion of this section, which in turn, can contribute towards the improvement of the household economy. The youths have their individual interests, potentials and limitations. Their total participation in agriculture should not be viewed without taking into considerations these factors in addition to a number of social and cultural factors prevailing in the situation. The study was conducted in Jorhat district of Assam that was selected purposively as a large number of rural youth programmes have been organized by the Directorate of Extension Education of Assam Agricultural University since 1977 in addition to advantages in communication. The study reveals that the respondents were mostly either metric passed or pre-university passed. Majority of them were having medium level of knowledge and their family's land holding were small. The youths were fairly well exposed to mass media and social participation. Majority of them were unmarried. Farming was the dominant occupation. Banks and other financial institutions' role in providing loan etc. was minimum. The correlation findings show that education, knowledge about winter vegetables, size of land holdings, marital status, occupational background and social participation of the youths directly influence their participation in winter vegetable cultivation. Special care should be taken to enhance the participation level of illiterate youths as this section can provide the stable backbone for future agriculture. The youths need to be given more opportunity to delimit their social activity only to the field of agriculture as far as practicable.

Key Words: Youths, Employment, Participation.

INTRODUCTION

The youths are a potential source of labour and skill that can effectively be used in the field of agriculture. According to 1991 census, 89.71 per cent of the total rural population in Assam was youths. The farming sector yields vast opportunity for employment of a sizeable proportion of this section, which in turn, can contribute towards the improvement of the household economy. The study by Jha and Jain (1972) revealed agriculture to be a high interest area for the youth activities. Singh et al. (1980) also found that 25.00 per cent of them went to the field to help their parents in farm operations. It is a fact that after independence, a large number of organizations and programmes such as Bharat Yuvak Samaj (1952), Youvak Mandals (1960) Nehru Yuvak Kendra (1972), TRYSEM (1980) etc. were started involving the youths in rural development works including agriculture and some success have already been reported. But modern agriculture demands participation of youths in more intensive, result oriented and specific agriculture programmes.

The youths have their individual interests, potentials and limitations. Their total participation in agriculture

should not be viewed without taking into considerations these factors in addition to a number of social and cultural factors prevailing in the situation. Sharma (1994) found that youths' participation in farming is related to once educational level, family's size of holding, mass media exposure and social participation. Hence, the present study is an attempt to study the profile of the youths, determine their extent of participation in vegetables production programmes and to find out any association, if existed, between their participation level and profile characteristics.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Jorhat district of Assam that was selected purposively as a large number of rural youth programmes have been organized by the Directorate of Extension Education of Assam Agricultural University since 1977 in addition to advantages in communication. Two agricultural subdivision, Jorhat and Titabor were selected from the district purposively based on the same factors as mentioned above from which further, two AEO circle (one from each selected subdivision) were selected purposively. Further, Patiagaon and Hukimora villages

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from Bahona A.E.O. circle of Jorhat subdivision, and Haluwagon and Gandhigaon of Baghchung A.E.O. circle under Titabor subdivision were selected randomly. Thirty youths (between 15-35 years) from each of the four selected villages were selected randomly as the final sample.

The "Extent of Participation" of the respondents in winter vegetables cultivation practices was the frequency at which the respondents were taking active part in various operations related with cultivation of winter vegetables in the family. A list of 16 winter vegetables cultivation items (namely, Nursery bed preparation, seed treatment, sowing of seeds in nursery bed, seedling care, main field preparation, doses of manure, doses of fertilizer, manure application, fertilizer application uprooting of seedlings, transplanting, irrigation, weeding, plant protection measures, harvesting, transportations of produce to the market) commonly practiced in the area of the study were prepared after initial survey of the subdivisions, discussion with extension agency and social scientists of Assam Agricultural University. The list was presented to all the respondents requesting them to indicate their responses in a 3-point continuum with categories- 'Regularly', 'Sometimes' and 'Never'. The scores assigned against the categories were 2 for 'Regularly', 1 for 'Sometimes' and 0 for 'Never'. The theoretical score ranged from 0-32 from all the 16 items.

The profile of the youths was measured on a number of characteristics, such as their educational level, knowledge level in winter vegetables cultivation, size of operational land holding of the youth's family, extent of their mass media exposure, social participation, marital status, occupational background and financial support received by the youths which were selected on the basis of review of literature available to the researcher and consultation with experts. Education of the youths was taken as the formal education received by the youths in schools or colleges. The Knowledge of the respondents in winter vegetables cultivation was measured with the help of scale developed by Gogoi, 1989 and scored accordingly. Family's operational land holding was marginal, small or big (Department of Agriculture, Govt. of Assam). The other established measurement techniques used in this study were Mass Media Exposure scale of Gill (1986) and Social Participation scale (Trivedi and Pareek, 1963). The youths were classified as married or unmarried with regards to their Marital Status. Occupational status was farming, farming and business together or farming, business and services combined. Financial support was used here to mean monetary support that is obtained by the youths for

purchase of inputs and other related materials and services from different sources like banks or other financial institutions and friends or relatives. Pearson's co-efficient of correlation was used to find out the relationship between the extent of participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Respondents' Levels of Extent of Participation in Winter Vegetables Cultivation Practices—It is observed from table 1, that the respondents were almost equally distributed in both medium and high level of participation in winter vegetables cultivation as 38.33 per cent and 36.67 per cent of them belonged to the two levels respectively. A sizeable proportion of them (25.00%) also exhibited low level of participation. The mean participation score of 17.53 on a theoretically possible score range of 0-32, further explained that the youth's average participation was neither too low. Further investigation showed that the youths were reluctant to involve themselves in some operations like seed treatment, application of manures and fertilizers, irrigation and weeding operations that may have contributed in their low average participation level.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents on Different Levels of Extent of Participation in Winter Vegetables Cultivation Practices (N = 120)

Categories	Score range	Frequency (%)	Mean /S.D.
Low	0-10	25.00	
Medium	11-21	38.33	17.53 / 6.02
High	21-32	36.67	

2. Distribution of Respondents on Socio Economic Characteristic—A perusal of table 2 reveals that the respondents were mostly either matric passed (27%) or pre-university passed (25%). The 11 per cent of them were graduates and 7.50 per cent were illiterate. Majority of them were having medium level of knowledge (55.83%) in winter vegetables practices and only 21.67 per cent of them possessed low knowledge. In case of 45.83 percent respondents, their family's land holding were small (between 1-2 ha) and it was marginal (below 1 ha) in case of 34.16 per cent. The youths were having fairly well exposure to mass media as half of them were in medium level with 23.33 per cent of them exhibiting high level of exposure. The majorities of the youths (54.17%) had medium level of social participation and were unmarried (61.67%). The youths in majority cases (58.33%) were from farming family and only 16.67 per cent were from families with farming, business and service combination background. Banks and other financial institutions provided assistance only in 8.33 per cent cases while 41.67 per cent youths had no

financial support from any corners. The 50 % respondents received financial assistance from friends and relatives.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents on Socio Economic Characteristic (N=120)

Characteristics with categories	Score range	Freq. (%)	Mean /S.D.
1. Education			
Illiterate	0	7.50	2.75 / 1.44
Can read and write	1	17.50	
Primary school passed	2	12.50	
HSLC passed	3	27.50	
HS/ PU passed	4	25.00	
Graduates	5	10.00	
2. Knowledge in winter Vegetables			
Low	<10.58	21.67	13.74 / 3.16
Medium	10.58-16.90	55.83	
High	>16.90	22.50	
3. Family's operational Land holding			
Marginal	< 1 ha	34.17	10.86 / 5.01
Small	1 ha-2 ha	45.83	
Big	> 2 ha	20.00	
4. Mass media exposure			
Low	<2.5	26.67	5.59 / 3.09
Medium	2.5-8.68	50.00	
High	>8.68	23.33	
5. Social participation			
Low	<0.45	22.50	1.53 / 1.08
Medium	0.45-2.61	54.17	
High	>2.61	23.68	
6. Marital status			
Married	1	61.67	—
Un married	2	38.33	
7. Occupational background			
Farming	1	58.33	—
Farming + Business	2	25.00	
Farming + Business+Service	3	16.67	
8. Financial support			
Bank & other financial institutes	2	8.33	—
Friends & relatives	1	80.00	
No outside support	0	41.66	

3. Correlation of Rural Youths' Extent of Participation in Winter Vegetables Cultivation Practices with their Socio-Personal Characteristics—It is evident from table 3, that five characteristics such as education ($r = 0.308^*$), knowledge level of the youths ($r = 0.198^*$), family's operational land holding size ($r = 0.730^*$), marital status ($r = 0.258^*$) and occupational background ($r = 0.427^*$) had positive and significant correlation with the extent of participation of the youths in winter vegetables cultivation at $p = 0.05$. These imply that the extent of participation of the youths in winter vegetables cultivation increases with increase in their level of education, knowledge level, size of family's operational land holding and occupational status. Even, marital status was

found to influence their level of participation. However, the negative and significant relationship ($r = -0.238^*$) between level of participation in winter vegetables cultivation practices and social participation score of the youths lead to the conclusion that increase in social participation decreases the level of participation in winter vegetables cultivation. Sharma (1994) also reported a moderate correlation between educational level, family's operational land holding size and mass media exposure of the youths with their extent of participation in farming. Sangwan et al. (1990) also reported that participation in agricultural activities increases with increase in farm size. Other factors like mass media exposure and financial support were found to have no influence on the extent of participation of rural youths in winter vegetables cultivation.

Table 3. Correlation of Rural Youths' Extent of Participation in Winter Vegetables Cultivation Practices with their Socio-Personal Characteristics (N = 120)

Characteristics	R values	T values
Education	0.308*	02.537
Knowledge in Winter vegetables cultivation	0.198*	02.195
Size of family's operational land holding	0.730*	11.530
Mass media exposure	-0.061NS	00.658
Social participation	-0.231*	02.662
Marital status	0.258*	02.899
Occupational background	0.427*	05.129
Financial support	0.084 NS	00.916

CONCLUSION

The extent of participation of the rural youths in winter vegetables cultivation practices was not discouraging as only 25.0 per of the youths exhibited low participation. However, the results also brings out the possibility for increasing their participation level as only 36.67 per cent had high level of participation. The study reveals that the respondents were mostly either matric passed or pre-university passed. Majority of them were having medium level of knowledge and their family's land holding were small. The youths were fairly well exposed to mass media and social participation. Majority of them were unmarried. Farming was the dominant occupation. Banks and other financial institutions' role in providing loan etc. was minimum. The correlation findings show that education, knowledge about winter vegetables, size of land holdings, marital status, occupational background and social participation of the youths directly influence their participation in winter vegetable cultivation.

These findings call for adoption of different strategies to enhance the level of participation of rural

youths in vegetables cultivation. Extension agencies and development managers need to formulate specific, well-organized winter vegetables production strategies for them. Emphasis needs to be given in enhancing the knowledge of the youths through regular knowledge and skills up gradation measures like training and group

discussions. Special care should be taken to enhance the participation level of illiterate youths as this section can provide the stable backbone for future agriculture. The youths need to be given more opportunity to delimit their social activity only to the field of agriculture as far as practicable.

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