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ENGAGING THE ECONOMY OF EXCLUSION WITH AN ENTERPRISE OF INCLUSION: ROLE OF LIFE LON LEARNING

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***Abstract* Indian agriculture remains the economy of small and marginal farmers. These farmers remain excluded from the fruits of development and are pushed to the periphery. Their exclusion is the net result of development paradigm adopted by the Indian Government over the past six decades. This process of exclusion needs to be countered by a process of inclusion by building people's socio-economic as well as human capital. The introduction of Lifelong Learning for farmers by Commonwealth of learning has demonstrated that a bottom-up and participatory approach to learning will not only contribute to the growth of socio-economic capital but also include them in the mainstream economy. Lifelong learning enables small and marginal farmers to negotiate with the economy of exclusion and design their destiny. This paper presents the outcome of the Life Long Learning introduced in Tamilnadu and its potentials to engage the economy of exclusion. It is an explorative study based on the secondary data available on this subject.**

***Index Terms*— : small farmers, exclusion, Lifelong learning for farmers.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Agrarian economy in India remains an economy of small and marginal farmers as is the case in most of the developing countries. According to the recent Indian National Sample Survey (NSS, 70th round, 2014) data there are about 90.2 million agricultural households in rural India which is about 57.8 per cent of the total estimated rural households in the country. Among these 75.42 per cent are marginal farmers operating land size of 0.002 to 1.0 hectare of land. In terms of their percentage the small and marginal farmers, to the overall population, might not be significant but their contribution to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and the livelihood risks and vulnerabilities they face requires immediate attention. This vast majority of farmers are the victims of the "economy of exclusion" needing a process inclusion in order to save food production, save sustainable agriculture and above all save themselves. The economy of exclusion is a result of development paradigm adopted by the Indian Government that slowly and systematically eliminated the livelihood securities of this people, exposed them to global market forces without adequate protection and excluded them from the fruits of various development interventions. Historically, the development intervention in terms of land reform, green revolution and current intervention of liberalization failed to pay attention to the "Bottom of the Pyramid". The net outcome of this economy of exclusion is poverty, mounting debt, ill health, lack of coping skills and finally ever increasing suicides.

To counter this economy of exclusion there is an urgent need to introduce a process of inclusion by building people's socio-economic and human capital. This will enable individuals and communities to make informed decisions and interact with various actors as equals. There are evidences from field that demonstrate this in some of the developing countries. Lifelong Learning for farmers introduced by Commonwealth of Learning has equipped small and marginal farmers to engage the economy of exclusion and achieve inclusion in many areas of their life. This paper presents the outcome of the Life Long Learning introduced in Tamilnadu and its potentials to engage the economy of exclusion.

II. SMALL AND MARGINAL FARMERS

Indian agriculture is dominated by small and marginal farmers reaffirmed by the findings of various National Sample Survey reports in India.

Table -1
Land Operational Holding at Household Level

Items	**1960-61 17th**	**1970-71 26th**	**1981-82 37th**	**1991-92 48th**	**2002-03 59th**	**2012-13 70th**
1.No.of operational holdings	50.77	57.07	71.04	93.45	101.27	108.78
2.Total area operated in mha)	133.48	125.68	118.57	125.10	107.65	94.48
3.Average area operated (ha)	2.63	2.20	1.67	1.34	1.06	0.967

III. CONSOLIDATED NSSO DATA

The table 1 maps the trends in land holding pattern in India and proves the inevitable dominance of small and marginal farmers. This reiterates that ownership of land is highly skewed in India and the impact of these tiny holdings on the lives of the farmers and on the Indian agriculture has been quite adverse. Consequently, these small and marginal farmers have experienced several disadvantages. Among the major disadvantages faced by them, inability to avail institutional credit, insurance, agricultural extension and adaptation of modern technologies are a few. Secondly, their awareness regarding government procurement operations at minimum support prices, availability of crop insurance schemes; extension services are minimal if not absent. It is reported that more farmers depended on other progressive farmers, media like radio, TV, newspapers and private commercial agents for their extension needs (Bera, 2014) than on agricultural research institutes. Moreover, the high transaction costs and low bargaining power resulting in high input costs and low prices for output has left them with poor returns (Reddy and Mishra, 2010). Consequently the small and marginal farmers are the bulk of the rural poor and the under nourished (Vyas, 1996; Patel, 2004). These factors, consequently, leave small-marginal farmers in a state of multiple deprivations.

IV. Process of Exclusion

The process of excluding the small and marginal farmers in India began with the concept of development adopted by the country. There are detailed studies that argue that the concept of development that our planners and policymakers adapted is partly, if not wholly, responsible for the problems we face today in Indian agriculture. In order to understand this argument we need to have a brief look at the context as well as the content of the development paradigm adapted by India. Post-colonial India was faced with a multitude of socio-economic and political problems. Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, inadequate healthcare facilities, poor sanitation, economic stagnation and mounting population were a few of the major challenges confronting the independent India. These problems were so acute that there was an urgent need to find solution, lest the country would have gone into anarchy. Naturally, the Government of India looked out for help from within as well as from outside the country. The then prevailing notion of development as economic growth or increasing Gross National Product (GNP) per head became the mantra of the independent India and economic planning was designed along that line. During this period it was widely believed that through economic growth and modernization, unequal distribution of income and social inequalities would be eliminated. Obviously, increasing the per capita income was a prime concern and as a result the five year plans were keen to improve the per capita income of families. Consequently, the focus was more on heavy industry, mining and infrastructural growth that licensed the exploitation of natural resources in the name of development. Industrialization was conceived as one of the powerful engine of growth which would pull the rest of the economy along behind it (Thorbecke, 2006). In agricultural sector, the situation of inadequate food grain production, prompted the policy makers to opt for large scale production of food grains, with the use of technology that neglected the ecological concerns and sustainability issues. This trend received a death blow to the Indian agriculture in 1990s with the introduction of structural adjustment programme. Liberalization gave a red carpet welcome to multinational companies and they took over the entire agriculture market in their hands.

V. Foundations of Development Discourse

First of all, it is a well-known fact that the notions of modernization and development adopted by the Indian policy makers had its roots in the cultural assumptions, political premises and economic values of the western society (Kumar, 2012). This trend is evident in the adoption of the McKeinsey model of development that promoted industry-driven agriculture and agribusiness development which failed to help the small and marginal farmers (Assadi, 2010; Gandhi & Dinesh Jain, 2011). It is this uncritical adoption and the consequent action plans, development strategies and programs had resulted in widespread socio-economic inequality and environmental pollution. In critiquing the prevailing notion of development, Rist (2010) sums up the existing notion of development in the following manner, the essence of 'development' is the general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations in order to increase the production of commodities (goods and services) geared, by means of market exchange to effective demand. It is this understanding of development that has introduced "Economy of Exclusion" in developing countries.

VI. Major Developments in Indian Agriculture

India adopted different strategies to revive the low yielding agriculture. Among the many developments interventions in Indian agriculture, one can identify three major developments that were deployed with the intention of resolving major agrarian crisis. They are land reform, green revolution and introduction of liberalization in Indian agriculture. All the three have left an indelible mark on the landscape of Indian agriculture.

A. Land Reform

Land reform, in India, was introduced, among many other objectives, to remedy the anomalies in the existing land tenure practices and to distribute the land to the tiller. At the time of independence, agrarian structure required priority and land tenure required immediate attention. It is to be noted that throughout the postcolonial period, improvement in the asset base of the poor has been viewed as a central strategy to relieve endemic poverty [Chenery et al. 1970]. India, too, took up the issue of land reform as its priority already during the phase of drafting the Indian Constitution in 1949 but left to the states, as land being a state subject. Indian land reform had three major objects. They were

- Abolition of intermediaries,
- Fixation of ceilings on land holdings and

- Redistribution of surplus land among landless or semi-landless peasants.

However, Indian states took their own time to enact land reform acts depending on the nature and composition of the political dispensation of that time. Besley and Robin (2000) after analyzing the various studies on this subject classify the land reform acts into four broad categories,

1. Tenancy reform that included attempts to regulate tenancy contracts both via registration and stipulation of contractual terms as well as attempts to abolish tenancy and transfer ownership to tenants.
2. Abolition of intermediaries. Most states had passed legislation to abolish intermediaries prior to 1958.
3. Implementation of ceilings on landholdings, with a view to redistributing surplus land to the landless.
4. Consolidation of disparate landholdings.

While the goal of Land Reform was ambitious, the net outcome had been uneven, diverse and in many ways diluted the core principles of the Act. Abolition of intermediaries through the Act was a great success. Tenancy reform met with a partial success but land sealing legislation had very limited impact. Many studies have reiterated that ambivalence in the formulation of policy and numerous loopholes allowed the bulk of landowners to avoid expropriation by distributing surplus land to relations, friends and dependents [Appu 1996; Mearns 1998]. An important policy intervention, like that of land reform, aiming at equal distribution of productive assets in rural areas, wanting to do away with absentee landlordism and intended to provide tenurial security failed to bring about radical restructuring in the agrarian structure for want of political will. Since the basic tenets of Land Reform threatened the socio-economic interests of the political class the law makers allowed this Act to serve the interest of the feudal class. It is a known fact that only states like West Bengal, Kerala and Jammu and Kashmir had the political will to implement the Act to a large extent.

B. Green Revolution

India, immediately after independence, initiated various measures to improve productivity in agriculture. The major focus of the first Five Year Plan (FYP) was augmenting agricultural productivity. However, mid-1960s agricultural growth recorded negative growth and there was serious food crisis in India. Meanwhile the early successes with wheat at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) in Mexico and rice at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) was established specifically to generate technological knowhow in order to promote agricultural productivity (Pingali, 2012). This process of developing and using High Yielding Crop Varieties (HYVs), fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation practices is called Green Revolution. India made use of this opportunity to strive for self-sufficiency in food production. Green revolution enabled India to produce wheat, rice and maize to meet the increasing food grain needs of the country. This resulted in production of food grains from less than 61 million tonnes in 1949-50 to 131 million tonnes in 1978. The production of cereals (rice, wheat, maize and barley) rose from less than 51 million tonnes to about 120 million tonnes during the same period (Singh, 2014). Similarly, the crop area under the high-yield varieties (HYV) grew from mere 7 percent to 22 percent of the total cultivated area during the 10 years of the 'Green Revolution' (Rena, 2004).

However, it had its negative side too. Introduction of HYV seeds and irrigation facilities opened up profitable business for the rich farmers than small and marginal farmers due to their inability to access the needed resources (Reddy and Mishra, 2010). This saw agricultural development as growth in productivity with productivity made a trope for development itself (Vasavi, 2010). Apart from the socio-economic problems, the following ecological problems are listed by Singh (2014) land degradation, deforestation, environmental pollution, depletion of biodiversity, increased incidence of mosquito borne diseases, pest resurgence and lowering of ground water level are the results of Green revolution in India.

C. Liberalization in Indian Agriculture

Indian economy experienced severe crisis in the early 1990s as the foreign exchange reserve was not sufficient to pay for the import. This warranted that Indian economy initiated the structural adjustment programme and globalization was an unavoidable outcome of the process (Deshpande and Khalil Shah, 2010). Elaborating on the Indian farmer's plight and liberalization A.K.Singhal (2010) argued that the Uruguay Round's Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) in 1994 resulted in several policy changes in the Indian agrarian sector. He identified the following policy measures that were the outcome of globalization,

- Improving the functioning of commodity market
- Rationalization of input subsidies
- Reforming commodity price policies
- Increasing investment in agriculture research and development, extension, rural infrastructure and services, public sector institutions
- Adopting participatory approaches in the provision of public services in agriculture

This process of liberalization removed quantitative restrictions on international trade in view of promoting completion in agriculture. It allowed Multinational Companies to enter the commodity market as well as in the factor markets. This certainly reduced government controls and interventions and enabled private players to participate in production, processing and marketing. Although, initially, the various reforms started yielding positive results in terms accelerated growth rate and managed overcome the food crisis, the net outcome has been quite negative for small and marginal farmers. In his detailed analysis Hans (2009)argued that globalization not only slowed down growth rate but a multifaceted problem with falling outputs, employment, investment, exports, etc. Thus goes on to conclude that, agriculture – under globalization – for India was not rosy either from the point of view of domestic consumption or from exports' point of view. Add to this even the credit flow to agriculture from banks has declined along with less mobilization of deposits for agricultural lending by scheduled commercial banks (Hans,2009).

VII. Outcomes of Policy Intervention

When one analyzes all the three policy interventions of the Indian government it becomes evident that the small and marginal farmers were the net losers. In all the three interventions the rich and resource rich farmers augmented their income and diversified their cropping pattern. The small and marginal farmers were left to lurch in the periphery. They were excluded from the mainstream development and were marginalized at many levels

VIII. Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning for farmers was a new initiate of Commonwealth of learning premised on the belief that self-directed learning founded on the principle of Open Distance Learning (ODL) with the help of modern ICT tools can transform lives of deprived communities. This was introduced among small and marginal farmers of India, Africa, Sri Lanka etc. The aim was to build the capacity of farmers, landless labourers and extension officials in order to help them in developing value-added farming, encourage more sustainable use of natural resources, strengthen their ability to face globalization, and ensure food and livelihood security (Ref). It is a community based approach with an emphasis on participatory development and promotes self-sustaining, self-replicating programmes in Commonwealth countries. Lifelong learning brings together array of stakeholders like banks, ICT service providers, Knowledge providers and the community based organizations and facilitate learning in their very socio-economic context.

IX. Process

Lifelong learning achieves progressive inclusion of small and marginal farmers through a cyclical process. The first process is formation of small groups in the local community which will play a pivotal role in the entire process. This small group meets on a regular basis and these meetings provide platforms for learning, building strong cognitive social capital, ensuring group solidarity and above all a sense belonging to a community. The next stage is introduction of horizontal and vertical learning with the help of ICTs. In many of the interventions mobile phones are used to send voice SMS (Short Message Services) at periodic intervals on a theme decided by the people, in their own dialect and in their own voice. Apart from this their also invite knowledge experts to strengthen their learning process. In this whole process the approach is bottom up, participatory and constant feedback is gathered to fine tune the learning. Thirdly, group formation and self-directed learning empowers them to enter into negotiations with institutions that affect their lives like banks; input suppliers; internal and external markets; agricultural and veterinary universities; Government officials like collectors and extension officials etc. Equipped with the knowledge of their economic activity, empowered by the power of their social solidarity the small and marginal farmers enter into negotiations with banks for their much needed credit, District Collectorate for timely supply of agricultural inputs, knowledge repository for timely information and markets for the best price for their produce. This process begins to transform their socio-economic life, transform the institutions that shape their lives and achieves inclusion in domains where they were excluded.

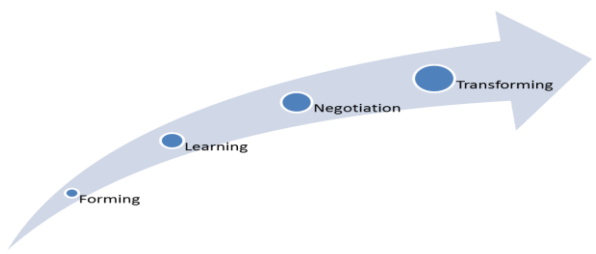
X. Outcomes

The existing literatures on lifelong for farmers across the developing world clearly indicate that it has helped them to engage in sustainable agriculture and increased their family income (Coomaraswamy, Kshanika Hirimburegama and Krishna Alluri, 2007). It has increased their agricultural production, income, improved livelihood and employment (Augustine, Jokthan and Bashir). The study by National Institute of Bank Management (NIBM) on the impact of Lifelong learning for farmers in Tamilnadu has identified three major outcomes among the many others:

1. L3F members have made considerable progress economically and are sustainable in their business management.
2. The cost-benefit ratio (CBR) of L3F project is 10.01, which indicates that for each rupee spent on the programme, Rs 10.0 is generated as return benefit from the project.
3. The social return on the project was building strong cognitive social capital, through concerted mobilization and organization (Naveen Kumar and Anjali Kulkarni)

The longitudinal study of CoL itself clearly demonstrates the net impact of lifelong learning on the women of Vidiyal by measuring it through empowerment index and social capital index (Thamizoli, Henry Francis, Hilaria soundari, Kamaraj, Carol Walker and Balasubramanian). This once again proves the above process depicted in

Figure- 1



the figure above. Lifelong learning can trigger inclusive processes that eliminate the negative impact of the economy of exclusion.

XI. Conclusion

The double digit of growth of Indian economy is inextricably linked to the double digit growth of Indian agriculture. This double digit growth will remain a myth as long as the small and marginal farmers are excluded from the development initiatives. Structurally, they are the core of Indian agriculture and they need to become the core partners in the developmental programmes. For these they need to be formed to learn and to transform their lives and the lives of the Indian agriculture. An informed farmer will engage in sustainable agriculture, interact with agencies at an equal footing and ensure win-win situation for all. Only this inclusive process can counter the evil effects of the economy of exclusion.

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