



## **Economic condition of agriculture labour in Bihar: A case study of Madhepura district**

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### **Abstract**

Agricultural labour are those persons who work on the land of others on wages, for the major part of the year and can earn major portion of their income as a payment in the form of wages for works performed on the agricultural farms owned by others. They working both in the house and farms of their masters but faces various problems in Madhepura of Bihar. The increase the number of agricultural labour has causes as increasing size of population, decline of cottage and village industries, evictions of small farmers, uneconomic holdings, growing indebtedness, deforestation, river erosion growth of capitalist farming etc are the main causes of agricultural labour problems of Madhepura of Bihar. The living conditions and the standard of living of agricultural labourers would largely depend upon the income earned by them. It also depends upon the number of employment days available in a year. Moreover, it is influenced by their level of consumption and the degree of their loan.

**Keywords:** agricultural, labour, income, payment and problems

### **Introduction**

One of the most distinguishing features of the rural economy of India has been the growth in the number of agricultural workers, cultivators and agricultural labourers engaged in crop production. The phenomena of underemployment, under-development and surplus population are simultaneously manifested in the daily lives and living of the agricultural labourers. They usually get low wages, conditions of work put an excessive burden on them, and the employment which they get is extremely irregular. Agricultural workers constitute the most neglected class in Indian rural structure. Their income is low and employment irregular. Since, they possess no skill or training, they have no alternative employment opportunities either. Socially, a large number of agricultural workers belong to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Therefore, they are a suppressed class. They are not organised and they cannot fight for their rights. Because of all these reasons their economic lot has failed to improve even after five decades of planning. Labour is the most important input in increasing production in traditional agriculture. In the early stage of development, since land was available in plenty increase in labour supply led to the clearing of more land for bringing it under cultivation. At this stage of development the increase in labour supply was a boon to the society. It made positive contribution and helped in increasing agricultural introduction of new technology.

The technological innovation required increased use of capital in agriculture. Even with the use of more capital and new technology a number of farm-operations required intensification of labour use such as seed bed production, weeding, irrigation and harvesting. Thus, labour is critical input in modern agricultural development. Agricultural labourers are socially and economically poorest section of the society. Agricultural labourer households constitute the historically deprived social groups, displaced handicraftsmen and dispossessed peasantry. They are the poorest of the poor in rural India. Their growth reflects the colonial legacy of under development and the inadequacies

of planning intervention in the past. Overcrowding and growth of agricultural labourer continued unabated, given poor labour absorption in the non- agricultural sector and also inadequacies of reforms in the agrarian structure. The poverty syndrome among agricultural labourers needs to be read against such a background of prolonged rural under development, assetlessness, unemployment, low wages, under-nutrition, illiteracy and social backwardness constitute the poverty syndrome among agricultural labourers. These reinforce each other so as to constitute a vicious circle of poverty. There is little inter-generational upward mobility among agricultural labourer households. Human factor is of supreme importance in any pattern of economic development. More so are the agricultural labourers of India, the country's largest unorganized section comprising the poorest workers, toiling on the sunny fields of India Most of them hail from the socially disadvantaged Sections of our society and a large number of them continue to live under the poverty condition.

Agricultural labour are those persons who work on the land of others on wages, for the major part of the year and can earn major portion of their income as a payment in the form of wages for works performed on the agricultural farms owned by others. They working both in the house and farms of their masters but faces various problems in Madhepura of Bihar. The increase the number of agricultural labour has causes as increasing size of population, decline of cottage and village industries, evictions of small farmers, uneconomic holdings, growing indebtedness, deforestation, river erosion growth of capitalist farming etc are the main causes of agricultural labour problems of Madhepura of Bihar. The living conditions and the standard of living of agricultural labourers would largely depend upon the income earned by them. It also depends upon the number of employment days available in a year. Moreover, it is influenced by their level of consumption and the degree of their loan. Therefore, in order to judge the socio-economic picture of agricultural labourers, it is absolutely essential to find out their total income, spending, loan. Socio-economic

condition of agricultural labourers depends upon a number of factors, e.g., source of income, expenses, asset holding position, land holding position, availability of farm and non-farm employment, size of family etc., are the obvious crucial quantitative factors which determine their socio-economic condition.

### Classification of Agricultural Labourers

Agricultural labourers can be divided into four categories:

1. Landless Labourers, who are attached to the land lords;
2. Landless labourers, who are personally independent, but who work exclusively for others;
3. Petty farmers with tiny bits of land who devote most of their time working for others and
4. Farmers who have economic holdings but who have one or more of their sons and dependants working for other prosperous farmers. The first group of labourers have been more or less in the position of serfs or slaves, they are also known as bonded labourers.

### Agricultural labourers can also be divided in the following manner

1. Landless agricultural labourers
2. Very small cultivators whose main source of earnings due to their small and sub-marginal holdings is wage employment.

Landless labourers in turn can be classified into two broad categories

1. Permanent Labourers attached to cultivating households.
2. Casual Labourers. The second group can again be divided into three subgroups: (i) Cultivators (ii) Share croppers (iii) Lease holders. Permanent or attached labourers generally work on annual or seasonal basis and they work on some sort of contract. Their wages are determined by custom or tradition. On the other hand temporary or casual labourers are engaged only during peak period for work. Their employment is temporary and they are paid at the market rate. They are not attached to any landlords. Under second group comes small farmers, who process very little land and therefore, has to devote most of their time working on the lands of others as labourers. Share croppers are those who, while sharing the produce of the land for their work, also work as labourers. Tenants are those who not only work on the leased land but also work as labourers.

### Characteristics of Agricultural Labourers

Before any attempt is made to evolve a rational policy to improve the living conditions of agricultural labours which happens to belong to the lowest rung of social and economic ladder, it is essential to know the distinguishing features that characterize agricultural labourer in India. The main features, characterizing Indian agricultural labour are as follows:

#### Agricultural Labourers are scattered

Agricultural labour in India is being widely scattered over 5.6 lakh villages, of which half have population of less than 500 each. And therefore, any question of building an effective organization, like that of industrial workers, poses insurmountable difficulties. Thus as the vast number of

agricultural labour lies scattered all over India, there has been no successful attempt for long, to build their effective organization even at the state level not to speak of the national level.

#### Agricultural labourers are Unskilled and Lack Training

Agricultural labourers, especially in smaller villages away from towns and cities, are generally unskilled workers carrying on agricultural operation in the centuries old traditional wages. Most of them, especially those in small isolated villages with around 500 population, may not have even heard of modernization of agriculture. Majority of them are generally conservative, tradition bound, totalistic and resigned to the insufferable lot to which according to them fate has condemned them. There is hardly any motivation for change or improvement. Since, there is direct supervision by the landlord, there is hardly any escape from hard work and since there is no alternative employment. The agricultural labourer has to do all types of work-farm and domestic at the bidding of the landlord.

#### Unorganised Sector

Agricultural labourers are not organized like industrial labourers. They are illiterate and ignorant. They live in scattered villages. Hence they could not organize in unions. In urban areas workers could generally organize themselves in unions and it is convenient for political parties to take interest in trade union activities. This is almost difficult in case of farm labour. Accordingly, it is difficult for them to bargain with the land owners and secure good wages.

#### Low social status

Most agricultural workers belong to the depressed classes, which have been neglected for ages. The low caste and depressed classes have been socially handicapped and they had never the courage to assert themselves. They have been like dump-driven cattle.

In some parts of India, agricultural labourers are migratory, moving in search of jobs at the time of harvesting. Government measures to improve their lot by legislation have proved ineffective so far due to powerful hold of the rural elite classes in the rural economy.

#### Demand and supply of Labour

The number of agricultural labourers being very large and skills they possess being meager, there are generally more than abundant supply of agricultural labourer in relation to demand for them.

It is only during the sowing and harvesting seasons that there appears to be nearfull employment in the case of agricultural labourers.

But, once the harvesting season is over, majority of agricultural workers will be jobless especially in areas, where there is single cropping pattern.

#### Less Bargaining Power

Due to all the above mentioned factors, the bargaining power and position of agricultural labourers in India is very weak. In fact, quite a large number of them are in the grip of village money lenders, landlords and commission agents, often the same person functioning in all the three capacities. No wonder, the agricultural labour is the most exploited class of people of India.

**At the Bidding of the Landlord**

There is generally direct and day to day 'contact between agricultural labourers and the landlords' on whose farm they are working. Unlike industrial workers, this direct contact between the employer and employees is a distinct feature of agriculture labourer. The above mentioned few important characteristics distinguish agricultural labourers in India from industrial workers. Thus partly because of factors beyond their control and partly because of their inherent bargaining weakness, the farm labourers have been getting very low wages.

**2. Review of Literature**

The present study is concerned with the 'dynamics of occupational change of agricultural labour in Bihar. The review of literature has given here relevant studies related to the field selected for study.

Venu B. N, Umesh K.B. and Gaddi G.M (2016) reveals that migration of labours from their ative place to small distance and within the district is high in rainy season but in other season agriculture labourers' migration to other district was relatively high in Karnataka.

Sawant T.R (2017) Agricultural labours condition is not good in India and government should twice its budgetary allocation to improve the condition of agricultural labours.

Venkateshwarlu & M.

Ramakrishna Reddy (2017) argued that agriculture labour is counted in the category of unorganized sector so the income is not fixed they are not covered any nsecure and full uncertainty in their earnings.

**3. Methodology**

In the present study self made questionnaire was used to collect the information regarding the Economic Condition of Agriculture Labour.

A total of 500 Agriculture Labour were selected from Madhepura district. Sampling technique adopted in the present study is stratified random sampling. Information was collected using interview method. The data were collected from Madhepura District, Bihar.

**4. Results and Discussion**

**Demographic profile of the respondents**

The following section explains the demographic profile of the respondents.

**Table 1:** Age wise Response of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Frequency
25-30	10	2
31-35	50	10
36-40	150	30
Above 40	290	58
Total	500	100

Source: Based on field Survey

Table1 shows the age groups of the respondents in years and found that most of respondent i.e. 290(58 percent) out of 500 are belongs to the age group of Above 40 years followed by 150 (30 percent) belongs to 36-40 years age group, 50(10 percent) belongs to 31-35 years age group and remaining few respondents 10(2 percent) are belongs to above 25-30years age group in the study.

**Table 2:** Qualification wise Response of Respondents

Qualification	Frequency	Frequency
Illiterate	150	30
upto 5th class	100	20
6th-10th class	200	40
above 10 <sup>th</sup> class	50	10
Total	500	100

Source: Based on field Survey

Table 2 shows the Qualification wise response of the respondents and found that most of respondent i.e. 200(40 percent) out of 500 are belongs to the 6th-10th class followed by 50(10 percent) belongs to above 10th class, 150(30 percent) are illiterate and remaining respondents 100(20 percent) are belongs to upto 5th class in the study.

**Table 3:** Response According to Size of Family

Size of Family	Frequency	Frequency
3 member in family	30	6
4 member in family	230	46
5 member in family	40	8
Above 5 member in family	200	40
Total	500	100

Source: Based on field Survey

Table 3 shows the response of respondents about Size of Family and found that most of respondent i.e.200 (40 percent) out of 500 are having above 5 member in family followed by 230(46 percent) having 4 member in family, 30(6 percent) are having 3 member in family and remaining respondents 40(8 percent) are having 5 member in family.

**Table 4:** Respondents Response According to Size of House

Size of House	Frequency	Frequency
100-200 sward Yard	230	46
300-400 sward Yard	30	6
500-600 sward Yard	35	7
700-100 sward Yard	205	41
Total	500	100

Source: Based on field Survey

Table 4 shows the response of respondents about Size of House and found that most of respondent out of 500 are belongs to the 300-400 sward Yard followed by 30(6 percent) belongs to 100-200 sward Yard and remaining respondents 230(46 percent) are belongs to 500-600 sward Yard 35(7 percent) and 205 are belongs to the 700-1000 sward Yard in the study.

**Table 5:** Respondents Response according To Size of land

Size of land	Frequency	Frequency
Landless	300	60
upto 2.5 Acres	90	18
2.5 to 5 Acres	70	14
Above 5 Acres	40	8
Total	500	100

Source: Based on field Survey

Table 5 shows the response of respondents according to size of land and found that most of respondent i.e. 300 (60 percent) out of 500 are landless followed by 70 (14 Percent) are having 2.5 to 5 Acres, 90(18 percent) are having upto

2.5 Acres and remaining respondents 40(8 percent) are having Above 5 Acres in the study.

**Table 6:** Respondents Response According to mode of Payment

Mode of payment	Frequency	Frequency
Cash By Hand	380	76
Installment	20	4
Against Loan	100	20
Total	500	100

Source: Based on field Survey

Table 6 shows the response of respondents according to mode of payment and found that most of respondent out of 500 are pay Cash By Hand followed by 380(76 percent) and 20(4 percent) are pay through Installment and remaining respondents 100(20 percent) are pay Against Loan.

**Table 7:** Respondents Response According to receive loan

Receive loan	Frequency	Frequency
Yes	300	60
No	200	40
Total	500	100

Source: Based on field Survey

Table 7 shows the response of respondents according to receive loan and found that 300 (50 percent) respondent out of 500 received loan and same 200 (40 percent) respondents have not taken loan

**Causes of the Poor Economic Condition of Farm Labour**

- 1. Unorganised:** Agricultural labourers in Madhepura of Bihar is totally unrecognised as they are ignorant illiterate and widely scattered. Thus the farm workers have no capacity to bargain for securing a fair wage level.
- 2. Low social status:** Farm workers mostly belong to depressed classes and thus they are lacking the courage to assert their basic rights.
- 3. Seasonal Unemployment:** As the agricultural operations are seasonal thus the farm worker are often facing the problem of seasonal unemployment and under-employment. Farm workers on average get about 200 days in a year.
- 4. Absence of alternative occupation:** In the rural areas the farm workers are not getting alternative job when they suffer seasonal unemployment.
- 5. Growing indebtedness:** Agricultural labours in Madhepura of Bihar is highly indebted. As the lend of wages are very poor thus the farm workers have been borrowing from land lords and become bonded labourers ultimately it can be said that the agricultural labours in Madhepura of Bihar is living in inhuman conditions and in the absence of organised status. They are deprived of all the basic amenities of their life.

**Government Policy for Improve the Conditions of Agriculture Labours**

- **Abolition of Bonded Labour:** The Indian constitution declared the practice of serf demand offence. It has also abolished agrarian slavery including forced labour by law but it will take some time before it is removed in practice.
- The minimum wage act passed in 1948 by state government were advised to fix minimum wages for

labour within three years. The minimum wages are fixed keeping in view the total costs and standard of living. But due to some practical difficulties most of the state could not fix the minimum wages till 1974.

- In India various state have passed necessary legislation for providing housing sites to agricultural labourers. Again under minimum needs programme and 20 point porogramme high priority is being attached to rural housing site cum-house construction scheme.
- **Employment Guarantee Scheme:** For providing alternative source of employment among the agricultural labourers various scheme have already been launched by both the central & the state governments.

**Finding**

The district has no implemented wage policy at all. Government policy does not works better in the area. The land concentrated few big farmers and landless agricultural labour are unorganized, bounded and low social status and having their indebtness, illiteracy poverty absence of alternative occupation and seasonal unemployment are found in the district of Madhepura. So there creates agricultural labour problems in the district.

**Suggestions**

- **Implementation of minimum wage act:** To implement the minimum wage act seriously and to revise the minimum wages periodically considering the changing price level of the country.
- **Alternative Sources of employment:** to create alternative sources of employment by developing small scale and cottage industries in rural areas.
- **Social Security Measures:** To introduce social security measures for the agricultural labours and also to introduce compulsory insurance on marginal contribution and also to institute old age pension scheme for the agricultural workers by the government.
- **Fixing working hours:** to improve the working conditions of agricultural labour by enforcing fixed hours of work banning child labour etc.
- **Economic Measures:** To make agriculture move remunerative active economic measures must be introduced. Subsidiary agro-based industries must set up in rural areas. So that surplus labour in agriculture sector can be utilised in these industries. Proper steps must be taken to break the vicious circle of poverty.
- **Human Development:** For the improvement of agricultural productivity in the state the quality of farmer must be improved through education, both general and technical. To save the agricultural labour from epidemics and other diseases, adequate public health measures must be undertaken.

**5. Conclusion**

In this study based on field survey of different villages of Madhepura District have chosen to find out the socioeconomic conditions of rural agricultural labourers. In the conclusion we can conclude that the condition of agricultural workers is not so good in Madhepura of Bihar, their living standard and income is very low. For the improve the conditions government should take proper steps for various aspect for agricultural labours, like wage reforms, new methods for agriculture, hours of works, improve the living conditions and overcoming the natural

factors like flood and erosion etc. After conducting the study we come to the conclusion that there is an urgent need for the development of rural areas and rural agricultural labours. Government must take more effective steps for their upliftment and betterment.

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