



Reforming Indian Agriculture: Towards Employment Generation and Poverty Reduction. Sankar Kumar Bhaumik. SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, B1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area, Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044. 2008. 552 pp. Price: Rs 795.

This timely book contains a collection of essays contributed by senior colleagues, friends and students of G. K. Chadha, to honour him for his service to the profession of agricultural and development economics for a period spanning over four decades. As pointed out by the editor in his comprehensive introduction, the decline of agriculture in India in the era of economic reforms has serious consequences for employment and poverty. Over 60% of our population depends for its livelihood on crop and animal husbandry, inland and marine fisheries, forestry and agro-forestry, and agro-processing. In contrast to industrialized countries where only 2–3% of the population depends on agriculture for its work and income, the food and income security of nearly seven hundred million people in our country depends upon farming and allied professions. Policies for Indian agriculture should therefore give overriding priority to safeguarding the livelihood security of a majority of our population.

The twenty chapters in the book fall under the following four major groups of issues: (i) Indian agriculture in the era of economic reforms; (ii) Policy interventions for agricultural development; (iii) Employment, poverty and food access; (iv) Other aspects of development policy.

Excepting the paper by Firdousi Naher on combating poverty and malnutrition in Bangladesh and one by Dr S. Hiroshima which deals with the Japanese per-

spective on the role of agriculture in India's development, all other chapters are based mainly on Indian experience. The essays are all scholarly and authoritative in nature. Hence this book is a timely contribution, when there is widespread awareness of the need to revitalize our agricultural and rural economy, and build a sustainable National Food Security System.

A comprehensive paper by Ramesh Chand provides an excellent summary of the domestic policy measures in agriculture initiated since 1947. The paper also brings out the inter-relationships between agricultural growth and industrial output by pointing out that a 1% change in agricultural growth results in 0.38% change in the growth rate of industrial output. This explains the need for the development of land-use policies which can foster the integrated growth of agricultural and industry. The Singur experience in West Bengal has underlined the need for land-use decisions based on proactive consultation among all concerned stakeholders. It will be useful to develop a referendum methodology to ascertain the majority view, on the model of the procedures adopted in Switzerland. Ramesh Chand has also dealt with price support policies in some detail and has emphasized the need for expanding the Public Distribution System (PDS). He has shown that the budgetary outlays for agricultural research, education and extension have been steadily going up however the impact of research on production and productivity has continued to remain marginal during the last twenty years. Cotton is a recent exception largely due to the introduction of *Bt* strains (i.e. genetically modified varieties).

G. S. Bhalla's paper provides a lucid analysis of some of the major economic problems confronting our farming community. Reference has been made to the work of Chadha, which has shown that the new technologies are size-neutral with reference to their relevance to farmers with different sizes of land-holdings. The new technologies are however not resource-neutral, since inputs are needed for output. This is where public policies should come to the rescue of small and marginal farmers who constitute the vast majority of the farming population, by providing them credit, insurance and other facilities which will enable them to purchase the needed inputs at the right time. Bhalla has stressed the need for the

modernization of agriculture in order to ensure that the cost 'risk' return structure of farming is favourable to small holders. Bhalla's paper is followed immediately by an analysis of the causes for the decline of agriculture by S. S. Jodhka. Obviously the causes for the decline of agriculture vary from state to state and generalizations could be misleading. It is however clear that if the farm ecology and economics go wrong, nothing else can go right.

Surjit Singh's paper deals with the role of public policy in minimizing agricultural risks. He has also suggested methods of minimizing agricultural risks through steps like enterprise diversification, contract cultivation and vertical integration. The paper also contains a summary of the experience with crop insurance measures in the US, Spain, Mexico, Canada and Morocco, in addition to India. Agricultural risks are likely to multiply with adverse changes in temperature, precipitation and sea level as a result of global warming. The National Commission on Farmers (NCF) has emphasized the need for a holistic insurance system which covers the needs of a farm family, both for domestic consumption and agricultural operations.

Sukhpal Singh has given an excellent overview of the current status of contract farming. He has emphasized that to be sustainable, contract farming should mark a win-win situation both for the producer and the purchaser. Again NCF has stressed that a code of conduct for contract farming should be developed, which will ensure that such contracts do not become unequal trade bargains.

The other interesting papers deal with microfinance and also compare the experience of the two Punjabs and West Bengal. S. S. Gill, for example, points out that the success of agricultural transformation in Indian Punjab and West Bengal and partly in Pakistani Punjab was made possible due to availability of innovations in production technology. However for sustainability, it is necessary that rural development is viewed beyond agriculture, particularly after an initial breakthrough in agricultural production, towards agro-processing.

Hirashima has compared the Indian and Japanese experience, and has concluded that compared to the Japanese case, the Indian agriculture in spite of its many potential advantages has to develop and contribute to the overall development of the country in an enormously difficult environment. The problem of

unemployment has also been dealt with by several authors. The editor of this book, Bhaumik himself has contributed an informative paper on rural non-farm employment, poverty and inequality in West Bengal. This paper is of contemporary relevance in view of the conflicts in the use of land for industry and agriculture in West Bengal. Bhaumik has concluded that the non-farm sector needs to be promoted vigorously in West Bengal, since agricultural activities satisfy only just 35 and 45% of the total employment requirements of the rural households in the advanced and backward regions of the State respectively. Also, the expansion of the non-farm sector in rural areas of West Bengal would benefit the landless and land-poor households more than the land-rich households.

Pervasive poverty seen in rural areas is essentially due to the lack of opportunities for remunerative employment in the non-farm sector. Inadequate purchasing power leads to inadequate access to balanced diet and clean drinking water. The magnitude of the malnutrition problem is also brought out by Firdousi Naher in her interesting paper on combating poverty and malnutrition in Bangladesh.

To conclude, this is an exceedingly well-researched and written publication dealing with issues ranging from the fatigue of the green revolution to pervasive malnutrition and poverty. S. K. Thorat and Joel Lee have made an important contribution to highlight the additional challenge of caste and class in rural areas both with reference to agricultural production and household nutrition. They have drawn attention to the unfortunate

situation where dominant castes sabotage the progressive potential of the midday meal scheme and PDS, thereby emphasizing that the right to food should become universal, including the Dalits.

Modern industry is not labour-consuming and this is why jobless economic growth is observed in many nations. Agriculture, in contrast, promotes job-led economic growth. If agriculture progress is inadequate or uneven among different agro-ecological regions, economic and social disparities will increase. This is why Mahatma Gandhi mentioned at Naokhali on 1946,

‘To a people famishing and idle, the only acceptable form in which God can dare appear is work and promise of food as wages.’

Gandhiji wanted that the State should create opportunities for productive employment for all its citizens. ‘Work for all’ is the pathway to achieving the goal of ‘food for all’ by analysing and highlighting the major challenges before Indian agriculture, the authors have done justice to the monumental contributions of Chadha to agricultural economics and national development.

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The Madhya Pradesh Council of Science and Technology, Bhopal has brought out two volumes entitled *Resource Atlas – Madhya Pradesh* and *Resource Atlas of Jhabua – A Celebration of the Land and People of Jhabua* respectively, published jointly by the M.P. Council of Science and Technology, Bhopal and the Centre for Policy Studies, Delhi. The second volume establishes in graphic detail, the people of Jhabua, who with their diligence and skills have made this district of limited natural endowments and difficult terrain, equal the average of the state and of the country in terms of productivity of land and per capita production of food. The Editor-in-Chief and Volume Editor is J. K. Bajaj. These volumes depict the resource strength of various sectors, especially the natural resources, socio-economic profile and infrastructure details with adequate analysis and interpretation. Madhya Pradesh, the geographic heart of India, is important historically as well as for the abundance of natural resources. The state is rich in natural resources in terms of water, forest and minerals. It also has rich and diverse forest with overwhelming biodiversity and wildlife, and is known as the ‘tiger state’ in India, harbouring 19% of tiger population in the country. The *Resource Atlas – Madhya Pradesh* is priced at Rs 500.

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