

WHATSINIT

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IMPROVING farm productivity

■ ON a PPP basis, overall labour productivity in India is quite low compared with most South-east Asian countries. Nevertheless, in India labour is four times more productive in industry and six times more productive in services compared with agriculture. If we compare productivity per person in agriculture to productivity per person in all other sectors combined, the latter was 6.2 times more productive in 2005-06, which declined to 5.8 times in 2011-12. India lags behind other BRIC nations where for the period of 2011-12 Brazil had a gap factor of 3.35, Russia had 2.67 and China 4.85. This implies that agriculture in India is unattractive compared with other BRIC nations. While this analysis justifies better returns in non-agriculture occupations and explains the trend of labour shifting away from agriculture, the problem needs to be addressed by taking adequate measures to reduce labour requirement and increase productivity in the sector. Most nations have responded with widespread use of technology on farms to replace many traditional farming occupations, a trend India will soon have to follow. Moreover, the requirement of labour for agriculture is not fixed and changes throughout the year based on the season and crop activity. It is also dependent on the crop being cultivated, for example, rice requires more labour during sowing than other crops. Labour scarcity at any point of the crop lifecycle leads to reduction in crop yield, reduction in cropping intensity and changes in traditional cropping pattern. Again, India is a vast country with 16 agro-climatic zones. Technological interventions for black cotton soil will be vastly different from alluvial soil. Therefore technological and other solutions need to be crop specific and also geography specific. Empirical studies have evaluated the effect of shortage of labour on various crops. A comparison of labour sufficient and labour insufficient farms shows a marked difference in yield due to labour shortage. Among the crops considered for the study, paddy and cotton are the worst affected. The impact of labour scarcity is felt lesser in pulses as compared with the other crops since their cultivation requires relatively less labour. Moreover, the labour intensive operations such as weeding and harvesting of pulse crops fall in the months of March and April, which are virtually considered off-season months in agriculture. The problem of labour scarcity in agriculture has repercussions across states and needs to be addressed in order to contain its impact on the overall sector and the nation. A two-pronged approach with respect to input factors and output factors has to be considered.

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