

25 RURAL LIVELIHOODS

CIVICS

People do not have equal opportunities to earn a living. People in rural areas earn their living in various ways. Some work on farms while others earn their living on non-farm activities. Working on farms involves operations, such as preparing the land, sowing, weeding and harvesting of crops. They depend on nature— climate especially rain for the growth of these crops. People are busy during sowing and harvesting and less so at other times.

Rural people in different regions of the country grow different crops. However, we do find *similarities in their life situations and in the problems that they face.*

Survival or earning depends upon the land that they cultivate. Many depend on these lands for work as labourers. Most farmers grow crops both for their own requirements and also to sell some in the market. Some have to sell their produce to traders from whom they have borrowed money. Many families need to borrow money for their work or when no work is available. Some farmers has large acres of lands, business and other activities like rice mills, factories, etc. However, most small farmers, agricultural labourers, fishing families, craftspersons in the villages do not find enough work to keep them employed throughout the year.



Different kinds of rural livelihoods

A Village at the Sea Coast

Physical features of the land and difference in climate affect the people and the work they do. In different landscapes and climates different kinds of crops, plants, trees and animals are found. Many sea coasts are plains. The delta regions of the sea coasts are very fertile. Paddy is the main crop that is grown in the irrigated lands. Most of the rural families earn a living through agriculture. There are some coconut groves around. Cotton, sugarcane and plantain are also grown. Plantain is a kind of banana which is cooked before it is eaten. There are mango orchards. Most farmers also have cows for milk.

There is non-farm work also such as making pots, utensils, baskets, bricks, bullock-carts, etc. There are people who provide services such as blacksmiths, weavers, and shopkeepers and traders, mostly working from their homes. The main street looks like a bazaar. There are variety of small shops such as grocery shops, cloth shops, tailor shops, tea shops, barber shops and fertilisers and seed shops. Teashops also sell different snacks for the morning and evening. The non-farm work is often more profitable. Some people go to the nearby town to work as construction workers, lorry drivers and lorry cleaners. The women also earn a living as daily wagers at construction sites. They keep their toddlers lying nearby.

The Landless Labourers

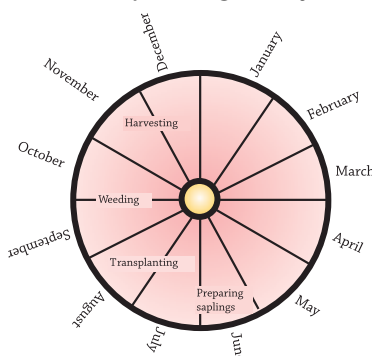
The landless labourers work on the lands of the big farmers. They are often forced to accept low wages. The work is seasonal mostly during the growing and harvesting seasons of the year. Paddy is grown by the transplanting method. First the paddy plants are grown in a nursery. Then the nursery paddy plants are pulled out and planted in rows, providing each plant a safe distance from each other. This enables the paddy plants to get sufficient sunshine and grow tall. When these plants grow up, there is need for weeding out the unwanted grass and plants that grow along side. At this time the big farmer needs help and calls the labourers once again for work in the fields. After finishing this work, there is no work for the labourers to do for quite sometime. During the harvesting of the paddy, they are engaged for a month or so. After harvesting, the labourers are required for the paddy to be threshed and the rice grains to be separated from the husk. However some big farmers have threshing machines nowadays.

The young men and women have no difficulty in doing the transplantation of paddy. But as the labourers grow older, they find bending down with feet in the water all the time to transplant paddy for long hours is painful.


Women also have to collect firewood, fetch water from a distance and graze their cattle. Though these activities are not paying but they have to do them for the household. The women and sometimes men also have to spend time doing these activities as they are not able to survive on the little money they earn. The women also have to cook food, wash clothes and clean the house.



Transplanting Paddy



The Seasonal work in a sea coast village



When there is off-season, that is, no work in the village, mostly men find work outside—loading sand from the river or stone from the quarry in the trucks. This is sent to the nearby towns to be used in making houses. They also reach the towns and try to find some work.

The landless labourers send their daughters and sons to the government schools in the village. However, the government gives free books, notebooks and pencils to the poor children in the villages. But there are not good facilities for treating all type of diseases in the village. If the children fall ill, it costs a lot to get them treated in the nearby town. Then they take loan. Often they have to sell their cattle to pay back the money with interest.

Small Farmers

Small farmers manage to do all the agricultural work on their own. At times, especially during the harvest they take the help of other small farmers and in turn help them harvest their field. Often they take seeds and fertilisers as a loan from a trader. To pay back the loan, they have to sell their paddy to him at a somewhat lower price than what they would get in the market. Some of the paddy they sell to settle the loan. The rest will be used in their houses. But whatever they have will last only six to eight months. So, they search some extra job in the village or nearby town.

Some of the small farmers have one or more cows to sell its milk to get some extra money. Selling milk to the village cooperative society or taking milk to the nearby town is the main source of livelihood for some families.


Apart from farming many people in rural areas depend upon collection from the forest, rearing of animals, fishing, etc. In central India, rural people collect mahua fruits, tendu leaves and honey to be sold to traders for an additional income.

Migration of Rural People

In India nearly two out of every five rural families are agricultural labourer families. All of them depend on the work they do on other people's fields to earn a living. Many of them are landless and others may own very small plots of land. Not being able to earn money throughout the year forces people in many rural areas to travel long distance in search of work. This travel or migration takes place during particular seasons.

Caught in Debt

This is the situation faced by a majority of the poor families in the villages, in order to survive. They live a bare existence. With the meagre resources they have to face the various odds of life. They are unable to save money for other important things in life or to meet emergencies. They are always in debt.



Very often small farmers need to borrow money to purchase basic things like seeds, fertilisers and pesticides. If the seeds are not of good quality or if the crop is attacked by pest, it could even be a major crop failure. The crops can also be ruined if the monsoon does not bring enough rain or the late arrival of the monsoon. Then the farmers are unable to pay back loans. For their survival, they borrow more money. Soon the loan becomes so large that in spite of earning well, they are unable to pay. In recent years many farmers have committed suicide in this situation of distress.

Terrace Farming in Nagaland

The hills are cleared and small step ladder types of fields called terraces are made on the hills. This means that the land on a hill slope is made into flat plots and carved out in steps. The sides of each plot are raised in order to retain water. This allows water to stand in the field which is best for rice cultivation. The farmers though having their own fields they work collectively in groups of six or eight. Each group eats together once their work for the day is over. They share their work as well as food for days.

The Big Farmers

80 per cent of the farmers in India are small farmers. Only 20 per cent of India's farmers are big farmers who cultivate most of the land in the villages. A large part of their produce is sold in the market. Many of them have started their businesses such as shops, money lending, trading, small factories, etc

In the villages, the survival of the people depends on the type of land that they cultivate. Most of the lower strata of rural society are labourers who are always hand to mouth and struggling for the basic necessities of life. They mainly depend on the big farmers to employ them, to work on their farms

There is a constant battle for survival among majority of people in rural areas. In search of livelihood they go to work in cities often leaving their families in the villages. This shows that in the battle for survival they have to knock at the city's doorsteps. The battle for survival is the story of the poor ones where as the rich farmers thrive as a result of this battle.

Key Words

- » Livelihood : means of obtaining the needs of life.
- » Paddy : the cereals from which rice grain is obtained after removing the husk.
- » Terrace Farming : a series of flat areas on an inclined slope used for growing crops.
- » Landless labourers : villagers not owning any land and working on the lands of other people.
- » Small farmers : farmers having a small plot of land.
- » Big farmers : farmers having large acres of land.

SUMMARY

- ▶ Rural people earn their living both by farm work and non-farm work.
- ▶ Rural people in different regions of the country grow different crops but we do find similarities in their life situations and in the problems that they face.
- ▶ Physical features of the land and difference in climate affect the people and the work they do.
- ▶ Most of the rural families earn a living through agriculture. Paddy, cotton, sugarcane and plantain are grown in sea coast delta regions.
- ▶ Rural people also do non-farm work such as making pots, baskets, bricks, carts, etc.
- ▶ There are people who provide services such as blacksmiths, weavers, and shopkeepers and traders mostly working from homes.
- ▶ The landless labourers work on the land of the big farmers or in nearby towns.
- ▶ Women also labour at farms or construction sites. They also have to collect firewood, fetch water from a distance and graze their cattle.
- ▶ The small farmers manage to do all the agricultural work on their own. They also work on the land of big farmers and in nearby towns.
- ▶ Majority of poor families, landless labourers or small farmers need to borrow loan. But they could hardly pay it back and are always caught in debt.
- ▶ The big farmers sell a large part of their produce in the market. Many of them have started their businesses such as shops, money lending, trading, small factories, etc.

Exercise Time

A. Tick (✓) the only correct choice amongst the following :

1. Rural people in different regions of the country grow different _____.
a. grass b. crops c. trees d. leaves
2. Plantain is a kind of _____ which is cooked before it is eaten.
a. banana b. mango c. neem d. leave
3. _____ of the farmers in India are small farmers.
a. 70% b. 80% c. 90% d. 100%
4. Small farmers manage to do all the _____ work on their own.
a. agricultural b. home c. rearing of animal d. village
5. A large part of farmer's produce is sold in the _____.
a. village b. market c. state d. city

B. Fill in the blanks :

1. Many small farmers help other small farmers to _____ their fields.
2. _____ is grown by transplantation method.
3. We find _____ in the life situations and problems of the rural people over the country.
4. Women also labour at farms or _____ sites.
5. The _____ farmers manage to do all the agricultural work on their own.



C. Match the Following :

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Fishing is a source of livelihood | a. seeds and fertilisers |
| 2. The poor farmers have to borrow money for | b. non-farm work |
| 3. Terrace farming is done | c. only seasonal work |
| 4. Making pots and baskets is a | d. in hilly areas |
| 5. The landless labourers get | e. in coastal areas |

D. Write true (T) or False (F) against the following statements in given brackets :

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. No money is gained or earned while performing domestic chores. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. All villages have a bazaar. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. The big farmers pay good salary to the labourers. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Most of the rural farmers are caught in debt. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Many villagers are forced to leave their homes to find work in distant cities. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

E. Define the terms :

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Livelihood | 2. Landless labourers |
| 3. Big farmers | 4. Terrace farming |

F. Answer these questions briefly :

1. How do landless labourers earn their living ?
2. What is the main occupation of the rural people ? What other occupations they are engaged with ?
3. Why are small farmers forced to sell their produce to specific people at lower prices ?
4. Why are most rural people caught in debt ? What are the consequences ?
5. What reasons may lead to a major crop failure ?
6. What is terrace farming ? How and where is it done ?
7. List the different types of people who depend on farming ? Who is the poorest among them and why ?
8. What household jobs the rural women have to do in addition to labour for earning ?

G. Answer these questions in detail :

1. Give an account of various means of livelihood in rural areas ?
2. Compare the conditions of a big farmer with a small farmer with respect to land cultivated, labour required, loans required, selling of harvest and other work done by them.

PROJECT WORK

- Visit a village and list the problems of the small farmers and landless labourers.