

# Existence and Causes of Agricultural Labour Scarcity in Dharwad District of Karnataka

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**Abstract:** *In order to capture the existence of and the reasons for labour scarcity in the agriculture sector, a study was conducted in Dharwad district of Karnataka state. Multistage random sampling procedure was adopted for the selection of the district, taluks, villages and farmers. Primary data was collected from 120 sample farmers, growing almost all the major crops of the area. Tabular analysis and Garrett's ranking technique was used to analyse and rank the factors considered by the farmers contributing to the labour scarcity. Almost 54.17 per cent of the farmers reported labour scarcity, out of which 85 per cent were large farmers and 23.33 per cent were small farmers. Among the various reasons reported by the farmers, the migration of the labourers to the nearby villages for higher wages was opined as the most serious one contributing towards labour scarcity. The shift to regular / permanent job due to the seasonal nature of agricultural occupation was reckoned as the second major reason. Higher wages in other jobs available locally, migration due to improvement in educational status and agriculture labour presumed to be a low self esteem job were the other factors opined by the farmers. Existence of MGNREGA was ranked as the VI and last among the various problems identified. This was because MGNREGA was not properly implemented in the study area which was clear from the level of migration of the people to the other cities in search of jobs.*

**Keywords:** *Agricultural labour, Garrett's ranking, Labour scarcity*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Today, labour has become the most important production component in Indian agriculture. A little less half of the total cost of production of field crop is of labour. It is much more for labour intensive crops such as sugarcane, cotton, vegetables, etc [4]

Agricultural labour means "those people who are engaged in raising crops on payment of wages" [3]. The 2001 census of India, has defined agriculture labourer as "A person who works on another person's land for wages in money or kind or share is regarded as an agricultural labourer. She or he has no risk in the cultivation, but merely works on another person's land for wages." [2]

Even though India has the second largest manpower in the world, all sectors of economy have been affected by the scarcity of labour, the impact being felt more in agricultural sector. Pursuant to this, following impacts have been predominantly noticed in agriculture in recent years; reduction in crop yield, reduction in cropping intensity and changes in traditional cropping pattern. Though agricultural research has evolved many crop-specific, labour-saving implements and technologies, the problem has not been addressed fully [5]

Till not very long ago, Indian agriculture was marked by abundant supply of farm labour and a sizeable portion of work force was absorbed in it even when it was not actually required. This labour remained under-utilized due to the residuary nature of agricultural occupations. One of the probable reasons for this over-supply was low levels of productivity and wages in farming, which encouraged more labour absorption so as to earn a subsistence level of income for household activities. This gave rise to a negative relationship between labour productivity and labour absorption. The scenario, however, has changed in recent years, particularly after the implementation of MGNREGA, expansion of public works and increased rural to urban migration owing to urbanization and generation of casual employment in the tertiary sector in towns and cities [1]. All these have created panic and helplessness among the farmers who may not hesitate to abandon farming.

This is the general situation existing in India and the situation in Karnataka is not different. These issues need to be studied in detail and discussed as these have far reaching implications on agriculture and rural development.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Sampling Procedure

The study was conducted in Dharwad district of Karnataka state. A multistage random sampling procedure was adopted for the selection of the district, taluks, villages and farmers.

Dharwad district was selected as it serves as an agricultural representative of Karnataka state, with 69 per cent of its area under agriculture use and growing almost all major crops in the state. In the second stage based on the highest net sown area, two taluks of Dharwad district namely Dharwad and Navalgund were selected. In the third stage from each sample taluk, two villages, viz. Garag and Hebballi in Dharwad taluk and Morabha and Kalavad in Navalgund taluk were randomly selected for the study. In the fourth stage, fifteen small farmers (with land holding less than 2 ha.) and 15 large farmers (with land holding more than 2 ha.) from each of the four chosen villages were selected randomly. Thus, a total of 120 farmers were selected for collecting the required information for the study.

## 2.2 Analytical techniques

Tabular analysis, percentages and Garrett's ranking technique were used to analyse the data to capture the existence of and the reasons for labour scarcity in the agriculture sector in Dharwad district of Karnataka.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Among the total 120 sample farmers, 54.17 per cent of the farmers reported the case of labour scarcity of which majority were large farmers (85%) and about 23.33 per cent were small farmers (Table 3.1). The labour scarcity was felt more by the large farmers who were engaged in the cultivation of High Labour Intensive crops (HLI) (Appendix1), especially during the peak crop season. While the small farmers who preferred cultivation of Less Labour Intensive crops (LLI) and Medium Labour Intensive crops (MLI) were able to meet the required labour demand with the family labour. The small farmers, who were involved in the cultivation of HLI crops, also reported the problem of labour scarcity.

The major reasons as opined by the sample farmers for the labour scarcity existing in the study area were as follows

- Existence of MGNREGA
- Higher wages in other jobs available locally
- Shift to a regular/ permanent job since agricultural job is seasonal
- Agriculture labour presumed to be a low esteem job
- Migration to nearby cities for higher wages
- Migration due to improvement in educational status

These reasons opined by the farmers were ranked using the Garrett ranking method. It can be seen from table 3.2 in the previous chapter, the migration to the nearby cities was ranked I and the existence of MGNREGA was ranked VI or the last problem. The absence of proper implementation of MGNREGA programme was the probable reason for the migration of the labourers. MGNREGA works had been recorded in the villages but as such the villages were not given

any employment under the scheme. Hence migration to other cities was high, but at the same time, as the MGNREGA is not implemented fully, its effect in the agricultural activities in these villages was low. The out-migration of the labourers resulted in labour scarcity particularly during the peak season. As a result of this the wage rates escalated, particularly in the peak season, resulting in acute labour shortage, especially for the small farmers who were unable to afford employing the labourers at the high wage rates. The labour scarcity affected the timely operation in the crop cultivation, which resulted in the reduction in productivity of the crops.

Most of the workers shifted to regular/permanent jobs as agricultural jobs were seasonal and did not ensure wage generation through-out the year. Instead of doing part time farming, they preferred permanent shifting to non-agricultural jobs to ensure through-out the year earnings.

The agricultural labourers were willing to do other jobs available locally rather than farm labour, as these works were less arduous, ensured timely payment and less working hours when compared to the farm works.

The rural youths were reluctant to work in the fields and mostly migrated due to improvement in education status. They preferred more remunerative and less cumbersome jobs than the field labour works. Moreover the agriculture labour is presumed to be a low esteem job, particularly among the youths. These findings were in line with the studies conducted by Prabakar *et al.* (2011). The farmers usually resorted to sharing the family labourers to overcome the acute labour shortage problem.

**Table 3.1: Farmers reporting farm labour scarcity in the study area**

(n=120)

Taluk	Villages	No. of farmers reporting farm labour shortage		
		Small farmers	Large farmers	Total
Dharwad	Garag	8 (53.33)	10 (66.67)	18 (60)
	Hebballi	2 (13.33)	13 (86.67)	15 (50)
Navalgund	Morabha	3 (20.00)	15 (100)	18 (60)
	Kalavad	1 (6.67)	13 (86.67)	14 (46.67)
Total		14 (23.33)	51 (85)	65 (54.17)

**Table 3.2: Garrett's ranking for the reasons for labour scarcity**

Reasons	Mean Score	Rank
Existence of NREGA (A)	35	VI
Higher wages in other jobs available locally	57.8	III

Shift to a regular/ permanent job since agricultural job is seasonal	59.33	II
Agriculture labour presumed to be a low esteem job	39.82	V
Migration to nearby city for higher wages	60.62	I
Migration due to improvement in education status	47.77	IV

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is clear from the above observations that both the large and the small farmers, though in different magnitude, are facing farm labour scarcity. If this problem is not well heeded and solved, the farmers' profit will be adversely affected, which may force them to opt out from agriculture. This may in turn lead to adverse effects on the whole food security of our country.

Among the various reasons reported by the farmers, the migration of the labourers to the nearby villages for higher wages was opined as the most serious one contributing to labour scarcity. Hence steps should be taken to integrate MGNREGA with agriculture. The public works included under MGNREGA programme now, must be undertaken during the lean months of agricultural operations, i.e. in the months of February, March, April and September, while the MGNREGA registered labourers must be engaged in farm related labour in the remaining months. This may check the migration of labourers as well as prevent the MGNREGA programme hindering agriculture.

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#### Appendix 1: Major crops grown in the study area (grouped as per labour requirement into HLI, MLI and LLI)

SI No.	Categories	Human Labour requirement (mandays/ha)
A.	High Labour Intensive (HLI) crops	
	Paddy	112
	Onion	130
	Chilli	148
	Cotton	122
	Sugarcane	114
B.	Medium Labour Intensive (MLI) crops	
	Maize	92
	Sunflower	102
	Safflower	104
	Soyabean	92
C.	Less Labour Intensive (LLI) crops	
	Jowar ( K)	78
	Jowar (R)	70
	Wheat	64
	Green gram	72
	Chickpea	68
	Ground nut	82
	Potato	80