



Indian Farmer
Volume 8, Issue 02, 2021, Pp. 212-215.
Available online at: www.indianfarmer.net
ISSN: 2394-1227 (Online)

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



Role of ARYA: Luring the youth in Agriculture in COVID-19 Scenario

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Article Received on: 6 February 2021

Published on: 20 February 2021

“Opportunities for rural youth are several. If educated youth choose to live in villages and launch the new agriculture movement, based on the integrated application of science and social wisdom, our untapped demographic dividend will become our greatest strength.”

- M. S. Swaminathan

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting all parts of society and livelihoods around the globe. In rural areas, the education, vocational education and training system may already be disadvantaged by the underdevelopment or lack of certain services. The closure of education and learning facilities, may leave behind millions of rural youth, owing to the difficult context they live in, paired with difficulties in accessing technologies for distance learning. All this may further result in inhibiting their school to work transition. Around one in five of the world's youth are not in employment, education or training with young women outnumbering young men two to one. Furthermore, the youth unemployment rates are about three times as high as those of adults (ILO, 2019). The COVID-19 crisis will increase this already tough scenario and intensify their unemployment rates and possibly their labour market vulnerabilities.

Amid the coronavirus outbreak and nationwide lockdown, massive reverse migration of people from urban areas to villages ever since due to COVID -19 has put focus on the Attracting and Retaining of Youth in Agriculture (ARYA) scheme of the Centre with the several expert suggesting that time is now ideal to for full-fledged implementation of the ambitious scheme. In order to realize the importance of rural youth in agricultural development, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research

(ICAR) has initiated a programme on "Attracting and Retaining of Youth in Agriculture (ARYA)".

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture's share in India's economy is significant, albeit in decline. Although the sector accounted for the share of gross domestic product (GDP) next to industry and services, it remains the leading industry for employing close to two-thirds of the country's working population. However, India is losing more than 2,000 farmers every single day and that since 1991, the overall number of farmers has dropped by 15 million till 2013. At the beginning of independence, people believed that "**Excellent farming, Average business, Worst job**", nowadays it is reverse. This has several implications for the future of Indian agriculture and India's food security. In this scenario, Young farmers can play an important role in ensuring food security if they are encouraged to involve in farming and the challenges they face are addressed. Because more than half of the country's population is below the age of 30 years and according to the UN International Labour Organization (ILO) young people are more susceptible to be unemployed than adults.

What is ARYA?

Realizing the importance of rural youth in agricultural development especially from the point of view of food security of the country, ICAR has initiated a program on "**Attracting and Retaining Youth in Agriculture**" on **16th July 2015**. Under this scheme, special efforts will be taken to attract the rural youth under the age of 35 years in agriculture so that the increase in the migration of rural youth towards cities is controlled.

Objectives

- To attract and empower the Youth in Rural Areas to take up various Agriculture, allied and service sector enterprises for sustainable income and gainful employment in selected districts
- To enable the Farm Youth to establish net workgroups to take up resource and capital intensive activities like processing, value addition and marketing and
- To demonstrate functional linkage with different institutions and stakeholders for convergence of opportunities available under various schemes/ program for sustainable development of youth

Operational Mechanism

- ❑ The project presently being implemented in 100 districts in the country on an experimental basis in 25 districts (one district from each state)
- ❑ Through the **KVKs** of those districts
- ❑ With technical partners from Institutes of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (**ICAR**), the **Agricultural Universities** and others.

- ❑ One or two entrepreneurial development units should be established at the KVK itself so that it serves as entrepreneurial training units for the farm youth.
- ❑ The KVKs should also facilitate youth for establishing various entrepreneurial units at the farm of the youths or group of youth.

Why ARYA scheme needed in COVID-19 situation?

ARYA scheme had been taken up particularly in the wake of a majority of rural youth shunning agriculture and migrating to cities in search of menial jobs. Rural-urban migration can be limited if better income-earning opportunities are created in rural areas. The main intention of the scheme was to turn agriculture and allied sectors into attractive and profit-making proposition for the rural youth.

1. Primary sector needs skilled youth with business skills to boost agriculture and allied sector.
2. The productivity of primary sector depends on skills and new technology. It is employing more than 55% population but share in GDP is only 13.7%.
4. Although it is increasingly recognized that youth participation has an important role in decision-making, including during the COVID-19 pandemic
5. scheme would help develop the service sector in rural area by building entrepreneurial skills.

Status of ARYA project

- Under ARYA 930 different enterprise units related to mushroom production, processing and value-addition of Non-Timber Forest Produce, processing and value-addition of lac, backyard poultry management, vermicompost production, beekeeping, piggery, large cardamom production, fisheries, offseason vegetable production under walk-in tunnel, cardamom cultivation under protected condition, pineapple production, Integrated farming systems, production of vegetable and fruit nursery, herbal jaggery making unit, commercial goat farming etc. Were established during the year benefiting 2,467 rural youth in the selected districts.
- Skill training was given to 3,879 rural youth through 92 various training programs pertaining to the enterprise units allotted to each ARYA Centre. Eight exposure visits were arranged to 327 youth to different enterprise units being managed successfully as training and confidence-building measure.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF ARYA PROJECT

- ICAR-CIBA signed an MoU with Sri Sathvika Aqua Agro Industries Private Limited and developed cost-effective and quality feed shrimp using indigenous feed ingredients for vannamei farming, and the feed is promoted as the 'Vannami plus', under ARYA programme.
- Under ICAR-ATARI, Umam 5 KVKs namely; Senapati in Manipur, Karbi Anglong in Assam, workha in Nagaland, Lunglei in Mizoram and North Sikkim in Sikkim are implementing the ARYA project for the benefit of rural youth in their respective districts. A brief achievement made by the implementing KVKs during 2016-17

- In KarbiAnglong (Assam) total 111 rural youth benefitted from different enterprises like poultry, piggery, pineapple and mushroom.
- In Senapati (Manipur) 120 rural youth got training about mushroom cultivation, piggery, poultry, fisheries, large cardamom.
- In Lunglei (Mizoram) 145 rural youth benefitted with various enterprises such as piggery, poultry, mushroom and beekeeping.
- In workha (Nagaland) 90 rural youth succeed in attaining several enterprises like a mushroom, poultry, piggery and cut flowers.
- In north Sikkim 90 rural youth gained diverse enterprises like cardamom cultivation in protected cultivation, piglet cultivation, off-season vegetable production under walk-in tunnel.

It is though worth recognizing that disadvantaged segments of populations like rural young women and men will be impacted harder. Rural youth are often unheard and not consulted. Although it is increasingly recognized that youth participation has an important role in decision-making, including during the COVID-19 pandemic discourse, too often their participation remains symbolic or passive.

Two avenues can make it happen: Increase in returns from small-farm agriculture; and more employment opportunities in the rural non-farm sector. Unlike many other sectors, agriculture has already shown its potential to revive the pandemic-hit economy. Spurring the rural economic growth can become the saviour for the situation and taking care of the most vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

From the ongoing discussion, it can be concluded thatThe COVID-19 pandemic is affecting all parts of society and livelihoods around the globe. In the rural area there is a low level of aspiration amongst the farmers to bring their children in the farming profession, deprived interest amongst children of farmers to work with drudgery oriented work, low preference of new generation of farmers to settle in villages or rural area, a low value in society of farming as profession, for farming are serious issues to be addressed for avoiding farming as a profession amongst youths in India. For this urgent need is realized to develop attractive strategy and policy by Government for attracting rural youths towards agriculture. ICAR has initiated ARYA programme, however, more critical efforts are expected to attract youths towards agriculture as a profession not only to feed stomachs of the second largest population of the world but also for the sustainable development of rural India.

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