

3.2 Work and labour in Indian agriculture: Insights for socially just & sustainable agriculture systems

Climate change not only jeopardises crops, it also threatens the socio-economic status and wellbeing of rural populations, potentially destabilising societies and ultimately compromising food security for all.

Agricultural stakeholders experience the challenges that climate change brings in different ways. A few relatively well-off stakeholders may even benefit from shifts in land use, while others bear the brunt of the decreasing productivity of land for crop cultivation, leading them to abandon or reduce cultivation and increase dependence on non-agricultural sources of income.

Researchers from MSSRF and the University of Cambridge have developed new perspectives on policies for sustainable agriculture that address issues of inequality and destabilisation in rural communities. Their research asks whose sustainability is considered when developing policies for sustainable agriculture?

One of the areas they have looked at is environmental, including land, degradation. Environmental degradation increases the amount of time women spend collecting water, reducing their time for other activities, such as



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paid work, increasing their drudgery so that their wellbeing and that of their households suffers. It also constitutes one of the factors increasing male out-migration and off-farm work, but the effects of this on households can vary considerably.

Without any concerted state effort to either restore the land or to alleviate widespread agrarian distress, land degradation develops into a continuously evolving downward spiral, where there will still be some winners (in terms of individual incomes) but many losers, creating long-term instability and an overall decline in production.

Policies are needed that look not just at productivity and diversity of cropping systems, but also employment guarantees and social protections in order to ensure that ‘sustainable’ agriculture is sustainable for all.

Political will is needed to work in favour of the most marginalised; they face the brunt of unsustainable policies and environmental challenges.

‘Political will and farmers’ skill are two major determinants of future of agricultural progress.’

Prof M S Swaminathan



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