

Impact of COVID -19 on local agriculture and farm based livelihoods in Resilience project sites, Assam

The Covid 19 has inadvertently impacted the farming and farmers livelihoods in a negative way. The farmers in Golaghat and Sivasagar field sites are facing the following major problems

1. Breakdown in the supply chain and access to markets
2. Unemployment for daily wage earners and agriculture labourers and
3. Lack of access to inputs

The crops/enterprise that are most affected are given below:

No.	District	Crops/Enterprise affected
1	Golaghat	Tomato, Capsicum, Pumpkin, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Brinjal, Chilli, Tea, Poultry - Broilers
2	Sivasagar	Capsicum, Other specify, Dairy, Poultry - Broilers, Fishery

Breakdown in the supply chain and access to markets:

Tomato: Rabi season crop

In Golaghat district, especially in Gomariguri village, current time is the peak season for tomato harvesting. Almost all the farmers in this area depend largely on their tomato produce. The farmers grow tomato in batches however, most of the farmers have harvested their produce but due to the sudden lockdown the produce has not been marketed. The area has been sealed for few days due to Covid- 19 positive cases increasing. Moreover, due to the positive cases in Merapani region the retailers who were buying the produce from the farmers have refused to make any purchase from the farmers. This has led to distress sale for most of the farmers. Apart from that a large amount of the produce has gone to waste as all farmers in the area produce tomato and hence the demand for it is very low. They do not have local



processing facility and almost the produces were targeted to market as fresh vegetable to near by places.

Capsicum

In the project area, after Tomato the most affected crop is Capsicum. Due to its comparatively high value and demand, farmers in the area produce capsicum and it also serves as one of the main sources of income for most of the farmers. Due to the lockdown and the sudden limitations over market access the produce has been left unpicked in the fields. Though a few farmers have sold their produce in the nearby villages, the price obtained from them is very low and not remunerative at all compared to that obtained when the produce is marketed in the weekly markets or sold to retailers.

Other vegetables:

Apart from tomato and Capsicum, other vegetable such as Pumpkin, Cabbage, Cauliflower, brinjal, Chilli, etc., have been affected due to lockdown. But the effects are not as adverse as that of tomato and capsicum. There are various reasons behind that, most particularly the crops apart from pumpkin have been harvested since the past few months and hence almost



80-90% of the produce has been marketed already. Pumpkin on the other hand due to its longer shelf life is in storage and farmers can have some time to sell their produce.

Tea Husbandry

Golaghat area has quite a few number of small tea growers. Due lockdown the growers are unable to sell their harvest as the vehicle entry has been restricted and hence they have now stopped plucking new leaves. The new leaves are thus plucked and thrown away or left as such resulting in heavy loss (around 9000-10000 rupees per day)to the growers. Here agriculture workers and family farmers are losing the employment in this shut down period.

Dairy

Apart from the agriculture goods, a large sum of the daily income is obtained from dairy produce especially in Sivasagar area where from Ujoni Bhorolua the milk production of almost all household is marketed through the Rupohi Dugdha Co-operative society. Apart from that they also produce several dairy products under the same cooperative. Now due to the lockdown, the vehicles have been restricted and hence the farmers are facing difficulty in selling and their daily income around 240-300 rupees daily has been greatly affected by this.

Poultry

Farmers especially involved in broiler production have witnessed a drastic fall in price of chicken over the last month. Due to decrease in demand the farmers are now selling their produce at a much lower rate than normal.



Unemployment for daily wage earners and agriculture labours:

The lockdown has had its most severe affect on the daily wage earners. Apart from working in their own fields a lot of farmers' work as temporary hired labourers, due to the lockdown and the restrictions in movement they are now unable to go for their daily work which has affected many households. Moreover, due to the decreasing demand activities such a harvesting, plucking of tea leaves has been stopped and hence it is difficult to find work even in the local areas. Especially the women who were earning through plucking leaves in the nearby garden have no source of income

these days. In the Sivasagar area the farmers work in the nearby brick manufacturing unit, but due its shut down there has been lot of problem of unemployment faced by almost all the farmers.

Unavailability of inputs

As the input shops have been completely closed down, the farmers have been facing difficulties to access fertilizers and pesticides. As a result, the affected crops are left untreated

in most areas. Apart from this, the poultry farms are facing problem of unavailability of proper feed due to which a lot of the farms are selling off the available items at very low cost.

Lack of Access to farm machinery: In Sivasagar area, as it is severely affected by flood many farmers go for cultivation of Bao (deep water) rice but this year due to the unavailability of equipments and machinery, the farmers have not started any field operations so far.

Lack of access to input: In Sivasagar area particularly households in Ujoni Bhorolua and nearby villages are actively engaged in fish farming, the farmers generally buy the spawns during this season but this year due to the lockdown they are not able to procure the spawns from the hatchery and hence there are many chances that the production will be delayed or may not be possible if they are not available by June.

Actions taken by MSSRF:

The Village Knowledge Centres (VKCs) established under the RESILIENCE project is conducting ICT based programmes for the benefit of the men and women farmers during this lockdown period of total shutdown as well as necessity to maintain the physical distance.

The mobile-based audio advisories, farmers helpline services and phone-in programme are helping the men and women farmers to get timely advisories and extension services related to pest, disease and nutrient management, cultivation practices, Government guidelines from their home through mobile technology.

Initiatives taken by the Government

- Few farmers have started selling their produce in the nearby villages on their own
- Farmers in the Sivasagar area have got into contact with the Agriculture department and the army officials and have sold their produce. Similarly in Golaghat region farmers have contacted the BDO of the region and sold their produce.

Recommendations:

- Government should take adequate measure to ensure that the harvested produce is procured from the farmers.
- Steps should be taken to make the produce available to every household, though government has already made available vehicles carrying vegetables in all areas it can be linked with the local farmers.