

PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES TOWARDS AGRIPRENEURSHIP: A RELATIVE IMPORTANCE INDEX ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Agripreneurship in organic farming started in Mizoram since 1996. Since then, the government is taking a number of initiatives, starting with educating the entrepreneurs, running motivational campaigns, providing training, giving finance, arranging for raw materials, managing technologies, extending marketing help, granting subsidies, etc., in order to give a boost to entrepreneurship development in different parts of the country. However, these initiatives have hardly reached all the areas of Mizoram, and so agribusiness conditions are still very backward, although there are high potentials for development. There seems to be many challenges and hindrances which work as barriers in the development of entrepreneurial endeavour in the agripreneurship in organic farming especially in the state of Mizoram. Thus, this paper analyses problems and challenges of Agripreneurs from six (6) districts in Mizoram which mainly emphasized to understand the constraints of Farmers Producer Organisation, Villages within FPO's and district wise in Mizoram.

Keywords: Agripreneurship, entrepreneurship, organic farming, farmer producer organization

I. Introduction

Agripreneurship and entrepreneurship are frequently used in the context of education, and small business formation in agriculture. It can be said that agripreneurship is synonymous with entrepreneurship in agriculture and it refers to the agribusiness establishment in the agriculture and allied sectors. Dollinger (2003) explains entrepreneurship in agriculture as the creation of innovative economic organization for the purpose of growth or gain under conditions of risk and uncertainty. Agripreneurship is not only employment plan that can lead to self abundance of the rural farmers; its development through training is a main component of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) etc., especially the agripreneurs. This leads towards improved performance of every individual that can contribute to employment opportunity, reduction in poverty and human resource development. Agripreneurship is greatly influenced mainly by the economic situation, culture and education (Singh, 2013). The transaction may involve either an input of a product or service and encompassing items such as productive resources, agricultural commodities, facilitative

services (Lokanadhan et al., 2009).

Agripreneurship is the profitable marriage of agriculture with entrepreneurship. Agripreneurship turns the farm into an agribusiness (Bairwa et al., 2014). Agripreneurship also relates to entrepreneurship in agriculture. Agripreneur can also be defined as an entrepreneur whose main business is agriculture or agriculture-related. It is also generally defined as sustainable, community-oriented, directly-marketed agriculture. Sustainable agriculture denotes a holistic, systems oriented approach to farming that focuses on the interrelationships of social, economic, and environmental processes (Uplaonkar & Birada, 2015).

An agripreneur is someone who undertakes a variety of activities in agriculture and its allied sectors. Agripreneur may start an agro business, change a business direction, acquire a business or maybe involved in innovatory activity of value addition. They are influenced by three factors such as the economic, culture and education of the country (Ravindra & Sweta, 2015). Agripreneurs are business-minded entrepreneurs combining their passion for agriculture with entrepreneurship. They come from all walks of life and come from any age group. Agripreneurs do not necessarily need to be farmers to add value to the food that farmers produce; some do this through processing or packaging. Agripreneurs do not necessarily act alone; they can join hands with others in order to create a successful value chain. Due to increasing unemployment and poverty in rural areas and the slow growth of agriculture, entrepreneurship in agriculture, food processing, food storage and handling units for increasing production and profitability is extremely required (Babu, 2015).

2. Problems and Challenges of Agripreneurship

This paper analyses the problems and challenges of Agripreneurs from six (6) districts in Mizoram. It is mainly emphasized to understand the constraints of Farmers Producer Organisation, Villages within FPO's and district wise in Mizoram. Some of the prominent issues and challenges are derived from the study of Bodunrin (2014) viz. illiteracy, lack of infrastructure, lack of processing centre, lack of government supports, lack of training, lack of capital, Lack of technological awareness and skills, society obligations, lack of family supports, work life imbalance, lack of finance, lack of market support, lack of skilled labour, lack of quality and treated seeds, lack of irrigation, high competition for start ups, unpredictable weather, absence of incubation centre for start ups, middlemen problems, lack of unity among Agripreneurs. An analysis is performed to highlight the challenges encountered by Agripreneurs taking up the agripreneurship of organic crops in the study area.

3. Significance of the Study

Mizoram economy is primarily based on the agriculture sector, and agribusiness played a substantial role in the growth of the state. Agri-entrepreneurship, compared to other sectors, is significantly more successful at eradicating poverty. As crop productivity raises poverty declines, and food prices for the impoverished drop. A system-oriented farming method that emphasizes the interdependencies of social, economic, and environmental processes is known as sustainable agriculture. Transform the farm into an agribusiness by combining the advantages of entrepreneurship and agriculture. This relationship between business and agriculture supports agripreneurs who find markets, innovate, and create new ways to meet needs. Therefore, the study is essential as it is based on ground-level dealing with agripreneurs.

In short, this study has the following significance:

- (i) It brings out the present status of agripreneurship in Mizoram. This can be supportive for government involvements and for entrepreneur to start their own enterprises in agriculture and its allied sectors;
- (ii) It explores the challenges and hindrances which work as barriers in the development of entrepreneurial endeavour in the agripreneurship in organic farming; and

(iii) The outcome of the study is expected to promote issues like what type of interventions is required for the government for development of agripreneurship, and also what changes are essential to hasten its developmental processes.

3. Methodology

This study is a mix method study which is both descriptive and empirical in nature, and is mainly based on primary data collected from six (6) selected districts, i.e., Aizawl, Lunglei, Champhai, Kolasib, Serchhip, and Mamit districts. As of 2019, there are 14 FPOs and FPCs under Mission Organic Mizoram (MOM). The total number of farmers and agripreneurs who are enrolled under Mission Organic Mizoram was 5803 in 2017–2018. The study attempts to cover at least 10% of agripreneurs from different FPOs, including 42 agripreneurs from the Farmers Producer Organization/Farmer Producer Centre (FPO/FPC), totalling 588 respondents. But few respondents submitted incomplete questionnaires; therefore, 551 respondents were collected using a simple random sampling method for the study.

The survey includes interactions with the agripreneurs and the concerned person(s), including government officials. The study considered only those agripreneurs who had been running agribusiness successfully for the past 3 years. The actual selection is difficult because there are some agripreneurs that are not functioning at the time of study. At the same time, every possible effort was made to represent all the clusters of the selected organic crops while selecting the respondent agripreneurs under a simple random sampling method.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

In this section, an attempt was made to study and understand the demographic profile of the respondents which are presented below in the following table 1 including variables such as age of the agripreneurs, educational qualifications, agripreneurship as main occupation, marital status and monthly income of the agripreneurs.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Category	Total No	Percentage
Age of the Agripreneurs	Below 20	149	27.04
	21 to 30	269	48.82
	31 to 40	72	13.07
	41 to 50	31	5.63
	50 above	27	4.36
	Total	551	100
Educational Qualifications	Illiterate	21	3.8
	Literate	359	65.2
	HSLC	82	14.9
	HSSLC	65	11.8
	Graduate	23	4.2
	Postgraduate	1	0.2
	Total	551	100
Agripreneurship as Main Occupation	Yes	477	86.6
	No	74	13.4
	Total	551	100
	Married	457	82.9
	Unmarried	49	8.9

Marital Status	Widowed	35	6.4
	Divorced	10	1.8
	Total	551	100
Monthly Income	Less than 50,000	452	82
	50,000 – 1,00,000	76	13.8
	1,00,000 – 1,50,000	10	1.8
	Above 1,50,000	13	2.4
	Total	551	100

Source: Computed from primary data

The first part of Table 1 determines the age group of the respondents examined based on the various categories. An analysis of the results indicates that majority of the respondents i.e. 269 (48.82 %) were belonging to the age group 21 – 30 yrs followed by below 20 yrs, 31 – 40 yrs, 41- 50 yrs and over 50 yrs respectively.

The background of farmers' education is classified in the form of illiterate, literate, High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC), Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC), Undergraduate and Postgraduate. An analysis of the results indicates that majority of the respondents 359 (65.2 %) are literate. Overall, the data suggests that education qualification may not be a major factor influencing agripreneurship in these districts, as the majority of agripreneurs are literate without formal education or have completed up to HSLC. However, the low proportion of agripreneurs with higher education qualifications may suggest that there is potential for greater engagement of educated agripreneurs in agripreneurship.

The above table 1 shows the distribution of agripreneurs' main occupation based on whether they are engaged in agriculture entrepreneurship or not, across different districts. Across all districts, 477 (86.6 percent) agripreneurs have agriculture entrepreneurship as their main occupation, while only 74 (13.4 percent) agripreneurs choose other occupations. This suggests that agriculture entrepreneurship is a major occupation particularly in the districts of Aizawl, Lunglei, Champhai, Serchhip, Mamit and Kolasib.

The details of respondents' marital status across all districts are highlighted and classified as - Married, Unmarried, Widowed and Divorced. The majority of agripreneurs in all districts are Married, comprising 457 (82.9 percent) of the total farmers. The percentage of Unmarried agripreneurs is 35 (8.9 percent). Widowed agripreneurs is 35 (6.4 percent), and Divorced agripreneurs is 10 (1.8 percent). Overall outcomes, table 4.6 shows that marriage is the dominant marital status in all districts, with unmarried agripreneurs being the second largest group.

Moreover, the monthly income of agripreneurs is categorised into four (4) - Less than Rs 50000.00, Rs 50000.00 to Rs 100000.00, Rs 100000.00 to Rs 150000.00, and Rs 150000.00 above. The income of agripreneur families includes income from all sources. The majority of agripreneurs in each district have a monthly income less than Rs. 50,000, followed by Rs 50,000 – Rs 1,00,000, above Rs 1,50,000 and Rs 1,00,000 – Rs 1,50,000 respectively.

4.2. Mean, Standard Deviation, Percentage and Level of Agreement

The problems and challenges of agripreneurs while taking up enterprises were derived from previous researches and the questions were structured using 5 points Likert Scale. Adequate numbers of data are collected from the respondents totaling to 551 respondents. The collected data are codified, tabulated, and finally administered for the analysis. The data were first analyzed by using mean, standard frequency and percentage analysis where the level of agreement for each statement was presented using percentage analysis as below:

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation, Percentage

Sl. No	Reasons	M	St. D	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Level
1	Illiteracy	1.97	0.90	165 (30)	294 (53.36)	42 (7.62)	42 (7.62)	8 (1.45)	Disagree
2	Lack of Infrastructure	3.57	0.98	9 (1.63)	101 (18.33)	77 (13.97)	292 (53)	72 (13.08)	Agree
3	Absent of processing unit	3.79	0.90	8 (1.45)	52 (9.44)	87 (15.79)	302 (54.81)	102 (18.33)	Agree
4	Lack of Government Supports	3.95	0.79	5 (0.90)	30 (5.44)	49 (8.89)	364 (66.06)	103 (18.69)	Agree
5	Lack of Training	3.58	0.98	12 (2)	87 (16)	91 (17)	287 (52)	74 (13)	Agree
6	Limited capital investment	3.94	0.82	7 (1.27)	39 (7.08)	44 (7.99)	348 (63.16)	113 (20.51)	Agree
7	Lack of technological awareness & Skills	3.32	0.99	14 (2.54)	124 (22.50)	128 (23.23)	238 (43.19)	47 (8.53)	Agree
8	Society obligation	2.75	1.02	37 (6.72)	137 (24.86)	129 (23.41)	61 (11.07)	27 (4.90)	Disagree
9	Non-cooperation from family	2.27	0.87	66 (11.98)	346 (62.79)	79 (14.34)	45 (8.175)	15 (6.07)	Disagree
10	Work imbalance	2.74	1.02	42 (7.62)	255 (46.28)	108 (19.60)	126 (22.87)	30 (5.44)	Disagree
11	Lack of finance	3.57	1.08	9 (1.63)	128 (23.23)	54 (9.80)	259 (47)	101 (18.33)	Agree
12	Lack of market support	3.74	0.99	13 (2.36)	71 (12.89)	72 (13.07)	284 (51.54)	111 (20.14)	Agree
13	Lack of skilled labour	3.24	1.01	10 (1.81)	111 (20.15)	87 (15.79)	264 (47.91)	79 (14.34)	Agree
14	Lack of quality/Treated seeds	2.84	0.82	7 (1.27)	49 (8.89)	32 (5.81)	340 (61.71)	128 (23.23)	Agree
15	Lack of irrigation	4.00	0.88	3 (0.54)	52 (9.44)	35 (6.35)	307 (55.72)	153 (27.77)	Agree
16	High market competition for start-up	3.37	1.02	15 (2.72)	131 (23.77)	92 (16.70)	265 (48.09)	48 (8.71)	Agree
17	Unpredictable weather & Climate	3.47	0.98	12 (2.18)	106 (19.24)	99 (17.97)	277 (50.27)	57 (10.34)	Agree
18	Absence of incubation for start-up	3.52	0.95	12 (2.18)	94 (17.06)	89 (16.15)	304 (55.17)	52 (9.44)	Agree
19	Problem from middlemen	3.38	1.07	22 (2.18)	128 (23.23)	77 (13.97)	267 (48.46)	57 (10.34)	Agree
20	Lack of unity among agripreneurs	3.35	1.03	18 (3.45)	131 (23.77)	82 (14.88)	274 (49.73)	46 (8.35)	Agree

Source: Computed from the primary data

Note: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree . St. D = Standard Deviation, M = Mean

Table 2 showcases the mean value, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, and level of respondents' agreement on problems and challenges variables in the study area. The analysis result

indicates the agreement variables with the 20 items, and the construct-level impact was from a point scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree. The study determined that the respondents agreement level of 16 items was found to agree on problems and challenges encounter in taking up agripreneurship, namely, item #2 (M = 3.57, StD = 0.98). 'Lack of infrastructure', item # 3 (M = 3.79, St.D = 0.90) 'Absence of processing unit', item # 4 (M = 3.97, Std. = 0.79) 'Lack of Government support', item # 5 (M = 3.58, Std. = 0.98) 'Lack of training', item #6 (M = 3.94, Std. = 0.82) 'Limited capital investment', item # 7 (M = 3.32, StD = 0.99) 'Lack of technological awareness and skills', item # 11 (M = 3.57, Std. = 1.08) 'Lack of finance' item # 12 (M = 3.74, StD = 0.99) 'Lack of market support', item # 13 (M = 3.24, Std. = 1.01) 'Lack of skill labor', item # 14 (M = 2.84, Std. = 0.82) 'Lack of quality/treated seeds', item # 15 (M = 4.00, Std. = 0.88) 'Lack of proper irrigation', item # 16 (M = 3.37, Std. = 1.02); 'High market competition for start-ups', item # 17 (M = 3.47, Std. = 0.98) 'Unpredictable weather and climate', item # 18 (M = 3.52, Std. = 0.95) 'Absence of incubation for start-ups', item # 19 (M = 3.38, Std. = 1.07) 'Competition from middlemen', and item # 20 (M = 3.35, Std. = 1.03) 'Lack of unity amongst agripreneurs'.

The study also highlights the existence of 4 items of problems and prospects creation impact in which respondents disagree on the variables such as item #1 (M = 1.97, Std. = 0.90) 'Illiteracy factors', item # 8 (M = 2.75, Std. = 1.02) 'Society obligations', item # 9 (M = 2.27, Std. = 0.87) 'Non-cooperation from family', and item #10 (M = 2.14, Std. = 1.02) 'Work-life imbalance. The study also reveals that none of the respondents agreement levels are found at the levels of strongly agree, neutral, or strongly disagree, meaning that respondents are moderately in agreement on these variables.

4.3. Relative Important Index

This study uses the Relative Importance Index (RII) method to identify and quantify the problems and challenges encountering while taking up Agripreneurship in six (6) district of Mizoram. There are 551 responders in total, the necessary information was gathered, tallied, and analyzed as follows:

$$RII = \frac{5n_5 + 4n_4 + 3n_3 + 2n_2 + n_1}{A * N}$$

Where,

n_5 = Number of respondent for Very Important

n_4 = Number of respondent for Important

n_3 = Number of respondent for Neutral

n_2 = Number of respondent for not important

n_1 = Number of respondent for Not at all Important

A = Highest weight

N = Total No. of Respondents

RII = Relative Important Index

Table 3: Relative Importance Index (RII) Ranking on Problems and Prospects in Taking up Agripreneurship

Variables	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total No.	A * N	RII	Rank
Lack of irrigation	3	104	105	1228	765	2205	2755	0.800	1
Lack of quality/treated seeds	7	98	96	1360	640	2201	2755	0.799	2
Lack of Government Supports	5	60	147	1456	515	2183	2755	0.792	3

Limited capital investment	7	78	132	1392	565	2174	2755	0.789	4
Absence of processing unit	8	104	261	1208	510	2091	2755	0.759	5
Lack of market support	13	142	216	1136	555	2062	2755	0.748	6
Lack of Training	12	174	273	1148	370	1977	2755	0.718	7
Lack of Infrastructure	9	202	231	1168	360	1970	2755	0.715	8
Lack of finance	9	256	162	1036	505	1968	2755	0.714	9
Lack of skilled labour	10	222	261	1056	395	1944	2755	0.706	10
Absence of incubation for start-up	12	188	267	1216	260	1943	2755	0.705	11
Unpredictable weather & Climate	12	212	297	1108	285	1914	2755	0.695	12
Problem from middlemen	22	256	231	1068	285	1862	2755	0.676	13
High market competition for start-up	15	262	276	1060	240	1853	2755	0.673	14
Lack of unity among agripreneurs	18	262	246	1096	230	1852	2755	0.672	15
Lack of technological awareness & Skills	14	248	384	952	235	1833	2755	0.665	16
Work imbalance	42	510	324	504	150	1530	2755	0.555	17
Non-cooperation from family	66	692	237	180	75	1250	2755	0.454	18
Illiteracy	165	588	126	168	40	1087	2755	0.395	19
Society obligation	37	274	387	244	135	1077	2755	0.391	20

Source: Computed from the primary data

Table 3 displays the Relative Importance Index (RII) along with the appropriate importance level and ranking. The following rating criteria were adopted on a 5-point Likert scale according to level of significance: It demonstrates that the sustainable criteria were more significant the higher the RII value, and vice versa. The analysis result demonstrates the agreement on variable measures and the construct-level impact, which ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. On the important scale of analysis of problems and challenges faced in an agripreneurship, lack of irrigation measure of parameter is found to have the highest significance level, ranking 1 with a RII value of 0.800, followed by lack of quality/treated seeds, which ranked second with a RII value of 0.799. The remaining factors were ranked as follows: Lack of government supports at rank 3 (RII = 0.792), limited capital investment at rank 4 (RII = 0.789), absence of processing unit at rank 5 (RII=0.759), lack of market support at 6th rank (RII = 0.748); lack of training at 7th rank (RII = 0.718); lack of infrastructure place in a 8th rank (RII = 0.715), lack of finance at rank 9th (RII = 0.714), lack of skilled labour at 10th rank (RII = 0.706); absence of

incubation for start up at 11th rank (RII = 0.705), unpredictable weather and climate at 12th rank (RII = 0.695), problem from middlemen at 13th Rank (RII= 0.676), high market competition for start up at 14th Rank (RII= 0.673), Lack of unity among agripreneurs at 15th Rank (RII= 0.672), Lack of technological awareness & Skills at 16th Rank (RII= 0.665), Work imbalance at 17th Rank (RII= 0.555), Non-cooperation from family at 18th Rank (RII= 0.454), Illiteracy at 19th Rank (RII= 0.395) and Society obligation at 20th Rank (RII= 0.391) have a significance roles in taking agriprenership in the Mizoram.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

Agripreneurs in Mizoram has encountered a series of problems and challenges in the pursuit of agriprenership. According to the respondents' ranking, the most important problem that needs immediate action is the 'lack of proper irrigation' which hampers the productivity and harvest quality of the farmers. It is imperative for the government to proactively initiate the installation of effective irrigation system for the agripreneurs in Mizoram. The concerned department or agency should be assigned the responsibility of identifying the optimal irrigation method for organic crops in Mizoram with government-backed support for proper installation. Moreover, lack of quality/treated seeds has been the second most important problems for organic cultivation, according to the respondents ranking. The relatively high prices of good quality seeds often make them inaccessible for many agripreneurs. In addressing this issue, the government should engage with the suppliers of good quality seeds and take the initiative to provide these seeds at subsidized rate for the agripreneurs in Mizoram.

Furthermore, the absence of unity among agripreneurs frequently hinders the development of agriprenership in organic crops. Therefore, the Farmer Producer Organization should take measures to establish a positive work atmosphere for all the agripreneur members. It is imperative to maintain peace and harmony in such a way that the incorrect practices must be corrected while the rewarding the right practices throughout the organization. Agripreneurs frequently overlook the terms and conditions agreed upon for selling their produce with processors or reputable companies. When offered immediate cash by businessmen directly, they tend to withdraw from the established agreements. Therefore, it is imperative for Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to take proactive measures in monitoring the agreements between agripreneurs and organizations. They should ensure that agripreneurs do not withdraw from any agreement without the consent of the FPO.

Finally, Agripreneurs who are dealing with specific organic crops are advised to patiently carry out the organic crop cultivation until harvesting. Additionally, they should approach concerned authorities and agencies for any assistance required. They are encouraged to collaborate closely with the FPO to which they belong. It is essential for them to adhere to the rules and essential guidelines provided by the FPO in terms of agreement, market, fixed rate, etc. Agripreneurs are suggested to give due attention to all government programmes and training sessions, attending them regularly for the successful organic cultivation practices. Moreover, it is crucial that the training must be attended by the concerned agripreneur personally, rather than another family member.

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