

COVID-19: Impact-Losses, Reboot-Gain and Agriculture

Abstract

The emerging infectious diseases are increasing in frequency exerting significant impact on human health and severely threatening global economy. Now at present, the whole globe is in the grip of Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic which has set the clock backwards on the developmental progress of several nations including India and pause the global economy owing to repeated lockdowns. The agricultural sector appeared as positive element in the GDP print beside various challenges faced by this sector especially labour shortage, transportation, marketing, etc. Thus, government should need to reframe policies related to agriculture as this sector is highly important and much affected due to any outbreak but, never got much attention. Government should strengthen transportation facilities, storage and warehousing, marketing channels, etc. and connect every farmer of each corner together to provide precise prediction of crop productivity and consumption and most importantly government should take initiative to sell farmers commodities directly to consumers even through online mode also.

The incidence of Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic clearly indicating that how highly vulnerable we are to viral threats. As we know, our world is globally connected and any emerging threat in one part of the world is a threat not only to a single country but to everyone everywhere. Emerging infectious diseases (EIDs) are increasing in frequency, posing a significant threat to global economies and public health (Jones et al., 2008; Pike et al., 2014). The Infectious diseases account for a quarter to a third of mortality rate. These diseases usually become pandemic and cross the borders of different countries and severely threaten economic and regional stability as evident by HIV/AIDS, 2009 H1N1 influenza, H5N1, SARS epidemics and pandemics, Ebola outbreak (Verikios et al., 2011) and now COVID-19.

The last outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 caused significant disruption and economic loss worldwide and is estimated to have reduced worldwide GDP by USD 40 billion in 2003 (McKibbin, 2004). The 1994 plague outbreak in Surat, India cause economic loss of USD 2 billion (Brahmbhatt and Dutta, 2008). Similarly, Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak in West Africa drastically drop the GDP growth to 0.5% in Guinea, which had otherwise been expected near about 4.5% before the emergence of Ebola crisis. In Liberia and Sierra Leone countries, GDP growth fell to more than half from 5.9 - 2.2% and 11.3 - 4.0%, respectively due to Ebola outbreak. Above disease outbreaks caused severe disruptions affecting all economic sectors including agriculture. Similarly, Avian influenza outbreaks also

affected different economic sectors with major loss to poultry sector (Brahmbhatt, 2005). As a whole, any disease outbreak affects the agriculture sector severely due to labour scarcity, which in turn affects cropping areas and yields ultimately resulting in reduced food production and food insecurity (FAO, 2003).

Now at present, the whole globe is in the grip of Corona virus (COVID-19). A lockdown had been announced in almost every country including developed and developing nations. In some countries re-lockdown has been announced keeping in view the second wave and new strain of Corona virus. Earlier (March-May 2020), due to lockdown all factories, markets, shops and places of worship were closed, most public transport were suspended and construction work halted, as many countries including India asked its citizens to stay at home and practice social distancing. As a result of rigorous travel restrictions and shutting down of non-essential activities including those of air polluting sectors, air quality improvement had been noted in many towns and cities across the globe. Data depicted that the main cities were recorded much lower levels of harmful microscopic particulate matter known as PM 2.5 and of nitrogen dioxide, which is released by vehicles and power plants (Anonymous, 2020a).

With the humans busy isolating and quarantining themselves, the wild animals were reported roaming in the city streets with the major example of 'Spotted Malabar Civet', a critically endangered mammal not seen until 1990s resurfaces for the first time in Calicut town indicating, mother earth was rebooting (Anonymous, 2020b). The wild animals otherwise not roam freely or move in cities because of busy roads of bustling cities and metropolitan areas. Many examples had been appeared from different corners of the globe. Perhaps, because of drastic drop in air pollution level (cleaner air), negligible traffic and factories that were not working owing to lockdown and curfew imposed to check the spread of Corona virus (COVID-19), the residents saw the 'snow-clad Himalayan ranges' from their rooftops with naked eyes lies at a distance of 213 kilometers from Jalandhar city of India (Anonymous, 2020c). The people said they had seen this for the first time in their lives. The Himalayan mountain (Dhauladhar) range is around 200 km away from Jalandhar and has an elevation between 3,500 - 6,000 metres.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 every citizen were locked at home with their family members. The pandemic and associated lockdown has not only caused enormous distress to the millions of poor and marginal farmers for saving their crops and livestock, but also influenced the overall poultry, dairy and livestock production systems and associated value chains, nutrition and health care and labour availability (Biswal et al., 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak had coincided with crucial stages of *Rabi* season crops especially wheat and oilseeds. Due to lockdown and curfew in many Indian states, farmers' movement to their respective fields had become very much limited. For instances farmers were feeding strawberries to livestock due to

lockdown, otherwise demand for such premium agriculture produce is very high in summer due to erratic supply chain (Anonymous, 2020d). Several farmers in Indian States especially Karnataka were facing trying times due to snapping of the supply chain that had forced them to dump their produce unable to find the means to transport them to the markets causing suicide by the farmers (Anonymous, 2020e).

The impact of COVID-19 had not only pause the global economy but, set the clock backwards on the developmental progress of several nations including India (Statista Research Department, 2020). In India, during lockdown and unlock period, agriculture sector has been emerged as the only saviour giving hope for future and registered a 3.4% GDP growth (Anonymous, 2020f). The positive agricultural output is the only positive element in the GDP print. Thus, agriculture sector has beaten pandemic as per the latest GDP figures. In the wake of COVID-19, the Govt. is making some policies and looking to strengthen and even strengthened the medical facilities in the country. Parallel to this, Government should also need to reframe policies related to agriculture as this sector is highly important and much affected due to any outbreak but never got much attention. From COVID-19, take away lesson is to connect every farmer of India together to provide precise prediction of crop productivity and consumption and most importantly government should take initiative to sell farmers commodities directly to consumers through online mode (Anonymous, 2020g). So, Govt. needs to understand the channel of agriculture and reframe policies accordingly as food is the only mean of survival during any outbreak. Secondly, everyone was afraid of purchasing vegetables from outside market because of contagious infectious disease COVID-19. So, farmers at least those have land, need to grow at least their daily need vegetable, etc. In this scenario, kitchen gardening holds a huge potential in future and may bring a revolution in this area.

Conclusion

In COVID-19 situation, agricultural sector has emerged as positive element for GDP beside various challenges faced especially labour shortage, transportation, marketing, etc. The government need to strengthen agricultural sector and connect every farmers to provide precise prediction of crop productivity and consumption vis a vis strengthening of transportation storage and warehousing, marketing facilities to ensure least loss of the produce and income of the farmers.

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