

Horticulture as a Source of Economic Development in North-East India

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Abstract – Indian economy has been based on agriculture for a long time but as returns from traditional agriculture wane, it is necessary to foray into associated activities like fruit and vegetable growing, flower growing etc. to augment farm incomes. The North East region of the country has lagged in the process of economic development as compared to other parts. Horticulture has the potential to energize the process of economic development in the region and ensure economic development of the seven states of NE India. The article attempts to analyze the importance of horticulture for the development of the region while emphasizing the role of an important scheme Horticulture Mission for North East & Himalayan States for the purpose.

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INTRODUCTION

Horticulture has emerged as an important agricultural activity over the years which have provided assurance of increased incomes to the flagging agricultural sector of the economy. Nearly a third of India's agricultural GDP comes from horticulture sector. Also, the nutritional benefits of consumption of more fruits and vegetables that can be garnered throughout the year are an added plus point for a populous country like India where a huge proportion of the population is mal-nourished and ill-fed. As regards exports also, horticultural products command an important space in the agricultural export basket, so there has been focus on development of horticulture in the country over the last few years.

Though the country embarked on a path of planned development right after independence, various regions and sectors have continued to lag behind. The North Eastern (NE) states of India namely Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, popularly called the Seven Sisters, have suffered from slow economic development over the years. However, these North Eastern states as well as the Himalayan hilly regions have demonstrated potential for horticulture and floriculture. Recognising the geographical advantages and natural potential of the region, various targeted programmes pertaining to horticulture have been initiated in these two areas during the last three decades with encouraging results. The horticulture and plantation sector have allowed for crop diversification leading to increased farm incomes as well as nutritional security in the NE region.

The objective of study is to identify the role of horticulture as a source of economic development of NE India. For the purpose of study, secondary data in

the form of published government reports has been utilized. Care has been taken to analyse the secondary data as per the requirement of topic under study and tables have been formulated from meta-data with utmost care.

DEFINITION OF HORTICULTURE

The Planning Commission Working Group on Horticultural crops, plantation crops and organic farming for the XIth Five Year Plan defined 'Horticulture' as the "science of growing and management of fruits, vegetables including tubers, ornamental, aromatic & medicinal crops, spices, plantation crops and their processing, value addition and marketing".¹ Further mushroom growing, bamboo and beekeeping have also been included within horticulture. The International Society for Horticultural Science has provided a very inclusive definition by considering fruits of tree, bush and perennial vines; nuts from tree and perennial bush; vegetables, aromatic and medicinal foliage seeds and roots; cut flowers, potted ornamental plants and bedding plants; plants and grasses propagated in nurseries for landscaping, fruit orchards and other crop production units; honey; and cultivated or gathered mushrooms as horticultural crops.²

Status of Horticulture in North East India

Horticulture has emerged as an important economic activity indifferent parts of the country. For the NE region it holds special significance as seen from the discussion below.

Table 1: Change in Proportion of horticulture Crops, Area, Production, Productivity in North Eastern States (2004-05 to 2014-15)

States	Proportion of Horticulture crops to GCA		Percentage change in area 2004-05 to 2014-15	Percentage change in production 2004-05 to 2014-15	Percentage change in productivity 2004-05 to 2014-15
	2004-05	2014-15			
Assam	9.83	15.67	67.0	109.99	25.0
Tripura	25.52	29.40	97.7	88.61	-4.5
Meghalaya	25.56	36.35	83.3	112.01	14.9
Nagaland	6.92	18.20	246.2	503.47	97.7
Manipur	27.31	25.33	49.1	99.68	33.0
Arunachal Pradesh	29.10	35.79	44.3	200.8	104.7
Mizoram	29.99	96.55	382.3	1126.46	152.6

Source: Table 2.1 (b): Horticulture area density before and after NIMHMNEH, Table 2.1(c): Percentage change in Aggregated area, production and productivity of Horticultural crops between 2004-05 and 2014-15

Table 1 shows the change in proportion of area devoted to horticultural crops compared to Gross Cropped Area (GCA) in the seven states from 2004-05 to 2014-15. As can be seen, all seven states have shown an increase in the cultivation of horticultural crops. Further the increase in area cultivated has shown tremendous increase in case of Nagaland (246%) and Mizoram (382%), though remaining states have also shown an increase in the last ten years.

The last two columns of Table 1 show the change in production and crop productivity over the ten-year period. Overall production has increased in all seven states and productivity has also tended to increase except for Tripura. States like Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland have nearly 100 percent increase in productivity and the increase in total production of horticultural crops is also high in these states.

In terms of total value of production, it is seen that there has been an increase in all seven states. From Table 2, it is evident that shifting to Horticulture has been profitable to the growers as they have been able to realise higher value of produce. While Assam and Meghalaya show a moderate increase in total returns from horticulture, the remaining states have shown a huge increment in 2013-14 in the value of product over that of 2004-05

Table 2: Gross value of horticultural production in North Eastern States (2004-05, 2013-14)

States	GVP (2004-05) (Rs in Crore)	GVP (2013-14) (Rs in Crore)	% Change
Assam	10730	17443	62.56
Tripura	1308	2801	114.18
Meghalaya	888	1625	83.12
Nagaland	332	1943	484.53
Manipur	656	1913	191.47
Arunachal Pradesh	746	2707	262.76
Mizoram	148	1008	579.56

Source: Table 2.1 (i): Gross Value of Horticultural Production

Government Initiatives for promoting Horticulture in NE India

The central as well as state governments have taken a number of steps for promoting alternative agricultural practices in their respective spheres of action. As clearly exhibited over the years, traditional agriculture does not have the capacity to increase farmers' incomes continuously. The adoption of allied agricultural activities such as bee keeping, floriculture, horticulture, mushroom growing etc., have led to increasing incomes for the farmers everywhere. Also, these activities help provide employment to rural workers who are forced to suffer due to the seasonal nature of agricultural work. Horticultural activities have another benefit in the form of socio-economic emancipation of women as it has been observed that mostly women have taken to growing fruits and vegetables in or around their homes.

In 2001-02 a central scheme on Technology Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture in North Eastern region including Sikkim was launched. Later in 2003-04, the scheme was extended to the states of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.³ In 2010-11, the scheme was rechristened as Horticulture Mission for North East and Himalayan states. While various schemes have been launched for promotion of horticulture over the years, during the Twelfth Plan, the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), a centrally sponsored scheme for the growth of the horticulture sector in the country subsumed a number of sub-schemes focusing on different regions of the country. Thus, National Horticulture Board (NHB), National Bamboo Mission (NBM) are in all states and union territories, Coconut Development Board (CDB) is for areas where coconut is grown. National Horticulture Mission (NHM) is for all state and union territories except North East and Himalayan region which has the Horticulture Mission for North East & Himalayan States (HMNEH) while Central Institute of Horticulture (CIH) focuses on human resource development and capacity building in the NE states.⁴ Of these, HMNEH is of special importance to the NE states and continues to play a pivotal role in economic development of the Seven Sisters. HMNEH focuses on research, production and productivity improvement activities, post-harvest management, marketing & exports, and processing of horticultural produce.^[5]

Problems and constraints of horticulture

Horticulture and similar allied agricultural activities like sericulture, animal rearing poultry farming etc., have often been touted as a panacea to economic development. But the firsthand experience of farmers has highlighted a number of concerns that need immediate attention in order to mitigate the hardship of the people. The thrust on Area expansion programmes has often ignored proper backward linkage with supply of quality seeds and planting

materials. Thus, while there has been an increase in area under cultivation, it has not translated into increased productivity and incomes due to the lack of good quality seeds and planting materials, water resources, efficient farming practices etc. Secondly, promotion of capital investment in terms of fertigation, input management and farm mechanisation has been ignored which proved inimical to future development. As rejuvenation of old and senile plantations has not been prioritized, today many plantations are facing low or negative returns. Lack of knowledge and training can also be attributed to the neglect of rejuvenation of old plants as farmers do not have adequate learning. The lack of easily available credit as well as shortage of trained personnel to guide horticulturists is also an important constraint. Infrastructural constraints such as lack of rail and road connectivity over long distances between the production clusters and market centres, absence of efficient marketing of perishables, non-existent transparent system of auction and price discovery are some other problems affecting the potential success of horticulture in the economic development of the NE region.

The people working directly in the field have identified certain problems in the implementation of HMNEH which reduce the effectiveness of the scheme. According to them, several critical areas remain neglected while various government schemes deal with similar components only. Most glaring is the difference between actual market prices and costs incurred as per the scheme leading to greater requirement of subsidy to bridge the gap. Delay in fund flow from Center as well as states affects the working of Self-help groups (SHG) and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPO) working in horticulture.[6]

CONCLUSION

The above discussion highlights that horticulture can prove to be an engine of development for the Northeastern states of India. It has the potential to revitalize the earning of the majorly agricultural communities of the hilly regions while maintaining their traditional lifestyles and simultaneously inviting them in to the folds of modern economic society.

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