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A STUDY ON MONOPOLY PROCUREMENT SYSTEM OF PADDY IN TIRUVARUR DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

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MANJAKKUDI

ABSTRACT

Indian economy is primarily an agricultural economy. The very existence of economic activities of the entire people is bound up with the state and health of this sector. In India, about 70 per cent of the people are engaged in agricultural pursuits and about 50 per cent of the national income originates from agriculture. Hence the level of efficiency and productivity in agriculture more or less determines the efficiency of Indian economy. Thus, the twin objectives of the Government that ensuring MSP to the farmers and also ensuring availability of food grains to the weaker sections at affordable prices were defeated due to the existence of middlemen, malpractices etc., even now in the procurement system of the Government. The area of study is restricted to Tiruvarur District only. Further studies may be conducted on the same line in other Cauvery delta districts like Trichy, Thanjavur and Nagapattinam or even in other districts of Tamil Nadu or India where agriculture is primary occupation of the people.

KEYWORDS

Monopoly procurement, paddy.

INTRODUCTION

As Adam Smith, the Father of Economics, argued in his book "Wealth of Nations," almost two centuries ago that agricultural output in its widest sense is the basic working capital of a nation in its initial stages of growth. A country in its early stages of economic growth, therefore, cannot simply ignore the progress in agricultural sector.

The development of agriculture therefore can help in the development of our economy from the stagnant to the progressive stage in three ways:

1. by supplying the physical resources needed by other sectors of economy in the shape of food and raw materials;
2. by increasing the gross national product; and
3. by providing economic surplus which constitutes the material basis for economic development.

Thus, the first and foremost contribution of agriculture to the economic development of a country is the supply of food. In India, since agriculture is the contributor of the largest amount of goods and services to the development of the country, it becomes essential and responsible on the part of the Government to regulate and control the marketing system of Agricultural produce. In spite of the Government's concern over the sound marketing system of all agricultural produce, the concern is to be excessive on the marketing system of food grains as it is the basic need of human being.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Thus, the twin objectives of the Government that ensuring MSP to the farmers and also ensuring availability of food grains to the weaker sections at affordable prices were defeated due to the existence of middlemen, malpractices etc., even now in the procurement system of the Government. Hence, a study has been proposed to explore the activities of the Government in paddy procurement and to assess the problems of paddy producers in that connection.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are

1. To analyse the historical developments of food grains procurement system in India.
2. To understand the administrative pattern and physical performance of the TNCSC Ltd., the Paddy Procurement Agency of the State.
3. To observe the opinion of paddy producers in marketing their paddy under Monopoly Procurement System in Tiruvarur District.
4. To identify the problems of the Paddy Procurement Agency, TNCSC Ltd. in Tiruvarur District.
5. To evaluate the operational results of TNCSC Ltd. on paddy procurement system in Tiruvarur District.

AREA OF THE STUDY

The area of the study has been limited to the district of Tiruvarur only. The main stay of the people in the district is agriculture. Paddy and sugarcane are the staple crops. The Cauvery is the major source of irrigation apart from a few bore wells and tube wells. There is not much industrial activity as it is predominantly an agricultural district. In Tiruvarur district, even farming is still a subsistence attempt and not a commercial venture. Cash crops are not grown, as the soil is clay, fit only for raising food crops. 1.57 lakhs Families live on farming in the district. The procurement of paddy in the district takes place through about 397 Direct Purchase Centers.

METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature. Survey method was adopted to carry out the objectives of the study. Both primary and secondary data were used in the study

DATA COLLECTION: Secondary data were collected from a wide spectrum of sources such as related books, relevant magazines, published and unpublished sources and Government reports. Websites of various organisations were also of great use in the collection of secondary data.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS: Two different pre-tested interview schedules were administered in this study- one to elicit information from the sample farmers and the other to solicit information from the Bill clerks of the DPCs.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY: The population of the study constitutes the total number of farmers in the district and the total number of representatives of the procurement agency namely the Bill clerks working in DPCs engaged in the procurement of paddy in the study area.

SAMPLES FROM FARMERS: From the list of PACBs, 20 were selected at random. Registers of Members of the PACBs were used as the source for selecting members. With the help of the list of members, non-members were identified and selected. Of these 20 PACBs, 4 from each taluk were selected on a random basis. There are four categories of farmers namely Big, Medium, Small and Marginal farmers in the study area. Therefore, a total of 320 farmers, 4 farmers of each category from each PACB were selected on random basis. Among the farmers, nearly 20 per cent are non-members of the PACBs. Therefore, to include them also, 80 farmers, 16 farmers from each Taluk (4 each of the 4 categories) were also selected at random. Thus the total number of Sample farmers of the study was 400 - 320 from PACB members and 80 from PACB non-members.

SAMPLES FROM MARKETING AGENCIES: In Tiruvarur District, there are 397 DPCs to procure paddy from the farmers. In each DPC, there is one Bill Clerk who is responsible for the entire functioning of the procurement centre. For the purposes of the survey 80 DPCs functioning in the study area were selected on random basis. Among the 80, due attention was paid to include atleast 16 from each Taluk.

HYPOTHESES USED IN THE STUDY: Several hypotheses were framed in the study for evaluating the efficiency of the paddy procurement system in the study area. The hypotheses were tested with the help of suitable Statistical techniques like Chi-square test and F- test-ANOVA.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Educational Background of Paddy Producers: As much as 90 per cent of the farmers are literates.

Knowledge about Monopoly Procurement System: 39 per cent of the farmers did not know anything about Monopoly Procurement System and MSP. Marginal farmers and small farmers were totally unaware of these facts. **Marketable Surplus:** The marketable surplus is higher (80 per cent and more) in the case of medium, small and Marginal farmers. The overall percentage of marketable surplus is 80.5 per cent.

Waiting Time at DPC: As much as 58 per cent of the farmers were able to sell only after a delay of 2 days or more.

Price of Paddy: All the farmers in the study area are selling their paddy not for MSP but only after unofficial deductions. To bribe the higher officials and to meet out the local expenses unofficial cuts are done by the bill clerks in the DPCs.

Deduction for Moisture Cut: The amount deducted from the Minimum Support Price for moisture content level by the DPCs is abnormal for 79 per cent of farmers.

Delay in Payment: 36 per cent farmers wait atleast two days to get the price (money) for their paddy sold to the DPCs. The delay in the payment of price in DPCs is evident in all the DPCs during harvest seasons.

Spillage per Quintal: The quantity of spillage taken from the farmers is around 2 kg for 50 per cent of the farmers and it is 3 kg. or for the remaining 50 per cent of them.

Storage Facilities: 76 per cent of the farmers were of the opinion that there were no adequate storage facilities at the DPCs.

Behaviour of the Bill Clerks: 66 per cent of the farmers were satisfied with the behavior of the bill clerks in the DPCs.

Behaviour of the Loadmen: 55 per cent of farmers were dissatisfied with the behavior of the load men in the DPCs.

Procurement Agencies – Preference of the Farmers: 82 per cent of the paddy producers prefer TNCSC Ltd for selling their paddy despite difficulties and irregularities.

Reasons for Preferring Private Agency: The paddy producers prefer private dealers because they give advance to them at times of need, make spot procurement and provide gunny bags to their need.

Mobile Procurement System: 81 per cent of the total medium and big farmers were not satisfied with the functioning of MDPCs in the study area. The mobile purchase system is not effectively operated in the district.

Issue of Gunny Bags in Advance: 86 per cent of respondents were of the opinion that the TNCSC Ltd. should issue gunny bags to them for bringing their paddy to the purchase centre.

Constitution of Grievance Cell: 91 per cent express their positive opinion for constituting Extra Grievance Cell and only 9 per cent feel that there is no need for it. Constitution of extra grievance cell is urgently needed as the present vigilance system is not a substitute for it.

Problems of the Farmers: The malpractices including price cut is the first and foremost major problem of all the paddy producers irrespective of their size of land holdings in the study area. For marginal and small farmers, existence of middlemen, lack of information about the functioning of the system, undue waiting time at the DPCs for selling their paddy, storage, transport to bring their paddy to the DPCs from the harvest place, delay in payment of price and unfair treatment of the bill clerks and load men were the problems accounted for and ranked accordingly by them.

Payment of Price Through Bank: As much as 63 per cent of the total farmers have given consent to the system of payment through bank.

Integration of Co-operative Credit with Marketing: integration of co-operative credit with marketing is acceptable to 56 per cent of the total farmers. **To revamp Cooperative Sector:** It also recommends that the co-operative sector should be revamped and streamlined by making it the sole agency of supplying agricultural inputs and marketing the output instead of insisting cooperatives to supply inputs and entrusting the procurement activities to TNCSC Ltd., This will help the cooperatives to recover their credit easily from the farmers from their sale proceeds. Otherwise both co-operatives and TNCSC Ltd., may joined together to carry out these activities.

Expectation of the Farmers: All the 400 respondents expect increase in the MSP in conformity with increase in the cost of inputs. All the farmers with huge cry expect that the paddy pricing should be made cost effective.

Government Policy on Paddy Procurement: All the 400 farmers were not satisfied with the existing policy of the Government regarding procurement of paddy.

FINDINGS AS REGARDS TO PROBLEMS IN DPCS

Age wise Classification of Bill Clerks: As much as 40 per cent of the bill clerks were in the age group of 40 –50 and another 20 per cent were in the age group of 50 and above.

Educational Qualification of Bill Clerks: All the bill clerks were highly educated people. Degree in science is the minimum educational qualification required for the post.

Experience of Bill Clerks: 85 per cent of the bill clerks in the DPCs were well experienced people in their field as their average experience is 11.5 years.

Nature of Post: All the bill clerks were appointed on temporary basis and they were paid only Rs.3300/- as monthly salary. The work is seasonal in nature and for six months only. All the sample bill clerks were not satisfied with their salary as it was not in accordance with their qualification and experience.

Work Environment: All the respondents were of the opinion that the work environment is not conducive. The safety, health and welfare measures provided to them were poor.

Attitudes of the Higher Officials: 90 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the attitudes of their higher officials.

Payment of Minimum Support Price (MSP) to Farmers: All the BCs accepted the fact that they are not paying the MSP fixed by the Government to the farmers. Thus, the very objective of the monopoly procurement system of ensuring MSP to farmers is defeated.

Reason for Not Paying Minimum Support Price to Farmers: All the respondents were of the opinion that they deduct money from MSP to pay their higher officials, to pay for local expenses like to give donations, to offer tea to visiting officials etc., and to pay maamool to lorry drivers. They were of the opinion that they were permitted by their higher officials to deduct money from MSP. Deduction for moisture is permitted one. Only 70 per cent of them deduct for moisture conditions of the paddy that too during rainy seasons only.

Supply of Materials to DPCs: Only 85 per cent of the BCs were adequately given with gunny bags. Inadequate supply of gunny bags hampers the continuous flow of procurement operations.

Opinion about Job Satisfaction: 65 per cent of the BCs were dissatisfied with their job. Problems like seasonal and temporary employment, poor salary, unlimited work time, recovery for weight loss are the reasons for job dissatisfaction.

SUGGESTIONS

To Improve the Educational Back ground of the Farmers: In spite of its growing importance, the attitude of the people towards agriculture remains backward. For many people in our country, industry stands for progress and agriculture for stagnation. They think that industry is a paragon of science and technology, while agriculture is the repository of primitive life. The sons of educated rarely choose agricultural occupations.

To Improve the Knowledge of Farmers: Wide publicity should be given among farmers about the functioning of monopoly procurement system.

To save Cost and Time: There are two options to save the farmers from waiting at DPCs and from incurring unnecessary transport and labour expenses. One is opening DPCs at each and every revenue village and the other is fine tuning the mobile direct purchase teams to be active, efficient and effective. This will avoid unnecessary transport cost, travelling and waiting time at the DPCs.

To Extend Mobile Direct Procurement System: Its performance should be improved further to function actively and the present number of units, which is two per Revenue Division may be increased. Its function should be extended to small and marginal farmers also, in a village where Direct Purchase Centres are not opened. On previous intimation to the farmers of the arrival of mobile DPCs to the village, paddy procurement can be considerably made, stationing at a centrally reachable place from all the small farmers and marginal farmers. This will be great boon to them as the transport charges are saved.

To Increase the Price of Paddy: The prices of farm products should be fixed on the basis of the **cost of living** which is mounting up day by day and not on **cost of production** only to fulfill the primary demand of the paddy produces.

To Ensure Immediate Payment: The farmers in the study area prefer DPCs not for better price but for ready cash payment. In practice, there is delay in payment of price. This can be avoided by issuing cheques in lieu of making payment in cash. It will also avoid malpractices and other unnecessary expenditures at the DPCs.

To Ensure Correct Weight: The higher authorities of the TNCSC Ltd. should pay surprise visit to the DPCs and check the accuracy of weighing and moisture cuts what they have made in the procured quantity just before their visit.

To Control Spillage: Steps to be taken by the TNCSC Ltd. to avoid the practice of taking more quantity for sample and the unnecessary spillage caused by load men in the procurement centres.

To Extent Storage Facilities: Establishing permanent Direct Purchase Centres with bucca buildings attached with a small godown, throughout the District to restrict storage problems at the DPCs.

To Increase the Incentives: The amount of incentives given to the farmers should atleast be equal to cover all incidental expenses like transport, labour etc. This will create a sense of loyalty in the minds of the farmers towards TNCSC Ltd. The incentive should be paid in cash only.

To Issue Gunny Bags in Advance: The TNCSC Ltd. should take steps to supply gunny bags to needy farmers, for enabling them to bring their produce to the Direct Purchase Centres.

To Fulfill the Expectations of the Farmers: The expectations of the farmers are reasonable, genuine and simple to be adhered to. They expect nothing new nor even modification in the existing system but exact implementation of the system intact. So, the Government should take immediate steps to fulfill the expectations of the farmers.

To constitute Grievance cell: In addition to the vigilance cell functioning in the TNCSC Ltd., Tiruvarur, an Extra Grievance Cell should be constituted exclusively to hear and redress the grievances of farmers connected with procurement. Steps should be taken by the TNCSC Ltd. to keep in the forefront of the DPC the complaint box enabling the farmers to lodge complaint if any, over the functioning of DPC.

To set up Farmers committee: Farmers' Committee may be set up by the Government comprising members from all categories of farmers to inspect the working of DPC and make complaints to the higher authorities for irregularities found if any.

To Regulate the Work Time of the DPCs: There is no scheduled work time for the DPCs. So, the TNCSC Ltd. should take steps to regulate the working hours of the DPCs and place it on the notice board of the DPCs.

To improve the Work Environment: The ensuring the minimum legal requirements of safety, health and welfare measures in the DPCs without fail. Drinking water, toilet facility, pollution control measures and lighting are the basic amenities required immediately in the DPCs.

To change the Attitude of the Higher Officials: Payment by cheque system be introduced which will restrict malpractices at the DPCs.

To improve transportation: The transportation schedule should be diversified in such a way to clear the stock in all the DPCs on daily basis.

To avoid recovery for loss of weight: To avoid recovery from the bill clerks for loss of weight of paddy under normal circumstance.

To supply quality materials to DPCs: To ensure good quality machines and materials particularly good quality gunny bags to the DPCs adequately.

To regularize the services of the DPCs Staffs: The services of the staff in the DPCs are very much required for the TNCSC Ltd. so, steps may be taken to regularize them immediately.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

The area of study is restricted to Tiruvarur District only. Further studies may be conducted on the same line in other Cauvery delta districts like Trichy, Thanjavur and Nagapattinam or even in other districts of Tamil Nadu or India where agriculture is primary occupation of the people.

There is wide scope to conduct similar studies on each of the other agricultural produces like wheat, maize, oil seeds etc., at micro level. Since each input is unique in its character it is worth studying each input in detail.

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