



SILVER JUBILEE PUBLICATION

**TWENTYFIVE YEARS
OF
AGRO-ECONOMIC
RESEARCH
IN N. E. INDIA
(1960-1985)**

**P. D. SAIKIA
U. PHUKAN**

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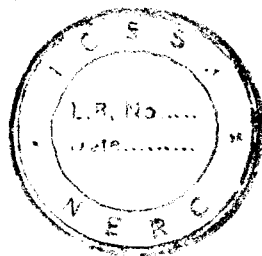
**ECONOMIC RESEARCH CENTRE FOR NORTH-EAST INDIA
ASSAM AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY**

JORHAT - 785013

1985

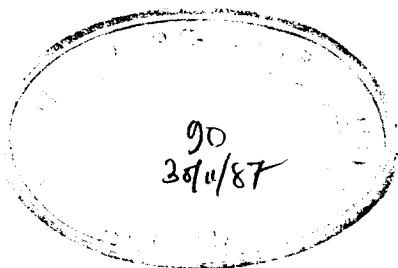
TWENTYFIVE YEARS OF
AGRO-ECONOMIC RESEARCH CENTRE
FOR NORTH EAST INDIA
(SUMMARIES OF RESEARCH PROJECTS
COMPLETED DURING 1960-1985)

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First Published, February 1986.



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Price Rs. 100.00, £ 8, \$ 20.

Published by Dr. P. D. Saikia for the Agro-Economic
Research Centre for N. E. India, Assam Agricultural
University, Jorhat-785013, Assam (India) and printed at
Bharati Press, Tarajan, Jorhat-785001.

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Twenty Five Years of Agro-Economic Research Centre For North-East India

Introduction

In view of the growing importance of Research in Agricultural Economics in India the Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture and Co-operation, Government of India established 4 Agro-Economic Research Centres at Delhi, Pune, Madras and Santiniketan (W.B.) in 1954, for the entire country. Later the Government established six more Centres at Jabalpur, Jorhat, Anand, Allahabad Waltair and the last one at Simla. The Agro-Economic Research Centre for N. E. India, Jorhat was established in February, 1960.

The Centres are attached to Universities and Research Institutions viz, (i) Delhi to Delhi University, (ii) Madras to Madras University, (iii) Santiniketan to Visva Bharati University, (iv) Anand to Sardar Patel University, Gujarat, (v) Allahabad to Allahabad University, (vi) Waltair to Andhra University, (vii) Pune to Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, (viii) Jabalpur to J. L. Nehru Agricultural University, (ix) Simla to Himachal Pradesh University and (x) Jorhat to Assam Agricultural University.

The Jorhat Centre was first attached to Assam Agricultural College, Jorhat and later to the Assam Agricultural University from 1969. The Centre at Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics from its very inception

is a part of the Institute. All other Centres enjoy different status and relationship with the main University to which they are attached. Moreover, there are 3 Agro-Economic Research Units attached to Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi; Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad and Institute of Social Change, Bangalore.

All these Research Centres and Units are fully supported by the Ministry with grants-in-aids. The technical guidance of the Centres is provided by the Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India specially in regards to allotment of works and selection of projects. The Centres, by and large, enjoy autonomy in regards to writing the reports. With the exception of the Centre at Jabalpur which covers Madhya Pradesh only, all other Centres cover a region. The regional specialisation has been the main characteristics of the Centres. The Research Units are meant for inter-regional and national studies. The administrative matters are vested with the Universities/Institutions to which the Centres/Units are attached.

The Jorhat Centre was first started under the administrative as well as technical control of the Economic and Statistical Adviser, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India. The administrative control of the Centre was later handed over to the Department of Agriculture, Government of Assam with the Secretary to the Government of Assam in the Department of Agriculture as the Chairman of the Advisory Body and late Dr M. C. Das, the Principal, Assam Agricultural College, as the Secretary. The administrative control of the Centre was transferred to the Assam Agricultural University in 1969. The Vice-Chancellor, Assam Agricultural University is the Chairman of the Advisory Body of the Centre and the Director of the Centre is the Member-Secretary. Other members of the Advisory Body are, Economic & Statistical Adviser, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India or his representative; Directors of Agriculture, Assam,

Meghalaya, Tripura, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Dean, Faculty of Agriculture, Assam Agricultural University and Director of Research, Assam Agricultural University.

Functions :

When the Centres were started the Government laid down the objectives of (i) carrying on continuous study on changes in the rural economy, (2) conducting ad-hoc investigation of agro-economic problems, (3) carrying on research on fundamental problems relating to agricultural economics, and, (4) giving technical advice to the Government of India and to the State Governments of the region.

The objectives remaining the same over the years, the type of research to be done was guided by the needs of the Ministry from time to time. The research projects to be taken up for particular year are finalised in the meeting of the Officers-in-charge held annually. Under the first objective the Centre carried on village surveys and resurveys to study the changes in the rural economy. Later, emphasis was laid on problem-oriented ad-hoc studies of short duration. The studies carried out by the Agro-Economic Research Centre for N. E. India are found to be important in so far as these have provided insights into the socio-economic characteristics of diverse communities of the region. The changes occurred in the socio-economic life of the villagers due to planned efforts were highlighted in the studies.

Village Studies :

Village studies or more precisely village surveys and resurveys were the primary works undertaken by the Agro-Economic Research Centres including the Jorhat Centre during the first decade. This involved survey of purposively selected villages at two points of time, usually 5 years to study changes, taking certain forces of change for the purpose. The reports are based on complete survey of socio-economic

parameters and even socio-cultural aspects of the people. Prior to the village studies facts about rural economy of the region were known only through aggregate data generated by the Census and official statistics. These did not give adequate micro-level insights into the rural economy. The village studies were useful source of information on tribal and backward groups of people. The N. E. India is the abode of a large number of tribal population with diverse socio-economic characteristics. The village studies became a handy tool for understanding tribal economy. In fact, the problems of shifting cultivation came into limelight after the publications of the village survey reports of the hill tribal communities. The studies, even with the limited coverage, gave the Research Staff of the Agro-Economic Research Centre the opportunity to construct economic scenarios of the rural areas. Despite the virtue of the village studies it proved to be both time and resource consuming. The number of village studies that could be taken were limited. In the later period specially after 1970, the Ministry emphasised on conducting problem-oriented studies of short duration.

The Jorhat Centre so far completed 19 first point surveys and 11 resurveys in different parts of the region. It included 14 tribal villages belonging to Garos, Khasis, Mizos, Nisis, Gallongs, Bodos, Mishings, Deuris, Apatanis, Dimasas, Miju-Mishmis, Noctes, etc. The details of village surveys and resurveys are given in Appendix I of this book. Of these village surveys 4 first point surveys were published in the book—Rural life in Assam Hills; Two other resurvey reports published are Dispur and Changes in Mikir Society. The rest are in mimeographed form.

Problem Oriented Studies :

The problem oriented studies or the ad-hoc studies were undertaken by the Centre either at the instance of the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of India or at the request of the State Governments. A few of the

studies were taken at the Centre's own initiative. One study was undertaken at the instance of the North-Eastern Council, Shillong.

The major work which the Centre undertook besides the regular programme of studies were the (1) studies in the Economics of Farm Management and (2) the study on the Co-operative Farming in Assam. The Ministry sanctioned the scheme for studies in Economics of Farm Management in Nowgong District of Assam in 1968 and a separate Farm Management Unit was established. The reports on the Economics of Farm Management in Nowgong District for 1968-69, 1969-70 and 1970-71 and a combined report were published by the Ministry. The Farm Management Unit was wound up in 1971 and a scheme for Cost of Cultivation of Principal Crops in Assam was sanctioned in the same year which is attached to the Assam Agricultural University. The Centre received additional grants from the Department of Co-operation for the study on Co-operative Farming in Assam and for publication of a book.

Problem oriented studies completed by the Centre from its inception to March, 1985 were 58 in number. This excludes the reports on the Economics of Farm Management. All these reports excepting the report on Co-operative Farming in Assam, were circulated in mimeographed form. In 1970, the Centre celebrated its 10th year of completion and on that occasion a Souvenir entitled, "A Decade of Agro-Economic Research in N. E. India" was published. A book entitled "Socio-Economic Research in Tribal Areas" was published in 1972 and this contained the research papers and summaries of group discussion of the Seminar on 'Problems of Research in Tribal Areas' organised during the Decennial Celebration in 1970. The Centre had also completed another study entitled "Changing Role of Women in Rural Society — A Case Study in Assam" at the instance of the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi for which funds were provided by the Council.

The list of research reports completed by the Centre is provided in Appendix II of the book. The studies, by and large, are micro-level studies based on field data. Only a few studies were based on secondary data which analysed state level situations. Those were Rice Economy of Manipur, Behaviour of Agricultural Prices in Assam, and the report on Agricultural Development in Assam. The reports on Problems of Small Farmers, Problems of Agricultural Development in Hill Areas, Pattern of Consumption Expenditure in Rural Areas, Agricultural Land use in Assam and Agricultural Production, Land and Labour Utilisation in Hill Areas of N. E. India were based on data generated in the village studies and other ad-hoc studies. The first two of the above mentioned studies were undertaken at the instance of Planning Commission, Government of India.

Of the studies, undertaken by the Jorhat Centre some studies like the studies on Behaviour of Agricultural Prices in Assam, the study on the Income, Saving and Investment in Nowgong and the Agricultural Development in Assam, were part of all-India studies undertaken by all the Agro-Economic Research Centres.

The study on the Economics of Shifting Cultivation in N. E. India, and "Comparative Study on Crop Production under Shifting and Terrace Cultivation" brought to focus a major problem of hill tribal areas where shifting cultivation is widespread. Some ad-hoc studies brought to focus important aspects of agricultural economy of the region.

The Centre has a mailing list according to which the reports are circulated. It includes the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Ministry of Agriculture, Govt. of India, concerned Departments of the State Governments, Directors of Agriculture of the States, A. E. R. Centres of the country, Reports are also sent to Libraries of the Universities of the region and a few other institutions and scholars. Requests for reports from foreign institutes and scholars are also received.

Agro-Economic Research in North-East India :

Prior to establishment of the Agro-Economic Research Centre for North-East India there were no notable studies available either on agricultural economy or on other rural economy of N. E. India. It was the Department of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam which had undertaken some rural economic studies in few districts. Before the establishment of the University of Gauhati in 1948, the academic Centre for the entire Eastern and North-Eastern Region was Calcutta. It was only after 1960 the University of Gauhati produced the first Ph. D. in Economics.

The jurisdiction of the Agro-Economic Research Centre, Jorhat was under the Visva Bharati Centre, Santiniketan and 8 village studies were done by that Centre in Assam during 1954-55. to 1956-57. Those were (1) Rangpur (Cachar District), (2) Dayangiage (Sibsagar District), (3) Phakial Gaon (Dibrugarh District), (4) Kanchanpur (Nowgong District), (5) Dispur (Kamrup District), (6) Tegheriartari (Kamrup District) (7) Chotahaibar (Nowgong District), and (8) Birendranagar (Tripura). Among these surveys Dispur, Chotahaibar and Tegheriartari were resurveyed by the Jorhat Centre.

In the later period new Universities at Dibrugarh (1965), Assam Agricultural University (1968), North-Eastern Hill University (1982) and Manipur University (1982) were established. This enhanced facilities for Social Sciences Research in N. E. India as a whole. Besides the Social Science Departments of the Universities a number of other Research Centres are also working in North-East India. Systematic research works were organised in Arunachal Pradesh (erstwhile NEFA) with a Govt. Research Department. The Tribal Research Institute, Assam, The Naga Institute of Culture, Kohima and the ICAR Research Complex, Shillong have also been doing valuable work. The Evaluation studies are also done by Department of Evaluation Units of the State Govts. Moreover, certain valuable studies are done by the

Directorate of Economics and Statistics of the States/Union Territories. The main body of Research in the field of Agricultural Economics is, however, contributed by the Agro-Economic Research Centre for N. E. India, Jorhat.

Other Research Activities :

The Research staff of the Jorhat Centre have been contributing papers to journals including the Indian Journal of Agricultural Economics, Bombay, Economic and Political Weekly, Bombay and other journals like, Man In India, Ranchi. The members also contribute articles to journals like Yojana, Payobhara (Assamese edition of Yojana) Kurukhetra, Social Welfare. A number of articles of staff members are also published in Economic Times and other news papers.

The Research staff of the Centre participate regularly in All India Conferences of the Indian Society of Agricultural Economics. The staff also participated in many All India Seminars organised by different Institutions/Universities as and when invited and contributed papers. The Centre has close link with the Universities of the region and other government and non-government organisations in matters of research activities. The number of papers and articles contributed by existing research staff and the ex-staff members would be nearly 180 for entire period. The list is provided in the Appendix III of the book.

The Centre is endowed with experiences in field research and scholars. Ph. D. students from different Universities come for consultation and Library work to the Centre. The research staff of the Centre provide assistance to all. Moreover, four of the Research staff of the Centre had obtained Ph. D. degree from Gauhati University (two left the Centre) while in service and a few more are working for Ph. D. The Director of the Centre is presently guiding a few Ph. D. scholars. Several scholars received Ph. D. degree

from Gauhati University under the guidance of Dr. P. C. Goswami while he was the Director of the Centre. The Research staff also guided few students of the Assam Agricultural University in preparing M. Sc. degree thesis (Agril. Economics). Some senior members of the staff were entrusted with teaching assignments in the Assam Agricultural University.

Staffing Pattern :

At present the Centre is headed by a Director. There are 3 Research Officers, 5 Senior Research Investigators, 5 Junior Research Investigators and 4 Senior Computers in the Research Staff. The names of existing Research Staff and the ex-staff members of the Centre are provided in Appendix IV and Appendix V respectively. Considering the necessity of inter-disciplinary research, the Centre has staff members belonging to various disciplines of Social Sciences viz., Economics, Statistics, Anthropology and Sociology.

Considering the fact that research is time consuming, the existing staff may be considered to be small and inadequate in relation to the area under the jurisdiction of the Centre.

Library :

The Centre has very important collection of books and journals on economics and allied subjects. The total collection is about 7000 books. Lack of Library buildings and lack of the provision for a Library Assistant are the two major difficulties in maintaining the library in proper order.

Finance :

The Centre is entirely financed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India. The annual expenditure in 1984-85 was nearly Rs 8.00 lakhs.

Problems :

The Agro-Economic Research Centre for N. E. India, Jorhat like many other such Centres had administrative as well as functional disadvantages due to the indeterminate nature of its existence. The relationship of the Centre with the Ministry and the Assam Agricultural University to which it is attached has not been well defined. The Review Committee for the AER Centres in India headed by Prof. M. L. Dantwalla in its Report of 1972 recommended adoption of pay scales, service rules etc., of the University to which it was attached. But it took long time to change over of the pay scales of the staff to that of the University and the staff has yet to receive some of the benefits as available to university teachers and research workers. The Committee also recommended that the Jorhat Centre be made permanent. But so far it is not declared so.

The Ministry had also constituted another Review Committee in 1983, headed by Dr. R. N. Poduval to look into the workings of the AER Centres and to suggest improvements. The Report was submitted in 1984. The Review Committee made certain important recommendations but actions on them are awaited. It is expected that Centres would be made permanent and status of staff be equalised with the University to which it is attached, and the benefits available in the University are made available to the staff of the Research Centre.

The need for agro-economic research would continue to exist as the development process continues. The Agro-Economic Research Centre for N. E. India with its jurisdiction of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh has vast fields to cover. The need for strengthening the Centre need not be overemphasised in view of the fact that the N. E. Region has lagged far behind not only in economic development but also in the academic fields.