

COOPERATIVE FARMING IN ASSAM

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

AGRO-ECONOMIC RESEARCH CENTRE FOR
NORTH EAST INDIA

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1969

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PREFACE

1. There has been a great deal of discussion on cooperative farming in recent years. For consolidation of holdings and efficient farm management, cooperative farming is suggested as the only remedy. But experience gained in India during the last few years is not very encouraging. The present study embodies the results of field investigation of a few cooperative farming societies in Assam and attempts to indicate the achievements and failures of the movement in the State.

2. Although the concept of cooperative farming is not a new idea, concrete steps for the development of cooperative farming societies were taken only after the publication of the report of the Cooperative Planning Committee in 1946. The Committee suggested that the following types of society be encouraged :-

- (1) Cooperative Better Farming Society;
- (2) Cooperative Joint Farming Society;
- (3) Cooperative Tenant Farming Society;
- (4) Cooperative Collective Farming Society

3. The Cooperative Better Farming Societies were expected to introduce new farm technique, joint purchase, use of machinery and other joint services without affecting individual holding and individual farms in any way. Cooperative Joint Farming Societies envisaged pooling together of farmers, land for joint management and cultivation; but no farmer was required to pool the entire areas of his holding. Outputs under Joint Farming Societies are distributed in accordance with labour input and land contribution to the society. Under Cooperative Tenant Farming Society, the Society takes land on lease from the Govt. or the landlord and distributes such land to tenant farmers. The Society is to act as a liason between the landlord (or Govt.) and the tenant. Under Cooperative Collective Farming, the society undertakes joint cultivation and management of land taken on lease from the Govt. and there is division of output on the basis of labour input by individual member.

4. The Congress Agrarian Reform Committee in 1947 also recommended (1) Cooperative Joint Farming for cultivators whose holdings are below the basic size and (2) Cooperative Better Farming Society for the rest. Although the Committee emphasized the voluntary character of the movement it also suggested that if voluntary efforts failed, some form of compulsion be made to organise farming societies.

5. The report of the Panel on Land Reforms, 1956, also suggested encouragement of cooperative farming. The Report of the Indian Delegation to China on Agrarian Cooperatives, 1957, also suggested formation of cooperative farming societies on voluntary basis. The National Development Council also accepted the suggestion. The Nagpur Session of the All India Congress Committee in 1959 by a resolution stated that "the future agrarian pattern should be that of cooperative farming in which land will be pooled for joint cultivation, farmers continuing to retain their property rights, and getting the share from the net produce in proportion to their land". As a first step, attempts were made to organise service cooperative throughout the country.
6. The Working Group on Cooperative Farming (under the Chairmanship of Shri S. Nijalingappa) appointed by the Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation recommended in 1959 that by the end of the Third Plan, 20,000 Cooperative Farming Societies should be set up in the country. The Draft Third Five Year Plan also reaffirmed Govt's faith in cooperative farming. The Planning Commission also accepted the recommendations of the Working Group for setting up 20,000 new Cooperative Farming Societies in the Country in addition to 3,200 societies recommended in the Pilot Project Areas. By the end of Third Plan (1965-66), altogether 7295 farming societies were established.
7. The Govt. of Assam appointed in 1962 an one man Commission under the Chairmanship of Dr. M. N. Goswami, IAS, Retired Commissioner of Plains Division, Assam, to review the working of the cooperative societies in Assam. It inspected various types of Societies in the State and submitted its report in September, 1963, recommending measures to strengthen the movement in all spheres. In respect of Cooperative Farming Societies, it inspected 20 such societies and observed that 50% of the land under the control of these 20 societies was received from the Govt. Because of the Government's faulty policy of land settlement the farming societies have become an association of men with divergent interests. The Commission recommended regular inspection of farming societies to ensure that there was no deviation from the bye-laws regarding pooling of land, participation in farming operation, sharing of the produce and financial and other matters. It should also be seen that there is no sub-letting of land to new member of the society.
8. The present report comprised two parts—first part dealing with the results of the field investigation in the First Round and the Second part with that of the Second Round. The Study was undertaken at the instance of the Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation, Govt. of

India. The overall guidance was given by the Committee of Direction under the Chairmanship of Prof. D. R. Gadgil. It is designed to take stock of the cooperative farming movement in the State of Assam in line with similar studies undertaken by the regional Agro-Economic Research Centres in respective regions. It was originally stipulated that the study would cover Assam, Manipur and Tripura. But it was found that there was no farming societies under Pilot Project Scheme in these two Union Territories by the end of 1961-62. As such the present study is confined to Assam alone.

9. The case studies of six pilot Joint Farming Societies (3 in the First Round and 3 in the Second Round, one society being common in both the rounds) will show that the farming societies—barring a few exceptions—do not fulfill the criteria of 'pilot' society which is expected to act as a 'catalytic' agent for the future expansion of the movement. The faulty management of some of these societies might even encourage organisation of 'spurious' societies only to take advantage of financial and other assistance granted by the Government. The collective farming societies composed of small land-holders and landless cultivators, however, stand on a firm ground. Such a society with proper leadership and guidance is expected to fulfil the basic criteria of social cohesion, higher production and income.

10. From the present study it will appear that the progress of Cooperative Farming in Assam is not encouraging. The spirit of cooperation and enthusiasm for the programme are rarely seen. Even farm operations and distribution of farm output have not been made on cooperative principles. In agricultural operations, the necessary guidance and assistance were lacking. The need for coordination of Cooperative and Agricultural Departments is highly felt for the success of the movement. Nevertheless, under the existing condition of fragmented tiny land holdings in rural areas, the prospect of cooperative farming cannot be said to be bleak, if the present bottlenecks are removed and the societies are organised with a genuine feeling of cooperation. No Government waste land should be settled with individual farmers, unless small cultivators and landless labourers form themselves into cooperative societies. In Assam there is bet or prospect for establishing Collective Farms on Government waste land when such land is made available for cultivation. This would also prevent illegal occupation of Government waste land by infiltrators from Pakistan or elsewhere.

11. It is hoped that the defects and lacunae pointed out by the case studies will be removed and farming societies will be made farmers' own institutions. The prevalent feeling of imposition from above must be eliminated if the movement is to receive cooperation and participation from genuine cooperators.

12. The field investigation for the collection of data for the First Round was started in the later part of January, 1964, and continued upto the end of March, 1964. The Report of the First Round Survey was submitted to the Committee of Direction in October, 1964. The Gadgil Committee in its report (1965) gave a brief review of the working of farming societies studied by the Seven Agro-Economic Research Centres in the country on the basis of their reports. The Committee, however, used pseudo names to hide the identity of the societies.

13. After submission of the Gadgil Committee's report, the Agro-Economic Research Centres were again requested to undertake a second round of survey. Field investigation for the second round continued from November, 1965 to June 1966 and the report submitted in December, 1966. Both in the first round and the second round, the societies were revisited from time to time with the progress of tabulation and analysis of data. In both the rounds the farming societies were selected on the recommendations of the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Govt. of Assam. In case of Second Round one society which was surveyed in the First Round (viz Tirual Joint Farming Society) was included at our own initiative to get an idea about the progress of the society since our first visit to the society in 1964-65.

14. Like all other studies of the Centre the present one is also a joint product under the guidance and supervision of the Director. The list of the study team associated with both rounds of surveys is given at the beginning of the report. Special mention must, however, be made of Shri N. Saha for the first round and Shri H. P. Khaund for the second round who had borne the main burden of drafting the reports. Shri P. D. Saikia supervised field works in the First Round. Besides the study team, Shri U. Phukan, supervised printing of the report. I am thankful to my colleagues for their cooperation in completing the report.

15. This study would not have been possible without the financial assistance from the Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation which has rendered financial support for conducting the study by its grants for appointment of additional staff and to meet expenses on travelling allowance, stationery etc. The Ministry has sanctioned necessary fund for printing the full report of both the rounds. We are grateful to the Ministry for enabling us to undertake the study and print the report.

16. The State Cooperative Department extended us the necessary help and cooperation. The management and members of various farming societies studied by us rendered us all possible assistance. I express my gratefulness to the State Cooperative Department, Shri C. K. Neog, Lecturer, Cooperative Farming, Gram Sevak Training Centre, Jorhat and the management of the respondent farming Societies for their assistance.

17. It is hoped that the present report will attract attention of the policy makers to the need for improvement of the working conditions of the farming societies. The societies should be formed amongst genuine farmers who are interested in cooperative efforts. For attracting honest persons to the movement the present system of accounting, keeping of records, audit procedures etc. will have to be improved. Unless people who can inspire and enthuse others are attracted to the farming societies, the movement will remain restricted to only a few self seeking individuals.

Argo-Economic Research Centre
for North East India,
Jorhat - 4.
Assam.
March, 1969.

P. C. GOSWAMI,
Director

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. The Agrarian Structure in Assam

1.1. Assam is predominantly an agricultural State in India with more than 90% of her population living in the villages and about 75% to 85% of her people depending on agriculture. According to the provisional estimate, 52.5% of the State income (1962-63) was contributed by agriculture. The pressure on land is continually mounting as the density of population in some of the plains districts is as high as 560 in Nowgong, 542 in Kamrup and 573 in Cachar. Available data about land indicate that the per capita availability of land is about half an acre. Even the maximum possible rate of industrialisation will not appreciably relieve the present pressure on land in the foreseeable future. This is because of the fact that Assam's population has grown at the fantastic rate of 35.45%, the highest in India, while its land resources have been dwindling due to continuous erosion of fertile tracts by the Brahmaputra and loss of fertility due to erosion and continuous use without manure and fertiliser.

1.2. The problems of agriculture in Assam are also many and varied. The chief among them is, perhaps, the subsistence nature of agriculture due to inadequate and un-economic holdings of a large majority of farmers. Table 1.1. (Page 2) gives the distribution of ownership holdings by size of farms in some villages in Assam viz. Morangaon, Dispur, Tegheriartari and Chalihagaon. On an average, 19% of the people are found landless while in two villages viz. Morangaon and Chalihagaon there was no farm above 10 acres. About 68% of the farms are below 5 acres.

1.3. This situation is further aggravated by the extent of sub-division and fragmentation of holdings. Table 1.2 presents certain data on this point. Though the data relate to 1948-49, it can be safely said that the situation, instead of improving, might have further deteriorated.

1.4. The subsistence nature of agriculture and the low-level of living in the villages are due to the inadequate income. The level of income in two villages in Assam is given in Table 1.3. It may be noted that 75% and 61% of the households in Morangaon and Dispur respectively have annual income below Rs. 1,000.00. Dispur is a sub-urban village near Gauhati and Morangaon is an interior village bordering Nagaland in Sibsagar district. As such a representative village in Assam will be in between these two extreme villages. Over and above, the distribution of income is also not equitable.

Table II
Land Ownership in Assam Villages.

Size groups	Morangaon-- (1961)		Dispur (1961)		Tegheriatari (1961)		Chaliha Gaon (1964)	
	No. of H. H.	Land - owned Area(Ac)	No. of H. H.	Land owned Area(Ac)	No. of H. H.	Land owned Area(Ac)	No. of H. H.	Land owned Area(Ac)
Landless	5 (12.19)	—	28 (25.93)	—	9 (17.65)	—	11 (13.75)	—
Below 1 Acre	3 (7.32)	1.2 (1.11)	51 (47.22)	—	4 (7.84)	2.76 (1.28)	17 (21.25)	6.36 (3.92)
1.00-2.50	16 (39.02)	28.5 (26.44)	13 (12.04)	16.22 (10.63)	10 (19.61)	15.33 (7.16)	32 (40.00)	55.92 (34.48)
2.50-5.00	11 (26.83)	39.1 (36.27)	8 (7.41)	21.18 (13.88)	13 (25.49)	44.66 (20.86)	11 (13.75)	40.07 (24.68)
5.00-7.50	40 (9.76)	22.7 (21.06)	2 (1.85)	24.91 (16.32)	5 (9.80)	34.08 (15.92)	7 (8.75)	43.20 (26.61)
7.50-10.00	2 (4.88)	16.3 (15.12)	1 (0.92)	11.57 (7.58)	5 (9.80)	41.47 (19.37)	2 (2.50)	16.74 (10.31)
10.00-15.00	—	—	2 (1.85)	8.24 (5.40)	2 (3.93)	23.33 (10.89)	—	—
15.00-20.00	—	—	3 (2.78)	21.90 (14.35)	3 (5.88)	52.50 (24.52)	—	—
20.00-25.00	—	—	—	48.60 (31.84)	—	—	—	—
Total :	41 (100.00)	107.8 (100.00)	108 (100.00)	152.62 (100.00)	51 (100.00)	214.13 (100.00)	80 (100.00)	162.35 (100.00)

Note : Figures in the brackets indicate percentages of column total.

Table 1.2. Fragmentation of Holdings in Assam, 1948-49

Items	Districts			
	Dar-rang	Sib-sagar	La-khim-pur.	Now-gong
1. P. C. of holdings with				
(a) 4 or more fragments	45.0	51.4	37.4	55.5
(b) 3 or more fragments	60.0	68.0	51.0	67.0
2. P. C. of fragmentation with size:-				
(a) Less than 0.6 Ac.	50.2	49.1	49.2	50.3
(b) Less than 1.6 Ac.	76.6	77.9	72.9	80.8
(c) Less than 3.3 Ac	90.6	92.6	79.8	94.1

Source : The Economic Development of Assam, by Dr. P. C. Goswami, Table 1, p. 51.

1.5. Thus Assam with small and uneconomic farms and low level of income for a large majority of her cultivators presents ideal situation for organization of joint or collective Farming Societies.

2. Cooperative Movement in Assam

2.1. Cooperation is not new in Assam. With the passing of the Indian Cooperative Credit Societies Act of 1904, attempts were made to organise cooperative Credit Societies in Assam. By 1911-12, there were 125 Rural and 16 Urban Societies with membership of 7,855 and 1,829 and working capital of Rs. 2,05,782/- and 1,92,555/- respectively. The rural Societies were very much handicapped by paucity of fund, and with the passing of the Indian Cooperative Societies Act of 1912, some Central Banks were organised to finance the Rural Societies. The Act also gave impetus for diversification of the movement, but till the time of the second world war, the movement was mostly restricted to credit. During the Second World War, Consumers' Stores were organised all over the State, but these Societies met their natural death with the normalisation of supply situation in the post-war period. Since the inauguration of the First Five Year Plan, serious attempts have been made to rehabilitate the Cooperative movement in the State.

2.2. The progress of organisation, membership and working capital of all Cooperative Societies during the two plan periods are given in Table 1.4. The index numbers of total number of societies stood at 309.42 with

Table 1.3
Cumulative Distribution of Family Farms by Level of Income in two Assam Villages

Income Level	Morangaon 1960-61				Dispur 1960-61			
	Cumu- lative total of house- holds	P. C. of C. Total house- holds.	Cumula- lative Total of Income	P. C. of Total income	Cumu- lative total H. H.	P. C. of C. Total H. H.	Cumulative total of in- come	P. C. of total income
Below Rs. 250.00	6	9.30	763.56	2.09	6	5.56	1,009.55	0.76
250.00-500.00	15	34.88	4,880.06	13.34	22	20.37	7,411.78	5.56
500.00-750.00	25	58.14	11,476.93	31.36	42	38.89	19,765.66	14.82
750.00-1000.00	32	74.14	17,926.18	48.99	66	61.11	40,783.78	30.57
1000.00-1500.00	36	83.72	22,388.37	61.18	87	80.56	66,209.63	49.63
1500.00-2000.00	40	93.02	29,618.20	80.94	94	87.04	78,361.25	58.74
2000.00-2500.00	40	93.02	29,618.20	80.94	99	91.67	89,784.60	67.30
2500.00-3000.00	43	100.00	36,591.83	100.00	100	92.59	92,745.85	69.52
3000.00-4000.00					103	95.37	1,03,111.15	77.29
4000.00-5000.00					104	96.30	1,07,553.65	80.62
Above 5000.00					108	100.00	1,33,413.05	100.00

1950-51 as the base. The number of members and working capital have increased respectively by 84.5% and 754% during this period. At the end of the Second Plan, per one lakh of population, there were 75 societies against only 32 at the beginning of the First Five Year Plan. Though there was a spectacular increase in respect of number of societies, the participation of the population has not kept pace with the increase in number. The participation rate increased from 3.2% to 4.2% of the total population. The average working capital per head of population rose from Rs. 2.16 to Rs. 13.51 during this period.

Table 1.4. Number, Membership and Working Capital-All Societies, Assam.

Years	No. of Societies		Membership		Working Capital	
	No. per 1 lakh of population	Index	Per-1000 inhabitants	Index	Per capita of population	Index
1950-51	32.5	100.00	31.6	100.00	2.16	100.00
1951-52	31.4	99.35	28.4	92.61	2.29	108.71
1952-53	34.2	97.10	30.3	100.70	2.10	101.56
1953-54	27.6	90.37	36.2	122.18	2.26	128.58
1954-55	38.7	129.05	31.1	106.69	2.96	147.78
1955-56	42.4	143.63	32.2	112.32	4.00	217.65
1956-57	51.8	178.70	32.9	117.25	6.00	333.49
1957-58	49.1	172.28	40.5	146.48	9.88	519.09
1958-59	59.1	211.10	75.3	277.46	12.70	679.36
1959-60	58.2	211.57	40.8	153.17	12.54	682.68
1960-61	57.0	304.10	42.3	176.41	13.51	819.76
1961-62	72.6	309.32	42.0	184.51	13.39	854.12

Source : Computed from the data published in the Statistical Statements by the Reserve Bank of India.

2.3. The provision of credit to cultivators at moderate rates of interest continued to be the principal aim of the Cooperative Movement for agricultural production. There was a considerable increase in volume of such credit during the period from the beginning of the First Five Year Plan to the end of the Second Plan. The other ways in which the movement

had its impact on agricultural production were through the activities of Cooperative Farming Societies, Fisheries Societies and Milk Supply Societies. At the end of June 1961 (by the end of the Second Plan) there were 200 Cooperative Farming Societies in Assam—18 'Joint' and 182 'Collective' Farming Societies. 4 Cooperative Better Farming Societies and 45 Tenant Farming Societies were, however, subsequently grouped under 'Service Cooperatives'. By this time, there were 15 Milk Societies and 140 Fisheries societies. A total number of 73 Farming Societies were organised during the Second Plan in Assam. The Third Plan provided for the organization of Cooperative Farming in a wider scale. The target and achievement of the organisation and overall progress of the movement of Cooperative Farming will be discussed in the next Chapter.

3. Objectives of Assessment

3.1. This evaluative study was undertaken at the instance of the Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation, Government of India. The Third Five Year Plan provided for the organization of carefully planned Pilot Societies to demonstrate the advantages of Cooperative Farming. These Societies are expected to facilitate evolving suitable methods and techniques of organization and management of Cooperative Farming. They are also to act as catalytic agents for the further expansion of the movement.

3.2. The Government of India have set up a Committee of Direction for the assessment of progress and evaluation of Cooperative Farming Societies (in Pilot project areas) to ascertain the progress achieved by different States in the movement of Cooperative Farming. The main objectives of this evaluation and assessment are :—

(i) Whether the Pilot Societies are making steady progress and have achieved their main purpose of increasing production, employment and income;

(ii) Whether the benefits derived from the Societies have accrued to the members equitably; and

(iii) Whether the societies have been able to create conditions so that the members can contribute their best.

4. Period and Scope of the Survey

4.1. This study covers the period since the inauguration of the Pilot Projects in Assam in October, 1961, till the end of June, 1963 in respect of progress of organisation of Pilot Societies. The case studies of the pilot socie-

ties cover the period of working of the Societies till the time of investigation in January, 1964. In respect of the non-pilot (old) societies, the period covered, is the actual period of existence of such Societies.

4.2. This study gives a review of progress of organisation of pilot and non-pilot Societies in Assam in general and two pilot projects, viz. Golaghat (East) Development Block in Sibsagar district and Kaliabor Development Block in Nowgong, in particular. In all 5 Societies have been studied; of them, three are pilot Societies and two are old Societies in the pilot project areas.

4.3. Data used in this survey are collected by the Centre from different official and non-official sources in respect of the programme and progress of the organisation of Farming Societies. As far as possible the sources have been indicated in appropriate places. The case studies have been done with data collected through field investigations. The investigators remained in the village for some time to collect data on different socio-economic aspects of the members and the Society. Three schedules, viz. (a) Village schedule, (b) Society Schedule and (c) Member's Schedule were canvassed for the collection of data. A questionnaire for the study of attitude of both members and non-members was also used to find out the attitude of the two categories of people towards the movement. These schedules and questionnaires were designed by the Centre and approved by the Committee of Direction.

4.4. This report is divided into 5 Chapters. In Chapter I, an outline of objective, period and scope of the survey has been discussed. Chapter II is devoted to a historical background indicating the policy and progress of Cooperative Farming of the State in general and the pilot projects, in particular. Chapter III is entirely devoted to the case studies of the following 5 Societies.

I. Pilot Societies :

- (a) Fatual Joint Cooperative Farming Society Ltd.,
- (b) Tirual Joint Cooperative Farming Society Ltd.,
- (c) Jaylakshmi Joint Cooperative Farming Society Ltd.,

II. Old Societies :

- (d) Samaguri Moamari Krishipam Samabai Samity Ltd.,
- (e) Dakhinhengera Krishipam Samabai Samity Ltd.,

Chapter IV presents some critical observations about the attitude of both members and non-members towards the movement. Chapter V gives the summary and conclusion of the study.

5. Sample Design

5.1. The selection of both 'pilot' and 'old' societies was done on the suggestion of the State Cooperative Department on a purposive sample. The two Pilot Projects undertaken in the first year of the Third Plan provided the basic samples. The three societies organised in that year are studied along with two 'old' societies one of which is a 'successful' Collective Farming Society, viz. Samaguri Moamari Krishipam Samabai Samity Ltd. (Case Study No. D) and the other is a 'defunct' society viz. Dakhinhengera Krishipam Samabai Samity Ltd. (Case Study No. E).

5.2. The analysis of data has followed, as far as practicable, the 'Key points' suggested by the Committee of Direction. The only departure may be noticed in the case of Dakhinhengera Society (Case Study No. E) in which case enough background materials could not be collected,
