

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Government Policies like Wetland Act 2008: A Push for Increasing Cultivable Waste Land of Alappuzha District

Dr. R. Maniyosai

Assistant Professor, PG & Research centre, Department of Geography,
Govt. Arts College (Autonomous) Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu, India

Antony Kuruvilla

Research Scholar, PG & Research centre, Department of Geography,
Govt. Arts College (Autonomous) Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract:

Land, a major factor of earth could be used for different functions. Agriculture is one such function. But Agricultural land could be used for other purposes also. This use of land depends on certain factors. Government policy is one such factor which determines the use of agricultural land. The land use Pattern of Alappuzha district shows that the area of Cultivable waste land is increasing in the district. This paper is an attempt to study the effect of Government policy on cultivable waste land in the district. The study reveals that the policies like Wetland Act 2008 only lead to the increase of cultivable waste.

Keywords: Land Use, Cultivable waste, Non Culturable waste, Wetland, Garden land, Wetland act, Marginal workers, Government Policies

1. Introduction

"Land use is characterized by the arrangements, activities and inputs people undertake in a certain land cover type to produce, change or maintain it" (FAO/UNEP, 1999). Land used for one purpose can also change in due course of time. This change of land use depends on factors such as financial, institutional, psychological, physiological and governmental decisions etc. Government is a major factor in deciding the land use. The short sighted policies taken by the rulers can change agricultural land to waste land and also long sighted policies can cause vice versa.

Alappuzha district 'the rice bowl of Kerala' is now slowly creeping to a mass of cultivable waste land. The proportion of cultivable waste land to total land area has increased nine times in the last decade. There are certain factors which constitute this rise. The policies taken by the Government is a major factor which reduces or controls the factors which are a constraint for agriculture or in other words government policies blocks all the factors which lead to increase in waste land. But unfortunately the short sighted policies taken by the Government of Kerala for the sake of reducing the conversion of wetlands to garden lands or for increasing rice production had a negative result. The Act 28 of 2008 "The Kerala conservation of paddy land and wetland act, 2008" is one such act. This paper is an attempt to study the impact of the act of 2008 on the land use pattern of the district.

2. Study Area

Alappuzha district is the smallest of all the districts in Kerala with an area of 141011 hectares (1414sq.Km).It lies between 9^o5' north Latitude, 76^o17' and 76^o44' east longitudes. This is the only district in Kerala having no high lands and forest. The district has a coastline of 82 kms. It has 6 Taluks, 12 Blocks and 73 Grama Panchayats.

According to the 2011 census, the total population of the district is 2127789 of which 10131 are males and 1114647 are Females. The District shares 6.53% of state's entire population. The rural population is 979643 and the density of population is 1501 per sq km. The literacy rate is 96.26%. The main worker's population is 596387 and marginal worker's population is 208084. Non workers constitute a population of 1323318. Among the workers the rate of female participant is 33.28%. The total number of the cultivators of the district is 17805 among which 15333 are males and 2472 are females. In 2012-13 the area under cultivable waste land was 15680 hectares, fallow land was 4826 hectares, net sown area was 85361 hectares and the total cropped area was 104287 hectares.

3. Methodology

The present study is based on primary data. These data are collected from the survey done among the farmers in the different panchayats of Alappuzha district. Five percent of total farmers of the district including tenants were taken for the study.

4. Aim and Objective

The objectives and aims of the study are as follows:

- i. To know about the causes of fallowing of farm lands.
- ii. To know about the causes for the increase in the area of cultivable waste land.
- iii. To know whether the percentage of cultivable waste land is increasing.
- iv. To know the factors behind the increase of cultivable waste land.
- v. To know whether there are adequate steps to reduce the area of cultivable waste land.

5. Impact of Government Policies (Analysis)

Agriculture is the most important primary activity of human race. This activity is influenced by different factors as it mainly depends on the land. "Growing demands for food, feed, fuel, fiber and raw materials create local and distant pressures for land-use change" (Lambin and Meyfroidt, 2011).

The land sometimes is kept as wastelands. According to the National Wasteland Development Board, wasteland mean degraded land which can be brought under vegetative cover, with reasonable effort and which is currently lying unutilized and land which is deteriorating for lack of appropriate water and soil management or on account of natural cause. Wastelands are of two types, namely, culturable wastelands and unculturable wastelands.

Culturable Wastelands are cultivable wastelands which are not being utilised to their full potential or are being mismanaged due to various reasons such as state or private occupation or being declared as notified forest area. Unculturable Wastelands are the wastelands which are not available for cultivation. These include barren rocky lands, steep sloping areas and areas covered by snow or glaciers.

Agricultural lands are converted to culturable waste at a high rate in Alappuzha district of Kerala. The culturable waste was 3356 hectares at the beginning of this century and it had reached to 15680 hectares in 13 years. On the other hand, fallow lands had decreased from 14238 hectares to 4826 hectares and net sown area also had gone down from 94328 hectares to 85361 hectares in the same period. Percentage share of Culturable waste had increased 9 times from 2% to 11%, while percentage share of Net Sown area and Fallow land had fallen from 66% to 60% and 9% to 2% respectively. There are certain factors which influenced this change of land to wasteland. But the policies of the government are the most important factor which controls all other factors which determines the cropping of the region.

The policies, if not well planned or well executed, will have a negative impact. Likewise, the policies can be a pull factor or push factor for the farmers. The policies which attract and encourage the farmers to do farming by giving them incentives are the pull factor while those policies which chain the freedom of farmers and force them to practice farming in which they are not interested is push factors. The pull factors have positive impacts while push factors have negative impacts. The policies executed without proper study of circumstances and the root problems always come under push factor.

Unfortunately, some of the acts, passed by Government of Kerala, come under the category of push factor. The Act 28 of 2008 "The Kerala conservation of paddy land and wetland act, 2008" is one such act. This act restricts the conversion of wetland to garden land. This act is defined as follows.

"An Act to conserve the paddy land and wetland and to restrict the conversion or reclamation thereof, in order to promote growth in the agricultural sector and to sustain the ecological system, in the State of Kerala "(Kerala Gazette-August 12 -2008)

It seems that this act encourages the wetland agriculture. But exactly it is not addressing the real problem. It is only plastering the original problem.

Government before enforcing the farmers for doing paddy cultivation should have checked whether their real problem is addressed. This act at any place does not address the concern of paddy farmers. From the survey conducted among farmers of the district it was found that their problems are deep rooted.

Firstly, the survey reveals that fragmentation of land is a major constraint faced by the farmers. The survey shows that average land holding is less than one acre. Even though Government had tried to overcome this problem by encouraging cooperative farming in the form of Padasekharam samities, it is doubted whether these samities could attain its goal as they are only semi cooperative societies which move in understanding only in some matters while other issues are managed by the farmer alone. It is also unpractical in areas where the wetlands are not closer.

Another major issue faced by the farmers is financial problem. This problem is the result of many factors. The cost of production is one major issue. The farmers who are not the members of any Padasekharam samitiys had to find out huge amount for the infrastructure, maintenance, labor etc. The government institutions demand many documents and it is as well a time consuming process to get the loans. So these farmers depend on private institutions for their sudden and ongoing needs and they have to pay high interest. The problem for these farmers is not only, finding the capital but also repayment of the loan as the government through its public procurement department collects the crops but pays the money only later. It takes five to six months for getting the sale proceeds of the sold crops. These farmers have to pay a huge amount as interest during these whole months.

The average profit for a farmer who has an acre of paddy field is only Rs 20,000 per season provided there is a good harvest as well as timely payment. So if there are two crops farming per year, the farmer having an acre of farmland is getting a yearly profit of Rs 40,000, provided everything is fine. The pathetic condition of farmers could be seen when we compare it with other jobs. A last grade servant in government service is getting a basic pay starting from the scale of Rs 6000 per month which when calculated is Rs 72,000 per Year plus DA and his life is financially secure as he is getting a pension. The salary scale of government servants is renewed periodically. An agricultural famer gets Rs 560 per day and if calculated he gets Rs 11,200 for 20 days' work and if he is going for

other labour works he is getting more income. As the income of other sectors increases the purchasing power also increases which leads to the rise in price which the poor farmers find difficult to face. So they are forced to take other jobs. The attraction of other jobs and risks in agriculture forces the farmers to shift their occupation and consider farming as a marginal occupation. Again when the income from paddy cultivation is compared to that of plantation farming, the difference could be seen, as plantations such as Rubber gets an income of more than Rs 1, 50,000 per annum for an acre of cultivation in the same district.

Thirdly, the labour problem is a major one. The demand and cost of labour is high while availability and mobility is low. Government had declared a wage of Rs 560 for male agricultural labourer and Rs 330 for females. In some areas the labourers are demanding Rs 800 per day. This amount when compared to the wages of the neighbouring states is very high. Mechanization is difficult as the machines do not suit to the environment of the district as the soils are soft and clayey. In many areas this machine cannot work as the farming areas are small in size.

There are also other problems like health problems, illegal sand mining, river channel encroaching and blocking the water flow, silting of water channels, natural calamities like uneven rain, droughts, winds, raising of land and blocking water flow, illegal raising of barrages used to block sea water intrusion etc.

The insurance and crop loss repayment by the government are inadequate. Compensation is given for the full loss or loss of atleast 10% of total cropped area of paddy crops. Farmers usually suffer when they face loss due to delayed collection of crops by government agencies.

Government instead of addressing the above problems, forces the farmers to have paddy cultivation. The result is that the farmers, when they find that farming is difficult as well as loss, abandon farming and let the land to be a wasteland. There are certain advantages for the small farmers in keeping the farmland wasteland. They do not have to take any risk or there is no need for them to find capital. After a few years they can convert the wetland by putting forward the argument that it was not used for farming for years. So the short sighted acts like the above produce a result just opposite to what is expected.

6. Suggestions

The Government, before putting forward an act, should study clearly its impact over the farmers. It is better to have a policy which is a pull factor rather than a push factor. In some cases, there is need for forcing some laws. But before enforcing the laws, it should be studied whether farmers are comfortable for applying those laws; otherwise it will be failure. Moreover, there should be a circumstance where the farmers feel that farming is a profitable activity. For that there should be a balanced sectoral growth i.e. three sectors, primary, secondary and tertiary sectors should get equal incentives. In Kerala service sector is getting a major boom while other sectors especially primary sector faces difficulty. This should be changed and there should be a dignified life for the producers of food. It could be done only by the Government

7. Conclusion

There are many factors which decide the land use pattern. Government policy is the most important one which can overrule all other factors. The policy should be farsighted one rather than a short sighted one to have the expected results. Short sighted policies always end up in opposite results. The wetland act of 2008 by the Government of Kerala is a pushing factor for the increase of Culturable waste land.

8. References

- i. KERALA GAZETTE, (2008). Government of Kerala, Published by Authority. Vol (LIII) No1790. August 12 2008.
- ii. Ruben N. Lubowski, (2006). Environmental Effects of Agricultural Land-Use Change. A Report from the Economic Research Service, United States, Department of Agriculture No 25 August 2006.
- iii. Carol Hunsberger, Tom, P. Evans. (2012). Land. Global Environment Outlook 5. United Nations Environment Programme, 2012.
- iv. Dinesan, V.P. (2013). Monsoon Rainfall Deficit and its Impact. Article on KERALA CALLING, (March 2013), (PP. 30-35).
- v. Mahesh, R. (1999). Causes and Consequences of Change in Cropping Pattern: A Location-specific Study. Discussion Paper No. 11, Kerala Research Programme on Local Level Development.
- vi. Jagdeep Kumar, (2013), Land Use and Cropping Pattern in Village Surah, Teh. Jhajjar, Distt. Jhajjar, Haryana, PARIPEX - INDIAN JOURNAL OF RESEARCH
- vii. Joel Efiog, (2011) Changing Pattern of Land Use in the Calabar River Catchment, Southeastern Nigeria, Journal of Sustainable Development
- viii. Abdullah Al Mamun, Asif Mahmood, Mafizur Rahman (2013), Identification and Monitoring the Change of Land Use Pattern Using Remote Sensing and GIS: A Case Study of Dhaka City, IOSR Journal of Mechanical and Civil Engineering
- ix. Asib Ahmed (2011), Some of the major environmental problems relating to land use changes in the coastal areas of Bangladesh: A review, Journal of Geography and Regional Planning