

Strategies of Agricultural Entrepreneurs in Lower Brahmaputra Valley, Assam

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Abstract: Agricultural entrepreneurship is imperative for the enhancement of the livelihood and living condition of the people in rural areas. Transformation of farmers into entrepreneurs is often emphasised as a strategy for development of agricultural as well as rural sector in developing countries. Assam is one of the agricultural backward states of India and yet to experience agricultural advancement. The paper attempts to answer two specific research questions. Why is agriculture not a remunerative livelihood option in lower Brahmaputra valley? What are the strategies used by the farmers to make farming a profitable avenue? It is based on key informant interviews with 30 agricultural entrepreneurs in the lower Brahmaputra Valley, Assam. Free listing technique of cultural domain analysis was used to collect data. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select districts, block, villages, and agripreneurs. Amongst the ten districts from lower Brahmaputra valley, two districts have been chosen, on basis of the intensity of agricultural activity. The qualitative data was analysed with the help of Anthro tools an R package. Smith's salience was to analyze the free list responses. In the perception of the agricultural entrepreneurs, inadequate financial capital, farmer's non-willingness to work hard, and non-remunerative prices were the three main reasons for farming remaining unprofitable livelihood option in the lower Brahmaputra valley. The entrepreneurs use a number of strategies to make agricultural as profitable as a business venture. The most prominent among them were undergoing training, farm mechanisation, availing bank loans, adoption of modern agricultural practices and networking with officials so as to avail the benefits of government programmes.

Key Words: Agricultural Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Efforts, Entrepreneurial Strategies, Rural Development.

Introduction

Agricultural entrepreneurship is often construed as a tool for empowering the rural unemployed youth. Agricultural entrepreneur is the one who has the capability and potentiality of starting an enterprise or venture and to excel in the field of agriculture. McElwee (2004) defines farmers as those people who are engaged on a full-time or part-time basis in a series of deeds that are related with farm and agriculture as the main source of income. Entrepreneur is a person who carries out a new combination of activities such as a new product, quality of the product, a new way of production, optional market opportunities, capture the new source of raw materials or the reorganization of any venture (Phelan, 2014). The concept of entrepreneurship is mostly related to economics, GSDP, productivity and employment growth as factors for development (Naude, 2013).

The rural entrepreneur needs the essential '6 M' such as manpower, money, material, machinery, management and market to the rural population (Patel & Chavda, 2013). An agripreneurs always undertakes a variety of activities in agriculture and allied sector in order to be an entrepreneur (Bairwa, Lakra, Kushwaha, Meena, & Kumar, 2014). Agricultural entrepreneurship is a sustainable employment strategy that will ensure self-reliance and economic self-sufficiency to the entrepreneur and also to the community (Uche & Familusi, 2018).

Increasing demand for agricultural products can encourage farmers to take up new strategies to develop themselves as an agricultural entrepreneur in rural areas such as value added products, diversification of farms, using modern agricultural technologies, emergence of the agro-processing venture, and spreading out the product into new markets (Larsen, 2009). Entrepreneurship is very much relevant with farmers because to develop the farms they need to adopt appropriate technologies, the role of agriculture is no longer limited to increase of food production, even the agriculture sector actively contributes towards the development of rural areas (Rudmann, 2008).

The present study explores into the strategies used by farm entrepreneurs in making farming a profitable livelihood avenue in lower Brahmaputra Valley in Assam.

Review of Literature

Development and recognition of entrepreneurial skills is an important area where there are a number of studies (see McElwee, 2005; Mikko & Pyysiäinen, 2006), management of farm and farm support for entrepreneurship (see Kahan, 2012; McElwee & Annibal, 2010), classification of entrepreneurial farmers (see

McElwee, 2008). There are studies available on enhancing entrepreneurial activity and job creation amongst the youth (see Schoof, 2006). Entrepreneurial orientation like knowledge, skills and attitudes towards agricultural entrepreneurship (see Gupta & Gupta, 2015), intensifying the production by using strategies such as increase in volume, specialise or diversify the farms, integration of the value chain by engaging in food processing, direct marketing, or through organic production (see McElwee, 2006).

In Nigerian society, agricultural entrepreneurship activities are always related with the ideas which is new and innovative for rural unemployed (see Uche & Familusi, 2018). In Bangladesh, agriculture and allied activities provide extra revenue to the people relating farms as well as vulnerable groups (see Hamid, Rahman, Ahmed, & Hossain, 2016).

In North East India has unique multiplicity in agro-climatic conditions and has the huge potential for increasing the production and productivity of various crops (see Gogoi & Borah, 2013). But the productivity of the crops other than tea is not satisfactory in the state Assam, and the farmers are deprived of good economic return (see Upadhyai & Nayak, 2017). So, the farmers can be benefit by adopting some strategy for their profitable ventures which will provide them with the much needed financial security, food security and long-term resource sustainability.

Research Questions

The present paper attempts to answer the following questions from the perspectives and experiences of the agricultural entrepreneurs in the lower Brahmaputra Valley of Assam.

1. Why is agriculture not a remunerative livelihood option in the lower Brahmaputra valley?
2. What are the strategies used by the farmers to make farming a profitable avenue in the lower Brahmaputra valley?

Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature and the data has been collected through key informant interviews. The study is based on the free list data (see J. Smith, Furbee, Maynard, Quick, & Ross, 1995; J. J. Smith & Borgatti, 1998; Thompson & Juan, 2006) collected from the key informant interviews with 30 agricultural entrepreneurs in the lower Brahmaputra Valley, Assam. The Free list data was analysed with the help of AnthroTools (see Purzycki & Jamieson-lane, 2016) a package to be used in R environment (see The R Development, 2008). To analyse the free list data, Smith's salience and percentages were computed.

Sampling

The unit of study is the individual agricultural entrepreneur while the population includes all agricultural entrepreneurs in the lower Brahmaputra Valley of Assam state in India. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select districts, blocks, villages, and agripreneurs. Amongst the ten districts from lower Brahmaputra valley, two districts have been chosen on basis of the intensity of agricultural activity. The most agricultural intensive districts of Goalpara and Bongaigaon were chosen purposively. First, of the ten districts in the lower Brahmaputra valley, two districts had been chosen, on basis of the intensity of agricultural activity. Secondly, 3 blocks (one from Goalpara and two from Bongaigaon) were selected purposively and 2 villages were chosen from each block. Thus, total 6 villages were chosen from the already selected districts. Thirdly, in the selected villages a listing exercise of farmers was made to identify the farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs. Fourthly, all agricultural entrepreneurs agreeing to be part of the survey were selected and interviewed.

Results and Discussion

The results of the present study are discussed in three sections. The first section presents a discussion on the demographic social structural bases of the informants. The second section, discussed about the reasons for agriculture not as profitable as business. The third section presents a discussion on the efforts made by agricultural entrepreneur are discussed.

Demographic and Social Structural Bases

The demographic and social profiles of key informant interviews KII include the characteristics of them such as age and educational status (see table 1).

Table 1 Demographic and Social Structural Base of Key Informants

N = 30			
S.N	Characteristic	Frequency	%
I	Age Group		
	Youth (<= 34)	4	13
	Early Middle Age (35 - 44)	11	37

	Late Middle Age (45 - 54)	8	27
	Aged (55+)	7	23
	Mean Age	44 ± 10	
II	Educational Status		
	Illiterate	1	3
	Primary Education	9	30
	High School level	13	43
	Higher Secondary	5	17
	Graduation level	2	7

Source: Computed

Mean ±SD

Age is first demographic attribute that determines social status of individual in Assamese society. The respondents were categorised as Youth (<= 34), Early Middle Age (35 - 44), Late Middle Age (45 - 54) and Aged (55+) on the basis of age. Highest proportion of the farm entrepreneurs were under early middle age (35 - 44) which was 37 per cent. Late Middle Age (45 - 54) were reported as 27 per cent and Aged (55+) were reported as 23 per cent, whereas only 13 per cent Youth (<= 34) were reported as engaged in agricultural entrepreneurship activity. Mean age of key informant interviews was worked out to 44 years. This corroborates the view of McElwee, (2008) who says that agricultural entrepreneurs are those who own the farm and aged under 45 years. However, the results show that nearly one half of the informants have crossed late the middle age.

Education status is the second major demographic characteristics which determine the entrepreneurial behaviour. In fact the education status of the key informants does not indicate agricultural education but it simply shows the formal education of the farm entrepreneurs. The results show that almost all of them were literates. Over 43 per cent of the key informants had education up to high school level. Nearly one third of them had Primary education (30%). Over 17 per cent had higher secondary education. Some of them had graduation (7%). Thus education status of the farmer entrepreneur also shows the potential for training in entrepreneurship.

Reasons for Agriculture Not as Profitable as Business

In Lower Brahmaputra Valley agriculture is not a profitable business and the free list responses of the reasons has been analysed by Smith's salience (**SmithsS**) which indicates the various reasons for agriculture not as profitable as business are discussed from the points of view of the key informants (see table 2).

Table 2 Reasons for Agriculture Not as Profitable as Business

S.N	Reason	Percent	Mean Rank	Smith's S
1	Low Price	37	2	0.26
2	Heavy Investment	33	2.5	0.22
3	Less Remunerative	40	2.8	0.22
4	High Cost of Production	23	2	0.18
5	Less Hard work	27	2.8	0.15
7	Lack of Entrepreneurship	23	3.1	0.12
6	Inadequate Government Support	20	2	0.12
8	Labour Shortage	20	2.8	0.12
9	Poor Market Linkage	13	1.5	0.11
10	Low Production	13	2	0.1
12	Financial Constraint	10	1.3	0.09
11	Technology	17	2.6	0.09
13	Less Market Knowledge	17	2.2	0.08
15	Inadequate Livestock	10	2	0.07
14	Less Agricultural Knowledge	13	2.8	0.07
16	Low Social Prestige	10	3	0.07
17	Time Consuming	7	3.5	0.03
18	Farmers Unity	3	3	0.01
19	Use of Chemicals	3	3	0.01

Source: Computed

The key informants were asked to answer a question about what are the reasons for agriculture which is not as profitable as business. The farmers have reported several reasons which were meaningfully clubbed into the reasons such as Low Price, Heavy Investment, Less Remunerative, High Cost of Production, Less Hard work, Lack of Entrepreneurship, Inadequate Government Support, Labor Shortage, Poor Market Linkage, Low Production, Financial Constraints, Technology, Less Market Knowledge, Inadequate Livestock, Less Agricultural Knowledge, Low Social Prestige, Time Consuming, Farmers Unity and Use of Chemicals were discussed.

The reasons for agriculture why it is not profitable mentioned by the farmers can be classified into four categories on the basis of their popularity viz. prominent, moderately prominent, and less prominent and least prominent ones.

The prominent reasons for agriculture not as profitable as business includes low price (37%), heavy investment (33%), less remunerative (40%) which were more than one third of the KIIs have recognised them. High cost of production (23%), less hard work (27%), lack of entrepreneurship quality (23%), inadequate govt support (20%), labour shortage (20%), poor market linkage (13%), low production (13%) were reported by nearly one fifth of the informants and hence may be called as moderately prominent ones. Financial constraints (10%), less technology use (17%), less market knowledge (17%), inadequate livestock (10%), less agricultural knowledge (13%), low social prestige (10%) were other notable reasons reported by more than one tenth of them. They can be called as less prominent reasons. Time consuming (7%), farmers' unity (3%) and use of chemicals (3%) were considered as reasons for agriculture not as profitable as business were informed by a few of the informants. This set of reasons may be conceded as least prominent attributes.

It is interesting to see the farmers recognize the important reasons for agriculture not being profitable like other business is low price and heavy investment for which agriculture fails to establish as profitable livelihood avenue in lower Brahmaputra valley, Assam.

MDS of Co-occurrence Matrix of Reasons for Agriculture Not as Profitable as Business

Table 3 MDS of Co-occurrence Matrix of reasons for agriculture not as profitable as business also have been done by using the key informants responses which were asked to answer the reasons for non profitability of agriculture. Two dimensions (Dimension01 and Dimension02) indicates the reasons on the basis of more prominent and less prominent, the reasons such as less remunerative, heavy investment, low price of the products and high cost of production have positive impacts on the economic factors because of which agriculture is not as profitable as business.

With the help of wards method cluster analysis also have been done (See figure 1).

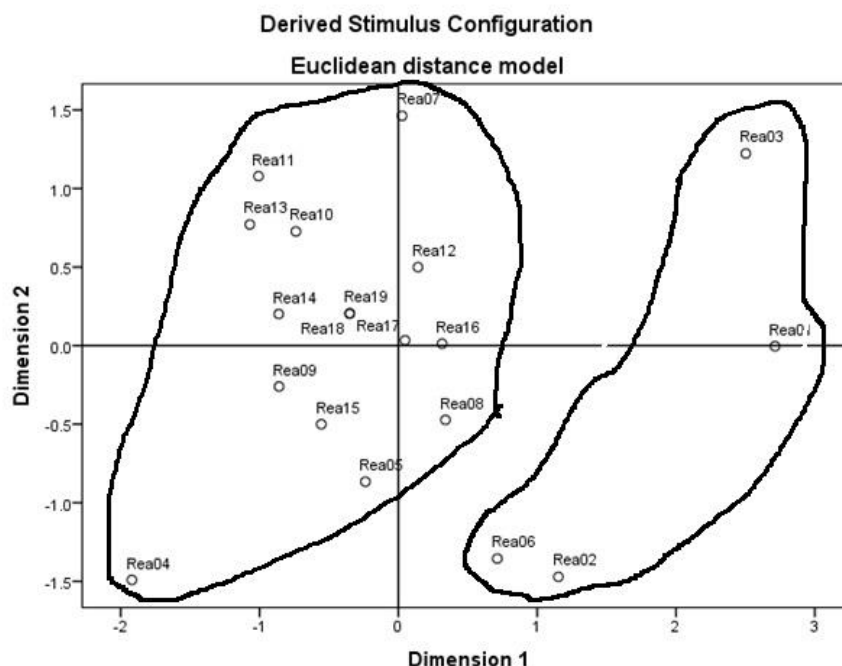
Table 3 MDS of Co-occurrence Matrix of Reasons for Non-profitability of Agriculture

Code	Reason	Dimension01	Dimension02
Rea01	Less Remunerative	2.71	0.00
Rea02	Heavy Investment	1.15	-1.47
Rea03	Low Price	2.50	1.22
Rea04	Less Hard work	-1.92	-1.49
Rea05	Entrepreneurship	-0.24	-0.87
Rea06	High Cost of Production	0.71	-1.36
Rea07	Inadequate Government Support	0.03	1.46
Rea08	Labour Shortage	0.34	-0.47
Rea09	Technology	-0.86	-0.26
Rea10	Less Agricultural Knowledge	-0.74	0.73
Rea11	Less Market Knowledge	-1.01	1.08
Rea12	Low Production	0.14	0.50
Rea13	Poor Market Linkage	-1.07	0.77
Rea14	Financial Constraint	-0.86	0.20
Rea15	Inadequate Livestock	-0.55	-0.50
Rea16	Low Social Prestige	0.31	0.01
Rea17	Time Consuming	0.05	0.03

Rea18	Farmers Unity	-0.35	0.20
Rea19	Use of Chemicals	-0.35	0.21

Source: Computed Stress = 0.18007 RSQ = 0.87

Figure 1 Multidimensional Scaling and Cluster Analysis of Co-occurrence Matrix: Reasons for Agriculture Not as Profitable as Business.



Efforts Made by agricultural Entrepreneurs

Efforts from the farmers to make agriculture as a remunerative avenue in rural areas are highly needed (see Baker & Sinkula, 2009; Mcelwee, 2008).

In this section, efforts of the farmer to make farming as remunerative in the study area are discussed. The free list responses has been analysed by **SmithsS** analysis in R tool and are discussed from the points of view of the key informants.

The informants were asked to report the efforts made by them to make their farming a profitable avenue. They reported efforts made by them such as Mobilising Loans, Increasing Irrigation Potential, Government Network, Agricultural Training, Increased Investment, Farm Mechanisation, Chemicalisation, Farmer Network, Increasing Area, Commercialization of Cropping, Diversification, Organic Farming, Adoption of HYV, Agricultural Intensification, Integrated Farming and Network Middlemen (See table 4).

Table 4 Efforts Made by agricultural Entrepreneurs

S.N	Efforts Made	Percent	Mean Rank	Smith's S
1	Mobilising Loans	36.7	2.1	0.27
2	Increasing Irrigation Potential	43.3	2.1	0.26
3	Government Network	36.7	2.5	0.22
4	Agricultural Training	36.7	2.6	0.19
5	Increased Investment	23.3	1.4	0.17
6	Farm Mechanisation	23.3	2.7	0.15
7	Chemicalisation	13.3	2.0	0.11
8	Farmer Network	20.0	2.8	0.10
9	Increasing Area	13.3	2.0	0.10

10	Commercialization of Cropping	13.3	2.5	0.07
11	Diversification	6.7	1.0	0.07
12	Organic Farming	10.0	2.0	0.06
13	Adoption of HYV	6.7	3.0	0.05
14	Agricultural Intensification	6.7	4.5	0.03
15	Integrated Farming	6.7	4.5	0.02
16	Network Middlemen	3.3	2.0	0.02

Source: Computed

These efforts made by the informants to make their farming profitable can be grouped into five hierarchical categories viz., most popular, more popular, popular, less popular and least popular strategies.

The first is the most popular set of strategies and it includes mobilising loans (36.7%), increasing irrigation potential (43.3%) and government network (36.7%) of the informants to make farming profitable. The second category is the set of more popular strategies and it includes agricultural training (36.7%), increased investment (23.3%), and farm mechanisation (23.3%) constitute the more popular effort followed by nearly one-fifth of the informants. The third set of efforts for making farming profitable is popular strategies. Chemicalisation (13.3%), farmers network (20%) and increasing area (13.3%) which were the popular efforts reported by nearly one-sixth of the informants as efforts to make farming profitable. The fourth set of strategies used by informants for making agriculture as a business-like a venture may be called as less popular strategies. Commercialization of Cropping (13.3%), diversification (6.7%), organic farming (10%) and adoption of HYV (6.7%) were reported by nearly one-tenth of the informants. The fifth and last set of strategies includes those least popular strategies. Agricultural Intensification (6.7%), integrated Farming (6.7%) and network with middlemen (3.3%) were reported by a few of the informants.

MDS of Concurrence Matrix of Efforts Made by agricultural Entrepreneurs to Make Agriculture Profitable

Table 5 shows the MDS of Co-occurrence Matrix of efforts made by agricultural entrepreneurs to make agriculture profitable in this table the results were discussed from the key informant's point of view about the efforts made by the farmers for the profitability of agriculture. Two dimensions (Dimension01 and Dimension02) indicates the efforts made by farmers on the basis of more prominent and less prominent, the efforts such as less remunerative, heavy investment, low price of the products and high cost of production have positive impacts on the economic factors because of which agriculture is not as profitable as business.

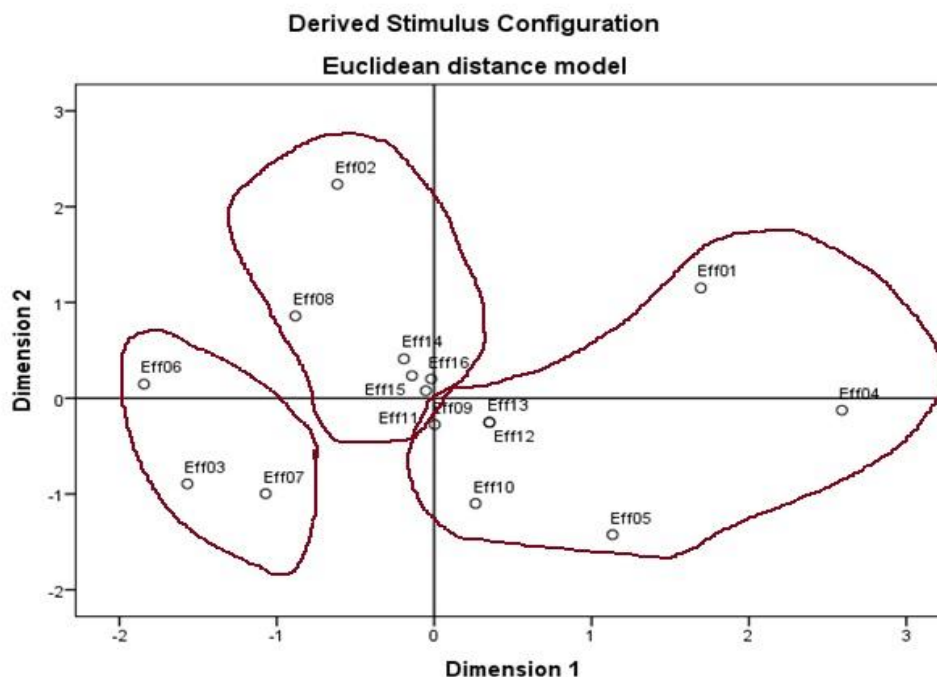
With the help of wards method cluster analysis also have been done (See figure 2).

Table 5 Efforts Made by agricultural Entrepreneurs to Make Agriculture Profitable

Code	Efforts	Dimension01	Dimension02
Eff04	Mobilizing Loans	2.5906	-0.125
Eff01	Increasing Irrigation Potential	1.6941	1.1512
Eff05	Farm Mechanization	1.1331	-1.4244
Eff12	Adoption of HYV	0.351	-0.2515
Eff13	Agricultural Intensification	0.351	-0.2515
Eff09	Commercialization	0.0032	-0.2751
Eff16	Network Middlemen	-0.0185	0.2019
Eff11	Organic Farming	-0.0527	0.0783
Eff15	Integrated Farming	-0.1411	0.2351
Eff14	Diversification	-0.1924	0.4107
Eff10	Increasing Area	-0.2629	1.0988
Eff02	Agricultural Training	-0.6153	2.2344
Eff08	Chemicalisation	-0.8822	0.8581
Eff07	Farmer Network	-1.0708	-0.9966

Eff03	Government Network	-1.5685	-0.8942
Eff06	Increased Investment	-1.8444	0.1474
Source: Computed		Stress = 0.17144	RSQ= 0.87183

Figure 2 Multidimensional Scaling and Cluster Analysis of Co-occurrence Matrix: Efforts Made by agricultural Entrepreneurs to Make Agriculture Profitable



Conclusion

The study reflects the demographic and social structural bases of the agricultural entrepreneurs; they had also mention the reasons why farming is not profitable business and efforts that they had carried out to make the agriculture as profitable venture in Lower Brahmaputra valley Assam.

In the perception of the agricultural entrepreneurs, Low Price, Heavy Investment, Less Remunerative, High Cost of Production, Less Hard work, Inadequate Government Support were the five main reasons for farming remaining unprofitable livelihood option in the lower Brahmaputra valley. The entrepreneurs made number of efforts to make agricultural as profitable as a business venture. The most prominent among them were Mobilising Loans, Increasing Irrigation Potential, and Government Network so as to avail the benefits of government programmes.

Acknowledgement

We thank agricultural officers for their insightful comments and suggestions throughout the data collection process. We also want to thank all the agripreneurs who have given their valuable time and response.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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