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Sustainable Livelihood Analysis of Organic Smallholder Tomato Growers in India

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Abstract

In spite of the rapid growth of the Indian economy, the fraction of the rural population living in poverty has declined only modestly. Increasing indebtedness, rising input prices, changing environmental factors and rapid commercialisation have contributed to rural distress. The government of India is in the process of scaling up a national rural livelihood program. The promotion of organic agriculture is one among them where organic agricultural system increasingly plays an important role for sustainable agriculture and rural development. In this context present research tries to assess the livelihood of the smallholder organic farmers with a sample of 100 households who are cultivating organic and conventional tomatoes in Karnataka, India. It also assesses, whether the adoption of organic farming can improve farmers livelihood to ensure enhanced food security and poverty reduction compare to conventional farmers. This research applies the sustainable livelihood framework in the smallholder agricultural sector to identify sources of vulnerability, support institutions, priority livelihood strategies and possible outcomes and variations across conventional and organic smallholder farmers. The farmers in the study area perceived that they improved their livelihood after conversion from conventional to organic farming. Further reduced input cost with higher yield resulted in higher net farm income. The adoption of organic farming also reduces the risk of crop failure due to droughts, pest and diseases, thereby reducing vulnerability. In addition, the results also reveal that enhanced human capital (capacity building, health), social capital (producer organisation, relations and connectedness), physical capital (production and processing equipment, certification), natural capital (soil health and water holding capacity), financial capital and better maintenance of the cultural capital contributes to an overall increase in quality life of the smallholder organic farmers compare to conventional farmers. However, the non availability of organic inputs, initial decline in crop yield, the lack of market access, lack of information and experiences are the major constraints preventing poor farmers to adopt organic agriculture.

Keywords: Organic farmers, organic tomato, sustainable livelihood