

Socio-Economic Aspects of Konkan Rice Farming Society, Maharashtra: Review

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ABSTRACT

This review provides the socio-economic dimensions of rice farming communities in Maharashtra's Konkan region, based on a blend of geographical, historical, and contemporary aspects of heavy rainfall and hilly landscapes. The combination of complex geography, historical context, and modern influences sustains rice cultivation and farmer livelihoods in Konkan. This abstract reveals themes derived from the literature, emphasizing traditional farming methods, land ownership structures, and the essential role of rice in these communities' cultural and economic lives. The research investigates the socio-economic challenges facing rice cultivators, including the impact of monsoon uncertainty, the lack of irrigation access, and increasing exposure to climate change. This study explores how government policies, farm initiatives, and cooperative movements impact the fortunes of these groups. It also uncovers the dynamics of the

rural labor market, migration patterns influenced by agricultural cycles, and the evolving aspirations of the youth. The study also focuses on the social structures of these groups, including caste relationships, gender roles in rice cultivation, and the influence of social capital on farm output and economic well-being. The effects of modernization and technological advancements on traditional agricultural practices and their socio-cultural consequences. Additionally, the review highlights existing research gaps. It proposes future research avenues, stressing the importance of interdisciplinary studies to comprehend and tackle the complex socio-economic conditions of rice-growing communities in the Konkan belt. Understanding these factors is essential to developing effective and sustainable policies that empower these agricultural groups.

Keywords: Konkan; Rice farming communities; Socio-economic aspects; Maharashtra; Agricultural livelihoods

Graphical abstract:



1. INTRODUCTION

Konkan, a narrow and long coastal belt in western Maharashtra, India, possesses a special geographical profile with the Sahyadri mountain system to its east and the Arabian Sea to its west. This distinctive topography, coupled with a tropical monsoon climate characterized by heavy rainfall, has,

throughout history, impacted patterns of agriculture and the socio-economic life of its inhabitants. Among the wide variety of crops cultivated in this rich belt, rice (*Oryza sativa* L.) (Fig. 1) is the prevailing staple crop with firm roots deeply rooted in the people's social, economic, and cultural life [1], [2].



Figure 1: Rice farm

For generations, rice farming has been an occupation and a way of life for much of the Konkan population. It is the foundation of their rural economy and an essential pillar of their food security and sense of identity. Understanding the intricate dynamics of environmental processes, historical evolution, and current issues in this farm context is essential to grasping the socio-economic existence of rice-farming communities in the region [3], [4].

1.1. Background and significance of rice farming in Konkan

The heritage of rice cultivation in Konkan dates back centuries, when indigenous cultivars and rice-farming practices evolved

based on the agro-ecological niches of the region. The high rainfall in the area, particularly during the southwest monsoon, and the sculpted hillsides terraced into the hillsides have permitted paddy cultivation, and it is the most suitable and common agricultural practice. Rice is not merely a crop but a cultural mainstay and is centrally involved in local festivals, rituals, and daily diets. The farming season follows the rice growth cycle, setting the rhythm of life for most rural communities (Fig. 2). From seed planting in nurseries to harvesting the full-grown paddy, each stage involves communal participation and traditional knowledge passed down from generations [5], [6].



Figure 2: Rice farming in the Konkan region

This deep-rooted tradition of rice cultivation has led to a unique agrarian culture, characterized by specific social customs, work patterns, and community relationships centered around the agricultural cycle. Economically, rice cultivation has been the primary source of livelihood for a large majority of the Konkan people. It provides direct employment to farmers and agricultural laborers and ancillary support through seed production, transportation, and local processing [7]. The surplus production of rice, wherever it happens, supplies local markets and regional trade networks, an integral component of the regional economy. Moreover, control and ownership of rice fields also have significant social and symbolic connotations, influencing social hierarchy and power relations within the communities. The agrarian pattern,

predominantly of small and marginal holdings, is a historical pattern of land inheritance and distribution, shaping individual farm households' economic opportunities and limitations. Despite increasing urbanization and livelihood diversification in some parts of Konkan, rice farming continues to be a significant economic activity, particularly in the more rural and interior areas [7], [8].

1.2.Socio-economic characteristics and challenges

The socio-economic profile of Konkan's rice-growing communities is complex and shaped by a complex combination of factors, such as land holding patterns, social stratification (caste, class), access to resources, level of education, and exposure to modernisation (Fig. 3).

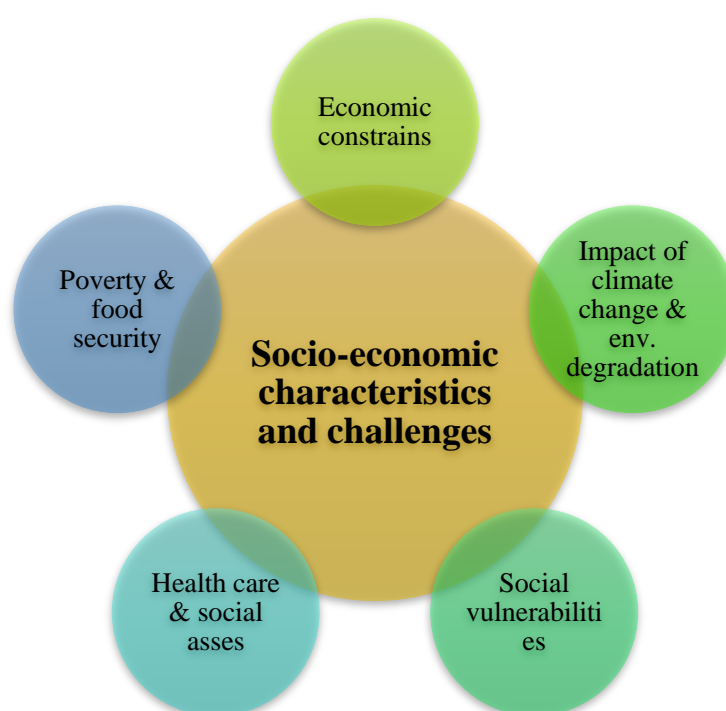


Figure 3: Socio-economic characteristics and challenges

Landholding is generally small, often fragmented by inheritance policy, limiting the amount of land cultivated and room for large-scale commercialisation. This fragmentation and dependence on monsoon-based irrigation expose rice cultivation to the whims of the weather, impacting yields and

income stability. Small and marginal farmers often have access to new agricultural inputs, credit facilities, and functioning market linkages infrequently, thus raising their economic risks further. Socially, the groups are rooted in kinship ties and local networks that enable farming labor cooperation and

exchange [9], [10]. However, traditional social hierarchies, like caste-based systems, continue to influence community access to opportunities and resources. Gender relations in rice cultivation are also significant, with women having an essential role in every cultivation phase, from transplanting and weeding until post-harvest processing. Realizing these social relationships is vital to comprehending the labor-share, income-share, and decision-making processes at the farm household level. Further, rice farmers of Konkan also have to deal with a host of emerging issues. The increasing impacts of climate change, including variable patterns of rain, prolonged dry spells, and increased occurrences of unexpected weather events, pose a significant risk to the stability of rice farming. Soil loss, water shortage in certain areas, and pests and diseases all contribute to these issues. Also, the younger cohort in these communities is taking alternative jobs in towns, which will likely lower the number of farm workers and challenge the long-term sustainability of rice farming. The lack of proper infrastructure, exposure to information and technology, and the

generally non-remunerative returns for their produce contribute to the economic plight that most rice-farming households face. These socio-economic characteristics and the list of challenges illustrate the need to understand the nuances in these populations to create efficacious and targeted interventions for their sustainable development and health [6], [7], [8].

2. Factors influencing rice farming communities

The socio-economic situation of rice farming communities in Konkan is not a result of inherent community forces. Still, it is more shaped by external factors, widely characterized as agro-ecological conditions and traditional practices, and the far-reaching influence of policy, support systems, and market forces (Fig. 4). These two sets of factors interact in complex ways, shaping the area's productivity, profitability, and overall well-being of rice farming families. Understanding how they interact is crucial for building effective strategies to enhance the resilience and sustainability of these agricultural communities [2], [8], [9].

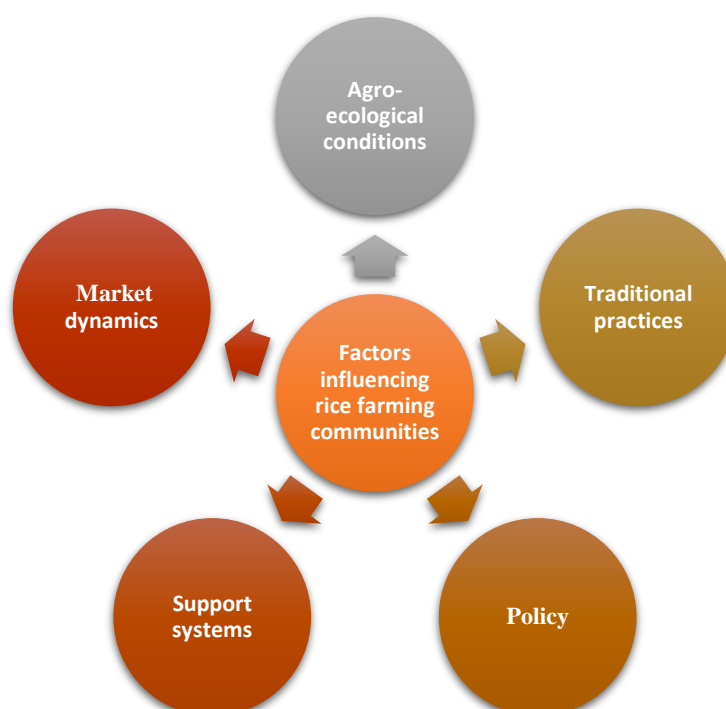


Figure 4: Factors influencing rice farming communities

2.1. Agro-ecological conditions and traditional practices

The unique agro-ecological conditions of the Konkan area play a critical role in shaping its rice farming systems. The excessive rainfall during the monsoon season is both beneficial and disadvantageous. While it provides water for paddy cultivation, its intensity and unpredictability can result in floods and waterlogging in the lowlands or drought-like conditions if the delayed or below-average monsoon occurs. The land's rugged nature requires terracing farming, a cultural method converted to modern agriculture to prevent soil erosion and water stagnation. The soil quality, primarily lateritic in composition, requires special attention to maintain fertility. Seed selection knowledge, crop rotation, and biotic pest management have been passed down through the ages and constitute a deep understanding of the native environment. The traditional rice-culture practices of Konkan also tend towards close relationships with nature and utilizing locally available resources. The use of indigenous seed varieties, which are suited to every microclimate in the area, has been a feature of these systems. Farming implements, typically simple and locally produced, are even more common in most areas, particularly among marginal and small farmers [11]. Labor exchange systems based on people, known locally by many different names, are also standard, reflecting social solidarity and interdependence among people in these societies. These old systems, even though generally sustainable and locally adaptive, may sometimes be restricted by productivity compared to the modern intensive cultivation methods. It is a central challenge for future rice cultivation in Konkan to balance conserving valuable old knowledge with accepting appropriate new technologies. Furthermore, increased exposure to climate change dictates the need to review conventional farming practices and the adoption of climate-resilient strategies in agriculture.

2.2. Policy, support systems, and market dynamics

The general policy environment, the availability and quality of support systems, and the dynamics of the market in agriculture significantly influence the socio-economic well-being of Konkan's rice cultivation communities. Policies like subsidies on inputs (seeds, fertilizers), price support, and the establishment of irrigation infrastructure play a direct role in influencing the economic feasibility of rice farming. The issues of utmost concern are how effective these policies are in extending to the marginal and small farmers and how responsive the policies are to the needs of the Konkan region. Institutional credit from cooperative societies and banks may decrease the debt burden obtained from informal sources and enable farmers to invest in better inputs and technology. However, bureaucratic and collateral demands usually limit access to the poorest farmers [12], [13]. Agricultural extension services assist in disseminating information about better farm practices, new technology, and market developments. The level and extent of these services can strongly influence the adoption of new approaches and the overall efficiency of rice production. Similarly, the level of effective market linkages and post-harvest infrastructure (storage, processing) influences the prices farmers receive for their produce. Market price fluctuations, the activities of intermediaries, and a lack of organized marketing channels help leave farmers with a smaller percentage of the end-consumer price. Forming farmer producer organizations (FPOs) and promoting direct marketing schemes can improve rice farmers' market access and bargaining power. Besides, tenancy policies and land ownership rights can profoundly affect household security and livelihood in rice farming. Secure tenancy and clear titles to land can promote long-term investment in land improvement and sustainability in agriculture. Conversely, ambiguous tenure systems instill uncertainty and act as disincentives for long-term farm

development. The interaction among these policies, support systems, and market forces creates a complex external environment that significantly shapes the opportunities and constraints for rice farming communities of Konkan. Understanding and managing the issues of this external arrangement are essential for creating a more equal and sustainable future for these key agricultural communities [12], [14].

3. Social structures, dynamics, and livelihoods

Local social structures and the livelihood pathways that Konkan rice farmer communities follow significantly determine resilience and well-being. These are the intricate social organizations in the villages, the organized role and function of different social groups (gender) engaged, migration patterns that influence labor trends, and the economic exposures that necessitate diversification of livelihood opportunities. Understanding these interdependent factors provides more insight into these agricultural populations' daily life and prospects.

3.1.Social organization, gender roles, and migration

The social organization of rice cultivators of Konkan is often characterized by intimate kinship ties and locally based neighbourhood associations, which play an essential role in the culture of life and agricultural practice. The traditional social structure, like caste ranking, even as it is changing, continues to influence social interaction, availability of resources, and distribution of power in the villages. An awareness of these social stratifications is central to comprehending labour distribution, land ownership, and decision-making [15]. Local customs, traditions, and festive celebrations are often built around the agricultural calendar, supporting social unity and shared identity. Gender also has a critical role in rice cultivation in Konkan, where women participate actively at all cultivation phases, from pre-planting operations like seed preparation to transplanting, weeding,

harvesting, and post-harvest operations. They also have an essential role in performing household chores, tending livestock, and often controlling the household income. Although women contribute significantly, their efforts regarding land ownership or participation in community decisions are not always documented or reflected. The gender segregation of labour and the character of challenge and opportunity available to women in agriculture must be understood so that gender equity and the productivity of agriculture may be enhanced [16]. Migration is an emerging factor in shaping Konkan rice farm communities' social and economic character. Seasonal outmigration, such as farm labour elsewhere or permanent outmigration to urban centres in search of better job opportunities, is prevalent. Such outmigration, particularly of young men, can lead to farm labour shortages during peak agricultural seasons and add additional pressure to women and older family members. Remittances sent back by migrants are a vital source of income for farm households, adding to their economic security. However, it also tends to reduce agricultural participation and change livelihood strategies. It is essential to understand the determinants and consequences of migration to address labour concerns and formulate rural development policies [17], [18].

3.2.Economic vulnerabilities and livelihood diversification

Rice farming in Konkan, primarily characterized by small holdings and rain-fed agriculture, has several economic vulnerabilities. Monsoon dependence makes agricultural yields susceptible to climate change impacts and meteorological fluctuations. Market price variability of rice, which is driven by forces outside the direct control of individual farmers, is likely to generate income instability. Limited credit availability at affordable prices and the prevalence of informal credit may result in debt traps. Prices of agricultural inputs, such

as fertilizers and pesticides, may erode profit margins, particularly for small farmers [3], [16], [17]. Crop losses to pests, diseases, or natural calamities can have disastrous impacts on household incomes and food security. To mitigate these economic vulnerabilities, Konkan rice farming households often resort to various livelihood diversification strategies to enhance their farm incomes and lower their vulnerability. Based on circumstances and available resources, these may be in the nature of taking up allied farm professions such as horticulture, animal husbandry (dairy, poultry), and fisheries. Off-farm employment opportunities such as construction wage labor, small business work, local tourist activities, and remittances from migrant household members are also significant contributors to household livelihood diversification. The extent and nature of livelihood diversification vary between communities. They are influenced by factors such as levels of education, access to skill training, infrastructure investment, and proximity to urban centres. Facilitating and promoting sustainable livelihood diversification prospects is critical to reducing the economic risk associated with rice farming communities and sustaining their long-term wealth and food security [7], [8].

4. Modernization, sustainability, and future directions

The destiny of rice farming communities in Konkan hinges on their ability to harness the power of modernization while adopting eco-friendly methods that ensure long-term ecological and economic sustainability. This subsection explains the technological adoption process, its multifaceted socio-economic implications, and the significant challenges and new opportunities for sustainable development in the region's agricultural sector.

4.1. Technological adoption and its socio-economic impact

Adopting new farming technologies gradually transforms rice-farming practices in Konkan, albeit at varying rates between communities and farm sizes. Mechanization by applying tractors, tillers, and harvesters is gaining momentum, particularly in areas with more extensive holdings and where labor is scarce because of out-migration. Adopting high-yielding rice varieties (HYVs) and increased use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides have increased productivity in some areas. Precision agriculture techniques, including soil analysis and localized nutrient application, are gradually gaining acceptance, although adoption remains limited due to costs and access to information. Digital tools, including mobile applications for weather forecast, market information, and advisory services for agriculture, hold enormous promise but require enhanced connectivity and digital literacy of farmers. Socio-economic impacts of technology use are complex and multifaceted. Mechanization may improve productivity and reduce labor expenses. Still, it may also lead to the displacement of farm labor, particularly of those who are from marginalized groups and who rely on manual work. Applying HYVs and chemicals can increase productivity, but can also have specific adverse environmental impacts, such as soil erosion and water pollution, and can increase farmers' input costs. Availability and affordability of these new technologies tend to create a gap between resource-rich and large farmers and small and marginal farmers, further widening existing inequalities. In addition, the shift towards more technology-based agriculture may also require new skills and knowledge sets, and hence investment in training and education for farmers to utilize these innovations. Technological adoption needs to be promoted in an inclusive, green manner and tailored to the needs and constraints of the different farming groups in Konkan [19], [20].

4.2.Challenges and opportunities for sustainable development

Sustainable development of Konkan's rice-growing business is a unique case of opportunity and challenges. Given the worsening impacts of climate change, environmental sustainability is the central concern, which necessitates saving water resources and preserving soil fertility and ecosystem health (Fig. 5). Erratic rainfall patterns, rising temperatures, and increased extreme weather conditions make climate-

resilient agricultural practices such as drought-resistant varieties, water-saving irrigation technologies, and integrated pest management practices essential. Promoting agroecological methods and organic cultivation can reduce chemical input use and maximize the long-term well-being of the agroecosystem. Sustainability requires rice production to be a profitable and sustainable livelihood activity for farmers [15], [16], [17].

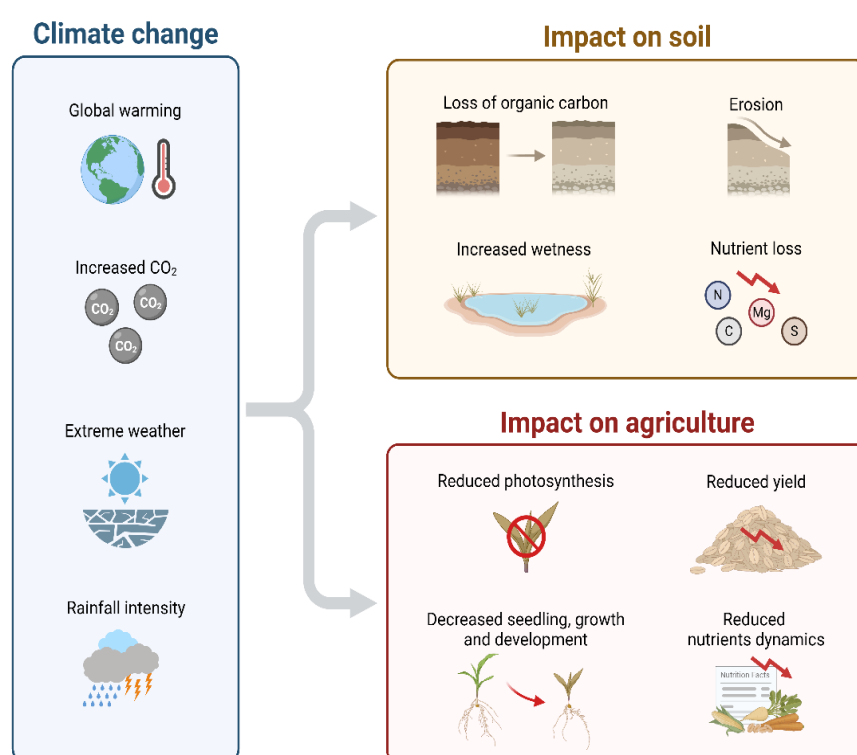


Figure 5: Smart farming data analysis

This involves improving productivity through sustainable intensification, increasing market access and price improvement, reducing the cost of input, and guaranteeing value addition in the form of local processing and brand name creation. Emerging farmer producer organizations (FPOs) may be useful for bargaining collectively, accessing better markets, and exchanging knowledge. Enlarging income bases from allied agriculture ventures and non-farm livelihood activities can strengthen

the financial sustainability of farm households. Social sustainability ensures justice, equity, and well-being of all stakeholders in the rice farmer communities. It entails addressing land ownership issues, enhancing gender equality in agriculture, enhancing access to health care and education, and preserving the rich cultural heritage of rice farming. Empowering local institutions through participatory approaches to development planning and decision-making will ensure that the interventions are

contextual and practical. In the coming years, there will be significant opportunities to enable sustainable development in rice farming in Konkan. Increased consumer demand for sustainably produced food, increased environmental concerns, and emerging agricultural technologies offer avenues for change. Promoting research and development of locally adapted and climate-resilient rice varieties, investment in ecologically sustainable irrigation infrastructure, improvement of agricultural extension services with focus on sustainable production, and evolving enabling policies to support ecological farming and fair market access are significant measures towards ensuring a more prosperous and resilient future for Konkan's rice producer communities. A holistic approach synthesizing environmental, economic, and social considerations will be needed if the full strength of this critical agricultural industry is to be obtained while safeguarding the area's natural capital and cultural attributes [19], [20].

5. CONCLUSION

This review provides the complex socio-economic terrain of rice farming societies in the Konkan region of Maharashtra and the profound cultural and economic importance of rice cultivation in their social fabric. The distinctive agro-ecological conditions of the region and the long-standing tradition of farming practice have given rise to unique agricultural systems, which are closely integrated with the region's people's social structure and day-to-day life. However, these communities face various sophisticated challenges, ranging from increasing exposures due to climate change and market volatility to socio-economic constraints of small landholdings, limited access to resources, and shifting social circumstances, including gender roles and migration. The ongoing process of modernization, defined by the incremental addition of new technologies, promises possibilities of increased productivity and dangers of exacerbating existing inequalities and

environmental problems. It has to be met by a gradual and people-inclusive process that is a top priority in the interests of marginal and small farmers and encourages eco-friendly production methods. The future of rice farming communities in Konkan is one where there is a wholesome approach towards sustainable development that includes ecological conservation, economic sustainability, and social justice. Achieving this vision needs collective action by several stakeholders. Inclusive government policies that address the region's challenges and proper support systems, such as agricultural extension, access to credit, and robust market linkages, are crucial. The consolidation of local communities in the context of farmer organizations and participatory development will guarantee context-specific and locally driven solutions. Moreover, the promotion of livelihood diversification, climate-smart agriculture, and investment in the capacities of the youth are of utmost importance for resilience building and long-term well-being of these key agricultural communities. Finally, the destiny of rice farming in Konkan rests on the ability to balance the rich heritage of traditional techniques with the potential of sustainable modernization, building a stable and enduring agricultural sector that will still contribute to the economy, culture, and food security of the region for several decades to come.

Declaration by Authors

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