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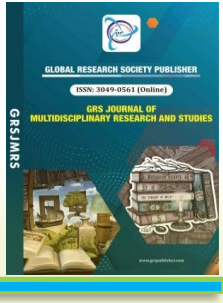

Challenges and Limitations Connected to Agriculture Production and Marketing in Serchhip District Mizoram

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Abstract: This study examines the challenges and limitations associated with agricultural production and marketing in Serchhip District, Mizoram. The district, with a population of 64,937 as of the 2011 census, relies heavily on agriculture, with over 60% of its inhabitants engaged in farming activities. Despite impressive literacy rates and a significant workforce involved in agriculture, several obstacles hinder the sector's efficiency and growth. Key challenges identified include geographical barriers, such as rugged terrain and inadequate road infrastructure, which impede the efficient transportation of goods. Technological inadequacies also persist, with outdated farming practices limiting productivity. Financial constraints are significant, characterized by limited access to affordable credit and insurance, and volatility in agricultural markets. The lack of well-structured producer organizations further weakens farmers' bargaining power and market leverage. Additionally, deficiencies in agricultural statistics collection hamper effective policy formulation and resource allocation. The study highlights the necessity of improving infrastructure, adopting modern agricultural technologies, enhancing access to financial services, and fostering farmer cooperatives to mitigate these challenges. Addressing these issues through targeted interventions and policies can promote sustainable agricultural development and economic resilience in Serchhip District.

Keywords: *Social Media Communication, Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA), Visual Semiotics, Digital Literacy, Online Communities.*

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Introduction

Serchhip District has a total population of 64937, with urban and rural populations numbering 32019 and 32918 respectively in 2011 census. Among them, there are 62889 ST individuals and 32 SC individuals. The sex ratio stands at 977 females per every 1000 males, while the population density is reported as being about 46 persons per square kilometer.[1] In terms of literacy rate, the district boasts an impressive figure of 97.91%, far surpassing the state's average rate of 91.33

In Serchhip District, more than 60% of the inhabitants depend on agricultural activities. The overall rice yield in the district for 2022-2023 amounted to 7782 Metric Tons over a land area of 4242 Hectares, representing a notable rise from the previous year's harvest of 7625 Metric Tons during 2021-2022.[2] The 2011 Census of India reported that nearly half, or 49.89 percent, of the entire population, which amounts to 32,397 individuals, were involved in employment, surpassing the state's average percentage of 44.36. The total number of cultivators was 21804 persons and its average was 67.30 against the state percentage of 47.17.[3] The District populations are involved and keenly interested the agriculture activities and more than half of the total workers are involved in agriculture and its activities.

Population and Demographics

Distribution of various workers in the Serchhip District and the State of Mizoram are shown below:

Table 1: Comparison of Worker and Non-Worker Distribution in Mizoram and Serchhip District

	Mizoram		Serchhip District	
	Total	**Percentile**	**Total**	**Percentile**
Total Workers (Main + Marginal)	486705	44.36	32397	49.89
Main Workers	415030	37.83	29838	45.95
Marginal Workers	71675	6.53	2559	3.94
Non-Workers	610501	55.64	32540	50.11
Cultivators	229603	47.17	21804	67.30

[1] *Census of India, 2011.*

[2] *Statistics from Directorate of Agriculture, Aizawl, Mizoram.*

[3] *Census of India, 2011.*

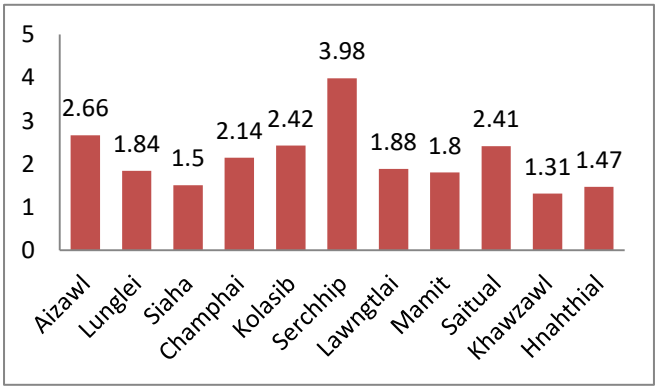
Agricultural Labourers	41787	8.59	1284	3.96
Household industry workers	7852	1.61	926	2.86
Other Workers	207463	42.63	8383	25.88

The total number of villages is 40 and there are 12590 households in the District. Serchhip is famous for its fresh vegetable produce in all seasons in the state. Market middlemen in different places from Mizoram get supplies from Serchhip District farmers. Agricultural activities form the primary occupation for the residents of Serchhip District. Based on the Mizoram Statistical Abstract 2021, Serchhip district hosts 21,804 individuals engaged in farming and 1,284 working directly in agriculture. In total, the district's labor force comprises 32,397 people, with farmers and agricultural workers constituting 71.2% of this workforce. Serchhip district comprises three sub-divisions and out of the total population of 64,937, approximately 30% reside in Serchhip Town, while the remaining 70% inhabit rural areas, mainly comprising farming households.

Agriculture stands as the primary occupation in the district, with the prevalent agricultural system predominantly practiced in the river valleys and through terracing in the foothills. Numerous farmers, especially those in rural regions, still depend on rotating cultivation methods for growing crops. Key crops cultivated in the district encompass rice, corn, bananas, pineapples, mandarin oranges, passion fruits, peppers, cabbages, and sugarcane, among others.

Production in Serchhip District

From the study it is known that the agriculture production in Serchhip District is increasing and from the record, Serchhip District has got the highest production per hectare of land. In 2022-2023, the area of production was 7886 hectares total production has reached 31359 metric tonnes and the yield per hectare is 3.98. No other District in Mizoram has higher than that, Aizawl District is next to Serchhip and it has got 2.66 yield per hectare. The state of Mizoram has got 2.34 yield per hectare. The study reveals that Serchhip District in Mizoram has shown great potential for agriculture production. Serchhip District has exhibited promising prospects for agricultural development within Mizoram. This potential can be further harnessed by introducing innovative farming techniques and systems.



Serchhip District in Mizoram has emerged as a hub for agricultural production, setting remarkable records in various crops. The district has showcased its potential in agriculture by achieving impressive milestones in the cultivation of different crops. The farmers of Serchhip District have demonstrated their expertise and dedication, leading to high yields and exceptional quality of agricultural produce. Utilizing the rich soil and favourable climate of the region, Serchhip District has become a shining example of agricultural success in Mizoram. Through their hard work and innovation, the farmers of Serchhip District have made significant contributions to the agricultural sector.

Challenges and Limitations

A comprehensive study has been conducted on the agriculture production and marketing of Serchhip District, and it revealed several challenges and limitations that are affecting agricultural production in the area. The challenges and limitations encountered in agriculture production and marketing are discussed below:

1. Geographical Challenge:

Agriculture production and marketing in Serchhip District face significant geographical challenges that impede the efficient movement of goods from farms to markets. The rugged terrain and steep slopes characteristic of hilly areas make transportation difficult and time-consuming. In some regions where the lack of proper road connectivity forces farmers to carry their produce to the market by head load. This situation underscores the severe limitations faced by farmers in such areas. According to the report of NABARD (2024), the overall length of Pucca Road in the District is 116 km. Some agricultural regions are mountainous and lack road connectivity. The absence of reliable and accessible transportation infrastructure not only increases the physical burden on farmers but also restricts the volume of produce that can be transported at any given time. This, in turn, impacts the market reach and economic viability of their agricultural activities, leading to reduced incomes and economic hardship.

Improving infrastructure and developing alternative transportation solutions are essential to alleviate these challenges. The Disaster Management Authority in Serchhip District records that the overall length of Road in the District is 488.29kms.

Table 2: Length of Roads in Serchhip District (in Kilometers)

SN	Roads	Surfaced	Unsurfaced	Total
1	State Highway	72.8	-	72.8
2	Major District Road	-	154.45	154.45
3	Other District Road	18	51	69
4	Town Road	79.67	40.69	120.36
5	Village Road	1.13	2.55	3.68
6	NH(BRO)	68	-	68
	TOTAL	239.6	248.69	488.29

Source: Disaster Management Plan, Serchhip District, Mizoram.

From the table above, it is evident that more than half (50.9%) of the overall roads in the area remain unsurfaced. The overall surfaced Roads are 49% only.

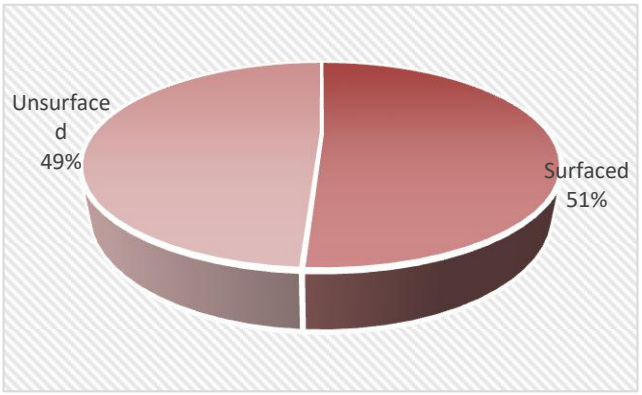


Fig: Percentage of Surfaced and Unsurfaced Road in Serchhip District

This indicates a significant portion of the road infrastructure has not been paved or coated with a durable surface material. This situation highlights the need for infrastructure development and investment to revamp the quality and accessibility of the road extreme weather conditions, such as heavy rains and landslides, frequently disrupt transportation routes and supply chains, causing delays in the delivery of goods and significant financial losses. The data from District Disaster Management Authority states that Serchhip District has experienced multiple disasters that have significantly impacted local farmers and resulted in substantial economic losses.

Table 3: Agricultural Losses from Disasters in Serchhip District (2018-2021)

SN	Particulars	2018-2019		2019-2020		2020-2021	
		Hectares	Amount	Hectares	Amount	Hectares	Amount
1	Landslide	78.2	5,94,835	-	-	0.4	2,720
2	Fire	6.2	1,01,710	7.1	1,27,800	22.5	4,53,780
3	Hail Storm	45.4	8,40,420	-	-	20	3,07,920
4	Cyclone	15.5	1,54,219	62.4	11,23,200	62	11,23,200
5	Flood	0.9	9,820	0.8	10,160	58	7,98,724
	Total	146.2	17,01,004	70.3	12,61,169	162.9	26,86,344

Source: Disaster Management Plan, Serchhip District, Mizoram

In 2020-2021, a total of 162.9 hectare of land was loss due to Disaster and this loss is equivalent to amount of Rs 26,86,344. Between the years 2018 and 2021, various disasters caused significant damage to agricultural land. A total area of 379.4 hectares was affected by these calamities. Consequently, the total financial loss incurred amounted to Rs 56,48,517. This substantial loss underscores the vulnerability of agriculture to natural disasters and the critical need for effective disaster management and mitigation strategies.

The inadequate storage facilities exacerbate these issues, leading to spoilage of perishable goods before they can reach the market. These challenges present significant obstacles to efficient agricultural marketing in mountainous regions, prompting targeted efforts to enhance infrastructure, transport logistics, and storage solutions. This logistical barrier contributes to higher transportation costs, prolonged transit times, and potential delays in delivering fresh produce to the market, impacting the profitability and competitiveness of agricultural businesses.

Addressing location-specific challenges is essential for promoting sustainable agricultural growth and optimizing supply chain effectiveness. Proactive measures from the government must be taken alongside resource allocation to overcome these geographical barriers that impede agricultural development. Improving road infrastructure connecting various farming areas is necessary while implementing agriculture crop insurance policies for farmers will safeguard them against losses due to climate change and extreme weather conditions.

2. Technological Challenge: The primary challenge confronting Indian farmers today is technological inadequacy. A significant portion of the technology employed in agriculture is antiquated and in need of modernization, although some commercial agricultural enterprises such as food processing and cold storage represent exceptions to this trend.The Agriculture Department is actively promoting Farm Mechanization by providing agricultural equipment to farmers at discounted rates. Subsidies ranging from 25% to 50% of the procurement cost are offered under the revised "Macro Management of Agriculture (MMA)" scheme for various categories of equipment.

In order to maximize production and productivity of land, optimum use of power tillers and other farm machinery/implements is necessary. Farmers are mainly using power tillers, mini power tillers and equipment like sprayer, grass cutters, etc., in the district. Subsidies on tractors and power tillers are applicable to models approved by the department under institutional financing. In addition to tractors and power tillers, combine harvesters are also accessible to farmers according to the approved subsidy scheme. Recognizing that individual farmers may face challenges in purchasing high-cost equipment independently, assistance under the program extends to Self Help Groups of farmers (SHGs), user groups, cooperative societies of farmers, and similar entities. Through the convergence of RKVY and MMA with SEDP, a significant number of machineries such as Power Tillers were distributed at subsidized rates, resulting in improved crop production.

From 2018-2023, the Department of Agriculture, Serchhip District has subsidised the following Farm Mechanization item to the farm

Table 4: Agricultural Subsidised to Farmers in Serchhip District

SN	Items	Number of item
1	Tractor	23
2	Power Tiller	57
3	Brush Cutter	107
4	Sprayer	1700
5	Mini Power Tiller	11
6	Solar Pump	5
7	Water Pump	37
8	Paddy Thresher	5
9	Harvester	7

Source: Agriculture Department, Serchhip District

The digital divide also affects the integration of information technology in farming, limiting the potential benefits of precision agriculture and market access through online platforms.

Addressing technical problems in agriculture requires a multifaceted approach. Adopting modern technologies such as precision farming, drones, and automation can enhance efficiency. Improving irrigation through drip systems and rainwater harvesting ensures optimal water use. Agriculture Department may ensure close coordination with banks for financing of tractors and Power tillers under the State Govt. subsidy scheme. Agriculture Department may also ensure that supply of farm machinery and its services network is adequate. Banks should finance FM activities through SHGs / JLGs to operate farm machinery on custom hiring basis. Farmers may be trained & educated to acquire appropriate farm implements as per their farm need by Agriculture Department. The government should foster the development of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) to aid farmers.

3. Financial Challenge

Agricultural production and marketing are fraught with financial challenges that significantly impact farmers' livelihoods and the efficiency of the agricultural sector. One of the primary financial obstacles is the limited access to affordable credit, which restricts farmers' ability to invest in high-quality seeds, fertilizers, and modern farming equipment. High-interest rates and stringent lending criteria from financial institutions further exacerbate this issue. Additionally, the volatility of agricultural markets poses a significant risk, with fluctuating prices making it difficult for farmers to predict their income and plan accordingly. This instability often leads to inadequate income and financial insecurity, discouraging investment in innovative practices. Moreover, the lack of proper insurance mechanisms means that farmers are vulnerable to losses from unpredictable weather patterns, pests, and diseases, without any financial safety net. These financial constraints are compounded by inadequate infrastructure for storage and transportation, leading to post-harvest losses and reduced profitability.

There are 12 banks and primary agriculture cooperative societies operating in Serchhip District, with a total of 24 branches. The crop loan issued in the year 2022 amounted to 2975.34 lakhs which was 10.51 % of the total loan issued.[4]

Table 5.8: No of Banks in Serchhip District

SN	Name of Bank	Number of Bank	Bank Branch
1	Commercial Bank	3	5
2	Regional Rural Bank	1	10
3	State Co-operative Bank	1	1
4	Primary Agri Co-op Society	6	-
5	Indian Post Payment Bank	1	8
		12	24

Source: Compilation of Bank Reports.

Addressing financial problems in agriculture marketing requires a multifaceted approach. First, improving access to credit for farmers is essential. This can be achieved through government-backed loan schemes, microfinance institutions, and cooperative banks offering low-interest loans and flexible repayment options tailored to the agricultural cycle. In the handling of their loan operations, banks in Serchhip District should prioritize agricultural lending. The allocation of loans to the agriculture sector by these banks decreased from 20.50% in 2020-2021 to 10.51% in 2022-2023.[5].

[4] *NABARD (2023), Potential Linked Credit Plan.*

[5] *ibid*

Table 5.9: Agriculture Loan issued by Bank in Serchhip District (2020-2023)

SN	Bank	2020-2021		2021-2022		2022-2023		2023-2024	
		Loan	%	Loan	%	Loan	%	Loan	%
1	Commercial Bank	220.42	4.59	277.75	NA	321.62	4.41	538.71	16
2	Regional Rural Bank	3107.14	28.20	3024.21	NA	2523.72	12.89	2710.45	80.51
3	C-Operative Bank	143.40	12.92	65.97	NA	130	9.04	117.50	3.49
	TOTAL	3470.96	20.50	3367.93	NA	2975.34	10.51	3366.66	100

Source: Compilation of Bank Reports

From the above table, it is shown that from various Banks operated in Serchhip District, Regional Rural Bank (Mizoram Rural Bank) contributes the highest percentage of agriculture loans issued to the farmers.

Secondly, investing in infrastructure realted to storage facilities, transportation and market access roads can significantly reduce post-harvest losses and enable farmers to reach broader markets. Implementing modern technology, like mobile platforms for market information and digital payment systems, can enhance transparency and efficiency. Additionally, establishing farmer cooperatives can empower smallholders by pooling resources and improving bargaining power. Government policies should also focus on stabilizing prices through minimum support prices (MSP) and encouraging contract farming to provide assured markets.

Finally, capacity-building efforts, encompassing training programs on financial literacy, modern agricultural practices, and market trends, can empower farmers with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions and maximize their earnings.

4. Challenge on Producer's Organization

The absence of a well-structured organization among producers poses numerous challenges. This deficiency not only impedes their ability to lower transportation expenses but also undermines their bargaining leverage in the market. Hence, it becomes imperative to establish producer organizations to effectively address these issues by regulating and stabilizing prices in agricultural markets. These producer organizations play an important role in advocating for the interests of farmers, negotiating fair prices with buyers, and collectively managing the marketing of agricultural produce. By consolidating the bargaining power of individual farmers, producer organizations can exert greater influence in the market, negotiate better terms with buyers, and mitigate the impact of price fluctuations. Moreover, they provide a platform for farmers to share knowledge, access technical support, and implement best practices in farming and marketing.

In Serchhip District, there are only 4 registered Farmer Producer Organization (FPO)[6]. FPO play a crucial role in supporting farmers with various activities related to production and marketing within their designated area of operation.

Several steps can be taken to support producer organizations. It is crucial to improve organizational capacity by offering training in leadership and financial management. Providing better access to technology and market information can enable more informed decision-making. Building partnerships with government, NGOs, and the private sector can offer important support and resources. Enacting supportive policies like tax incentives and subsidies can promote growth and stability. Additionally, advocating cooperative models and aggregation of small producers can enhance bargaining power while lowering costs, thus enhancing the effectiveness and resilience of producer organizations for the benefit of their members.

5. Statistical Challenge

Improper Agricultural Statistics is another obstacle faced in agricultural marketing. There is a system lacking in collecting accurate agricultural information and data both in the Departments. Agricultural data collection at the field level in Mizoram is insufficient and does not meet adequate standards due to a lack of technical knowledge, insufficient field staff, and inadequate operational funding.

Farmers' lack of education presents a significant challenge, leading to potential inaccuracies in survey data. The inability of many farmers to provide precise information hampers the work of data collectors and results in unreliable research outcomes, policy decisions, and resource distribution. Therefore, it is crucial to address this issue by improving farmer education and survey techniques to ensure the reliability and accuracy of agricultural data. Additionally, the current field staff lack proper education and training. Reliable statistics are crucial for formulating effective policies and programs in both government and private sectors. Therefore, addressing this issue is of urgent importance.

Steps must be taken to improve technical knowledge through targeted training programs for field staff and also the farmers. Increasing the number of field personnel and ensuring they are well-funded and equipped with the necessary tools is also crucial. By enhancing the accuracy and reliability of agricultural statistics, more effective and realistic policies and programs can be developed, ultimately leading to a more robust and productive agricultural sector in Mizoram.

Conclusion/Findings

Agricultural production and marketing in Serchhip District are essential for the local economy but are facing a range of complex challenges. Issues such as limited infrastructure, constraints in market access, and the potential impacts of climate change pose significant obstacles for farmers and stakeholders. However, these difficulties also present opportunities for strategic intervention and innovation. Addressing infrastructural deficiencies, improving market accessibility, and advocating for climate-resilient agricultural practices can help create a more favorable environment for growth and prosperity. Adopting a forward-thinking approach that integrates traditional knowledge with modern technologies and strong policy support will be critical in turning these challenges into opportunities to establish a sustainable and flourishing agricultural sector in Serchhip District.

[6] *Ibid.*

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