Shodhpith
International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
(International Open Access, Peer-reviewed & Refereed Journal)
(Multidisciplinary, Bimonthly, Multilanguage)
Volume: 1 Issue: 1 January-February 2025

Land Use Trends in India and Their Impact on Agriculture

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Abstract

Land use trends in India have been constantly changing over time, strongly influenced by geographical, economic and social factors. Traditionally, being an agrarian economy, most of the land here has been devoted to agriculture and its allied activities. The advent of the Green Revolution led to the use of high productivity crops, advanced irrigation techniques and chemical fertilizers, which significantly increased the country's food production capacity. However, it also resulted in challenges such as excessive pressure on agricultural land, indiscriminate use of underground water sources and decline in soil fertility. The water crisis in drought-prone areas deepened these problems, creating new difficulties for farmers. The rapid pace of industrialization and urbanization over the past decades has brought about sweeping changes in land use patterns. Due to increasing population and urban expansion, large tracts of arable land are being converted into residential, commercial and industrial constructions. This has not only adversely affected agricultural production, but also posed challenges to environmental protection. Seasonal uncertainties and harsh weather cycles due to climate change are also disrupting land use plans, consequently affecting crop production. In such a situation, the need for micro-irrigation, organic farming, technological development and coordinated policy-making has increased to ensure sustainable and balanced use of land.

The government and the private sector are working together for soil conservation and agricultural modernization so that the environment is protected along with the availability of food for the coming generations. The changing land use trends in India provide both new challenges and opportunities to the agriculture sector. Sustainable development requires coordination among policy-makers, farmers and local communities for efficient use of land resources. The convergence of innovations at the micro level and larger policy-level interventions can play an important role in this direction. In the future, a holistic geography-based approach will help strike a balance between economic growth, ecological balance and inclusive agricultural advancement.

Key words: land use, trends, agriculture, green revolution, irrigation, industrialization, urbanization, climate change, environmental protection, productivity, technological development.

Introduction

India is a land of vast terrain, where along with geographical diversity, cultural and social diversities also exist. Due to these diversities, land use patterns have changed over time, which has had a direct impact on agricultural production, rural livelihoods and economic development of the country. The

study of land use is particularly important in the geographical discipline, as it not only helps in understanding environmental processes but also provides the necessary basis for policy-making at the local and national level. Land use refers to the manner in which human beings use or alter a plot of land. It includes agriculture, housing, industry, pasture, forestry, water harvesting and many other activities. In simple words, land use is the study of the physical and economic use of land as well as the changes taking place in it. To understand land use, it is necessary to consider natural factors such as soil fertility, climate, topography, water resources, vegetation, etc. At the same time, social, economic and political decisions also affect land use. For example, in areas where irrigation facilities are more available, land is used preferentially for agriculture, while industrial activities may be concentrated on land where the availability of raw materials, transportation, and economic policies are widely supported [1].

Under this definition, it is necessary to adopt a multi-pronged approach in understanding land use. From the geographical point of view, it is important to understand which type of soil will be suitable for which crop, while from the economic and management point of view, it also has to be seen how sustainable is the part of land that is being used. Sometimes long-term environmental damage is ignored for short-term gain, leading to the problem of declining soil fertility. Thus, only a holistic approach can explain the entire identity of land use [2]. Land use trends in India have been constantly changing from ancient times to the modern era. Agriculture and animal husbandry were the major means of livelihood during the Vedic period, which led to the settlement of villages in river valleys and fertile plains. In the later period, with the rise of various empires, the revenue system and irrigation systems improved, leading to the expansion of arable land and crop diversification. Under British rule, more attention was paid to cash crops and the development of rail transport encouraged commercial agriculture. However, land use policies in this period were often designed to increase the revenues of the regime more than the interests of the peasants, which also adversely affected the productivity of the land in some areas [3].

After independence, the Green Revolution started a new phase in land use. The inclusion of high-productivity seeds, chemical fertilizers and irrigation schemes broadened the scope of agriculture. Simultaneously, the rapid pace of industrial development and urbanisation also changed the nature of land use. Urban expansion led to large-scale conversion of arable land into residential and commercial construction. As a result, in the last few decades, agricultural acreage has decreased to some extent and environmental issues related to land use change have emerged. It is therefore important to analyze these historical changes so that we can understand how the current scenario was created and how policy directions for the future can be taken forward [4]. The interrelationship between land use and agriculture is deep and interdependent. Since agriculture is the most ancient and widespread form of land use, agricultural conditions, production techniques and crop diversity play an important role in determining the pattern of land use. At the same time, changes in land use directly affect the productivity and classical patterns of agriculture. When arable land is converted for urbanisation or industrialisation, problems such as decline in foodgrain production, lack of rural employment and loss of bio-diversity arise. On the other hand, the development and promotion of sustainable agricultural practices can help in maintaining the fertility of the land, thereby maintaining the balance of land management in the long run. Thus, land use policies and agricultural practices have a synergistic effect on each other, affecting not only the economic, but also the social and environmental dimensions [5].

The relevance of the research lies in the fact that India is still an agrarian economy, where the livelihood of a large population depends on farming. Preserving the availability and quality of land has become a challenge in the midst of industrial and urban expansion. Therefore, by studying land use trends and their impact on agriculture, conclusions can be drawn that can provide guidelines at the policy level. This research will not only be beneficial for rural development but can also give meaningful insights on issues such as environmental protection, water resource management, employment prospects and food security. Thus, establishing a balance between land use and agriculture emerges as an important key to long-term development.

Present Land Use Scenario in India

The present scenario of land use in India is driven by various geographical, social and economic factors resulting in the emergence of diverse patterns at the regional level. Increasing population, urbanization and industrialization have greatly increased the pressure on land resources. In addition, the effects of climate change also affect this process, leading to changes in the distribution of arable land as well as forests and pastures. The changing economy and policy decisions have led many regions to shift from agricultural to non-agricultural uses, while in some regions the trend of cash crops has increased in terms of economic benefits. Each region has its own distinct land use because of India's diverse geographical formations and climatic variations. In northern plains, intensive agriculture is prevalent due to fertile alluvial soil, in which major crops like wheat, paddy and sugarcane are grown. On the other hand, the cropping pattern in peninsular India has been changing due to rocky geology and relatively less water resources, which majorly include crops like pulses, oilseeds and cotton [6].

In hilly areas, agricultural activities are relatively limited due to geographical slope, cold climate and limited availability of irrigation, while in some places gardening and tree plantation are preferred. In coastal areas, land use patterns vary due to fisheries and coconut or fish-based livelihoods. It is clear from these different patterns that geographical factors play an important role in determining the direction of land use. A state-level comparative study shows that states such as Punjab and Haryana have contributed significantly to the country's foodgrain reserves by making extensive use of arable land in the wake of the Green Revolution. At the same time, states like Maharashtra and Gujarat have extensive cultivation of cotton and oilseeds, giving them a dominant position in the production of cash crops. Differences in land use patterns can be seen in the availability of irrigation projects in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu of South India. The diversity from traditional jhum cultivation in the north-eastern states to horticulture-based land use in Kerala shows that each state has been developing land use in accordance with its climate, resources and cultural traditions. The expansion of residential and commercial land in states with a rapid pace of urbanisation - such as the Mumbai Metropolitan Region in Maharashtra or Delhi-NCR - has led to a reduction in agricultural land [7].

At present agricultural land covers a large part of the total geographical area, as agriculture has been an important base of India's economy. But increasing population and industrial development have increased the pressure on agricultural land, resulting in conversion of agricultural land for industrial corridors, special economic zones and urban expansion in many areas. The expansion of residential land is mainly concentrated around metros and big cities, where the demand for housing has increased rapidly due to high population density. The distribution of forest land is also diverse: major forest areas are concentrated in sites such as the Himalayan region, the forests of central India, and the Western Ghats. However, deforestation continues to be a concern due to urban expansion, agricultural expansion, and illegal logging. Thus, maintaining balance in the distribution of agricultural, industrial, residential and forest land is not only a matter of national policy but also imperative for environmental and social sustainability.

Factors contributing to land use change

Land use change in India is driven by the interplay of several factors, including population growth and urbanization, industrialization and infrastructure development, climate change and natural disasters, and policy and legal decisions. All these factors together affect the proportion of different uses of land, such as agricultural, residential, industrial and forest areas. As a result, the geographical landscape of the country undergoes vast changes over time. Population growth and urbanization are one of the most important factors of land use change. With the continuous increase in population, the demand for food, housing and basic amenities increases rapidly, leading to urbanization and conversion of agricultural land and natural areas for industrial purposes. The expansion of metros and big cities as well as smaller cities has seen an increase, with arable land coming under residential and commercial construction [8]. Urban areas not only put pressure on land resources but also progressively increase the

demand for water resources and other natural resources. As a result, land use changes occur in urban sprawl as well as in rural areas.

Industrialization and infrastructure development have further diversified the nature of land use. Large plots are required for setting up industries, for which agricultural or barren land is acquired. Additionally, road, rail, and other infrastructure projects to improve transportation facilities are expanding rapidly, causing land use patterns to change in different regions. These projects not only accelerate the economic development of the region, but also have a diverse impact on the livelihoods of local communities and the environment. Due to industrialization, the increasing population also has more chances of getting employment, but it creates challenges like reduction in agricultural land and environmental damage. Climate change and natural disasters have a profound impact on the nature of land use, as changing climatic conditions increase the risk of drought and extreme rainfall in some areas. In coastal areas, rising sea-levels and increasing frequency of cyclones affect the salinity of arable land, forcing farmers to adopt alternative livelihoods [9]. In hilly and forested areas, disasters such as landslides and floods also cause changes in the quality and use of land. Thus, due to climate change and natural disasters, human activities need to be reoriented, the impact of which is clearly visible on land use strategies.

Land Use Trends

Land use trends in India have been changing over time, constantly influenced by geographical, social and economic factors. In the journey from traditional agricultural system to modern urbanization and industrialization, various types of changes are seen in the land use patterns. Increasing population, economic development and technological advancement have led to expansion of urban areas in particular, which has had a far-reaching impact on the status of arable land as well as forest cover and water sources. In addition, the increasing amount of barren and fallow land also raises important questions regarding land management. It is therefore important to comprehensively assess such changes so that land resources can be harnessed in a sustainable and balanced manner. One of the major reasons for the decline in arable land is the steady increase in population and the corresponding increase in the need for housing, business and social infrastructure. To develop the modern urban environment, construction work is often carried out on fertile land, forcing farmers to sell their land. As a result, migration from rural areas has also increased rapidly, and the size of arable land is shrinking in many areas [10]. From a long-term perspective, this situation can affect food security, as production is likely to decline due to less agricultural land. At the same time, the risk of damage to traditional agricultural knowledge and local food systems also increases.

The influence of urbanization and industrialization plays another major role in shaping the direction of land use. The requirement of large plots of land in metros for residential, commercial and industrial purposes puts pressure on agriculture and forestry sectors. Industrial corridors, modes of transport, and centres of economic activity are shifting around cities, changing the nature of land in the surrounding countryside. These changes have created new employment opportunities, but also challenges such as environmental degradation and land-use imbalances. The increase in barren and fallow land indicates that there are still many problems regarding the sustainable use of arable land. In some areas, soil fertility is declining due to excessive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, while in others the land becomes barren due to lack of irrigation or uncontrolled drainage. Sometimes, in the absence of a long-term management plan, such land is left fallow for years, which is neither useful for tilling nor is any other economic activity possible on it [11]. This not only adversely affects the local livelihood but also disturbs the ecological balance.

Land use change also has a direct impact on forest cover and water sources. Deforestation and encroachment of rivers and lakes lead to soil erosion, climate imbalance and reduction in water harvesting capacity. Deforestation in hilly and coastal areas can increase the frequency of disasters such as landslides and coastal erosion. At the same time, increasing pressure on water sources has serious implications for irrigation, drinking water and aquatic ecology. Thus, degradation of forest and water resources presents a serious challenge to both long-term economy and environmental

security. It is necessary to understand the above changes in land use practices and to improve their effectiveness so as to find ways for conservation of arable land, planned development of urban and industrial activities and ecological balance. It is not only a question of food production or economic profit, but also of sustainable management of natural resources and meeting the needs of future generations. A balanced land use policy can be the basis of long-term stability and inclusive progress in all areas of the country.

The impact of Land use trends on agriculture

Land use trends in India are constantly changing, which have a direct impact on the agricultural sector. Population growth, rapid pace of urbanization and industrialization, unbalanced exploitation of natural resources and environmental changes have combined to make cultivable land challenging at multiple levels. Due to these trends, while on the one hand there are signs of decline in agricultural production, on the other hand there is an adverse impact on food security and livelihood of farmers. Decline in agricultural production and challenges emerge from the interplay of several factors. As urban areas expand, arable land is being reduced, leading to a decline in total yield. Secondly, over-exploitation of ground water resources and excessive use of chemical fertilizers also have a long-term negative impact on soil fertility. In some areas, the soil is becoming saline due to uncontrolled irrigation management and excessive drainage, further limiting the scope of cultivable land. Changing weather cycles, erratic rainfall and recurring flood or drought conditions resulting from climate change make agricultural production unsustainable [12]. In such a situation, the farming community needs technical training, water management and crop diversification strategies from time to time so that they can sustain production amid changing land use trends.

The impact on food security comes as a sequel to these challenges. When the area of arable land is less and production decreases, there may be difficulties in supplying the required grains, pulses or vegetables to the large population of the country. As a result, dependence on import of foodgrains increases, leading to pressure on foreign exchange as well as supply chain. At the local level, food prices fluctuate, which has a direct impact on the poor and middle class. The issue of food security is not only limited to nutrition and availability, but it is also important from the point of view of economic stability and social welfare. The impact on farmers "livelihoods is wide-ranging and multi-dimensional. Small and marginal farmers are the most affected economically due to the limitation of cultivable land and increase in production cost. Farms located near big cities are often converted to residential or commercial use, forcing farmers to leave their traditional lands, forcing them to migrate in search of new employment options. On the other hand, the uncertainty of crops and fluctuating market prices make the farming community feel the absence of a stable income [13]. This situation affects the rural structure as well as the entire economic system.

The relationship between climate change and land use

The relationship between climate change and land use is deep and interdependent. Changing climatic conditions, such as increased temperatures, erratic rainfall, and increased frequency of extreme weather events, directly affect land use and management. On the other hand, changing patterns of land use, such as deforestation and the expansion or shrinking of arable areas, have the potential to further unbalance the climate system. This bilateral relationship is particularly important in India, as the country's vast population and agrarian economy are heavily influenced by climate. The impact of climate change on agricultural land is clearly visible. In some regions, extreme temperatures reduce crop productivity, while in others, the erratic nature of rainfall increases the risk of drought or flooding. Due to the rise in sea level in the coastal areas, saline water has started entering the land, which has a negative impact on the arable land. Even during the favorable climatic conditions in the plains, there is an increasing possibility of heatwaves and heatwaves, which hinder the growth of crops. In all these situations, farmers have to change the traditional crop cycle, or put in additional resources to deal with

the adverse effects. As a result, agricultural costs increase and the pressure on the economic security of small farmers increases [14].

Land use planning has become essential for sustainable agricultural practices to meet the challenges associated with climate change. The fertility of soil can be maintained better by adopting methods like crop rotation, mixed farming, organic manure and micro irrigation. The selection of climate-friendly seeds and field-specific research enables farmers to produce relatively safe produce even amidst the vagaries of weather. Conservation and afforestation of forests should also be encouraged while planning land use, thereby reducing soil degradation and increasing water storage capacity. At the same time, it is necessary to build small reservoirs and strengthen rainwater harvesting systems at the village level through community participation, so that the irrigation system suffers least from climate change. The link between carbon emissions and changes in land use can be seen on a wider scale. Deforestation, shrinking of pastures and expansion of wastelands contribute to the increase of carbon emissions in the atmosphere. Decreasing vegetation reduces the ability to absorb carbon, which in turn increases the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Additionally, agricultural land is under increasing pressure from industrial activity and urban expansion, leading to increased use of chemical fertilizers and fossil fuels. To reverse this trend, a balance between land, water and air has to be established by adopting long-term thinking in land use management. If agriculture, animal husbandry and forestry are put in an integrated approach, carbon emissions can be limited and the path towards sustainable development can be paved.

Conclusion

A study on land use trends in India and their impact on agriculture shows that many threats to land arise due to factors such as population growth, urbanisation, industrialisation and climate change. These claims have presented direct and indirect challenges in the form of deepening of arable land, overexploitation of natural resources and degradation of forests. In order to meet these challenges and to ensure long-term agricultural production, land use balancing and collective efforts are required. In conclusion, it is clear that a balanced approach to land management, a combination of scientific methods and socially active cooperation play an important role in effectively addressing these problems. Measures to balance land use can be applied at many levels. First of all, it is necessary to formulate policies at the local level by understanding the special circumstances of the land and the needs of the communities. If there is a problem of salinity in a field's soil, micro irrigation and biological methods may be of advantage to you instead of chemical-based techniques. Secondly, along with agriculture, activities like forestry and grazing are equally important, whose conservation forms the basis of sustainable land use. Community participation can also give impetus to programmes such as ground water recharge, afforestation and rehabilitation of wastelands. Thus, region-specific studies, community participation and judicious management of natural resources present a robust framework for effective measures to bring about a balance in land use. In short, the changing land use trends in India and their impact on agriculture are multifaceted. To balance or control these effects, a three-pronged framework of policy-making, technological innovation and community collaboration has to be adopted. If balanced land use policies and programmes are implemented on the ground, meaningful progress can be made towards sustainable development of agriculture as well as the overall upliftment of the rural economy.

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Cite this Article-

'Dr. Amar Kumar', 'Land use trends in India and their impact on agriculture', Shodhpith International Multidisciplinary Research Journal, ISSN: 3049-3331 (Online), Volume:1, Issue:01, Jan-Feb 2025.

Journal URL- https://www.shodhpith.com/index.html

Published Date- 05 February 2025