

Marketing Practices And Challenges Of Agricultural Produce In Ukhrul District Of Manipur

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Abstract

It is paper that attempts to underline the marketing mix practices of the Tangkhuls. Marketing and selling of goods produced in the farms or from the wild is a very recent development in an economy that had predominantly been a self-sufficient sharing economy. The introduction of money in the barter economy gave rise to the need to market the produce and shift from sharing economy to selling economy. But it being at the initial stage, market is poorly developed and the art of marketing is still at its infancy. The limited market is complicated with the lack of skill and art of marketing. Marketing of the agriculture produce and other products has become one of the greatest challenges of the economy and in fact it is detrimental to production and productivity. The limited market, the poor infrastructural facilities, and lack of market innovation has proven to be the bottlenecks in the economy. The paper endeavours to suggest practical solutions to the marketing challenges of agricultural produce plaguing the Tangkhul economy

Terms

Leingapha, barter system, infrastructural bottlenecks, standardization, door-to-door

Introduction

The Tangkhul Naga tribe occupies Ukhrul and Kamjong districts of Manipur, the Somrah track of Myanmar, and a few villages in the neighboring districts of Manipur. Agriculture is their main source of livelihood and occupation. All their festivals, social life and economic activities revolves around agriculture.

The main crop produced and consume is rice and it is supplemented by numerous horticultural produces. They are very skilful and hard working with the limited traditional implements. Their economic life is the village because from time immemorial every village is governed like an independent republic. It is governed by a chief and assisted by the council of elders. The elders are the representing all the original clans of the village.

Each village have well defined territory marked usually by the natural mountain range and ravines. Within the given territory there could be private ownership of immovable land property or common land property of the village. The villagers cultivate in the common land or in their private land to meet their needs.

Rice is the staple of the Tangkhuls and it is widely cultivated in the terrace fields and the Jhum fields. Besides rice, some of the common agriculture and horticulture produce of the farms are chilly, beans, soya beans, cayote, mustard leaves, cabbage, yam, cucumber, pumpkin, sesame, millets, plum, peaches, many wild fruits and nuts, etc. These were all produced in the traditional methods with the limited implements and techniques in a limited quantity to meet the need of a season. It was a self-

sufficient subsistence economy with the surety that all members in the village does not lack the basic need. Surplus commercial production was never the objective of cultivation and if by favourable conditions, if harvest is bountiful and plentiful, the surplus is always shared with the less fortunate ones within the clan or the village.

But in recent times the narratives of agriculture among the Tangkhuls have transformed and transited into territories unknown to the tribe. There are new technologies introduced, new inputs such as fertilisers, insecticides are introduced, extensive cultivation of various cash crops, and food crops are also cultivated on commercial basis. The cultivation of the staple food has suffered the most in terms of cultivation and production due to shortage of labor. The shortage of labor for rice cultivation is due to migration of labor for higher education or employment opportunities in other income generating sectors. The self-sufficient objective of farming has evolved into surplus commercial purpose to generate money. Sharing economy with the less fortunate have completely been replaced with Selling economy of every produce. Self-sufficient economy has become dependent economy to import of foodgrains from outside. There are many new crops introduced such as potato, cauliflower, broccoli, kiwi, apple, mushroom, lemon, long beans, dragon fruit, etc. along with allied agricultural activities such as fisheries, animal husbandry, etc. are widely practice and supplanting the traditional crops on commercial considerations.

Marketing of agricultural produce, handicrafts, handloom, etc. is absolutely a new practice to the Tangkhuls and they yet to master this skill and art. Until the introduction of western education and Christianity, there was minimum inter-village interaction and mobility was limited within the village territory. There was no market to sell or exchange the produced goods except in the once-a-year village fair “Leingapha” by a large village, during which the goods were exchanged on barter system. With the eventual demise of the head-hunting practice, increase inter-village interaction, exposure to alien culture, and introduction of monetary system, the needs and demand of the villagers increase significantly. These socio-economic dynamics motivated the villagers to increase production and productivity to enable them to generate revenue.

Marketing Practices and Challenges

Marketing is the process of moving a product or service from the point of production to the point of consumption. It is creating a need and want, and satisfying it by agreeing to exchange the ownership at some given point of place. Marketing process and mix in the Tangkhul economy is still at its infancy. It is simple, limited, and unorganised.

Research clearly indicates the following marketing practices in the Tangkhul economy for all its products; agriculture, horticulture, handicrafts and handloom. With higher education and exposure to marketing practices in the metropolitan cities, connectivity and network, much needed marketing practices are being introduced by the entrepreneurs in the economy but it is still predominantly traditional and limited in quantity and quality. The following are the prominent marketing practices of agriculture and allied activities produce in Tangkhul economy.

1. Unorganised

The market is unorganised since there is no market regulations of the quality and price. The farmers make individual effort to dispose the produce in the market at the price determined by them based on need and time. The retailers and consumers are always on the advantage over the farmer due to energy, distance, language, time and information constraints.

2. Transportation

Villages are located at remote areas with very poor or no proper roads and transportation facilities. The farmers transport their produce on the traditional baskets and physically transport it to the town market. To make it early and then return, the village farmers normally leave for the market early morning before dawn.

3. Door-to-door

The most common method of selling observed in Ukhrul market by the farmers is selling of the farm produce door-to-door. It is time consuming and energy sapping as farmers need to

ensure that the produce is sold before the prospective consumers leave for their duties. One common phenomenon is that there is no guarantee that the farmer will be able to dispose the products at the desired price or on time to return to the village. When they are not able to sell, they are often left at the mercy of the retailers.

4. No standardization

The agriculture and horticulture produce are normally sold in the market as harvested from the farm. The produce is not pack nor segregated in size or quality. At times the sellers have no measuring scale but sold on estimation. Often the farmer or the seller determines the quantity and the price of the produce individually ending up competing against another farmer in the market.

5. Individual pricing

One of the most prominent marketing practices in Ukhrul is that the pricing of farm produce is not regulated. The price is determined by the farmer and sold to the retailer or to the consumer directly. The retailer would then sell the same with added profit margin or reduced quantity. Thus, the price of agriculture and horticulture produce in Ukhrul district fluctuates and highly unpredictable.

6. Small quantity

Because of the method of farming and the traditional practice of producing only for self-consumption, the output small and surplus is marginal. This supply of the marginal surplus is further limited by the bottlenecks of the economy in the form of infrastructural and logistic challenges and thereby the final quantity of supply arriving in the market is very limited as the farmer is able to supply the quantity limited to the basket carried by him/her. The supply is not only small but unpredictable.

7. Sale on need basis

The culture of sharing is still strong in the midst of modernization and monetary system. Tangkhuls in the village are still known for their hospitality and generosity which is still obvious when one visits the village, they would rather give away rather than sell to earn. What is supplied finally in the market is out need to earn money to meet other needs.

8. No established market place

A practice obvious and normal is market is all over Ukhrul town as there has never been a specific designated market place until recently when the “Ava” or Mothers’ market was built.

Factors contributing to the marketing practices

1. Distance

The marketing practices of the Tangkhuls is because of the distance of the farm from the market. Ukhrul town as the main market is far from most of the villages in distance because of the lack of proper road and means of transportation.

2. Lack of knowledge and skill

The produce is not graded nor pack attractively because of the lack of marketing knowledge and skill, and also the means to do it.

3. Lack of information

Farmers lack market information and skill training. They do not have the much-needed information of the demand of the market, consumers, price, availability of inputs, government schemes, etc.

4. Lack of market logistics

The marketing practices in Ukhrul by Tangkhul farmers is due to the lack of established designated market. It is also due to the inability to expand the market beyond Ukhrul town.

5. Need of money

Sell of produce is to meet the need of money for various activities and at times it is sold at the price desired by the consumers and the retailers because of the need to return to the village.

6. Poor infrastructural facilities

The infrastructural facilities especially road and transportation facilities are still yet to be developed. The villages are yet to be connected with all weathered roads and means of transportation from the village to the market is extremely poor.

7. Lack of entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills are yet to be developed.

8. Unpredictable conflicts

The volatile and fluid socio-economic-political situation in the state adversely impacts every activity in the state of Manipur.

Suggested remedies

1. Market innovation and expansion

The scope of marketing of agricultural produce can be maximised by innovating the marketing strategies; explore and build marketing network, online marketing, processing and packaging, publicise, promote and tap the organic market. Market beyond Ukhrul and Manipur must be explored and tapped.

2. Infrastructural facilities development

There is a great need for investment and development of infrastructural facilities such as roads and connectivity, transportation, information, cold storage, market sheds, etc. In Ukhrul, these are pre-requisites to the success of marketing agricultural produce.

3. Workshops and training

The government, the Civil societies, scientist, entrepreneurs must take the initiative to organise workshops and training for the farmers and general public. Such programs will empower the farmers and general public with skills and knowledge higher production and marketing opportunities.

4. Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills are essential to produce to market. The lack of experience in commerce and trade of the farm produce could be the reason for poor entrepreneurship. The trend is shifting and becoming more dynamic with exposure, education, and training but there is a need to accelerate the spirit of entrepreneurship to market the available produce and also to encourage higher production.

5. Logistic support by the Government

The economy is poor and market is limited which discourage and deters investment. Thus, it will be crucial for the government to initially invest in the development of infrastructural facilities, publicity, capital, connectivity and networking, etc. The state government must distribute and invest the resources equitably to the hills and the valley if the socio-economics narrative of the state has to stabilize.

6. Diversification in cultivation

Besides the traditional cropping methods and food crops, the community need to diversify to cash crops. The possibilities of horticulture, pisciculture, poultry, animal husbandry, etc must be tapped. Single cropping pattern must be transformed into multiple cropping.

7. Paradigm shift

The self-sufficient farming must be transformed to commercial farming. The attitude of considering agriculture to be the least preferred profession because it requires much labor for very little returns must be re-examined because there are huge prospects for those willing to work.

Conclusions

Production only for self-sufficiency and lack of marketing facilities could be related like the two sides of a coin. Presently there is not much surplus to supply to the market and very little to export beyond the district. Even if there is surplus at the point of production, it does not reach the market due to

poor connectivity and transportation. Ukhrul economy is presently not conducive for marketing due to many inter-related socio-economic factors.

The mode of production is largely traditional, production and productivity are low, and the infrastructural facilities and logistics for successful marketing of agricultural produce is poorly developed. It will be critical for entrepreneurial skills development in the district for processing the produce and marketing. Expansion and innovation in production and marketing will contribute positively to the growth and development of Ukhrul economy.

There is ample land available for higher production, introduction of many new food and cash crops and its success, increase in entrepreneurship, better infrastructural facilities, internet facilities, and strengthening of financial market have open many avenues of connecting, disseminating information and marketing the agricultural produce. Besides the socio-economic factors directly or indirectly affecting production and marketing agricultural produce in the district, it is equally or more critical and important to ensure political stability in the state.

The unpredictable eruptions of ethnic conflicts and violence in the state between different communities has emerged to be a major deterrent to marketing. Primary goods being highly perishable, any delay in marketing the produce in the market due to strike, bandhs or blockade causes distressed in the market as the produce is wasted. Thus, is the conflict worth the loss and the challenges?

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