

Agricultural Stagnation in Bihar Revisited: Agro-Ecological Conditions, Groundwater Irrigation and Government Policies

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The fact that accompanied by massive private investment in tubewells Bihar achieved the Green Revolution in wheat since the mid-1960s has long been overlooked. The alleged theory—the inequitable agrarian structure is the fundamental cause of its agricultural stagnation—can hardly explain that the new technologies were adopted in rabi (wheat) season but not in kharif (rice) season by the same farmers. Until recently farmers in Bihar have never used tubewell water for rice simply because the irrigation is too costly and uneconomical for HYV cultivation. Hence, they continued to grow LVs under rain-fed conditions. The paper attempts to explain the agricultural stagnation in Bihar in a different way, with an emphasis on the interaction between agro-ecological conditions, groundwater irrigation and government policies—rural electrification and agricultural research in particular—from a wider regional comparative perspective, including Punjab, eastern Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bangladesh. The paper also investigates how contractual arrangements in groundwater markets have been determined in eastern India and Bangladesh for the future development of groundwater markets and associated agricultural growth in Bihar.