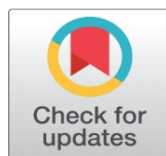


EMPOWERING GROWTH: UNVEILING ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAITS AND STRATEGIES AMONG AGRI ENTREPRENEURS IN BODOLAND TERRITORIAL REGION (BTR) OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

The study attempts to examine the entrepreneurial traits possessed by the agricultural farmers of BTR and their strategies to survive and make their farm profitable. BTR is mainly agricultural region where the primary occupation is agriculture and is blessed with fertile land, favourable climate-weather conditions. The region is an autonomous region of Assam, India consisting of five districts i.e. Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang, Tamulpur and Udalguri. The study will give an insight regarding the entrepreneurial qualities possessed by the agricultural farmers and their strategies to be consistent in the farming and to make their farm profitable. The study is exploratory and analytical in nature and has interviewed 126 agricultural entrepreneurs from the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam purposively. Statistical tools such as multiple response analysis, chi square test, mean, SD, frequencies and percentage have been used for analysing the data. The findings show that entrepreneurial qualities such as hard work, consistency and experience in agriculture are the main attributes perceived to be possessed by the agri entrepreneurs. Whereas, the strategies such as adopting modern method of farming, proper planning, connection with departmental officials, farm diversification, mixed and multiple cropping are some of the major strategies adopted by the agri entrepreneurs of BTR, Assam. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers to design targeted policies; by identifying effective strategies used by successful agri-entrepreneurs, the research offers a roadmap for aspiring entrepreneurs and foster growth. This can stimulate rural entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, reduce migration and promote self-sufficiency within the BTR region of Assam.

Keywords: Agriculture Entrepreneur, Agri-Entrepreneur, Agripreneur, Qualities, Strategies, Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR)



1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. AGRICULTURE IN ASSAM AND BODOLAND TERRITORIAL REGION (BTR)

Agriculture plays a major role and is the primary source of livelihood in the state of Assam. This sector is the primary occupation of majority of the rural population of the state. A significant proportion of the population of the state of Assam are engaged in the farming activities (Das R., 2019). The sector provides employment to more than 50% of the total workforce of the state. Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) on the other hand is a significant region of the state. The region contributes significantly to the economy of the state of Assam (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 2021). The region is mainly agricultural in nature. And purely an agrarian economy, where most of the households rely on farming activities for earning their livelihoods. BTR is blessed with fertile land, has favourable climatic viz weather conditions for

agricultural and allied activities. The region consists of five districts viz Chirang, Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Tamulpur where the farmers enjoy autonomous benefits from the council of the region as well as the Government of Assam. Previously the region was known as Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. It has been changed to BTR since the year of 2021. It falls on the north bank of the mighty Brahmaputra River. The region shares a boundary with Bhutan which indicates a greater scope of export of agricultural produces in upcoming future. The total area of operational holding for cultivations of various crops including rabi and kharif crops in Bodoland Territorial Region is 43311 hectares and the production in MT is 716767.062 as reported by (Director of Agriculture, BTC, Kokrajhar, 2021-22). The major crop of the region is rice which is the primary food sources of the state. The region also cultivates tea, rubber, and other horticultural produces. Cash crops such as jute, spices are also common in the region. BTR is an agricultural hub in the region because it contributes to the economy of the state, contributes in food security and overall regional development. It further contributes to ancillary units such as food processing, handicrafts, local traditions etc.

The farmers of the BTR are slowly adapting the entrepreneurial qualities in the field of agriculture, leaving the traditional techniques behind. And are adopting different strategies to sustain and stand out in the market. The farmers are also starting to cultivate new, high yield and profitable crops such as dragon fruit, cocoa, apple, watermelon, millet, banana, mushroom, honey (bee keeping). The environment has become such that farmers are cultivating and producing in their own region instead of importing from foreign markets. The farmers are either producing new produces or are producing in large quantity.

1.2. AGRICULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP, ENTREPRENEURIAL QUALITIES AND STRATEGIES

Agricultural entrepreneurship is necessary for the enhancement of the living condition of the rural population. Transformation of farmers into entrepreneurs will be considered as a strategy for development of agricultural as well as rural sector in developing countries. A movement from traditional agriculture to managing farm commercially aligning with an agribusiness is a fundamental way to reform and revitalize Indian agriculture sector and to make farming a more profitable and attractive venture (Singh, et al., 2014). Agri-entrepreneurship has the tendency to contribute to the social and economic development of the nation, where employment opportunities can be created, poverty can be eliminated or reduced, health and nutrition can be improved, food security will be enhanced and overall rural economy will be improved (IAS, Forum IAS, 2023).

The importance of entrepreneurship for economic development has been widely spread and widely been accepted as a universal knowledge since many years. Joseph Schumpeter (1934) a renowned author and a contributor to the knowledge of entrepreneurship, states that entrepreneurship is the “process of introduction of new commodity, or a new feature of commodity; introduction of new method of production; opening a new market; domination a new source of offering raw material or semi –made commodity; and creating a new organization of industry”. It basically means that entrepreneurship is the innovation of something new (Sledzik, 2013). According to, Cantillon (1931), an entrepreneur is the one who seeks profits by organising and assuming the risk of a business (Econlib, Econlib, n.d.). According to Knight (1921), Entrepreneurship is associated with risk bearing. Profit is the award of the entrepreneur for bearing non insurable risk and uncertainties (Emmett, 2010). Kirzner (1973) states that alertness to opportunities is significant to understanding the concept of entrepreneurship. By being alert, entrepreneurs can identify and take advantage by selling on higher prices which they have acquired on low prices (Econlib, Econlib, n.d.). According to Shackle (1979), entrepreneurs are imaginative and creative with their work. The act of imagination helps the entrepreneurs in discovering potential market opportunities. This can lead to effective decision- making when comparing with the resource available (Walia & Chetty, n.d.). These are the theories or concepts of entrepreneurship that were given by renowned authors.

According to (McElwee, A taxonomy of entrepreneurial farmers, 2008) “agricultural entrepreneurs are always entrepreneurially alert, motivated by the pull factors, technically trained, understand markets, and are knowledge-intensive”. Agri-entrepreneur is a combination of agri-entrepreneur competencies and qualities (Chaudhary, Prakash, & Kantwa, 2022).

The agriculture entrepreneurs have certain personal traits which makes them different from others. There are several key characteristics or traits which differentiate between a successful agri entrepreneurs and unsuccessful in business. These traits include curiosity, vision, proactive, persistence, determination, hard work, good management and organization skills (Bairwa, Lakra, Kushwaha, Meena, & Kumar, March 2014) As per (Sullivan, 2017) Successful

entrepreneurs are the ones who take advantage of changes in consumer demand and deals with satisfaction of consumer needs with various products including value-added products. Value-added products offer entrepreneurs with high return-on-investment and high level of profit margins. Successful entrepreneurs are honest, persistent, have integrity, and always work towards their goals (Nordqvist, Wennberg, Bau, & Hellersted, 2013). The feature of entrepreneurial risk taking is an essential for promoting and sustaining entrepreneurial efforts and initiatives that ensure family firm renewal as per (Audretsch, 2015).

Along with possessing certain traits, qualities, characteristics, the agripreneurs also adopts various strategies in order to make their farm a profitable one and in order to sustain for long. The strategies may include diversification of farm, mixed cropping, intercropping, building a connection with wholesaler and retailers, cultivation of high yielding and high profitable crops etc. As per the observation during field survey, it has come to notice of the Researcher that these agricultural entrepreneurs are finding out new and creative ways to enhance their farm, such as adopting organic method where they are trying to make organic fertilizer in their own way, building good market linkage, developing distribution channel, diversifying their farm, cultivating new and exotic agricultural produces, using high quality seeds etc. Focusing in agricultural entrepreneurship is an important because it enhances the local economy and the food security of the region as well as the state. Understanding more about these agriculture entrepreneurs and their strategy to stand out in the market is fundamental, because only then more and more marginal and small farmers will come out and start applying the domain of entrepreneurship in their respective agricultural field. The field of entrepreneurship in agricultural and allied activities will help the farmers to search for the sources and ways to improve their productivity and it will show them the ways to tackle down the wastages.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To identify the entrepreneurial characteristics possessed by agricultural entrepreneurs of Bodoland territorial Region (BTR)
- 2) To explore the strategies applied by these agricultural entrepreneurs.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- 1) **Research design:** The study is exploratory and analytical in nature.
- 2) **Area of study:** The study has been conducted in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) of Assam. The region consists of five districts viz Chirang, Kokrajhar, Baksa Udalguri and Tamulpur. The region shares a boundary with Bhutan which opens a gateway for future economic activities.
- 3) **Sampling method:** For the study, 126 agripreneurs have been selected purposively from the five districts of BTR. The agricultural farmers who match the criteria of the study have been considered for the study.
- 4) **Data type:** The data is mainly primary data, which were collected using interview and schedule method.
- 5) **Statistical tool:** For the study tools like frequencies, percentage, mean, SD have been used to analyse the data. Multiple response analysis has been used for table no. 6 and 7 which is illustrated in the section of data interpretation. A chi square test has been applied to analyse the relationship between demographic variables and selected variables.

4. RESULTS

4.1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE AGRIPRENEURS

4.1.1. TABLE NO.1: AGE OF THE AGRIPRENEURS

Age	Frequency	%
25-35 years	21	16.7
35-45 years	64	50.8
Above 45 years	41	32.5
Total	126	100.0

Source Computed, Field survey

Out of 126 respondents, 16.7% are between the age group of 25-35 years, 50.8% are between the age group of 35-45 years, 32.5% are between the age group of above 45 years of age. This indicates that agripreneurs are mostly middle-aged level and belong to the age group of 35-45 years group range.

4.1.2. TABLE NO. 2: GENDER OF THE AGRIPRENEURS

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	114	90.5
Female	12	9.5
Total	126	100.0

Source: Computed, Field Survey

Out of 126 respondents, 114 agripreneurs are male and 12 are female. Indicating that the domain of agripreneurship is dominated by the male persons.

4.1.3. TABLE NO.3 EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF RESPONDENTS

Education level	Frequency	%
No formal education	3	2.4
Primary	6	4.8
M.E	21	16.7
Matriculate	45	35.7
H.S	27	21.4
Graduate	15	11.9
Post Graduate	9	7.1
Total	126	100.0

Source Computed, Field Survey

The table number 3 represents the educational status of agripreneurs, it can be noted that all the agripreneurs have the basic level of education and 35.7% reported having completed education up to the matriculate (10th grade). In addition, there is 21.4% of respondents who attained higher secondary level (12th grade) of education followed by 16.7% who are middle education (M.E), which explains that majority of the agripreneurs' education does not move past secondary level. A limited proportion of the sample, however, managed to pursue and complete tertiary education, where 11.9% of the individuals had a degree, and postgraduate degree was attained by 7.1% of the individuals, 4.8% had attended primary level whilst 2.4% had no schooling at all. This compels inferences that the state of education particularly advanced qualifications is questionable to this group, as almost all agripreneurs have primary or secondary plus education, and very few if any have been highly educated. This may also lean towards the educational levels in agriculture locked in up rural areas.

4.1.4. TABLE NO. 5 MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION

	Age	Gender	Education
N	126	126	126
Mean	3.1587	1.0952	4.3333
Std. Deviation	.68601	.29472	1.34462

The "Mean and SD" table provides key descriptive statistics for several demographic and background variables: age, gender, education level, The mean age and education level reveal a relatively experienced and moderately educated group of agri-entrepreneurs. Gender statistics appear with a mean around 1.09, suggesting a male-dominated sample.

4.2. TABLE NO.6 ENTREPRENEURIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGRICULTURE ENTREPRENEURS

Entrepreneurial characteristics or traits	N	Percentage	Percentage of responses
A. Personal characteristics or traits or qualities			
Innovative	42	6.2%	33.3%
Hardworking	51	7.6%	40.5%
Risk taking	27	4.0%	21.4%
Determined	48	7.1%	38.1%
Goal oriented	36	5.3%	28.6%
Management and organizing skill	30	4.4%	23.8%
Adaptable	18	2.7%	14.3%
Problem solver	6	0.9%	4.8%
Accepting challenges	15	2.2%	11.9%
Consistent	75	11.1	59.5
B. Other Characteristics related to farming			
Good market linkage	54	8.0	42.9
Mixed farming	36	5.3	28.6
Multiple cropping	42	6.2	33.3
Advertisement and Promotion	12	1.8	9.5
Creative and innovative	45	6.7	35.7
Proper system of irrigation	48	7.1	38.1
Access to financial capital	3	0.4	2.4
Experience in agriculture	51	7.6%	40.5%
Motivation	21	3.1%	16.7%
Operational Holding	15	2.2%	11.9%
Total	675	100%	535.7%

Source Computed, Field Survey

The table represents a range of personal and professional traits valued in this group, with a focus on innovation, hard work, risk-taking, and goal orientation. The totals show the number of responses with Yes (Code-1) for the corresponding item. Out of 675 responses, consistency and good market linkage are among the most prevalent traits (59.5% and 42.9% respectively). High levels of hard work, determination, and creativity also stand out, each cited by over a third of the respondents. Characteristics such as adaptability, problem-solving, and accepting challenges are less frequent but still notable. These traits likely contribute to resilience and adaptability in the agriculture sector, helping entrepreneurs navigate both market and environmental challenges. The variety in entrepreneurial characteristics emphasizes a blend of traditional and innovative skills, which are essential for both sustaining and growing agricultural businesses.

4.3. TABLE NO.7: ENTREPRENEURIAL STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY THE AGRI-ENTREPRENEURS

Strategies adopted by the agri-entrepreneurs	N	Percentage	Percentage of reponses
Availing trainings	9	2.3 %	7.1
Availing bank loans	12	3.1%	9.5
Adopting modern method of farming	78	20%	61.9
Proper Planning	39	10%	31.0
Market oriented planning	21	5.4 %	16.7
Interaction with Government officials	54	13.8%	42.9
Using of chemical fertilizer	6	1.5%	4.8
Organic Farming	33	8.5%	26.2
Connection member with FPO/FPC	6	1.5%	4.8
Connection with retailers	18	4.6%	14.3
Exposure visit	24	6.2%	19
Farm diversification	48	12.3%	38.1
Mixed and Multiple cropping	39	10%	31
Integrated pest management	3	0.8%	2.4
Totals	390	100%	309.5%

Source Computed, Field survey

The above table shows several strategies as an approach to manage and grow their businesses. The totals show the number of responses with Yes (Code-1) for the corresponding item. Out of 390 responses 61.9%, have adopted modern farming techniques, indicating a shift towards efficiency and sustainability. Additionally, building connections with officials (42.9%) and engaging in farm diversification (38.1%) are also common, highlighting the importance of networks and diversification for risk management. Other significant strategies include organic farming (26.2%) and exposure visits (19%), which reflect an openness to learning and exploring alternative practices. Financial strategies, such as availing of bank loans and participating in training programs, are also represented, showing a proactive approach to securing resources. Together, these strategies reflect a holistic approach to entrepreneurship in agriculture, combining technical

advancement, resource acquisition, market-oriented planning, and community engagement for long-term growth and resilience.

4.4. TABLE NO.8: CROSS TABULATION OF GENDER WITH REGARD TO STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY AGRIPRENEURS

Strategies adopted by agripreneurs	Gender				Total
	Male		Female		
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Availing trainings	3	0.9%	6	13.3	9
Availing Bank loan	9	2.6	3	6.7	12
Adopting modern method of farming	69	20%	9	20%	78
Proper planning	36	10.4%	3	6.7%	39
Market oriented planning	21	6.1%	0	0	21
Interaction with Government officials	45	13.0%	9	20%	54
Using of chemical fertilizers	6	1.7%	0	0%	6
Organic farming	33	9.6	0	0	33
Connection with FPO/FPC	6	1.7%	0	0%	6
Connection with Retailers	18	5.2%	0	0%	18
Exposure visit	15	4.3	9	20	24
Farm diversification	45	13	3	6.7	48
Mixed and Multiple cropping	36	10.4	3	6.7	39
Integrated Pest management	3	0.9	0	0	3
TOTAL	345		45		390

Source Computed, Field survey

The table provides the strategies used by the male and female agripreneurs with frequency and percentage contribution for each in the respective gender groups. The totals in each of the male and female column, show the number of responses with Yes (Code-1) for the corresponding item. Out of 345 male responses, for male agripreneurs the most practiced strategy is modern farming at 20%, followed by connection with agriculture officers at 13% and farm diversification at 13%. Other prime strategies include proper planning at 10.4% and organic farming at 9.6%.

Out of 45 female responses, the strategies adopted by female agripreneurs: Women have maximum exposure visits at 20%, modern farming methods at 20% and connections with officials. The least adopted strategy from women are chemical fertilizers, connection with FPO/FPCs, and connections with retailers.

Strategies with minimal adoption: Male as well as female agripreneurs adopt chemical fertilizers to the least extent at 1.7% male, 0% female for it, and integrated pest management at 0.9% male, 0% female.

None of the female respondents adopted strategies such as market-oriented planning, organic farming and contacts with FPO/FPCs.

Overall, it can be concluded that male agripreneurs are most likely to adopt strategies such as adopting modern farming methods, organic farming, and farm diversification which indicates that male agripreneurs engage in a higher diversity of practices of agri-entrepreneurship but emphasized more modernity and diversification. Whereas, female agripreneurs prefer strategies like exposure visits and connections with officials, indicating interest in learning and networking.

4.5. TABLE NO. 9: ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC AND SELECTED VARIABLES (0.05 LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE) USING PEARSONS CHI SQUARE TEST

Variables	Chi-square Value	d.f	Significant (p value)
1. Age Vs Entrepreneurial characteristics of agri entrepreneur	171.402	40	0.000
2. Gender Vs Entrepreneurial characteristics of agri entrepreneur	72.939	20	0.000
3. Education Vs Entrepreneurial characteristics of agri entrepreneur	423.691	120	0.000
4. Age Vs Strategies adopted by agri entrepreneur	127.413	28	0.000
5. Gender Vs Strategies adopted by agri entrepreneur	86.527	14	0.000
6. Education Vs Strategies adopted by agri entrepreneur	282.847	84	0.000

Source Computed, Field survey

The Chi-Square analysis strongly indicates that demographic factors significantly influence the entrepreneurial characteristics and strategies adopted by agricultural entrepreneurs. There is a significant relationship between age and entrepreneurial characteristics ($\chi^2 = 171.402$, $df = 40$, $p < 0.05$) as well as strategies adopted ($\chi^2 = 127.413$, $df = 28$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that entrepreneurial characteristics and strategic choices among agricultural entrepreneurs differ remarkably depending on different age groups.

Gender significantly affects both entrepreneurial characteristics ($\chi^2 = 72.939$, $df = 20$, $p < 0.05$) and strategies adopted ($\chi^2 = 86.527$, $df = 14$, $p < 0.05$). This reveals that entrepreneurial behaviors and strategic approaches for male and female entrepreneurs vary and may be attributed to variations in accessing resources, social role assignments, or individual preferences.

Education shows the strongest relationship with entrepreneurial characteristics ($\chi^2 = 423.691$, $df = 120$, $p < 0.05$) and strategies adopted ($\chi^2 = 282.847$, $df = 84$, $p < 0.05$). This also underlines the importance of education in developing entrepreneurial skills and strategic thinking, as greater educational attainment might provide better knowledge, problem solving abilities, and access to networks.

Thus, the result emphasizes that age, gender, and education are critical factors in influencing entrepreneurial behaviors and strategies among agricultural entrepreneurs. This would likely inform policymakers and other stakeholders about efforts needed in terms of tailoring their training programs, resources, and support systems to serve the different demographic groups differently so that their entrepreneurial success is augmented.

5. DISCUSSION

The research analysis of the paper is divided into three main parts, demographic profile of the agriculture entrepreneurs, farming experience, and land pattern; entrepreneurial traits or qualities or characteristics; and strategies adopted by the entrepreneurs of Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam. The demographic profile indicates which group of age and gender are most likely to apply the domain of entrepreneurship in agriculture. Also, it represents the basic or minimum farming experience and how much land holding these agri-entrepreneurs possess. The entrepreneur typically possess qualities or traits which drive them in their business venture. The current paper identified some key

entrepreneurial characteristics or traits which are relevant to agricultural field. There are various traits or qualities which are perceived to be possessed by these agri entrepreneur. Out of which the traits like hard work, consistency, good knowledge and experience in agriculture are popular among the agri entrepreneurs of BTR. The third part of the analysis is the strategies adopted by the agri entrepreneur of the BTR Assam. Strategy is the plan of action which is undertaken in order to make a profitable venture. The farmer entrepreneurs of the BTR are found to adopt various strategies to make their farm a profitable one. Out of numerous strategies the most popular ones are, adoption of modern farming method, proper planning, connection with agriculture department officials and farm diversification. A cross tabulation of strategies adopted by both men and women have been shown differently in the interpretation section. The strategies are different in both men and women agripreneur.

The implication of this paper is that it will be beneficial for the traditional farmers; marginal farmers; research scholars and students who are studying the field of agriculture; and agriculture department officials. The paper will help to understand how these entrepreneurs think, work and behave. Understanding the mindset and their strategies will bring and insight that drive sustainability in farming, innovation, and challenging the rapidly changing scenario. Revelation of successful strategies by the Agri entrepreneur can be applied by other traditional/marginal farmers and can be adopted in other regions or sectors also. Understanding this part will help to analyze how agri entrepreneurs are different from those of non-entrepreneur or traditional farmers, how they are working in order to improve the efficiency and productivity in their farm. The smart steps taken by them will contribute to sustainability and growth.

6. CONCLUSION

There are many opportunities for entrepreneurship in agricultural field. There are many new fields nowadays in the agri-business sector such as value addition, food processing, packaging, service of agricultural tool, marketing service for agricultural produces, provision of raw materials, other related industries, and exports of local agricultural products which will eventually promote vocal for local prospect. The perspective of high-skilled workers is changing due to the relaxations in Government regulations, increase in micro-financing, and access to cutting-edge technology. As a result, many youngsters are coming up and working as self-employment in agriculture and allied sectors as well as exploring new prospects in agriculture entrepreneurship. Many aspects can be achieved through agriculture entrepreneurship such as generation of jobs for rural youth, stopping of rural-to-urban migration for jobs, development of industries in rural areas, reducing pressure on urban areas, raising the national income etc. Agri-entrepreneurship helps marginal and small farmers to enhance their productivity, make more profit out of agri business, and make their produces marketable on a wide a range of geographical area. Sectors catering both in urban and rural areas, agripreneurship provides business opportunities which results in accelerating growth and diversified income sources. Therefore, it is important to understand what kind of entrepreneurial traits, entrepreneurs possess which makes them different from those of non-entrepreneur. It is also important to understand the various tactics used by them for which they are able to stand out in the mark. Eventually study of these aspects will empower growth and bring more crop production, maximizing yield and lead to sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. As the world population is increasing day by day, the traditional farming method may not be able meet the higher future demands of the agricultural produces and food. Adopting modern farming method and applying the domain of entrepreneurship in the agriculture field remains one of the transformative strategies to change the agricultural landscape and empower growth in the country.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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