

Rehabilitation of Tribal through Rubber Plantation in Tripura: Role of Rubber Board

Dr. B. K. Panda* & Dr.Sukanta Sarkar**

[*Professor, Department of Economics, Berhampur University, Odisha, India. Email: bkpandabu@gmail.com and **D.Litt. Scholar, Department of Economics, Berhampur University, Odisha, India, Ph:09856321179, Email: sukantaeco@gmail.com]

Abstract

This paper attempts to highlight the role of rubber board for rehabilitation of tribal in Tripura. The results indicate that Rubber Board is promoting rubber cultivation in Tripura by extending technical as well as financial assistance to the small and marginal farmers. Rubber Board has been playing a pivotal role in familiarizing very alien rubber culture with the resource and intellect poor growers through its training modules. Rubber has been playing a vital role in the rehabilitation projects for shifting cultivators (Jhumias) for their social and economic uplift and for the forestation of denuded forest lands. Thus the paper suggests that rubber board playing vital role for rehabilitation of tribal jhumias through the block rubber plantation.

Keywords: Block rubber plantation, Income, Empowerment, &Jhumia rehabilitation,

Introduction

India ranks third in terms of production of Natural Rubber in the World after Thailand and Malaysia. Tripura is the second largest producer of Natural Rubber in the country (Sen & Nandi, 2013). In Tripura rubber plants (*Hevea brasiliensis*) were initially introduced for soil and moisture conservation by Forest Department in 1963. Rubber is a tropical crop and grows well in Tripura. The species has proved excellent for permanent settlement of Tribal Jhumias (Vinitha&Ramalingam, 2017).

The history of rubber in Tripura dates back to 1963 when the State Forest Department, with the technical support of the Rubber Board, introduced rubber as a measure for soil conservation. In 1976 Tripura Forest Development & Plantation Corporation (TFDPC) has been set up which brought a big leap in expansion of rubber mostly in denuded forest land. Laying special emphasis for the rehabilitation of the "Jhumia" tribal, Tripura

Rehabilitation Plantation Corporation (TRPC) was established in 1983 (George & Chandrashekar, 2014).

The Rubber Board started its activities in the state by opening a one-man office at Agartala in 1967 for undertaking development and extension activities. This office was upgraded to the status of Regional Office in 1979. A regional research station aiming at location specific R&D was also established in the same year in an area of 85 ha at Taranagar. The Rubber Board has taken up spectacular achievements in extension development schemes, took the rubber concept out of estate sector and went on domesticating the crop for the rural mass. Today the vast majority of the rubber plantations in Tripura pertain to very small to marginal growers. By now, Tripura has emerged as the second largest rubber growing state of the country, next to Kerala (Varghese & Vanitha, 2018).

The objectives of this paper are: (a) to study the role of rubber board for rehabilitation of tribal in Tripura; and (b) to examine the Rehabilitation Programmes for tribals in Tripura.

Methods and Materials

The paper is based on both the primary and secondary information. Primary information's are collected from discussion with Rubber board official in Tripura. The secondary information's are collected from articles, report of tribal welfare (Govt. of Tripura), report of directorate of statistics (Govt. of Tripura) and Rubber board reports.

Result and Discussion

(a) Role of the Rubber Board

The Rubber Board is promoting rubber cultivation in Tripura by extending technical as well as financial assistance to the small and marginal farmers. Under north-eastern package; Rubber Board offers multifaceted assistances to its farmers. Rubber Board has been playing a pivotal role in familiarizing very alien rubber culture with the resource and intellect poor growers through its training modules. A Regional Rubber Training Centre was instituted in 2000 at Agartala, for enlightening the stakeholders of rubber, where training programmes on Estate Management, Crop Harvesting, Apiculture, etc. have been offered to the growers.

Another endeavour of Rubber Board which gathered acclamation from all over the state is the empowerment of rubber producers through group formation under the umbrella of Rubber Producers' Societies (RPSs). RPSs can also ensure better prices for their crop through

collective bargain. These societies have developed a vibrant rubber market in Tripura by monitoring the market trends and updating the market intelligence.

Rubber Board is maintaining its own Nurseries to produce and distribute Quality Planting Materials and genuine budwood materials. Rubber Board has established a Regional Research Station (RRS) at Agartala for investigations on various aspects of rubber cultivation specific for this region. Research on crop improvement and field trials for the development of clones suitable for Tripura, other income sources like intercropping in Rubber Plantation to tide over the uneconomic period of rubber cultivation etc are also being undertaken by the research station. Considering the long pending demand from various stakeholders in Rubber sector in the north eastern region, Rubber Board has started an office of Marketing Division with the posting of Asst. Marketing Officer in this region.

The species has proved excellent for permanent settlement of Tribal Jhumias. TFDPC is the 2nd public sector company in the country and only one in the North East region to get FSC certificate. Till date Corporation owns 7087.74 ha rubber plantations and besides created 2120.22 ha plantation for SC/ST families, and created 233.70 ha Bamboo Plantation. Total area of plantation done by TFDPC Ltd. is 9441.66 ha. The production for 2015-16 was 2861 MT Rubber. The study conducted by the National Bureau of Soil Survey and Land Use Planning, as a part of exploratory study for the World Bank Assistance revealed that approximately 1.00 lakh ha (85094 ha) of land in the State is suitable for rubber cultivation. This offers tremendous scope for expansion of cultivation of this crop. Apex Bodies of Industries and Commerce like CII etc. have also realized the importance the potential of rubber cultivation in the State.

Major extension activities of Rubber Board are:

- 1) Expansion and renovation of rubber plantations through promotion of new planting in NE region adopting region specific technology and creating awareness for replanting of old and senile plantations with high yielding clones.
- 2) Extending free technical expertise through advisory visits, demonstrations, trainings, plantation development, productivity enhancement and quality up-gradation.
- 3) Quality planting material generation in Boards own nurseries and certification of planting material in private Nurseries for ensuring quality.
- 4) Distribution of critical inputs at concessional price for enhancing productivity.

- 5) Conducting skill development and skill improvement trainings in rubber plantation related activities such as tapping, processing, Plantation Management, Nursery management, budding, etc.
- 6) Bringing in convergence with schemes of other agencies, such as MGNREGS, Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA), PMKVY, etc., for plantation development, group empowerment, skill Development Training etc.
- 7) Conducting exposure visits, 'Sasthra-darsan', seminars and exhibitions as promotional activities(Source: Economic Survey of Tripura 2016-17).

(b) Jhumias Rehabilitation Programme

The move from subsistence farming to market-oriented farming has opened up numerous opportunities for smaller farmers and others to earn from working as labourers or daily wage earners in the various farms and plantations. This has facilitated the diversification of livelihood options for many people who do not have the resources to farm. On the other hand, it has also brought about a situation where the already limited labour has become even scarcer. At the same time, increased market opportunities have facilitated the emergence of many entrepreneurs who not only invest in cash crop cultivation but also in marketing and value added activities. National policies and programmes have been generally designed to wean away traditional farmers from shifting cultivation and to introduce them to permanent land-use systems.

According to Tripura Human Development Report, 2007, traditionally, most of the tribal population practised shifting or jhum cultivation and were termed jhumias. The term jhumias is a generic term used for tribal people dependent on shifting cultivation as the primary source of livelihood. J.B. Ganguly's book on the Problems of Jhumias in Tripura (1968) showed that in 1961 there were about 25,000 families who were dependent on jhum for their livelihood.

By 1978, this number had increased to 46,854 families, of which about 23,292 families were primarily dependent on jhum for their livelihood. In 1999, according to the Department of Tribal Welfare, 51,265 families were dependent on jhum, and the large majority of them were fully dependent on jhum. The big concentration of jhumia families was in Dhalai and South District. The total count shows a clear decline in the number of jhumia

families. Number of Households and Persons Dependent on Jhum, Tripura are discussed in table no. 1.

Table 1: Number of Households and Persons Dependent on Jhum, Tripura, 1968 to 2007.

Year	Source of the Estimate	No. of Households	No. of Persons
1968	J. B. Ganguly	25,000	-
1978	Benchmark Survey 1978	46,854	2.59 lakh
1987	Benchmark Survey 1987	55,049	2.88 lakh
1999	Department of Tribal Welfare	51,265	-
2007	Forest Department	27,278	1.36 lakh

Source: Government of Tripura

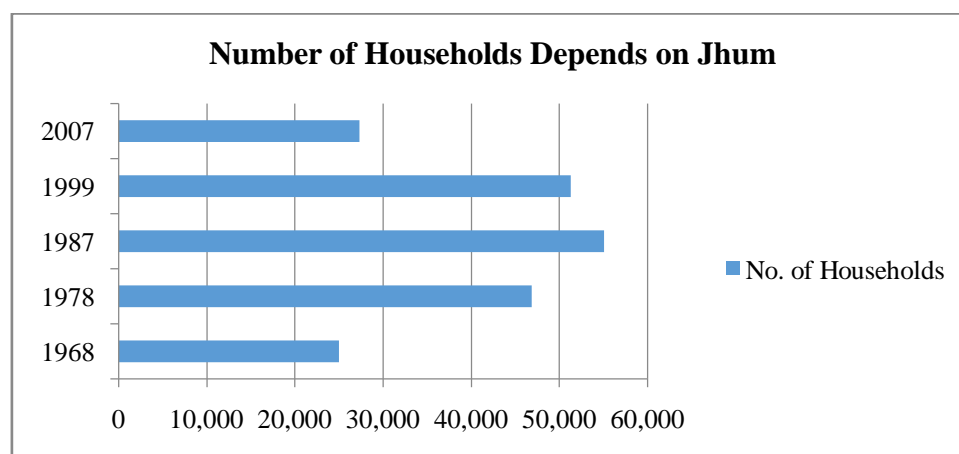


Figure 1: Number of Households and Persons Dependent on Jhum, Tripura

The major public policy intervention in favour of forest dwellers has been to rehabilitate and resettle jhumia families. The first attempts to settle jhumias were made by the Raja of Tripura, who set up the Kalyanpur Reserve in 1931. The reserve was situated in a fertile area outside forests and was intended to induce jhumias to take to the plough. The Congress Government set up colonies where jhumias were given land to carry out plough cultivation. Through the 'Shifting Cultivation Control Scheme', a centrally sponsored scheme, each family was to be granted a piece of cultivable land and Rs. 500 as initial capitals. Each settlement or 'colony' was designed to provide basic amenities to the tribal people. Numbers of Families Resettled under Various Schemes are discussed in table no. 2.

Table 2: Number of Families Resettled under Various Schemes, 1986-87 to 2004-05

Sl. No.	Plantation	Total Number of Families
1.	Horticulture	8,962
2.	Rubber	9,445
3.	Tea	795
4.	Coffee	557
All		18,959

Source: Human Development Report of Tripura, 2007; p. 39.

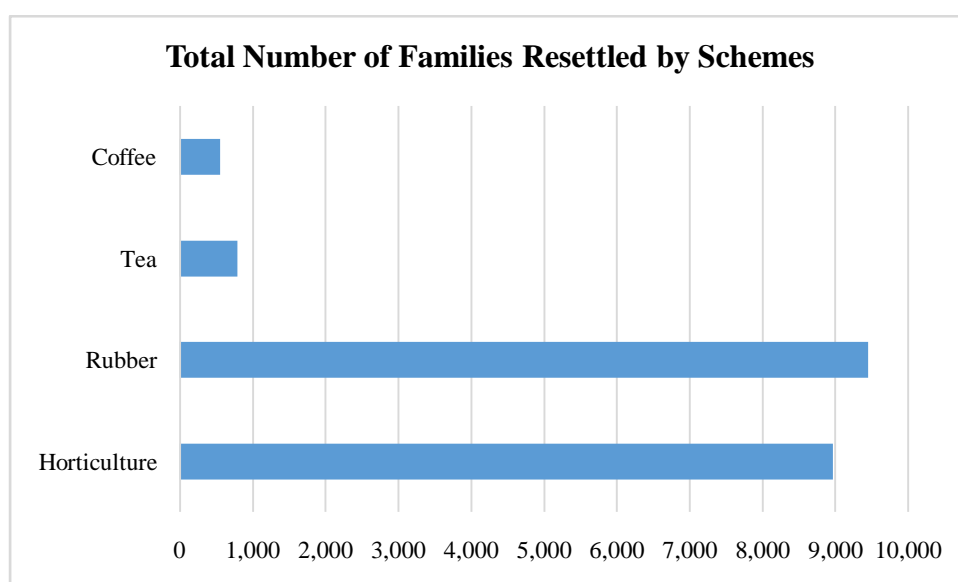


Figure 2: Nur of Families Resettled under Various Schemes

The Tripura experiment is modelled on the experiences of the Kerala rubber economy, where the 'Rubber for the Poor' project attempted to provide tribal and other marginal farmers with a steady income. Rubber has the potential of providing jhumias with a substantial income. Apart from income benefits, the jhumia rehabilitation schemes are also significant because they contribute to skill development in several ways. The Government of Tripura is also eager to use tilal and waste land to grow cash crops and tap industrial and export markets. West Bengal and Tripura were the first two States in the country to implement the Joint Forest Management programme.

National flagship programmes like the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act facilitate minimum employment guarantee in rural areas to provide additional

income to rural people. The income from such programmes helps poor farmers get much-needed cash to invest in farms and other alternative livelihood options. Older people opine that once farmers start earning from other sources, they generally look for jobs and other opportunities and abandon farming activities. Often many people choose to work on other people's farms and plantations to supplement their monetary income, neglecting their own farming activities. The usual monetary income for such small or marginal farmers is from selling wild and uncultivated herbs and leaves, which they gather from the forests.

The government of Nagaland has passed a law on shifting cultivation: The Nagaland Jhumland Act of 1970. The law recognizes the practice and the ownership of people over land and resources. However, the state does not have any clear written policy with regard to this traditional practice and has maintained a rather ambiguous attitude toward it. Except for two externally aided projects, one supported by the Canadian government and the other by the United Nations Development Programme which directly work with shifting cultivators to improve their practice, there are no state supported programmes initiated for shifting cultivators. However, the state is implementing various national programmes that support permanent land-use development programmes.

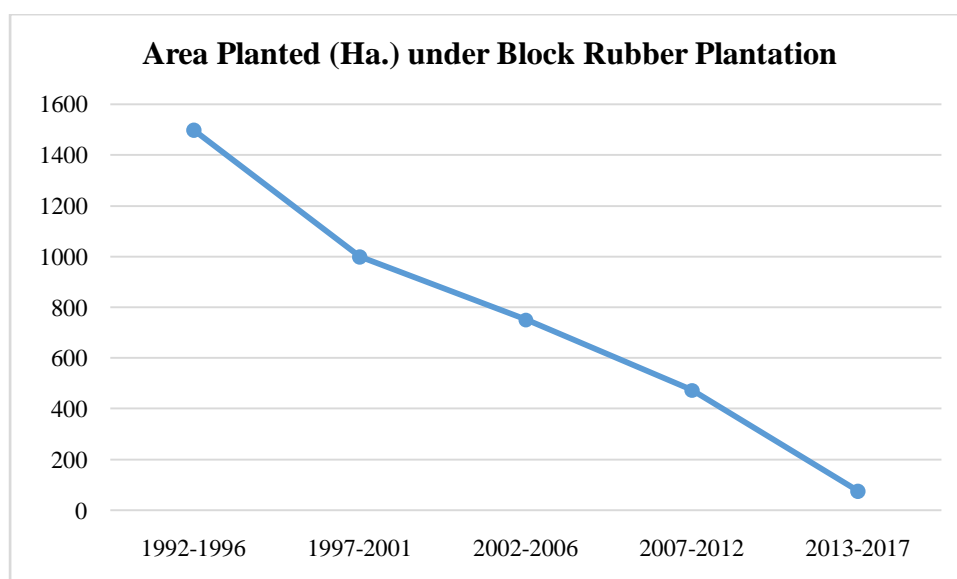
(c) Block Plantation Scheme for Rehabilitation

Apart from its commercial value, rubber has been playing a vital role in the rehabilitation projects for shifting cultivators (Jhumias) for their social and economic uplift and for the forestation of denuded forest lands. Keeping this in mind, Rubber Board has been implementing Block Plantation Scheme since 1992. The plantations are raised in compact land possessed by tribals under the direct technical supervision of the Board with financial support from the state government and Rubber Board. During the immaturity period the beneficiaries earn wages for the work rendered by them in their own plantations.

On attaining tappareability, the beneficiaries are empowered to undertake harvesting, processing and marketing of the produce by forming Rubber Producers' Societies. This scheme has so far adopted 3546 jhumia families by raising 3800.56 ha rubber plantation in 59 villages and ensured permanent settlement for the nomadic community. The social change and economic uplift brought about by this scheme has helped in wiping out social evils to some extent. The extent of plantations raised from 1992 to 2017 is as follows table no.3.

Table 3: Area Planted under Block Rubber Plantation

Phase	Phase Year	Area Planted (Ha.)
I	1992-1996	1500.00
II	1997-2001	1000.00
III	2002-2006	751.23
IV	2007-2012	473.64
V	2013-2017	75.69
	Total	3880.56

**Figure 3: Area planted under block rubber plantation**

The above figure shows that area planted under block rubber plantation is decreasing continuously since 1992-96. This is a matter of concern.

Conclusion

Rubber Board has been playing a pivotal role in familiarizing very alien rubber culture. Block Plantation Scheme since 1992 plays vital role for rehabilitation of jhumias. The plantations are raised in compact land possessed by tribals under the direct technical supervision of the Board with financial support from the state government and Rubber Board. This scheme has so far adopted 3546 jhumia families by raising 3774.75 ha rubber plantation in 59 villages and ensured permanent settlement for the nomadic community.

Rubber Board is implementing various schemes for the welfare of Tappers and plantation workers. Education stipend scheme, Housing subsidy scheme, Medical attendance scheme, Group insurance cum deposit scheme are the major schemes.

Acknowledgement

It has been acknowledged that information and fact of rubber plantation are taken from the report of rubber plantation of Economic Survey of Tripura 2016-17, Directorate of Economics & Statistics Planning (Statistics) Department Government of Tripura, Agartala.

References

- 1) Sen, N. & Nandi, M. (2013). A Study on Transshipment Model for Export of Rubber from Tripura to Bangladesh, IOSR Journal of Mathematics, Volume 6, Issue 1, p.31.
- 2) Vinitha, A. & Ramalingam, L. (2017). Scenario of Rubber Production and Consumption in India, International Journal of Advance Research in Computer Science and Management Studies, Volume 5, Issue 6, p.35.
- 3) Varghese, L. & Vanitha, K. (2018). Analysis of Factors Affecting Rubber Cultivation in Kerala, International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research Volume 9, Issue 3, p.1672.
- 4) George, J. & Chandrashekar, H. (2014). Growth and Trends in Production and Marketing of Natural Rubber in Kerala, India, International Journal of Current Research and Academic Review, Volume 2 Number 8, p.53.
- 5) Joseph, J., George, T., and Dey S. (2010). Report on the socio-economic impact of Natural Rubber cultivation under the block planting scheme in Tripura, MPRA Paper No. 52370, pp.1-31.