

FOREST, PEOPLE AND LIVELIHOOD SUSTENANCE: A STUDY IN DINDIGUL DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

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Abstract:

The present study attempts to analyze the impact of the Social Forestry Project on the livelihood sustenance of the rural masses in general and the forest dependent communities in particular in Natham Taluk, Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu. The present study is purely based on the secondary data which was obtained from the Forest Department Office in Natham Taluk of Dindigul district. It is estimated that about 2187 hectares of forest area are available. It finds that of the total plants planted, 68 per cent were dead and only 38 per cent of the plants were standing at the time of audit in these forest areas. It further accounted that the value of material collection was done by the forest dependents was estimated that about Rs.107080 during the last ten years.

Keywords: Forest, People, Livelihood, Income, Employment

Introduction

Forest and people are closely associated with one another in several respects. Forest has been playing a vital role for the people's livelihood in general and the livelihood of the forest dependent communities in particular. They provide several goods which serve as raw materials

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for many industries. But in recent decades, the forests have been exploited beyond the carrying capacity of the forest lands. This is mainly due to ever increase and over increase in population and poverty, urbanization, increase in infrastructural activities and change in lifestyles of the people in both the rural and urban pockets of India and in different parts of the economy.

In India, Joint Forest Management (JFM) is a novel experiment in the protection and conservation of forests by local communities in collaboration with the forest department (Neela Mukherjee, 1995 p.3130). A similar exercise was carried out in the Natham Taluk of Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu. In this backdrop, the present study attempts to analyze the impact of the Social Forestry Project on the livelihood sustenance of the rural masses in general and the forest dependent communities in particular in Natham Taluk, Dindigul district of Tamil Nadu. The present study is purely based on the secondary data which was obtained from the Forest Department Office from the Annual report of the Tamil Nadu Forest Committee during the period of 1997-98 to 2007-08 in the Natham Taluk of Dindigul district in Tamil Nadu.

Methods and Materials

The present study is purely based on the secondary data pertaining to Social Forestry Project, which has been functioning in the Natham Taluk of Dindigul district in Tamil Nadu. It is covering six selected villages such as Velayuthampatti, Vettaikaranputhur, P.Kuttur, Sakkiliyankodai, Merkupatti and Kuppliapatti for the present study. For this purpose, the relevant data were collected from the Annual report of the Tamil Nadu Forest Committee during the period of 1997-98 to 2007-08. The present study used simple percentage analysis for proving the stated objectives in the selected villages.

Results and Discussion

This section is devoted to the discussion the results of secondary data which was obtained from the forest departments in the study Taluk.

The table (1) clearly shows that about 2187 hectares of forest area are available in the Natham Taluk of Dindigul district. It was distributed to 400 hectares of each in P.Kuttur and

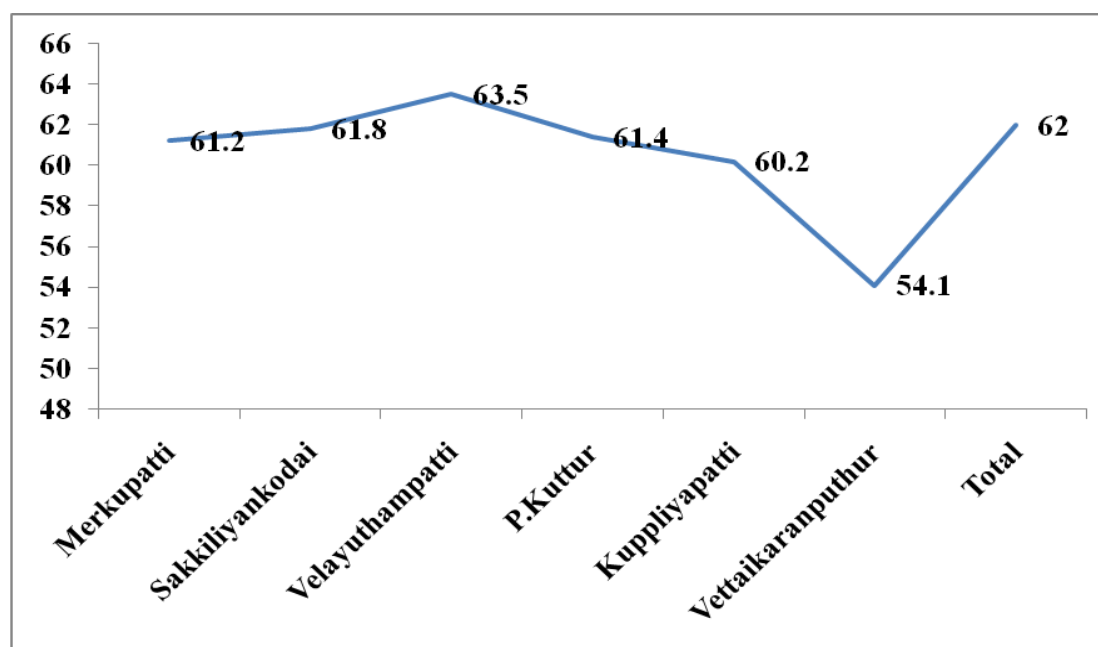
Kuppliyapatti, 380 hectares in Velayuthampatti, 365 hectares in Sakkiliyankodai, 342 hectares in Merkupatti and the remaining 300 hectares in Vettaikaranpatti.

During the study period, the government planted trees in these six village forests for regeneration of forestry. Nearly 7,63,500 plants were planted in these village forests. However, only 2,90,069 plants alone standing at the time of the audit and the remaining were dead was mainly due to drought climate and unfavourable rainfall in these villages during the study period.

Table 1: Status of forest and tree planted in the study villages in 1997-2001.

Villages	Area in Ha.	Tree planted	Plant at the time of audit	Loss
Merkupatti	342	123000	47700 (38.8)	75300 (61.2)
Sakkiliyankodai	365	137750	52562 (38.2)	85188 (61.8)
Velayuthampatti	380	130250	47525 (36.5)	82725 (63.5)
P.Kuttur	400	147750	56940 (38.6)	90810 (61.4)
Kuppliyapatti	400	122750	48762 (39.8)	73988 (60.2)
Vettaikaranputhur	300	102000	36580 (35.9)	65420 (64.1)
Total	2,187	7,63,500	2,90,069 (38.0)	4,73,431 (62.0)

Source: Annual report of Tamil Nadu Forest Committee during 1997-98 to 2007-08.

Figure 1: Percentage of plants lost during 1997-98 to 07-08

Source: Annual report of Tamil Nadu Forest Committee during 1997-98 to 2007-08.

It finds that of the total plants planted, 68 per cent were dead and only 38 per cent of the plants were standing at the time of audit in these villages forest areas.

Table 2: Forest dependent in the study villages

Villages	Male	Female	Total
Merkupatti	41	34	75
Sakkiliyankodai	40	7	47
Velayuthampatti	60	35	95
P.Kuttur	120	30	150
Kuppliyapatti	87	10	97
Vettaikaranputhur	40	40	80
Total	388 (71.32)	156 (28.68)	544 (100)

Source: Annual report of Tamil Nadu Forest Committee during 1997-98 to 2007-08.

Table 2 reveals that the number people who have been directly depending on forest for their income and employment related activities during the last ten years. Of the total person's dependence on forest, 71.32 per cent of them were male members. The rest of them (28.68 per cent) were female members in the study villages.

In India, in general and the rural pockets of Tamil Nadu in particular, the non-timber forest products play a crucial role for the poor forest dwellers by providing income for the

livelihood sustenance. The table 3 shows that the value of material collection was done by the forest dependents in the selected villages. The forest dependents were usually engaged in collection of minor forest products from the forest.

Table 3: Types and Value of Minor forest products

Village	Types	Value (Rs.)	Total value
Merkupatti	Tamarind	4550	4550
Sakkiliyankodai	Tamarind	4005	5605
	Turkey berry	1600	
Velayuthampatti	Tamarind	7764	15160
	Turkey berry	7396	
P.Kuttur	Tamarind	62350	62350
Kuppliyapatti	Tamarind	11255	12355
	Turkey berry	1100	
Vettaikaranputhur	Tamarind	7060	7060
Total		10,7080	10,7080

Source: Annual report of Tamil Nadu Forest Committee during 1997-98 to 2007-08.

The study village people are mainly engaged in the collection of Tamarind and Turkey berry in addition to the medicinal value products from the forest resources. The present study accounted that the total value of material collection was done by the forest dependent communities is about Rs.10,7,080 during the study periods.

Table 4: Income from Minor Forest Products to the dependent HHs (in Rs.)

Villages	Period		Total
	1998-99 to 2001-02	2002-03 to 2008-09	
Merkupatti	0	4550	4550
Sakkiliyankodai	5605	-	5605
Velayuthampatti	14860	300	15160
P.Kuttur	61500	850	62350
Kuppliyapatti	6355	6000	12355
Vettaikaranputhur	2200	4860	7060
Total	90,520	16,560	10,7080

Source: Annual report of Tamil Nadu Forest Committee during 1997-98 to 2007-08.

The income was gained by the forest dependent households (HHs) during the last ten years (Table 4) shows that in the first five years, i.e. 1998-99 to 2001-02 the total income gained by the forest dependent communities was very high as compared with the next five years such as 2002-03 to 2008-09. The value difference in these periods is mainly due to rainfall reduction and drought climatic conditions in the study Taluk. Among the selected six villages, the P.Kuttur has registered higher amount of income gained by the forest dependent households is naturally due to the greater extent of the endowment of the forest area as well as the number of members dependent on the forest.

A study conducted by Debnath and Dasgupta (2006) reveals that through the adoption of the new National Forest Policy in 1988 and subsequent resolutions of the government of India, the Forest department of Madhya Pradesh passed the JFM resolution of the state in 1991 providing significant role to the people for participating in protection, management and development of forest. The amended resolution in 1995 was passed to provide more openings for the women and weaker sections along with NGO's involvement. The amended resolution in 1995 was subsequently revised in 2000 and 2001. In the revised resolution, three types of people's institution, commonly known as committees such as Forest Protection Committees (FPCs), Village Forest Committees (VFCs) and Eco-development Committees (EDCs) have been recognized in this regards.

Table 5: Number of HHs and members in Village Forest Committees (VFC)

Villages	HHs	Members		Total
		Male	Female	
Merkupatti	47	80	40	120
Sakkiliyankodai	198	239	192	431
Velayuthampatti	150	190	115	305
P.Kuttur	160	160	165	325
Kuppliyapatti	126	126	128	254
Vettaikaranputhur	155	177	172	349
Total	836	972	812	1784

Source: Annual report of Tamil Nadu Forest Committee during 1997-98 to 2007-08.

In such similar activity is taking place in Tamil Nadu, especially in the study Taluk for preservation and regeneration of forest. The forest departments were formed the Village Forest Committees (VFC) in the surrounding villages. Around 836 households were member in the VFC. Totally about 1784 persons from the 836 households have been actively participating as members in the VFC. Of which, 972 are male and the rest of them were female members. The committee members were responsible for regeneration of forest and its productivity.

For the development of degraded forest a detailed micro-plan were developed and it was designed to benefit rural poor and other people living at the close proximity of the forest, and particularly those people who were most dependent on the forest for their daily livelihood subsistence. The micro planning process was designed to identify all forest users and community members interested in improving forest conditions of both quantity and its productivity. In table (6) illustrate that the volume of the amount and number of people have been benefited in the micro plan through the project in the study villages.

Table 6: Number of members benefited in Micro plan in the study villages

Nature of service	Member			Total amount (in Rs.)
	Male	Female	Total	
Business	62	0	62	242050
Machine	218	62	280	722059
Business loan	126	100	226	730390
Agriculture	138	4	142	114040
Livestock	33	23	56	228600
Petti-shop	17	0	17	54100
Other work	21	16	37	77990
Total	615	205	820	21,69,229

Source: Annual report of Tamil Nadu Forest Committee during 1997-98 to 2007-08.

Around 820 members were benefited in the micro plan. Of which, three fourth of the male members and one fourth of the female members were benefited from the scheme. It indicates that most of the beneficiaries were male members as compared with the female members in the selected six study villages. The money received from the project was spent on

seven types of activities such as business, provision machine and tools for agriculture and allied activities, lending loans, provision of agricultural implements for the development and improvement of agricultural land and its productivity, livestock maintenance and other social assets as an alternate income and employment in the forest dependent communities in the selected villages. For instance, Debnath and Dasgupta (2006) study finds that the VFC has the autonomy of decision making of the community funds for investments in agriculture, non-farming activities, processing and trade activities, forestry, resolving credit, livestock improvement, health, education, roads, drinking water, among others. Naik (1997) advocated that the better management of common property resources like forests is considered vital for poverty alleviation, sustainable development with equity, ecological stability and preserving biodiversity.

Table 7: Amount spent on employment generation (Rs.)

Villages	Year		Total
	1997-98 to 2000-01	2001-02 to 2004-05	
Merkupatti	236990	70000	306990
Sakkiliyankodai	411190	70000	481190
Velayuthampatti	108375	70000	178375
P.Kuttur	399055	70000	469055
Kuppliyapatti	388619	-	388619
Vettaikaranputhur	-	345000	345000
Total	15,44,229	6,25,000	21,69,229

Source: Annual report of Tamil Nadu Forest Committee during 1997-98 to 2007-08.

A sum of rupees 21,69,229 was spent in the creation of employment of the six selected villages during the last two terms. Of which, the higher quantum of rupees 15, 44,229 has been spent for employment generation in the first five years and the remaining amount of rupees 6, 25,000 spent on the same by next five years of 2001-02 to 2004-05. The main intention of the employment generation activity has to reduce the exploitation of the forest by the forest dependent communities in general and the other people who were located near the forest for their daily livelihood sustenance.

Conclusion

Forest plays a significant role in the poorest of the poor in particular and the forest dependent communities in general. They not only provide livelihood sustenance to the forest dwelling communities, but it has played a vital role in the development of the economy as a whole by providing raw materials for many industries. The present study estimated that about 2187 hectares of forest area are available. It finds that of the total plants planted, 68 per cent were dead and only 38 per cent of the plants were standing at the time of the audit in the forest area. It further accounted that the value of material collection was done by the forest dependents are estimating that about Rs.10,7,080 during the last ten years i.e., from 1997-98 to 2007-08. The money received from the project was spent on seven types of activities such as business, provision of machine and tools for agriculture and allied activities, lending loans, provision of agricultural implements for the development and improvement of agricultural land and its productivity, livestock maintenance and the other social assets as an alternate income and employment in the forest dependent communities in the selected villages.

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