

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF DISSERTATION

ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT OF 'JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY' (JICA) PROJECT IN TRIPURA ON LIVELIHOODS OF FOREST FRINGE DWELLERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tripura is a small state in the North Eastern part of the country. The third-smallest state in India, it covers an area of 10,491 square kilometres. The region is characterised by remoteness, poor connectivity and infrastructure, almost non- existence of industry, and under-development of the economy.

However, the region has a high forest cover (6294.3 sq km) and rich biodiversity. Tripura has a population of 36.71 Lakh (2011 Census) with a rural population of 27.1 Lakh (73.8 %). A sizeable portion of the population resides in and around the forest areas and has little or no means of livelihood.

These forest fringe dwellers living in and around the forest areas are essentially poor people who mainly use the forest produce for their livelihood. Deterioration of forest occurs due to over harvesting and shifting cultivation (Jhum) activities by these dwellers. As a result, soil erosion and reduction in water retaining capacity occurs. Even bio diversity is threatened. Unsustainable use of the forest causes its further depletion and a cycle of further poverty results for the forest fringe dwellers. The fast depleting forest resources necessitated an effective Joint Forest Management technique which would facilitate in sustaining the forest resource base against the growing population pressures of both human and livestock.

Recently, the state, in an effort to ensure the preservation of the rich natural resource base on one hand, and wean the local population away from illicit tree felling on the other, has taken up initiatives for poverty alleviation through the Tripura JICA project entitled “Tripura Forest Environmental Improvement and Poverty Alleviation Project”. It has entered into an agreement with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for designing sustainable methods for income generation for forest dwelling communities and for improving the ecology of the forests. The objective is to restore degraded forests and improve the livelihood prospects of villagers, including tribal families engaged in traditional shifting cultivation and promoting sustainable forest managements through JFM, thereby improving environment and alleviating poverty.

The strategy adopted is mainly through capacity development of the forest fringe dwellers, for income generation activities, utilising the locally available rich natural resources such as Bamboo and other Non-Timber Forest Produce. The project has also outlined certain activities like sustainable fishery, piggery, mushroom farming, making of bamboo handicrafts, making of incense (agarbatti) sticks, brooms etc. by the local people using the locally available material. The project also aims at value addition of the produce and marketing of the products.

The JICA is providing financial assistance for this livelihood program. The project is for a period of 10 years and is currently in its last year.

The major economic benefits envisaged and by the project are:

- a) Promotion of Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) as a means of livelihood for the masses on a sustainable basis and to develop bamboo and cane based entrepreneurship including assisting in marketing of products.
- b) Augmentation of improved farming practices for cultivation and management of bamboo, cane and medicinal plants and value addition for poor forest fringe dwellers.
- c) Capacity building of forest fringe dwellers for harnessing the rich bio diversity of the region.
- d) Production of fodder, grass and fuelwood.
- e) Prevention of soil erosion as a result of increased vegetative cover by plantation and soil moisture conservation structures.
- d) Carbon dioxide sequestration by afforestation.
- e) Income generating activities like pisciculture, piggery, horticulture, integrated farming, vermiculture, duckery, incense stick making, edible bamboo shoot processing, bamboo mat weaving etc.

Apart from economic benefits several other tangible benefits include improved forest cover, water conservation in forest soil, protection of endangered/threatened species of animals, biodiversity conservation and forest rehabilitation activities.

The project is based on creation of Self Help Groups (SHGs) through the Joint Forest Management and the aims at development of livelihood assets, enhancing access to services and enterprise promotion. The project also fosters activities for livelihood enhancement not only by forming new SHGs but also revival of existing SHGs in the project area, building their capacities, grading them and involving them in income generating activities by dovetailing funds from other Government schemes as well. The aim has also been to implement scientifically designed agro forestry models in Recognition of Forest Rights (RFR) land.

The current study assessed the impact of the livelihood generation programme on the income of the forest fringe dwellers. The project has been successful and has made considerable improvements in several facets of the life of the forest fringe dwellers. In addition there has been improvement in ecological parameters like regeneration of forests, more availability of water and biodiversity. It has succeeded in weaning the Jhumias away from shifting cultivation. It has also been successful in augmenting the income of the targeted villagers. The income sources have also become more reliable and consistent. There has been a significant increase in the availability of NTFP, not only in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality and variety.