

IMPACTS OF NATURAL RUBBER CULTIVATION IN TRIPURA: AN INTER-TEMPORAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF TRIBAL AND NON-TRIBAL RUBBER FARMERS

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The study on socio-economic impact of natural rubber (NR) cultivation under the Block Planting Units (BPUs) in Tripura conducted in 2008 revealed (i) higher dependence on income from NR; (ii) lack of income diversification activities and (iii) low level of human capital formation in the rubber growing regions of Tripura, especially among the tribal rubber growers. A revisit to the households surveyed in 2008 was done in 2019 to understand the changes in the socio-economic condition of rubber farmers in Tripura. Though all the BPUs and Group Processing Units (GPUs) were revisited the present study could not locate all the 480 rubber farmers studied during the year 2008. Data from 414 households were collected and analysed. An increase in (i) household income; (ii) size of the families; (iii) investment in alternative sources of income; (iv) availability of credit facilities; (v) borrowings of rubber farmers, *etc.* and decline in (i) area under NR and (ii) share of income from NR in total average household income were observed. Sources of income of the rubber farmers were also diversified. As a result, NR farming was found to be a part-time activity for majority of the rubber farmers in Tripura.

Keywords: Block planting, Group processing, Income change, Natural rubber, Socio-economic change, Tripura

INTRODUCTION

Successful implementation of block planting scheme/units (BPUs)¹ for the tribal communities and establishment of group processing centres/units (GPUs) for all the

rubber growers (including both tribal and non-tribal) in Tripura not only helped to wean away the tribal population from shifting cultivation to settled mode of cultivation but also was a catalyst for

¹ The rubber plantation activities in Tripura got momentum among the tribal small growers when the Rubber Board in collaboration with the Government of Tripura started Block Plantation Project in the state in 1992 (Bhowmik, 2006). The scheme is formulated as a settlement scheme for the upliftment of the tribal Jhumia's in the state. Under this scheme, a compact land owned by SC/ST households are identified and the rubber plantations are developed by engaging family labour as wage earners. The scheme was successful in bringing up expansion of area under NR cultivation, improvements in the income profile of the tribal rubber farmers and paving way for settled mode of cultivation among the tribal farmers.