Tribal Development: Problem & Prospect

(An Experimental Project)

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Abstract

The Tribes are very interested in becoming more involved in agricultural production and utilizing their lands for their own agricultural endeavors. They would like to see more tribal members, particularly the youth, develop an interest and assume a more active role in the many diverse agricultural opportunities available on the Reservation. However, in today's technologically-based society, youth have lost the connection and interest in agriculture. In the past, many families operated small agricultural operations which youth were involved in. However, as agricultural practices have changed to meet growing populations, small family farms and ranches have decreased. As a result, tribal youth have not had opportunities to learn about agriculture or food production. Because of the Tribes' rich knowledge in indigenous agriculture methods, interest and involvement in production agriculture, tribal elders want youth to become more interested, educated and involved in agriculture.

Key words: Tribe, Youth, Agriculture, Training and Capacity building.

Introduction

Much tribal youths have sets of skills which are largely ignored, marginalized and eventually suppressed by the normal educational system. These include detailed customary knowledge of the forest and other ecosystems; cultural traditions around natural resource management and collective decision making; understanding of techniques of traditional sustainable cultivation, wildlife management etc.

Alienating these youth from their cultural and social background is a serious blow to them, to their communities and to the society as a whole. Therefore, skill development programmes aimed at retaining youth in agriculture as well as imparting them with hands-on experience in modern agro-technology are a requirement for tribal youth. Moreover, despite welfare efforts and schemes, tribal youth in the country find themselves increasingly restricted in terms of the kind of employment and opportunities that they are able to access.

The existing agricultural extension system disseminates outdated practices and technologies, and hence a barrier to youth who look for prospecting ventures and modern technologies. They also failed to provide adequate support in the form of credit and market

linkage. In this backdrop of high significance Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD) and Community Agrobiodiversity Centre of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Wayanad jointly designed and implemented 'Yuva Jyoti'- one-year long project, to retain tribal youth in agriculture. The project was aimed to attract and retain tribal youth in Wayanad towards agriculture by equipping them in advanced farming techniques, enhancing managerial skills and ensuring credit linkage for establishing production units.

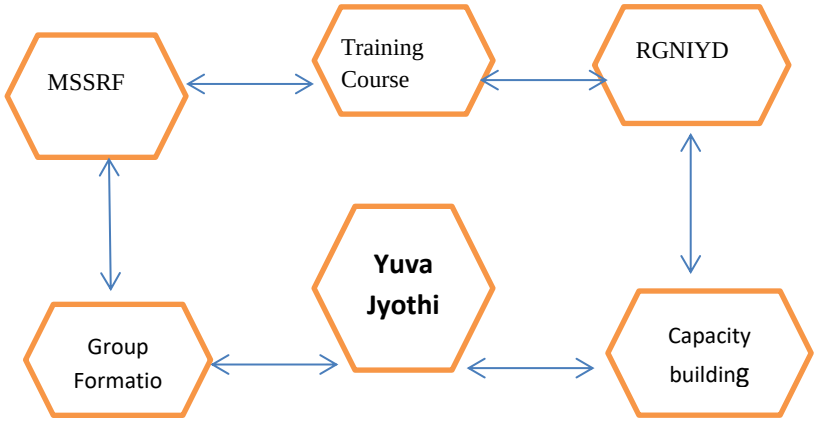
The project envisaged to provide training and capacity building of tribal youth and help to increase the standard of living of selected tribal families. By establishing agro-enterprises and value addition units by the young farmer's project had helped to increase the value of their labour and time. Transfer of technologies in the form of precision farming, scientific cattle rearing helped them to increase the farm income and tribal youth employment opportunities. Similarly, impart quality training that equips the young tribal men and women to increase their income either from farm operations, managing stress, and leading quality life was also considered as long term objective of the project. .

The Project

The project is designed as a joint venture between MSSRF and RGNIYD by sharing resources, knowledge, the expertise developed by both institutions in the areas of agriculture, youth development and establishment of agro-enterprises.

The project visualized to provide training in establishing agro-enterprises like precision farming; fruits/vegetable processing; cattle farming; biotech applications in the areas of commercial nursery raising; mushroom cultivation; production of value-added products from pepper, coffee and ginger. The overall aim of the project was to make agriculture a remunerative enterprise and channelize quality human resources into the field of agriculture.

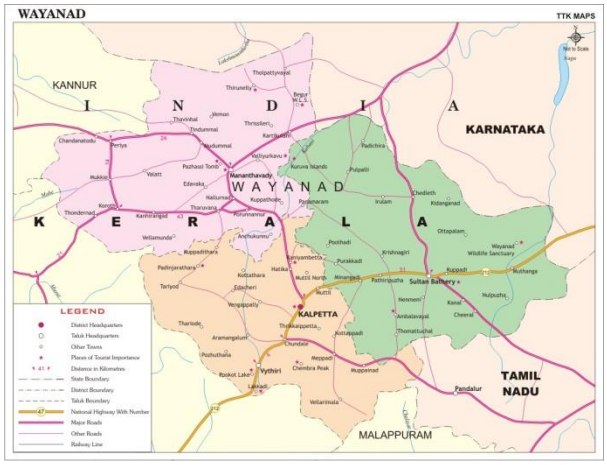
Components of the project



Training course: Duration of a particular training course was 3 days. This includes classroom lectures, practical and hands-on experience, exposure visit, interaction with successful farmers and business people, developing business proposals for individual enterprise or action plan for farm operations, mobilisation of credit, managing stress, managerial skill etc.

Resource group formation: As part of this project, MSSRF with the support of RGNIYD had established a resource group to support the participants to implement their strategies effectively and to guide them to overcome the hurdles (technological, financial, and marketing).

Profile of the project area and targeted population



Wayanad is regarded as one of 250 most backward districts in the country, which receives funds from Backward Region Grant Fund from Government of India (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2006). Wayanad district is lagging behind rest of the districts in Kerala in terms of many of the socio-economic parameters. The district is located in the northeast part of Kerala and sharing boundary with Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Wayanad has the largest concentration of tribal population in Kerala. Tribes constitute 17.4% of the total district population. Main tribal communities of the district are Paniyans, Adiyans, Kattunaickans, Kurumas, Uralis and Kurichians.

The Paniyas and Adiyas are landless or marginal landholders depending on wage labour in agriculture for their survival. The Kattunaikkas and Uralis are forest dwellers mainly depending on the collection of non-timber forest produce like honey, gooseberry, and other economically important resources. The Kurichiyas and Kurumas have settled agriculture communities and small and marginal landholders cultivating a number of crops like rice, coffee, pepper, ginger, vegetables, banana etc for both food and market purpose. Cattle rearing are a supplementary income for most of the tribal groups in the District.

Wayanad is predominantly an agrarian district. Agriculture is the main source of employment and livelihoods for more than 80% of its population. Of the total 2131 Sq. km of land, 78787

hectare is forest, forming 37% of the total area.1142 Sq. km of the total area is used for agriculture which forms 54% of the total land area of the district. Census data reveals that 47.3 % of the total workforce of the district is involved with agriculture while the figure for the State of Kerala is 22.8%. 30.5% of the total labour force of the district is agricultural labourers.

Lack of exposure to modern farming methods and lack of knowledge and infrastructure to produce value-added products are the main reasons for their backwardness. This project visualises to address backwardness of tribal communities by equipping tribal youths with modern farming practices and technology and skill for taking up potential enterprises.

Tribal Youth and Agriculture

The tribal communities have to live under a harsh economy, the ways of their livelihood are limited and they have to work very hard to get a bare subsistence. Thus, the tribal children from an early age are burdened with a number of economic duties and obligations and they can hardly be spared for school. The proportion of dropout is also higher among tribal children. In fact, most of the tribal youth and school going children participate in farming and looking after the economic demands of the family.

Youth especially the tribal youth face a number of problems related to educational, cultural, social, economic, technological and vocational development, because of the low level of education, lack of vocational guidance and scientific outlook towards agriculture. The tribal youth selected for the project were educated up to pre-primary and primary level, had medium sized families (except Kurichias), had agriculture as the main occupation, had a marginal size of land holding, belonged to low annual income group and low social participation. They also had a medium degree of change-proneness and risk orientation. Almost all of them had not undergone any vocational training.

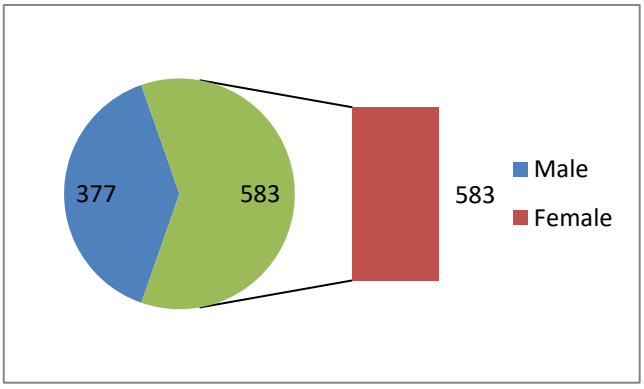
The tribal youth in Wayanad had a medium level of participation in agriculture and allied activities, were confined to manual operations like ploughing, harrowing etc., and meagre participation in operations involving improved farm practices like seed treatment, adopting plant protection measures, application of fertilizers and adopting post harvesting practices.

A snapshot of the project activity

Over a period of one year (September 2015 to December 2016) 30 programmes organised and major beneficiaries of the programme were Kurumba, Kurichiya, Kattunayikans, and

Paniya tribes of Wayanad District. Kuruchiya tribal youth constituting more than one-third of the beneficiaries who attended the capacity building programme under the project

This project is envisaged to facilitate quality training and learning environment for young men and women belonging to farming communities or intended to opt to farm as their profession. The project is aimed to equip the youths to earn a reasonable income from farming and related agro-eco-enterprises. They will get exposure in multiple technologies prevailing/ developed by national and international research and development organisations working in the field of agriculture and rural development. The project visualises enhanced the participation of young men and women in farming and related areas. The overall aim of the project was to make agriculture a remunerative enterprise and channelize quality human resources into the field of agriculture. A vibrant generation of young men and women can create structural changes in Indian agriculture through innovations. This project is a step towards modernising agriculture by enhancing quality human resources.



Approach

Every lecture in the field of technology transfer will be accompanied by the sharing of experiences by the farmer(s) for effective dissemination and transfer of skill sets. Hands on experience and exposure visit are other strategies adopted to transfer technologies. Information Communication Technology (ICT) was linked with the transfer of technologies and post-training services. Interested youths were being linked with banks for availing credit support.

Subject areas covered

1. Precision farming
2. Fruits and vegetable processing for the export market
3. Biotech application in agriculture, seed technology, tissue culture (Nursery techniques, Mushroom farming)

4. Cattle farming
5. Honey processing and marketing
6. Value addition of pepper, coffee and ginger products

Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development & Youth in Agriculture

As Youth Development constitutes a core component of national development in the context of building human resources in a vast country like ours, it is the role of Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD) to identify the all relevant aspects of youth motivation and to develop and design programmes for promoting youth welfare. Since its inception, it has emerged as the professional resource agency and act as a think-tank of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and assists the Governmental and Non-Governmental agencies in youth-related activities. One of the prime mandates of RGNIYD is to reach the unreached by a more focused approach on integrated skill development programmes including agriculture, traditional skills like carpentry, weaving, honey processing etc. The training and capacity building programmes of RGNIYD are intended to support and supplement the tribal youth of the country with the required skills necessary to have a decent livelihood.

Towards this direction RGNIYD designed and implemented the 'Yuva –Jyothi' Project with the collaboration of M.S Swaminathan Research Foundation in Wayanad during 2105-16. Other than financial implications, RGNIYD played a vital role in the project by the way of providing technical and resource support through various training modules developed by us to enhance the youth participation in agriculture.

Youth in Agriculture

As a regular feature of its functional activities, the Institute has launched a number of research projects and training programmes to unearth the potential in the Indian Youth which perhaps remains untapped.

Rural youth are the future of food security in India. Yet around the country, few young people see a future for themselves in agriculture. Youth in agriculture is such an effort by RGNIYD to enable the rural and tribal youth to understand the benefits of modernisation happening in the field of agriculture and allied sectors.

The first and foremost challenge in enabling youth in agriculture is their insufficient access to knowledge, particularly in our country, there is a distinct to need to retain rural as well as tribal youth otherwise prone to migration in agriculture. To fulfil this objective the Department of Local Governance, RGNIYD had developed a short course module on youth in agriculture in 2011 with the support of experts in the field. The two-day module consists of both theoretical and practical components in the form of field exposure to institutions working towards the betterment of agriculture in India. RGNIYD utilized this module with some modifications to suit the objectives of the Yuva-Jyothi project.

Report of the Project Monitoring committee (Yuva- Jyothi)

The PMC discussed the subjects covered under one year long project and observed that 960 tribal youth were trained on various agro-related subjects viz; Precision farming, fruits and vegetable processing, Biotech applications in agriculture, seed technology, tissue culture, nursery techniques, Cattle farming, honey processing and value addition of pepper, coffee and ginger products. Trainees were provided with learning journey to the following institutions;

a) Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Wayanad
b) Regional Agriculture Research Station(RARS), Wayanad
c) Kerala Milk Marketing Cooperative Society (Milma), Wayanad
d) Brahmagiri Meat Processing Unit, Govt of Kerala, Wayanad

Besides this, exposure visits were also made to individual farms with small landholders' success stories. This exposure as well as learning journeys provided trainees with necessary motivation and confidence to venture into an agro-related livelihood. Committee also reviewed the post-training support provided to the training completed tribal youth. MSSRF has supported the following activities under post training components and found to be effective among young farmers.

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- **Resource support**: Provided necessary expertise and experience to young farmers to innovate new seed varieties and crop care.
- **Networking;** Enabled networking of farmers with local researchers and implementers such as KVK, RARS and KVAU.
- **Farmer clubs:** to ensure that training completed youngsters are engaged in livelihood activities related to agriculture.
- **Bank linkage-** Canara Bank the lead bank of the District is benevolent to the tribal youth and supporting them through bank linkage programmes.

Observations

1. The programme has benefited largely to the plain tribal communities, landless and forest dweller tribes were not influenced by the training programme.
2. More thrust to be given for the training and capacity building of Katunayikans (forest dwellers) and Paniyas (landless tribes) in Wayanad with a special focus on Katunayikans in Mushroom cultivation.
3. Training need of Paniya tribal youth are different from other tribal groups in Wayanad, they need more support in terms of education and livelihood.
4. Among the tribal youth, group-based livelihood activities are more effective rather than individual-centric capacity building.
5. Capacity building on cattle farming is one of the good options for skill development among the landless tribes.
6. During the meeting, the tribal welfare department promised that excess agriculture produce of the tribal will be purchased by the metric/pot-metric hostels under TWD.
7. Agriculture Department, Govt. of Kerala is also extended their support to promote collective farming among the tribal communities.
8. As agriculture is no longer supporting farmers with regular income, the training on value addition and food processing are of great help to the tribal farmers.
9. The rain shelter training provides to the women farmers seems to be one of the good components of the project. As Wayanad terrain is prone to heavy rainfall for 6-7 months in a year, these shelters will protect horticulture farming activities.

Following the PMC meeting, RGNIYD organised face to face meeting in tribal settlements and interacted with training completed tribal youth, and noted that more than two third of the

beneficiaries are engaged in agriculture and allied activities. The training covered all major tribal groups in Wayanad and the participants were seemed to be happy and satisfied with the capacity building programme and the exposure they received from the same.

Impact of the Project over tribal farmers

The project envisaged to provide training and capacity building of tribal youths will help to increase the standard of living of selected tribal families. By establishing agro-enterprises and value addition units by the young farmer's project had helped to increase the value of their labour and time. Transfer of technologies in the form of precision farming, scientific cattle rearing will help them to increase farm income and rural employment opportunities. Hence, the success of this project is that it helped to attract a more vibrant young population towards agriculture and thereby lead to the modernisation of agriculture.

The Way Forward

Inaccessible areas where tribal groups such as Katunayikans have concentrated this kind of training programmes are not going to be effective. And the tendency among less mainstreamed tribes is that once the agency withdraws they also tend to withdraw from the activity. In this scenario, tribal youth need agriculture-based livelihood training programmes, which may help them to produce their own food supplements, and this will reduce nutritional deficiency among them. The sustainability of activities and programmes are one of the biggest challenges faced during tribal training programmes, therefore a local specific and need-based training programmes embedded with marketing strategies are necessary for this sector

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