

SDC 2018 Annual Meeting Abstracts

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Title: Scalability of development projects: What matters?

This paper examines the sustainability and scalability challenges of development projects among marginalized communities. It provides empirical evidence on creating sustainable income generation models through commercial, professionally managed agriculture systems, mainstreaming tribal populations and ensuring the inclusion of women. The paper is based on the findings from a rehabilitation project to wean tribal shifting cultivators away from environmentally unsustainable practices in the north eastern region of India. The project implemented by the Rubber Board (Government of India) was supported by the State Government. Initiated in the backdrop of the repeated failures of government initiatives to provide a meaningful settlement to tribal cultivators (Mahapatra, 1999; Mathur and Marsden, 2000; Parasuraman, 2016), the project identified the reasons for failure to be project design, execution and capacity of key stake holders rather than the availability of funds or technical issues. The design of the project revolved around the concept of creating a long-term asset through raising natural rubber plantation besides addressing the issues cited above. The project design also addressed economies of scale for creating basic infrastructure including that for primary processing and market linkage, facilitating the creation of empowered local institutions which transformed into producer groups. The increased income of tribal families positively affected HDI on parameters such as preference for professional medical aid and education of children. Project coverage increased from 120 families in 4 hamlets to 3423 families in 58 hamlets in a decade. The project triggered wide scale voluntary adoption of rubber plantations among tribals outside the project, the design being adopted in other states. We use a case study approach to extrapolate key themes and results that help predict critical success factors and other hidden issues that can be applied to wider practice, and/or provide a means for understanding key issues in the scalability of development projects among marginalised communities with greater clarity. This paper finds factors such as the bottom-up approach, flexibility provided to the project implementation team, convergence of funds, dedicated project implementation team, creating grassroots level organizations and the meaningful participation of women to be crucial to the success of any sustainable resettlement initiatives.