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Research article

Augmenting Tribal Economy through Leveraging Common and Private Land: Cases from Koraput

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At a time when tribal livelihood base is shrinking because of loss of forest and agriculture land, the tribals have become marginalized. The disintegrated economy has a negative consequence on socio-cultural lives of the tribals. Therefore, it is important that their livelihood is ensured and they be provided with more economic opportunities. There has been a realization that livelihood security depends on access to productive assets like land, water and trees. In geographical areas where poverty and lack of livelihood security have been major concerns, it has been observed that people have least access to productive assets. In this background, in the present article I have discussed how leveraging common and private land for agriculture purposes can help poor and marginalized people in expanding their livelihood base, thus adding to their income.

Keywords: livelihood; CYSD; common property; tribal economy, Odisha.

Introduction

Tribal economy is primarily forest and land based. In other words, their livelihood is derived mainly from these two sources. However, over the years, the tribals have been losing their forest and agricultural lands due to various reasons including leasing out of both private and forest land to traders from outside for commercial farming (UNDP, 2008), industrialization, mining activities, development projects and land alienation by non-tribal people. This has led to shrinking livelihood base of tribal population. In response, either there have been resistances¹ or migration of tribal population in search of alternate livelihoods or marginalization of the tribals. In some other cases, development programmes have resulted in disintegration of tribal economy as in Kashipur area of Rayagada district in Odisha (Pathy, 2003). Whether it is due to migration or marginalization or disintegration of their economy, the tribals have suffered socio-culturally. Pathy (2003) argues that development programmes have led to altered social relation among the tribals of Kashipur. As we know, tribals have a unique culture and social relation contributing to their distinctive identity, this distinctiveness is constantly under threat with a fragile and disintegrated economic or livelihood base.

To address this issue, efforts are being made, particularly from the last part of the 20th century, to expand the livelihood base of tribal population and providing them with livelihood opportunities. Both government and non-government organizations (NGOs) have been working towards development of marginalized tribal population. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the Government of Orissa (2005: 26) acknowledges that “Livelihood is the material basis on which life is sustained”. There is recognition that livelihood is more fundamental than either growth or poverty and hence, it is argued that promoting growth without ensuring livelihood security is meaningless (Government of Orissa, 2005). On the contrary, lack of livelihood security because of loss of livelihood along with loss of habitation and social cohesion has been a source of discontentment among the tribals, argues Bandyopadhyay (2004).

Both government and non-government agencies have been working to widen the livelihoods bases of the marginalized tribal people. But, the most important thing, as suggested by scholars (Hammond, 1971; Chambers, 1984), is that people should have access to and control over natural resources, be it common property resources (CPRs)² including land, water and forest or private property, i.e., agricultural land.

In this background, in the present article, I argue that through leveraging unused common and private land, livelihood base of poor and marginalized people can be expanded. I have tried to show how facilitation of common and private land in three villages by CYSD, an Odisha³ based NGO, has helped the marginalized tribal communities in expanding their agricultural activities, thus augmenting their livelihood base. In the end, I have drawn attention to the fact that of late, the Government has also taken steps to legalize the leasing of unused common and private lands to provide the landless people access to land for agriculture purpose. The data for the article have been collected as part of my Ph. D. fieldwork conducted in three villages, namely Jholaguda under Kundra block, and Kenduguda and Dadhyapadar under Boipariguda block of Koraput district in Odisha. Only qualitative data collected from these three villages using focus group discussion (FGD) and key informant interviewing have been used for the present purpose.

The present paper has been divided into five sections. Following introduction in the first

section, I have provided a brief profile of the study area in the second section. In the third section, I have briefly discussed CYSD's approach to augment livelihood of marginalized communities followed by discussion of field findings in the fourth section. Finally, in the fifth section, I have summarised the discussion and concluded the research findings.

Brief Profile of the Study Area

As mentioned, the present paper is based on observations made in three villages under Boipariguda and Kundra block of Koraput district in Odisha. Koraput lies at 17.4° to 20.7° north latitude and 81.24° to 84.2° east longitude. The Koraput district map is provided in Figure 1. The district is spread out in a geographical area of 8,807 km. As per 2011 Census, it consists of 13,79,647 population. With 83 per cent of the total population depending on agriculture, it is the mainstay of the district economy. While paddy is the major crop produced in the district, other important crops grown here are finger millet, other small millets, maize, vegetables, horse gram and niger. Cash crops like cotton, sugarcane, ginger and turmeric are also cultivated in the district. Nearly 75 per cent of cultivable land is rain-fed. Besides agriculture, people in the district depend on non- timber forest produce (NTFP) collection and its trading. Agriculture labour and wage labour activities also provide employment opportunities to the district population. However, it may be noted that with gradual reduction in forest coverage, dependence on NTFPs have decreased over the years.

With high incidence of poverty, malnutrition, hunger and starvation deaths, low literacy, unemployment, and low level of income, Koraput features as one of the least developed districts in India. According to the Orissa Human Development Report, 2004, Koraput ranks 27 among 30 districts of Odisha in terms of human development.

Demographically, scheduled tribes (STs) constitute half of the population as per the 2011 Census. Major tribes of the district include Paroja, Gadaba, Saura, Bhumia, Dhurua, Kondh and Bhattadas. The study blocks of Boipariguda and Kundra are predominantly inhabited by Paroja, Bhumia, Dhurua and Kondh tribes.

As per data presented in the District Statistical Handbook, 2009, the per capita food grain production was below 500 grams in both the study blocks. This was due to the absence of productive land owing to geographical condition, poor irrigation infrastructure and dwindling forest resources. In terms of other development indicators like educational institutions, health care facilities and road connectivity both these blocks also lagged behind compared to other blocks in the district.

CYSD's approach for augmenting livelihood

CYSD began its work in Boipariguda and Kundra block of Koraput district in the late 1990s. Prior to its intervention, CYSD conducted a vulnerability assessment in these two blocks. It found that the economy of the region was operating at a subsistence level, which was predominantly agriculture and forest based. People were engaged in producing their own food, work as agricultural labourers and collect NTFPs to support their livelihoods. At the same time, it also observed that people in the study area were deprived of round the year livelihood security, and thus were vulnerable.

This situational assessment led the NGO to believe that providing economic opportunity round the year to the people was important to arrest their vulnerability. This, in turn, led CYSD to intervene in the area through its project - Prayas, Koraput - to

promote sustainable livelihoods and provide round the year food security.

In the lines of the argument put forth by Chambers (1984), CYSD also recognized that providing access to productive assets like land was the key to ensure round the year livelihood security. Besides, it also realized that there was urgent need to build the capacity of the people to utilize the available resources and provide them market access to aid in expanding their economic activity. It believed that ensuring livelihood would lead to poverty reduction, which in turn, would ultimately result in ushering in a sustainable livelihood base for the vulnerable community. This logical thought process is depicted in Figure 2.

It may be noted here that Koraput district because of its undulating terrain has very little arable land. On top of this, CYSD observed that many individuals did not have access to whatever arable lands available in the area. Therefore, as a strategy, it promoted community farming involving a group of people from a village. In the process, it facilitated access to common and private land in the locality, depending on availability, to promote community farming. In the following section, I will discuss three cases of community farming where CYSD had facilitated access to arable land for augmentation of livelihood of marginalized people.

Cases of Leveraging Common and Private Land for Livelihood Augmentation

As mentioned, in this section I will discuss three cases of leveraging common and private lands for livelihood augmentation of marginalized people. While the first two cases are stories of leveraging private land for agriculture purpose, the third case is about leveraging of common land for construction of water harvesting structure (WHS). A summary of these three cases is provided in Table 1 depicting the locality, the types of land leveraged, support provided by CYSD and the outcomes of such initiatives.

Case 1: Community Farming at Dadhyapadar

CYSD began its field intervention in Dadhyapadar village, a tribal dominated village, under Doraguda panchayat of Boipariguda block in 2002. As part of its community mobilization activity, CYSD helped form a self-help group (SHG), named Maa Tarini SHG involving 15 women from the village. However, the SHG members realized that small monetary savings would not enhance their socio-economic condition. They increasingly felt the need to diversify their economic activities, but were found short of ideas. At this juncture, CYSD came up with the idea of community farming. It recognized the fact that not many of the SHG and community members possessed cultivable land of their own. Therefore, it proposed cultivating a bigger patch of contiguous land by a group of members. CYSD believes that the community farming approach not only has the potential to benefit the community in general and the landless people in particular but also helps utilization of the hitherto fallow land.

One SHG member, Namita Hantala, was found to have seven acres of *dangar* land (up land). As she was a widow, she lacked the capacity to use the land for agriculture purpose and let it remain fallow. However, with persuasion from CYSD and other group members she agreed to give her land for community farming purpose on lease. An agreement was made between her and the SHG that she would lease her land for 10 years starting from 2005. In return, she would receive Rs. 2000 as a one-time cash payment and three quintal of paddy and two quintal of millet every year till the end of the agreement.

Following the arrangement, in the initial year the SHG took up floriculture activity. CYSD helped them fetching marigold flower saplings from Jeypore, a nearby town. The SHG spent Rs. 200 on flower saplings and another Rs. 150 toward purchasing fertilizer.

Everyday two SHG members watered the plants in turn. In a month's time the SHG members started harvesting flowers and sold them at Rs. 1750.

However, the success in floriculture was short-lived, as water availability around the patch of land was a concern. On the other hand, the SHG members realized that achieving round the year food security was their immediate priority. So, they decided to grow food grain in the leased land. With guidance from CYSD the SHG members along with other male members of the village constructed a water harvesting structure of 70 ft. X 50 ft. X 15 ft. dimension. CYSD provided monetary assistance of Rs. 41,700 for the construction of the water harvesting structure and also provided an old diesel pump to lift water from it.

With the passing of time, as the old pump needed regular maintenance, the community opted for a new pump. CYSD too facilitated availing loan facility for the purpose by linking the SHG to the nearby Indian Overseas Bank at Boipariguda. The SHG was sanctioned a loan of Rs. 70,000 (Rs. 40,000 for the diesel pump and Rs. 30,000 for agriculture purposes). The group members now started cultivating paddy during *kharif* season and in *rabi* they grew finger millet and different types of vegetables. While repaying three quintals of paddy and two quintals of finger millet to Namita, the land owner, at the end of every year as per the lease agreement, the SHG members were now able to harvest adequate cereals to sustain their family for the whole year.

Thus, CYSD's initiative of leveraging a patch of private land for community farming not only helped villagers to achieve round the year food security, but also adding nutritional value to their food kitty through vegetable consumption. Selling of surplus vegetables also added to their income.

Case 2: Leasing of Private Land at Jholaguda

Jholaguda is a remote village under Digapur panchayat in Kundra block of Koraput district. The *Parojas* are the dominant community in this village and cohabit with people belonging to *mali* community. The primary occupation of the tribes in this village was subsistence agriculture, which was rain-fed, and collection and selling of fire wood. The main crops grown by the *Parojas* were paddy, finger millet and maize. CYSD's intervention in the area in 2007 has helped the *Parojas* to reduce fire wood business to a large extent and instead focusing more on settled agriculture. The NGO activity in the area helped in reviving a defunct WHS and thus making lands arable. Besides, it also facilitated leveraging a private land for cultivation by 10 *Paroja* families.

There was a check-dam constructed by the Soil Conservation authority on the foothill area adjoining Jholaguda. This check-dam was constructed with only 15 meters of cement-concrete water channel and there was no check-gate facility. Thus, it was not able to retain water beyond rainy seasons. In this context, where the check-dam was of little use beyond rainy seasons, the inhabitants of Jholaguda were dependent on rain-fed agriculture.

CYSD took initiative to revive this check-dam. In 2007, it provided 90 bags of cement, sand, concrete chips and Rs. 20,000 towards labour charges to reconstruct the dilapidated WHS. The community contributed voluntary labour for the purpose.

This effort paid off as water started flowing down the hill through a cement-concrete water channel of 200 meters length. In 2008, CYSD contributed an iron check-gate worth Rs. 24,000 and its key was handed over to the community. To maintain the structure and instil sense of ownership, a user fee was fixed at Rs. 400 per annum per household to be deposited in the SHG account. Later, another Rs. 15,000 was spent by CYSD on a wooden

gate to regulate the flow of water round the year from the renovated WHS of 70 feet X 70 feet X 12 feet dimension. The WHS was now irrigating an ayacut area of 15 acres.

Since the renovation of the WHS the *Parojas* of Jholaguda started cultivating vegetables like potato, cauliflower, radish, tomato, green chilli, beans and egg plant in *rabi* season. This is in addition to cultivation of major cereals like paddy, finger millet and maize during *kharif* season.

To further expand the economic base of the community members, CYSD in 2009 facilitated leasing of 1.5 acres of land from one of the community members. The lease was made for three years to cultivate turmeric as a cash crop. During field work, I could witness the green carpet of turmeric plants spreading the transformation story in the lives of the *Parojas* of Jholaguda with perennial water flowing down the WHS.

Case 3: Leasing of Common Land for Construction of WHS at Kenduguda

No wonder, people were happy with the development in remote Kenduguda village under Doraguda panchayat in Boipariguda block of Koraput district. CYSD had facilitated construction of a WHS for round the year water provisioning for agriculture purposes. Adjacent to the WHS, the villagers were now cultivating a two-acre patch of *kotha jami* (a common property resource belonging to villagers). Though the villagers were initially reluctant to cultivate the common land because of lack of irrigation facilities, it was the persuasion of CYSD and facilitation of construction of WHS that instilled confidence in the villagers. The villagers too attributed the credit of this development story to CYSD. Bisoi, 33, the president of the village organisation of Kenduguda heaved praises on the then Programme Manager of CYSD, Shri Mahesh Chhatoi and said, "Mahesh Sir has shown us the way. We will remain ever grateful to him and this WHS will always remain as an indelible imprint in our hearts and minds as his contribution to our community."

In March 2007 CYSD assisted the villagers with Rs. 52,400 towards construction of a WHS. The villagers contributed voluntary labour and the WHS was constructed under the supervision of CYSD. After completion of the structure, it was found to be technically unfit to hold desired amount of water. Therefore, realising the mistake, in the subsequent year CYSD contributed another Rs. 17,100 to rectify the faulty structure. Except for the two summer months of May and June, the WHS was now capable of holding water and thus, the nearby fields became capable of holding moisture content almost throughout a year. This has helped the villagers to get engaged in round the year agriculture activities. While earlier they used to cultivate only rice, finger millet and *alasi*, now with the WHS coming up and also equipped with knowledge of improved agriculture practices they are producing vegetables like eggplant, tomato, onion and green chilli in *rabi* season along with black gram. With growing engagement in agriculture activities over the years, there has been a drastic reduction in daily wage labour activities. Even the villagers have taken up horticulture activities like mango plantation with support from CYSD.

Summary Discussion and Conclusion

UNDP (2008: 4) acknowledges that "Access to land is acutely important in rural India, where the incidence of poverty is highly correlated with lack of access to land". In this context, the three cases from Koraput district indicate that provided access to arable land the livelihood base of marginalized communities can be expanded, which in turn, will result in poverty reduction.

The field findings from Kenduguda suggest that at a time when customary access to CPRs is gradually diminishing because of agriculture intensification (Beck & Ghosh, 2000), leveraging such common land for agriculture purpose will help expand livelihood base of

marginalized population.

Further, it may be noted that agricultural land tenancy was banned in Odisha since 1960 under the provisions of the Odisha Land Reforms Act. However, with Government of India having constituted an Expert Committee on land leasing in September 2015 to review the agricultural tenancy laws and suggest appropriate amendments to legalize land leasing, Government of Odisha followed suit (Choudhury, 2017). In this context, Choudhury (2017) argues for formalizing leasing of private land by the Government. This, he believes, would enable bringing in fallow land under cultivation and provide access to the landless and poor. The cases of Dadhyapadar and Jholaguda corroborate this argument where leasing of private land has helped villagers engaging them in agriculture activities.

Thus, the three cases from Koraput districts suggest that if CYSD like initiatives to leverage common and private land can be taken up by development agencies, whether government or NGOs, it will help marginalized communities expand their shrinking livelihood base. In turn, this will help them lead a life with dignity.

ENDNOTES

1. For a glimpse of tribal resistance over land issues, see Verma (1995:38-65).
2. The 54th National Sample Survey (NSS) conducted during January to June 1998 describes "Common property resources constitute all such resources which are meant for common use of the villagers. In the pre-British India, a very large part of the country's natural resources was freely available to the rural population. These resources were largely under the control of the local communities. Gradually, with the extension of state control over these resources, resulting in decay of the community management system, CPRs available to the villagers declined substantially over the years. Nevertheless, it is widely held that CPRs still play an important role in the life and economy of the rural population. The beginning of the studies of the CPRs in India can be traced back to early 1980's. Some of these studies covered fairly a large number of villages scattered over the vast area of the country but majority of those was of the nature of case studies." (NSSO, 1999: Preface)
3. Odisha is an eastern Indian state. Prior to 2013 it was known as Orissa. Therefore, Orissa and Odisha have been interchangeably used throughout the text.

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Table 1: Summary of cases of leveraging common and private land

Locality	Type of land leveraged	Support from CYSD	Outcome
Jholaguda, Digaour Panchayat, Kundra Block, Koraput District	Private land (1.5 Ac.) on lease for 3 years	Revival of WHS, exposure visit on turmeric cultivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 Paraja families adopted vegetable cultivation and earned money Turmeric cultivation in the lease land Multi-seasonal cropping
Kenduguda, Doraguda Panchayat, Boipariguda Block, Koraput	Kotha land (Village common land)	Construction of WHS, training on vegetable cultivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water made available round the year except for May & June Soil moisture content increased in the nearby lands prompting vegetable cultivation and rabi crops Increase in income base Reduction in daily wage labour activities Rise in self-esteem
Dadhyapadar, Doraguda Panchayat, Boipariguda Block, Koraput	Private land (7 Ac.) on 10 years lease	Construction of WHS, training on improved agricultural practices including vegetable cultivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vegetable cultivation by SHG Rs. 2000/- one-time payment to the land owner, 3 q. of paddy and 2 q. of millet every year for 10 years Income generation for SHG members Economic empowerment of women

Source: Field work

Illustrations

Figure 1: Koraput district map

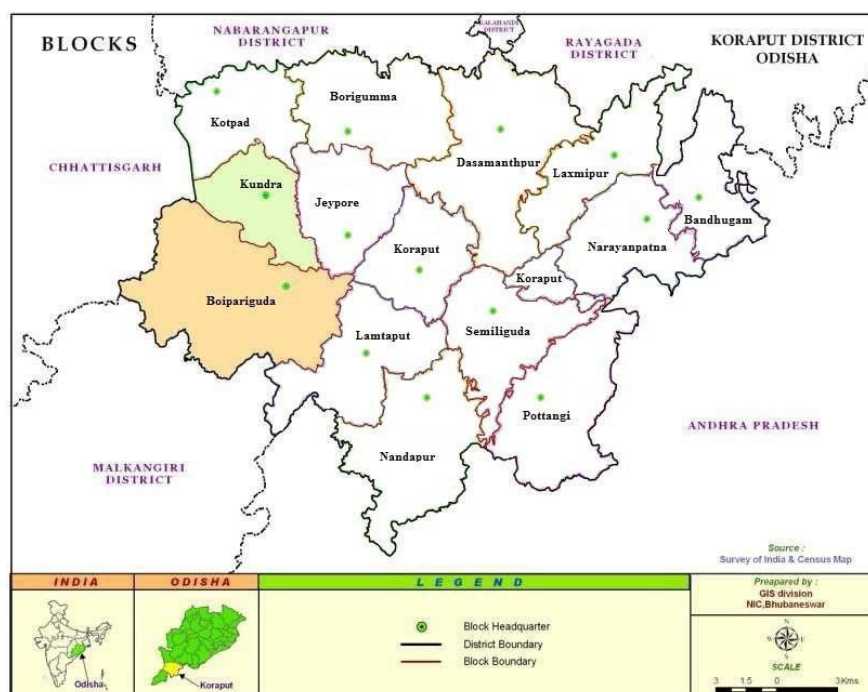
Source: <https://koraput.nic.in/map-of-district/>

Figure 2: Significance of livelihood as perceived by CYSD