

Multi-Disciplinary Approach towards Sustainable Development



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Migration and Livelihood Pattern: A Study on the Sunderbans and the Santals of Purulia, West Bengal

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Abstract

Migration is not a new term in India's vast diaspora. It existed and still exists among the vulnerable communities and constitutes the major portion of migrants. Migration affects the livelihood pattern and the way people use their land resulting into a complex inter-relationship. The Sunderbans is a vulnerable ecosystem with its population depending on the nature and agricultural produce. Thus, post Aila (cyclone), when the salinity and the embankment failure resulted in huge crop loss and consequent livelihood change, most of the local inhabitants took resort to migration as a stable economic alternative. It has been a common feature in various indigenous families where the main earning member migrates for work (inter-state or intra-state), leaving behind the rest of the family members. There is always an interaction between the environment in which the community lives and their customary practices that sustain their livelihood. The studied villages are of no exception. It has often been analyzed from two points of view- the stakeholders (local community and indigenous people) and the ultimate exploiters.

The present paper looks into the various push and pull factors that results into the migration to urban and semi-urban areas over time. The links between migration and livelihood challenges can be seen as an unprincipled exploitation by conservation organisations, which portray forest dependent people as potent liabilities. It has often been seen that in the process of doing so an approach based on political ecology is not adopted. The paper will look into the economic and socio-cultural vulnerability of the local communities taking examples from two regions of West Bengal- the Sunderbans and the district of Purulia. The study looked the areas of socio-demographic and economic attributes. Data have been collected using pre-tested schedules from both the sexes, with prior consent. In-depth interviews, case studies, focus group discussion (as in the field work in the Sunderbans) and observation were also taken into consideration. The secondary research was carried out by studying the relevant works and scholarly articles along with thorough library search. Both the regions being backward and vulnerable in terms of the ecology and livelihood practices of the communities, gave the impetus to choose them as the area of consideration. Sunderbans, being a vulnerable ecosystem has always faced the problem of sustaining life, livelihood and commercial exploitation of resources. The result is dwindling resource base followed by lack of asset and the consequent food insecurity. On the other hand, the Santals of Purulia who depended on the forest resources for both household and commercial purposes have been suffering from right deprivation in terms of access, control and use rights of forest resources, resulting in severe livelihood challenges. Lack of generation of human capital, unavailability of industrial opportunities, unequal distribution of food and wealth and regressive occupational choices pose a serious threat to the economic fabric of the population. The researchers suggest Public-Private Partnership (PPP) as the best way forward, but the way to travel is still long.

Keywords: Migration, Push and Pull Factors, Livelihood Challenges, Food Security, Indigenous