

# Analysis of livelihood diversification among farming community– towards a livelihood based extension approach

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**ABSTRACT :** The sustainable livelihood approach assumes that any development interventions for the rural people should be congruent with their existing livelihood strategies and ability to adapt. The present study was an attempt to understand the livelihood diversification among small and marginal farmers. The study was conducted in the northern and central region of Kerala. It revealed that multiple livelihood options were adopted by the farming community of Kerala, which included farm diversification along with non-farm employment and migration of the family members. While the small farmers could adopt enterprise type self employment, the resource poor marginal farmers mostly depended on the low skilled, low capital intensive and low income earning activities in the unorganized service sector. It was concluded that any intervention to achieve sustainable agricultural development in the state needs to focus on the livelihood security of the marginal farmers.

**KEY WORDS :** Sustainable livelihoods, Small and marginal farmers, Livelihood diversifications

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## INTRODUCTION

With the agricultural development thinking in the country undergoing a paradigm shift from green revolution to evergreen revolution, the focus on food and nutritional security needed to be broadened to adopt a sustainable livelihood approach. Food production is identified to be a subset of the wider livelihood considerations of rural people, which is becoming highly diversified and complex. Households combine their livelihood resources within the limits of their social and political context and their institutional connections to pursue a number of different livelihood strategies. Thus, each household can have several possible sources of entitlement which constitute its livelihood. Rural livelihood diversification is the process by which households construct a diverse portfolio of activities

and social support capabilities for survival and in order to improve their standard of living (Ellis, 1998 and 2000). A livelihood based extension approach to rural development needs to be adopted in the country with a focus on enhancing livelihood options, resources and peoples capacities to achieve livelihood security. The present study was undertaken with the objective of understanding the livelihood diversification pattern of small and marginal farmers in Kerala, to identify their most pressing constraints and the most promising opportunities and recommend a livelihood based development intervention for the rural households in the State.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted among the small and marginal

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farmers of Kerala, with a total sample size of 120 households. The samples were collected randomly from the two districts viz., Malappuram and Ernakulam representing the northern and central region of the state. The data were collected through personal interview method using a pre-tested semi-structured interview schedule.

## OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT

Table 1 presents the livelihood diversification pattern of small and marginal farmers.

A perusal of the data in the Table 1 revealed that majority of farmers followed diversified livelihood options. It is also found that the small farmers (87%) adopted more diversified livelihood than marginal farmers (75%). It is interesting to note that only 13 per cent of the small farmers followed farming as their only livelihood option while 25 per cent of the marginal farmers depended on farming alone. This may be due to the fact that the small farmers had better access to financial and human resources like skill and education which were needed to diversify towards non-farm livelihood activities compared to the marginal farmers. However, majority of the households under the marginal farmer category also followed non-farm activities along with farming. It is also important to note that

some of the farmers (13% of small farmers and 15% of marginal farmers) had highly diversified livelihood, which included farming, non-farming and migration. It can be concluded from the data that farming along with non-farming activities was the dominant livelihood pattern of farmers.

### Farm diversification pattern of small and marginal farmers :

The study has also made an attempt to analyse the farm diversification pattern of farming community. The types of farm diversification followed by the small and marginal farmers are presented in Table 2.

A bird's eye view of the table revealed that small farms were more diversified than marginal farms. Majority of the marginal farmers were found to follow cash/plantation crops based cropping system while most of the small farmers had adopted mixed farming, which included both crops and livestock/poultry. It was also found that more than half the percentage of small farmers raised food crops (57%) when compared to marginal farmers (40%). This might be due to the fact that the marginal farmers could not afford the lower profit from growing food crops compared to the small farmers. Hence, majority of the marginal farmers adopted cash/plantation crops like rubber/coconut based cropping system

**Table 1 : Livelihood diversification adopted by farmers**

Category	Small farmers (n=60)		Marginal farmers (n=60)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Farming alone	8	13.00	15	25.00
Farming + Non farming	25	42.00	22	37.00
Farming + Migration	19	32.00	14	23.00
Farming + Non-farming + migration	8	13.00	9	15.00

**Table 2 : Farm diversification pattern of small and marginal farmers**

Category	Small farmers (n=60)		Marginal farmers (n=60)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Food crops +cash/plantation crops +livestock/poultry	24	40.00	12	20.00
Cash/plantation crops + livestock/poultry	15	25.00	14	23.00
Food crops +cash/plantation crops	10	17.00	12	20.00
Cash/plantation crops alone	11	18.00	22	37.00

**Table 3 : Non-farm options of small and marginal farmers**

Category	Small farmers (n=33)		Marginal farmers (n=31)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Enterprise</b>				
Allied sector	3	9.10	0	0
Non-agriculture	13	39.40	8	25
Total	16	48.50	8	25
<b>Service sector</b>				
Organised sector	13	39.40	7	23
Unorganised sector	4	12.10	16	52
Total	17	51.5	23	75

(Brock, 1998). In fact this was the reason that rubber, the highly remunerative plantation crop occupied even the homesteads of Kerala, threatening its ecological as well as food security. All these findings highlighted the fact that sustainable development could be achieved only through ensuring the livelihood security of the farming community, especially the marginal farmers group (Murthy, 1983 and Carswell, 2000).

#### **Non-farm diversification options of small and marginal farmers :**

Table 3 presents the non-farm diversification options of farming community in the area.

Analysis of the livelihood options of the farmers (Table 1) revealed that 42 per cent of the small farmers and 37 per cent of the marginal farmers followed non-farm activities as their livelihood option. Table 3 presents the kinds of non-farm activities followed by the farming community. A perusal of the table revealed that service sector employment including both the organised and unorganized sector is the major non-farm option for the farmers of Kerala. When the small farmers (39%) had more access to the organized service sector, marginal farmers mostly (52%) depended on the unorganized service sector. It is also important to note that a good number of small farmers (48%) could adopt enterprise type self-employment while only very few marginal farmers (25%) had that option. This again supports the view that it was the resource scarcity of the marginal farmers which pushed towards the low skilled, low capital intensive and low income earning activities in the unorganized sector.

#### **Migration as a livelihood option :**

The analysis of livelihood diversification pattern of the respondents in the study showed that migration was one of their important livelihood option (Table 1). About 45 per cent of the small farmers and 38 per cent of the marginal farmers followed migration abroad as one of their livelihood option. This finding has to be analysed in the peculiar socio-economic context of Kerala, where seasonal or circular migration is less compared to migration abroad, especially to Gulf countries. Prakash (1998) also reported that migration to the Gulf countries and the inflow of remittances was a basic factor determining all the economic activities in northern Kerala. An analysis of the characteristics of the migrants in the study revealed that majority was males with low skill and less formal education. The 'push factors' of migration identified in the study included limited scope for agriculture due to their small land holdings, lack of skill or qualification to find employment in the service sector and non-availability of employment opportunities in the domestic industrial sector.

The 'pull factors' like expectation of wider employment opportunities and higher income, even for low skilled and semi-skilled works in Gulf countries also played a major role

favouring this phenomenon. The general conclusion is that though migration had resulted in the reduction of unemployment, it has resulted in the shortage of labourers with upgraded skills, increased wage rate and thereby promoted the inward migration of workers from neighbouring states. However, the higher level of income resulting in higher rate of consumption and acquisition of assets like better housing could contribute to the livelihood security of these migratory households. Similar work related to the present investigation was also carried out by Carswell *et al.* (2002); Joshi *et al.* (2003); Sadengi (1991) and Singh *et al.* (1970).

#### **Conclusion :**

The analysis of the livelihood diversification pattern of rural people in Kerala revealed that the multiple livelihood options were adopted by the rural households while farming as a single livelihood option has been significantly declining. The small and marginal farmers have opted for non-farm employment and migration of family members along with small scale farming. This kind of diversified livelihood could be seen as a good sign of sustainability of livelihoods as it indicated that the rural households could cope with and recover from stress and shocks and thereby reduce their vulnerability. However, in depth analysis of the livelihood systems of rural community in the state revealed that the growth of non-farm employment in the unorganized sector and migration due to push factors were not sustainable livelihood strategies for the rural people. The factors which acted as the constraints to practice agriculture as livelihood were in fact the push factors behind the adoption of diversified livelihood by the farming community of Kerala. This indicates a crisis in the State's path towards the goal of sustainable agriculture and food security. Therefore, it can be concluded that the livelihood based extension approach with a primary understanding of the livelihood strategies followed by different rural communities to meet their specific needs keeping in mind their vulnerability should become an integral part of the development interventions towards sustainable rural livelihoods.

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