

# Sustainable Livelihoods for the Lepers through Forest Resources: A case study in the Raigarh District in Chhattisgarh

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*Sponsored by: IIFM*

Health and disability affect the livelihoods of people benefiting from development programmes in the communities. According to some sources, as many as one person in ten has a disability. Three out of four of those are thought to live in developing countries. Disability limits access to education and employment, and leads to economic and social exclusion. Poor people with disabilities are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and disability, each being a cause and a consequence of the other. The Indian National Sample Survey conducted two country-wide surveys in 1981 and 1991 to assess the number of people with disabilities. From these it was estimated that 12 million are blind, 28.5 millions have limited vision, 12 million have speech and hearing impairments, 6 million are orthopedically handicapped, 24 million have a cognitive disability, 7.5 million are mentally ill and 1.1 million are disabled as a result of leprosy. Leprosy, which is perceived as being highly contagious and incurable, forces millions of patients to live as social outcasts.

Many attempts have been made since the inception of five-year plans for the socio-economic development of various underprivileged, marginalized sections of society. Still there are many issues and concern areas, which require special attention. One such section is people suffering from leprosy. There are some good examples where an attempt has been made to transform the lives of leprosy patients from physically handicapped, psychologically shattered, economically weak and one of the most neglected member of the society to confident citizen of India through forest resources. On the basis of the above thought this research was done to fulfill the following objectives:

## **Objectives**

- To review the Government policies and programmes for lepers.
- To assess the socio-economic condition of lepers before and after interventions of Government programmes.
- To analyze the socio-economic development of lepers in the study area through forest resources.
- To assess the potential condition of forest resources in providing sustainable base to lepers in the village economy.
- To capture perception, attitude and responses of the society/ villagers and administration towards the rehabilitation of lepers their acceptability and accessibility to the basic amenities.
- To suggest suitable paradigm for NRM based sustainable development of lepers.
- The present study was conducted in Raigarh District of Chhattisgarh. Raigarh District has one of the highest leprosy prevalence rates in the country i.e. 28 per 10,000 against 9 per 10,000 all India on an average. Lepers are settled in Raigarh mainly from Orissa (Sambalpur & Bhubneshwar). In Pussore Block where the study was carried out, the prevalence rate is as high as 29.51 per population.

## **Rehabilitation Initiatives for Lepers**

Arunodaya project was first initiated by Shri K.C. Yadav (IFS) and with the District Administration of Raigarh. The project is an experiment in human forestry to transform the life of leprosy patients from physically handicapped, psychologically shattered, economically 'Daridranarayan' and most neglected members of the society to confidence citizen of free India through technological forestry operations. It has been proved that these types of initiatives really works where community of the lepers is being established named 'Arunodaya Parisar' where at present lepers live comfortably.

The Arunodaya project gave a chance to the lepers for their income-generating activities and socio-economic development through forest resources. The establishments of the nursery where the lepers work help and contribute immensely for the up-liftment of lepers and connecting them to the mainstream of society. The nursery was established in 1987-88, which was initially funded by Forest Department. Lepers

worked there as a daily wager. There is a high potential of NTFP related activities for the socio-economic upliftment of lepers. In the past some of the attempts have been made by foresters for the rehabilitation of the lepers through forest resources and other plantation work like Rehabilitation of lepers in Arunodaya Project. But NTFP as a source of income generation has not explored fully. Different varieties of NTFPs are found and available in the Raigarh districts which have potential for increasing the income of lepers and organizing the lepers around income generating activities through NTFPs.

### **Income generating activities**

K.C. Yadav (IFS) initiated an innovative scheme called "Aurnodaya" to take up afforestation and related activities over 51.5 hectare of wastelands in village Jurda with the help of leprosy patients. He joined as a Soil Conservation Forest, Raigarh in 1988 as District Forest Officer (DFO) and had a chance to encounter of its own kind with lepers. After joining, he proposed welfare project for leper in front of staff. He was able to convince his staff about the aims and objective of the project and preliminary action plan was chalked out. The area was surveyed so that more forestry works could be undertaken for sustaining lepers. After consideration with his junior experienced staff and the then Collector, Jurda village (near an old Soil Conservation Center) was selected where mulberry plantation for rearing silk worm, cocoons was already taken up by the division under National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) in 1988 and enough government wealth was available. The income generating activities were as follows:

- Nursery was prepared in the colony for raising the variety of saplings.
- Training to lepers.
- Preparation of germination beds.
- Technique for filling polythene bags with soil.
- Transplantation of cuttings and naked saplings in bags.
- Training for raising mulberry plantation.
- Rearing silkworm cocoon in Chandrika and Chawraha.
- Plantation of kappa, Eucalyptus, Karanj, Khamah, Guava, Amla etc. in 2.5-hectare area.

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- Floriculture which includes marigold plantation and cutting of roses.
- Collection of Phulbahari grass to make brooms.
- Goat rearing, Poultry, Cropping of vegetables and cereals.
- NTFPs collection. (Collected Mahua Flowers and Guthali and sold them).
- Training for collection of Tendu Patta, Achar, Harra, Baheda from adjacent forest was provided to lepers.

### **Stakeholders**

Right from the FD staff of Soil Conservation Division, District Administration Raigarh, PWD, PHE, MPEB, Health department, Panchayat and social welfare Department provided support for the successful implementation of the programme.

The veterinary department also helps a lot for the economic up-liftment of the lepers in the form of poultry set up. It was all going well until the veterinary department gave the food. But it was the last year that the food stock ended and lepers started buying them from the market. As the consequences, the chicken's diets were eating them up.

### **Sustainable livelihood of lepers through forest resources:**

- Bamboo plantation, selling of bamboos in the market, and training for basket making.
- Lac cultivation on kusum and sagaun trees for income generation.
- Collection, processing and storage of mahua flower, and selling in when the price increases.
- Farm forestry.
- Wasteland development.
- Establish rural-urban linkage resulting in sustainable development of lepers.
- Nursery development.
- Aonla collection and processing.
- Tendu patta collection.

This study also made some comparative analysis on other rehabilitation centres and found that the income generating activities through natural resource management is the most effective and successful one.