



Striking a Balance

CPF's experiences on bringing-in
convergence among concerned
stakeholders towards livestock-based
livelihoods and use of natural resources

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*CPF's experiences on bringing-in convergence
among concerned stakeholders towards livestock-
based livelihoods and use of natural resources*

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An increasing uncertainty associated with traditional livelihoods like agriculture, owing to change in climate patterns, depletion of natural resource-base perpetuated through prolonged degenerative practices for survival, among several other factors, have caused an increasing number of rural households, particularly those in arid and semi-arid regions in India, to choose *livestock-rearing* as their primary means of livelihood. Understandably, this very trend is also seen among the forest dependent communities.

A livelihood survey by Center for Peoples Forestry¹ (CPF) in the year 2004 with a sample size of 680 Vana Samrakshana Samithi² (VSS), across the State of Andhra Pradesh, revealed that livestock-rearing is a vital source of livelihood even among forest dependent communities in the arid and semi-arid forested regions of the state. The discouraging NTFP scenario coupled with very low employment opportunities in agriculture sector owing to irregular rainfall patterns, recurring and prolonged periods of drought and consequent crop failure is resulting in a trend of increasing dependence on livestock-rearing, especially of small ruminants like goat and sheep, as a key source of livelihood.

This increasing-dependence of the rural poor including forest-dependent communities on small-ruminant rearing together with the fast decreasing common lands has resulted in diminishing availability of fodder and increasing dependence on forests for fodder. Consequently, communities dependent upon this *alternative/supplementary livelihood* of small-ruminant rearing are once again face-to-face with uncertain long-term sustenance of their livelihood choice - further compounded by the position of the Forest Department towards grazing in forest areas.

The existing situation is such that the population of livestock is far higher than the availability of natural resources for fodder in areas where rearing of small ruminants is a prominent source of livelihood - thus requiring the rearers' to migrate with their livestock in search of grazing pastures. Apart from the decreasing fodder availability, the rearers also face issues such as;

- High Mortality rates among the livestock owing to difficulty in accessing veterinary healthcare facilities while migrating
- Cooperation at the village level owing to isolation thrust upon by migration
- Inability to access government programs and schemes
- Intercommunity conflicts – the launch of the Andhra Pradesh Forestry Programme, necessitated the forest protection committees to enforce direct restriction on grazing in forests

¹ CPF is a national level NGO, based in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh working the forestry sector since 1996 towards the empowerment and livelihood security of forest dependent communities. www.cpf.in

² VSS – as forest protection committees formed by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department through the World Bank supported community Forest management programme.

Given this scenario, CPF felt the need to initiate a project that would attempt to address the needs of the livestock-rearers, especially small ruminant-rearers, while focusing on how their problem of accessing fodder could be solved in a collaborative, sustainable manner and without damaging the natural base further. Taking forward the efforts in this direction through the above mentioned 2004 survey, CPF initiated a study followed by a project involving different stakeholders both at primary (village level) and secondary levels (government) with the aim of developing workable strategies towards increasing fodder availability at village level while maintaining a viable balance between livestock –based livelihoods and use of natural resources.

The present project was implemented through CPF's Regional Resource Center hosted by its partner NGO *Center for Human Resources Development (CHRD)* in Thuvvapalli Panchayat, Mydukur Mandal of Kadapa district. At the village level the project created a multi-stakeholder group with representatives from women's self help groups, forest protection committees (VSS), watershed committees, panchayat ward members and farmers with large and small ruminants. At the secondary level the project coordinated with the Forest, Animal Husbandry, Rural Development, Revenue and Panchayat Raj Departments at the district and state level.

This document brings out the current situation; issues related to livestock based livelihoods and the use/dependence on the forest ecosystem for sustenance in Andhra Pradesh. It also illustrates the processes, strategies and the convergence approach adopted by the Centre for People's Forestry towards balancing the livestock –based livelihoods and use of natural resources. The document also throws light on the challenges that still lie ahead and the opportunities that exist for other stakeholders working in the field of livestock development and natural resource management to take on as there is still a long way to go.

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