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Scope and challenges faced by Soliga tribes of Biligiri Rangan hills of Chamarajanagar District, Karnataka in livestock rearing

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Abstract

The present study was on analysis of scope and challenges of livestock development and constraints faced among the *Soliga* tribes in Biligiri Rangan (BR) hills of Chamarajanagar district, Karnataka. Data were collected from tribes and other official respondents through a structured interview schedule developed for the purpose. The livestock rearing was an alternative source of income along with mixed farming. The tribes preferred desi-birds, goat and non-descript cattle in cold climatic BR hills. NLR (Non livestock rearing) respondents (90%) showed keen interest in establishing livestock farms, if the forest department permits free veterinary service & loan facility to purchase animals. The major constraint faced by the tribes in rearing of livestock was fodder scarcity as the forest department-imposed restrictions on movement of tribes and animals inside the forest. The study provides an investigation to formulate a coordinated project with proper ICT for uplift of tribes.

Keywords: Animal husbandry, ICT tools, literacy, annual income, employment

Introduction

Livestock rearing is basically an income-generating, self-employment-oriented enterprise in rural parts of India where majority of population live in rural setup. It mainly depends upon minimal internal inputs and contributes significantly to annual income family, especially to the lower income group involved in livestock rearing. The *Soliga* tribes are distributed in states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. In Karnataka they are called as *Soliga* and their total population was 23,955. In Tamil Nadu they are called as *Sholaga* and their population was 6,754 (Census, 1991) ^[1]. The group of *Soligas* in Karnataka is often mentioned as Soligaru. Soligaru settlement is restricted in Karnataka state, and approximately 80 per cent of their population lives in Mysore and Chamrajanagar districts.

In BR hills more than 70 per cent of *Soligas* depend on Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) and have an agricultural background. Most of these tribes started rearing livestock of different species as a supplementary source of income. Shrenik (2014) ^[4] documented that the *Soligas* were brought to civilization with the joint effort of Government and the Non-Government Organization (NGO), Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK) by constructing homes with bricks (replacing the traditional bamboo huts) and providing DTH Satellite Television, providing training on various aspects like purification of honey, juice making, pickle making, paper bag making, book binding, powder making (shikakai) and candle making. *Soligas* started to rear animals such as poultry and goat. They evolved low input production systems based on their traditional knowledge with locally available resources. A considerable population of *Soliga* tribes, in BR hills has been rearing desi birds and improved strain of Giriraja as backyard poultry and also certain non-descriptive goats.

The present study aims for qualitative analysis of scope and challenges of livestock rearing among *Soliga* tribes. The study also focus on the interest of tribals in livestock rearing which provides an alternative income and constraints faced by the tribals in rearing livestock.

2. Materials and Methods

The present study was conducted during the year 2015 in tribal region/settlements of Biligirirangan Hills (BR Hills) situated in Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka which has the largest *Soliga* tribal population. The tribal respondents were selected from the eight *podus*, so that 60 Livestock Rearing (LR) and 60 Non-Livestock Rearing (NLR) respondents constitute

the study table. In addition, 12 respondents from the Forest Department, Animal Husbandry Department (AHD) and Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (NGO) were selected for assessing the scope of livestock development in the study area. The selected respondents were interviewed personally with the help of structured interview schedule and the data collected were tabulated and statistically analyzed.

3. Results and Discussion

The study revealed the following information regarding the Livestock rearing (LR) and Non livestock rearing (NLR) groups of *Soliga* tribes and other respondents with regard to scope for livestock development.

3.1 Scope for livestock development by Livestock Rearing (LR) group

It could be inferred from Table 1 that most of the respondents (98%) felt that the scope for livestock rearing in the BR hills is very perspective. Nearly half of the respondents were interested in rearing goats as they preferred livestock and around 18 per cent of respondents preferred poultry rearing. Only few respondents preferred dairy cattle and sheep rearing with regard to fodder and feed for livestock more than half of the respondents indicated that they can provide sufficient fodder for livestock, if the forest Department permits their

animals for grazing in the forest. However, 10 per cent of respondents claimed that they have accessibility to common forest area for collection of fodder and grazing. More than three fourth of the respondents were of the view that livestock rearing alone is sufficient for their livelihood security. Table 1 revealed that the majority of the respondents expressed the need for financial support to expand their farming and they expect loans from government agencies as they can't afford to purchase livestock without government assistance. They also opined that they need free and easy accessibility in providing veterinary services from NGO or AHD. Recently the Forest Department of Karnataka Government has issued an order, banning livestock rearing in the forest area (Order No: MAG MLO: 396/2014-15. 19/03/2015). This is posing a serious problem to the *Soligas*, especially those involved in livestock rearing and their plans to expand in future.

More than one third of the respondents opined that they need free training facilities while 27 per cent for vaccination and health coverage for livestock management. Most of the respondents said that the ban on livestock rearing in the study area is a bane for their livelihood because livestock rearing provides asset, employment and household nutrition. The ban on livestock rearing in the BR hills was opposed by nearly 97 per cent of tribal respondents.

Table 1: Scope for livestock development by LR group (n= 60)

SI. No	Scope for development	LR	
		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Interested in livestock rearing	59	98
2	Livestock preference		
	a) Cattle	12	20
	b) Goat	31	52
	c) Sheep	5	8
	d) Poultry	11	18
3	Fodder and feed availability	28	47
4	Accessibility to common forest area	6	10
5	Relying only on livestock rearing	52	87
	Form of support from NGO or AHD		
	a) Financial help	57	95
	b) Free veterinary services	47	78
	c) Free training	21	35
	d) Vaccination and Health	16	27
	e) Free advisory	8	13
7	Expectation from government		
	a) Loan or free service	58	97
	Ban on livestock		
	a) Bane	58	97
	b) Boon	0	0
	c) No knowledge	2	3
	Consequences of Ban		
	a) dispose of animals	0	0
	b) Oppose the ban	58	97
	c) Discuss in a meeting for further action	58	97

3.2 Scope for livestock development by Non-Livestock Rearing group (NLR)

It could be noted from Table 2 that around 90 per cent of respondents felt that the scope for livestock rearing in the BR hills is high. Nearly half of the respondents were interested in rearing goat as their preferential livestock provided loan and free service are available from government as they can't afford money for purchasing of livestock. More than half of the respondents were interested in poultry rearing. Only few

respondents evinced interest in cattle and sheep rearing. About 27 per cent of the respondents perceived that they have sufficient fodder for livestock, if forest department permits these animals for grazing. Around 8 per cent of respondents claimed that they have accessibility to common forest area for fodder collection and grazing. More than three fourth of the respondents believed that livestock rearing alone is sufficient for their livelihood security from their past experience. But majority of the respondents expressed that financial support

and free veterinary services from NGO or AHD is essential. More than one third of the respondents expressed that they need free training facilities, vaccination and health cover for livestock management. The ban on livestock rearing in the BR hills was opposed by nearly 87 per cent of tribal respondents. *Soliga* tribes face many challenges and constraints in rearing of livestock due to weather because BR hill is located in chain of Eastern and Western Ghats resulting in a very cold climatic condition. Tribes complain that there is no regular veterinary service, training, health camps and vaccination. They were not aware of scientific management practices and they needed

loan from government for purchase of animals. Recently Government has distributed Giriraja birds to most of the *podus*, but most of the birds died due to diseases and wild animal attack. These birds were not protected against diseases through vaccination. *Soligas* were of the opinion that the crossbred cattle, goats and desi-birds are suitable for rearing in the BR hills but not sheep. They have sufficient forest area for grazing but forest department was not allowing them for grazing under Wildlife Conservation Act and Tiger project. *Soligas* were upset with these recent changes and they were worried about their livelihood.

Table 2: Scope for livestock development by NLR group (n=60)

SI. No	Scope for development	NLR	
		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Interested in livestock rearing	54	90
Livestock preference			
2	a) Cattle	4	7
	b) Goat	27	45
	c) Sheep	6	10
	d) Poultry	16	27
	e) All the above	1	2
3	Fodder and feed availability	16	27
4	Accessibility to common forest area	5	8
5	Relying only on livestock rearing	41	68
Form of support from NGO or AHD			
6	i) Financial help	50	83
	ii) Free veterinary services	42	70
	iii) Free training	24	40
	iv) Vaccination and Health camps	18	30
	v) Free advice	14	23
Expectation from government			
7	a) Loan or free service	54	90
Ban on livestock			
8	a) Bane	52	87
	b) Boon	0	0
	c) No knowledge	6	10
Consequences of Ban			
9	a) dispose off animals	0	0
	b) Oppose the ban	53	88
	c) Discuss in a meeting	53	88

3.3 Problems in livestock rearing

It could be observed from Table 3 that the main constraints were non-availability of veterinary services which includes veterinarians, production inputs, vaccines, and medicines. Majority of the tribes were of the opinion that livestock rearing is economical and it provides them livelihood, about 13 per cent of respondents expressed that they had financial constraint to expand their farming. They were aware that they had low knowledge on livestock rearing. The other constraints perceived by them were interference from other agencies like Forest department; Tiger project official, Medicinal plant conservation committee (87%), inadequate land for grazing

(18%) and wild animal threat (25%). These agencies do not allow the tribes and their livestock to these areas, which resulted in a restricted zone for tribes and availability of fodder becomes great constraint. They can neither purchase nor produce their own fodder. Ban on collection of Non timber forest produce from the forest area made the tribal community to think about their continuous stay in their native hill. It is challenge for the department working for the tribal development to address the conflict of interests of tribes who wish to stay in their *Podus* and provide encouragement in livestock rearing.

Table 3: Problems in livestock rearing as perceived by tribes (n=60)

SI. No	Problems	LR	
		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Interference from other agencies (Forest Dept.)	52	87
2	Wild animal threat	15	25
3	Inadequate land for grazing	11	18
4	Financial constraint to expand farming	8	13
5	Limited knowledge on livestock rearing	8	13

3.4 Feedback from official authorities

Conservation of forest and wild animals is important for the forest department and hence imposed restrictions on movement of tribes and animals in the forest. In addition, the department wishes to mitigate human- animal conflict and safeguard humans from the attack of wild animal. Majority of the tourists bring live animals (poultry and goat) to offer to god, and these activities are slowly stopped, resulting in lot of conflicts among tourists and forest department guards. Government and other NGO provide better package for these tribes, they can go with that, and they can learn to live with other people, and expose themselves to actual reality in the society. Hence the scope for livestock development is very much critical in the study area.

The officials of department of Animal Husbandry expressed that it was very difficult to convince tribes and to arrange health camps and training for them. They felt that the tribes lack interest in learning management practices and do not participate in meetings. It is difficult to address these problems with limited man power and inputs. In addition, the ban on rearing by the forest department is a serious impediment for livestock development. Despite these constraints, Animal Husbandry Department vaccinated animals against Foot and Mouth disease (FMD), Peste des petitis ruminants (PPR) and Blue tongue (BT). Hence, they were of the opinion that the scope for livestock development totally rests on Forest department.

NGO officials expressed that *Soligas* livelihood is completely depend on livestock and NTFP collection. The ban on NTFP collection has made these tribes to migrate to other states, which resulted in insecurity to the tribes and for their culture. They must be encouraged to go intensify livestock rearing with good government support. NGOs are ready to lend its support to help the tribes by preventing migration to other areas. They were also of the view tribal resettlement is not an easy issue, and it is very difficult task for government to shift all these tribes. The Government and NGOs are of the opinion that it is easy to convince *Soligas*, but it is not true. *Soligas* were aware of rules, regulations and their tribal rights.

4. Conclusion

Cultivation of fodder in the allotted land and permission to grow the animals on natural grasses grown in the forest area will provide the tribes an improved livelihood through better livestock rearing. Radio and cell phone which are widely used by the *Soligas* can be used as potential ICT tool to deliver information in the form of voice/ text/ video messages on improved livestock management practices. Mixed farming can be strengthened by identifying appropriate fodder grass or crop that could be helped in utilization of crop residue in an efficient manner. The conduct of veterinary services namely camps, rallies and regular vaccination will help and encourage the tribe's interest in livestock rearing. The objectives of department of Animal husbandry department and forests are contradictory in nature. The planners and policy makers need to visit hill area to understand the situation, before planning or implementing any livestock related project or schemes specific to *Soligas*. The coordinated efforts of all concerned departments would help to achieve the desired results in livestock rearing.

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Sudharshan- *Soliga* tribal mentor, Ravi -Key communicator, *Soliga* tribes and staff of Non-Government Organization (NGO's).

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