

Review Article

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## Review on Rubber Producers' Societies in North East India

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### ABSTRACT

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Natural rubber is an essential raw material which is used in manufacturing of a wide variety of products. India is the sixth largest producer and the second largest consumer of natural rubber. Despite not being a very favourable region for growing natural rubber, India continues to record the highest productivity among the major natural rubber producing countries. The rubber cultivating regions are Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal and North Eastern state like Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Kerala is the leading producer of rubber and Tripura ranks second in India. In India the rubber plantation sector is dominated by small holdings. Small rubber growers were unorganised and the processing of rubber was unscientific which resulted in very low quality of product. In order to solve the political and bureaucratic control on rubber growers and to promote self-help concept, the Rubber Board promoted formation of voluntary associations of small growers called the Rubber Producers Societies (RPS) in 1986. RPS functions as a self help group which aims at the economic and social empowerment of growers. This review focused on the status, opportunities and challenges of Rubber Producers' Societies on the rubber farmers in India with special reference to North East. Formation of RPS has improved the welfare of small rubber growers. In India according to the recent estimates there are about 3000 numbers of RPS including 451 numbers in North East India.

### Introduction

Natural Rubber is an important commercial plantation crop and it is grown in tropical humid climatic conditions. Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, China and India are the leading producers in the world. Price of rubber is influenced by economic growth, production in major producing countries and demand in major consuming

countries. Domestic rubber prices generally follow the international market and are therefore, subjected to fluctuations in price. India is currently the sixth largest producer of NR in the world with one of the highest productivity. Traditional rubber-growing states are Kerala and Tamil Nadu which account for 81% of production. North Eastern states of Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya, Odisha, Karnataka, Maharashtra and West

Bengal are the major non traditional rubber growing regions<sup>[1]</sup>. Rubber plantation sector is dominated by the small rubber growers globally and locally. In India small rubber growers had long remained as an unorganised lot. Rubber Board promoted the formation of voluntary grass root level organisations in the villages called Rubber Producers' Societies which have been started as charitable societies to tackle the issues with unorganised small rubber growers<sup>[2]</sup>.

### **Rubber plantation in north east**

Indigenous rubber yielding trees (Assam Rubber) were planted on a commercial scale in Assam long before the introduction of the Para- rubber tree to India and other South-East Asian countries<sup>[3]</sup>. Since the area for expansion of new rubber plantations in traditional rubber growing regions is saturated and to meet the growing domestic demand of rubber, many schemes for rubber plantation have been implemented in north-eastern region.

Availability of vast resources *viz.* uncultivated hilly and fellow land, favourable agro-climatic condition and availability of huge unemployed labour forces lead to the expansion natural rubber area in North East. Rubber Board indicated that around 450000 hectares in North East India is suitable for rubber plantation<sup>[4]</sup>. State-wise potential area, planted area and the relative share of north-eastern states are given in Table 1.

Total production of natural rubber in North East India is about 94430 tonnes in 2018-19. Highest productivity is 1226 kg per hectare in Tripura and lowest 928 kg per hectare in Arunachal Pradesh. The average productivity in NE is 1206 kg per hectare, which is far less than the national average 1453 kg/hectare<sup>[7]</sup>. The volume of production is less due to the fact that most of the states of this region just

started rubber plantation recently. So there is enormous scope to increase production and productivity in the near future.

### **RPS and FPO**

The foremost difference is that RPS deals with single commodity, rubber. Although RPS can be viewed as farmer producer organization as the key operational patterns are similar, there are some differences in terms of the priorities and focus of the RPS.

### **Functions**

RPSs help in dissemination of latest technologies to members from the Rubber Board, state governments along with other developmental programmes. Through RPSs small rubber growers are getting remunerative prices for their product by common marketing of member's rubber grade-wise and at remunerative prices, thereby improving the living condition of small growers. RPSs promote and assist group approach for new planting, replanting, productivity enhancement, availing of bank finance, Rubber Board grants etc.

RPSs establish common crop processing centres that help members to upgrade the quality of rubber. RPSs also raise nurseries and supply high yielding planting materials to members. Members receive supplies of various inputs from Rubber Board and other possible sources through the RPSs. RPSs participate in joint ventures on regional basis, with or without Rubber Board assistance for the interest of members<sup>[8][9]</sup>.

### **Present status of RPS in India and in North East India**

The number of Rubber Producers' Societies in India is increasing at a great rate. The number of RPSs was only 185 in 1986<sup>[2]</sup>. But the

number in 2018-2019 increased to 3000<sup>[6]</sup>. There are 451 registered Rubber Producers' Societies in the North East. State wise number of RPS in NE is given below:

**Economic benefits of Rubber Producers' Societies**

RPSs ensure the supply of quality input materials to the small growers at a considerably cheaper rate by procuring directly from trading companies or wholesale dealers. The most important benefit is that small rubber growers are subjected to exploitation by middleman since small rubber growers do not have holding capacity to get a better bargaining power and better price. So RPSs collect latex, sheets, and scrap from their members and sell it at remunerative prices to processors <sup>[2]</sup>. RPSs set up group processing centres and community smoke houses for the small growers who cannot afford on their own resources. Selected RPS are supported financially as well as technically to transform them into model ones which act as demonstration centres for other RPSs <sup>[10]</sup>. RPSs also help and motivate the members to generate subsidiary income like bee keeping, cultivation of other crops like cocoa planting and medicinal plants.

**Social benefits**

RPSs act as a forum for discussion and help the growers to discuss their common problems and try to solve them. It helps in developing leadership qualities among members and empowers women by including them the board of directors. The best rubber growers and tappers among the members are honoured by the RPSs. It acts as a nodal agency between the members, the government and the Rubber Board. RPSs provide study aids and scholarship to the children of the members. Information on various beneficial schemes of the Government and the Rubber Board are provided to the members by RPSs. RPSs also takes part in local area development like providing better transport facilities and making arrangements for drinking water supply<sup>[2]</sup>.

**Training benefits**

The RPSs arrange training programmes with the help of the Rubber Board and various other agencies from time to time in various fields like Rubber planting, Rubber tapping and Processing, Fertiliser application, Value addition and subsidiary income generation <sup>[2]</sup>.

**Table.1** State-wise Potential and Planted Area of Rubber Plantation in North East

State	Potential area (Ha)	Area planted (Ha)	Production (Tonne)	Productivity (kg/Ha)
<b>Arunachal Pradesh</b>	25000	4065	450	928
<b>Assam</b>	200000	51795	24300	1219
<b>Manipur</b>	10000	3955	1850	1040
<b>Meghalaya</b>	50000	14775	9100	1167
<b>Mizoram</b>	50000	3350	750	952
<b>Nagaland</b>	15000	14235	4930	1120
<b>Tripura</b>	100000	75070	53050	1226
<b>Total</b>	<b>450000</b>	<b>167445</b>	<b>94430</b>	<b>1206</b>

Source: <sup>[5][6]</sup>

**Table.2** Comparison between country’s total and North East

Particulars	Country’s total	NE	Remarks
Area planted(ha)	822,000	1,67,445	20% share of NE
Production (tonne)	648000	94430	14.5% share
Productivity(kg/ha)	1453	1206	Lower than national average

Source: <sup>[1][5][7]</sup>

**Table.3** Comparison between RPS and FPO

Particulars	RPS	FPO
Function	Without any motive of profit making.	Usually profit making
Registered under	Charitable societies act and also with Rubber Board	Co-operative Societies Act or Companies Act
Registration fee	Free of cost	Around Rs 40,000/-
Supporting organisations	Rubber Board	SFAC,NABARD,NCDC
Minimum no of members for formation	50	300 for plains and 100 for hilly areas
Jurisdiction	Compact, 2-3 km radius	Widespread, districts, States
Membership in more than one society	Not possible	Possible

Source: <sup>[6][8]</sup>

**Table.4** State wise no of RPSs in NE

States	No of RPS
Arunachal Pradesh	2
Assam	200
Manipur	5
Meghalaya	20
Mizoram	5
Nagaland	17
Tripura	212
<b>Total</b>	<b>451</b>

Source: <sup>[6]</sup>

### Challenges of Rubber Producer Societies in North East India

Since rubber is a relatively new crop in the region, strong extension support is required by the member growers to help them adopt scientific agro-management practices.

Non-availability of agricultural chemicals and

fertilisers to the RPS members remain a major problem in North East.

Scarcity of skilled tappers in North East and periodic monitoring of quality of tapping in North East.

RPSs in North East lack of proper infrastructures like Group Processing Centres.

Competition from local traders in purchasing rubber produces from member growers which hinder the functions of RPSs.

Lack of proper marketing facilities and industries in North East. Marketing of rubber is also a tough task in the North-East.

Poor connectivity throughout the North East. Lacks of support and encouragement from State governments of North East to RPSs.

### **Suggestions for strengthening Rubber Producers Societies in NE**

Rubber Board and the state governments should provide support and financial assistance to the small rubber growers to strengthen RPS in villages. Rubber marketing societies and RPSs are needed to be strengthened<sup>[11]</sup>. The government should identify various problems and constraints which affect the growth of such societies. Timely action should be taken for sustained growth and progress to put the co-operatives in the right path<sup>[12]</sup>. Model Rubber Producers' Societies should function as training centres for the small rubber growers<sup>[13]</sup>. RPS should have a working style above political and sectarian thoughts. The Rubber Producers' Societies must be able to distribute agricultural implements that the farmers need for the expansion of rubber cultivation, at subsidised rates<sup>[14]</sup>. Rubber Producers' Societies can arrange facilities to the needs of the farmers distribute agricultural implements to them and provide technological and scientific knowledge<sup>[15]</sup>. One society in every village will let small grower's control rubber marketing, if the Rubber Producers' Societies carry out latex collection, processing and storing<sup>[16]</sup>.

In conclusion the North East region is becoming the centre of rubber cultivation in India as potential areas are yet to cover and

areas in traditional rubber growing areas have become saturated. With increasing rubber cultivation areas, Rubber Producers' Societies have an important role to play in North East with respect to quality up-gradation, limiting of exploitations by middlemen, assured market and price throughout the year. Formation of RPSs in village level is a rational approach to socio economic upliftment which will lead to economic sustainability. Though many benefits of RPSs have been seen, there is still a gap which hinders the rubber growers in North East. Factors like lack of awareness about scientific cultivation practices, Government policies, lack of infrastructure, improper market facility etc. needs to be addressed for development of RPSs in North East. Efficiency and effectiveness of RPSs are the key components for sustainability of small rubber growers in North East.

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