



# Grass Root Institutions for Enhancing Wood Productivity: A Study on Functioning of Tree Grower Societies in Tamil Nadu

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## ABSTRACT

A study was conducted among two hundred and forty five tree growers of Tamil Nadu state in India to assess the functioning of Tree Grower Societies (TGS) and to predict the willingness of farmer to join TGS. It was observed that majority of the respondents were not aware of the existence of TGS, neither enrolled as member nor paid membership fees. Regarding the perceptions about the benefits of participation in TGS, majority of the respondents shown positive response to know the market information of tree produces, technical information on tree growing, to meet fellow farmers and interacted with them and to avoid interference of middleman in selling their forest produce. The constraints expressed by respondents in the functioning of TGS were, lack of infrastructure facilities like office space, furniture, staff, members did not have adequate knowledge to run the society, non availability of time to attend society meetings and sizeable number of respondents felt domination of few members in the societies. Logistic regression results revealed that, if a tree grower had high perception towards forestry extension activities, the odds of his willingness to become member of TGS would increase by a factor of 17.58 units. In other words, the willingness of a tree grower to become member of TGS improves by 17 times if he had high perception towards forestry extension activities.

**Key Words:** Awareness, Constraints, Grower, Perception, Societies, Tree, Willingness.

## INTRODUCTION

Tree Grower Societies are characteristically umbrella organizations and their prime objectives is to represent the interest of private tree growers to the forest department and other line departments at the state and district level and to influence politically to achieve their objectives. These associations are beneficial to tree growers for buying expensive equipment for forestry works especially planting equipments to be shared among members, reducing the fixed cost burden, inputs of individual tree growers. Higher market price for wood produces could be achieved through joint marketing and through bulk order. The expenditure for raising seedlings needed for tree growing private lands could be lowered for small and marginal farmers. These farmers their individual capacity may not

be possible to influence policy makers and cope up the market fluctuations whereas members of TGS together can organize for collective actions in the field of private forestry and provide to its members, forward and backward linkages (forestry extension entries) that are inevitably needed for tree cultivation.

## Tree Grower Societies in Tamil Nadu

One important activity of FECs is to facilitate the functioning of tree grower societies (TGS) to augment the potentials of farm lands for the cultivation of tree crops Twenty Seven TGS were formed in various districts about a decade back. Despite the fact that TGS are being promoted with greater enthusiasm by the Forestry Extension wing, the diffusion of the concept among the members

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**Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to the Awareness, Participation and Involvement about Functioning of Tree Grower Societies.** (n=245)

| Sr. No. | Parameter                               | Yes    |       | No     |       |
|---------|---|--------|-------|--------|-------|
|         |   | Number | %     | Number | %     |
| 1       | Awareness about existence of TGS        | 97     | 39.59 | 148    | 60.41 |
| 2       | Member in TGS                           | 84     | 34.29 | 161    | 65.71 |
| 3       | Payment of membership fee               | 55     | 65.48 | 29     | 34.52 |
| 4       | Members attending the meeting regularly | 75     | 89.29 | 9      | 10.71 |
| 5       | Satisfaction with functioning           | 57     | 67.86 | 27     | 32.14 |

has not been satisfactory as desired. Most of the TGS in different district were defunct and very few are functioning with lesser activities. Though, the benefits accrued out of such farmers societies elsewhere were found to be abundant, it was necessary to analyze the reasons or factors which are responsible for defunct nature as well as the poor functioning of TGS and to find out the strategies for strengthening the activities of TGS in Tamil Nadu. Keeping this in mind, a study was contemplated to analyze the functioning of Tree Growers Societies and predict the willingness of tree growers to become members.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was undertaken in Tamil Nadu state of India. A total of 245 farmers were selected from the eight districts representing five agro-climatic zones of Tamil Nadu which have higher potential for tree growing activities. The respondents were selected using snow ball sampling wherein word of mouth of potential tree growers and opinion of the Forestry Extension officials were taken into consideration for the selection of farmers. All the selected respondents were enquired about the functioning in their respective districts. Out of 245 respondents, 84 were found to be members of TGS and were considered for further data collection regarding functioning of the societies.

A well structured pre-tested interview schedule was constructed to pursue the objectives of the study which included four components namely awareness about TGS, perception about benefits of

participation in TGS, constraints in functioning of TGS and suggestions to overcome the constraints in functioning of TGS. The items of TGS to be included in the interview schedule were finalized through discussion with the office bearers and members of TGS and prospective tree growers in different agro climatic zones of Tamil Nadu. The data were analyzed using simple percentage analysis and binary logistic regression. The response of the respondents namely willing to join TGS or unwilling to join TGS was coded '1' and '0' and the predictors of the willingness was studied through binary logistic regression

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The perusal of data (Table 1) revealed that almost two third (60.41%) of respondents did not know the existence of TGS in their villages. One third (34.29%) of respondents enrolled themselves as members in TGS. These members were also part of few TGS which are functioning with limited activities.

Likewise, it was evident (Table 1), that only 65.48 percent of members have paid the membership fee. It was conspicuous to note that there existed gap between being a member in TGS and paying membership fee. Since the members could not realize any tangible benefits from the society, they were bit hesitant to pay the membership fee. Further, the societies were poorly patronized by the Forestry Extension personnel. Had the benefits of being member of society been explained in a pacifying way to the farmers, the participation

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**Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their perceptions about functioning of Tree Grower Society .** (n = 84)

| Sr. No. | Benefit  | Yes    |       | No     |       |
|---------|--|--------|-------|--------|-------|
|         |  | Number | %     | Number | %     |
| 1       | Got to know the fellow tree growers                      | 61     | 72.61 | 23     | 27.39 |
| 2       | Chance to interact with fellow tree growers              | 66     | 78.57 | 18     | 21.43 |
| 3       | Improved my expressiveness and developed self confidence | 72     | 85.71 | 12     | 14.29 |
| 4       | Understanding the collective approach                    | 69     | 82.14 | 15     | 17.86 |
| 5       | To know about technical information on tree growing      | 74     | 88.09 | 10     | 11.91 |
| 6       | Got to know market information                           | 77     | 91.66 | 7      | 8.34  |
| 7       | Avoidance of middle men                                  | 70     | 83.33 | 14     | 16.67 |

of members in terms of payment of membership fee could have enhanced which would facilitate sustenance of society activities. Out of 84 members, majority of them (89.29%) were reported to attend the meeting regularly. Nearly two third (67.86%) of respondents were satisfied with the functioning of the society. The findings were in line with Kumar (2016) reported that 87.0 per cent of the respondents had favorable attitude towards FIG activities and he also revealed that two –third (66.0%) of the respondent’s attendance in the meeting was medium level followed by high (24.0%).

### Perceptions about benefits of participation in Tree Grower Society

The perceived opinion of the members of TGS about the benefits of participation is paramount important to assess its sustainability.

An important benefit that whopping majority of members (91.66%) indicated was to know the market information by being a member of the society. This would result in avoidance of middlemen which was again reported by majority of (83.33%) members as a benefit. From this finding, it was evident that the expectation of members to get reliable, timely market information such as demand, supply, price of timber and other forest produces was steadily increasing. Hence, the Forestry Extension system needs to invigorate itself to improve its information

system to provide needed market details to members of the societies.

Majority (88.09%) of members of TGS endorsed the benefit of getting to know technical information about tree growing by being a member of society. Further, the membership in the society has improved their expressiveness and developed self confidence as reported by majority of members (85.71%). The TGS gave an opportunity to the members to meet the Forestry Extension officials and have interaction with them which improved their self-confidence and to get technical information about tree growing. Further, the meetings which are being organized by TGS helped the members to express their ideas and to engage in transfer of each other ideas.

The indirect consequence or benefit of being a member of TGS is that understanding the collective approach which has been reported by nearly four fifth of the respondents (82.14%) which was in line with the findings of Song and Olshfski, (2008) who revealed that valued interpersonal relationship can influence organizational outcomes by increasing institutional participation. The group extension concept is fast emerging like Farmers Interest Groups (FIGs), Commodity Groups, Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) in agriculture and the farmers are increasingly realizing the benefits of working in groups. Approximately three fourth of

**Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to constraints in prevailed functioning of Tree Grower’s Society . (N = 84)**

| Sr. No. | Constraint                                     | Yes |       | No  |       |
|---------|--|-----|-------|-----|-------|
|         |  | No. | %     | No. | %     |
| 1       | Dominated by few persons                       | 48  | 57.14 | 36  | 42.86 |
| 2       | Lack of fund to run the society                | 70  | 83.33 | 14  | 16.67 |
| 3       | Lack of infrastructure facility                | 76  | 90.48 | 8   | 9.52  |
| 4       | Inadequate knowledge to handle society matters | 58  | 69.04 | 26  | 30.96 |
| 5       | Time constraint                                | 55  | 65.48 | 29  | 34.52 |

members of TGS reported that they got to know the fellow Tree growers (78.57%) and they had chances to interact with fellow Tree growers (72.61%) respectively. The findings of Wambugu *et al* (2009) corroborated with the findings of the study who reported that social capital positively affects the performance of famers groups and developmental strategies that target commercialization of small holder agriculture through producer organizations which pay attention to the internal factors within such organizations. Further, the findings of Hiremath (2014) need to be emphasized here who reported that the structure and organization of Farmers organizations were different from the traditional cooperative institutions and their management.

**Constraints in the functioning Tree Growers Society**

The prime constraint expressed by vast majority of members (90.48%) was the lack of infrastructure facilities such as office space, furniture’s, computer accessories with internet facility and a staff which are essential to hold meetings and governing day to day activities for the effective functioning. The next constraint which was expressed by majority of members (83.33%) was the lack of funds to run the society which was bare minimum requirement for running the society.

Another constraint which bewildered the functioning of the society as reported by nearly two third (69.04%) of members was that the inadequate knowledge to handle the society matters. This was the crucial point to be borne in mind by the

officials of Forestry Extension wing and they have to seriously think of imparting knowledge about working and mandatory activities of the society, renewal of society and maintenance of records and accounts. Time constraint has been reported by nearly two third of (65.48%) members of the society. Although, the members were eager to take part in the meetings organized by the societies, due to various timely agricultural works, the members could not find time to participate in the meeting organized by the society. The society must fix a particular date in a month for the periodical meeting which will enable the members to attend the meeting by adjusting their other works. Nearly half (57.14%) of members felt domination by few persons as one of the constraints. Any group is bound to have such individuals who need to be tackled diplomatically by the other members and the office bearers. Training on group dynamics for office bearers as well as members proved to be an effective solution for such problems.

**Willingness of Tree growers to become members of Tree Growers Society**

Another dimension of the study was to assess the willingness of the Tree growers to become members of TGS which might have been influenced by several factors.

In the present analysis, two variables namely Innovativeness and Perception towards Forestry Extension activities were found to be significant at one percent level of probability. Another variable namely Information seeking behavior was

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**Table 4. Logistic regression coefficients.**

| Sr. No. | Predictor  | B      | S.E.  | Wald  | df | Sig.  | Exp(B)  |
|---------|--|--------|-------|-------|----|-------|---------|
| 1.      | Area under tree cultivation                      | 0.070  | 0.051 | 1.923 | 1  | 0.166 | 1.073   |
| 2.      | Decision making pattern                          | -0.088 | 0.096 | 0.833 | 1  | 0.361 | 0.916   |
| 3.      | Information seeking behaviour                    | 0.725  | 0.421 | 2.961 | 1  | 0.055 | 2.065*  |
| 4.      | Innovativeness                                   | 1.578  | 0.537 | 8.640 | 1  | 0.003 | 4.847** |
| 5.      | Income from tree crops                           | 0.000  | 0.000 | 0.061 | 1  | 0.804 | 1.000   |
| 6.      | Marketing orientation                            | 0.125  | 0.182 | 0.472 | 1  | 0.492 | 1.133   |
| 7.      | Access to forestry production technologies       | 0.039  | 0.027 | 2.129 | 1  | 0.145 | 1.040   |
| 8.      | Perception towards Forestry Extension activities | 2.867  | 1.288 | 4.956 | 1  | 0.026 | 17.58** |
| 9.      | Adoption of tree growing practices               | 0.078  | 0.088 | 0.788 | 1  | 0.375 | 1.081   |

significant at five percent level of probability. It could be interpreted that, if a tree grower had high perception towards Forestry Extension activities, the odds of his willingness to become member of TGS would increase by a factor of 17.58 units. In other words, the willingness of a tree grower to become member of TGS improves by 17 times if he had high perception towards Forestry Extension activities. If an individual perceive high about a phenomena/activity he tends to move towards that phenomena or activity. The perception towards Forestry Extension activity was carried out by Forestry Extension wing will act as a catalyst to have a opinion about forestry. Further, the societies were mobilized by Forestry Extension wing and the benefits of being a member of the society has been reinforced in most of the meeting of the wing. Hence, if a tree grower had a high perception about Forestry Extension activities, there is every likely hood that he becomes a member of TGS. Similarly, if a tree grower is innovative, the odds of his willingness to become a member of the society would increase by a factor of 4.84 units. In other words, the willingness of a tree grower to become a member of the societies improves 4 times if he is innovative. Obviously, any farmer who wishes to practice agriculture innovatively, he tends to look for innovative practices which are in the offing through any means. The Forestry Extension

wing which is promoting TGS are also known for transferring innovative tree growing practices. Hence, the innovative tree growers might have formed an opinion to join the societies anticipating the benefits of being a member.

Yet another variable 'Information seeking behavior' was also found to be significant which implies that the odds of a Tree grower to become a member of the societies would increase by a factor of 2.06 units and hence, the likelihood had increased two times if he had higher Information seeking behavior. It has already been discussed in adoption of tree growing practices wherein Information seeking behaviour was significantly contributing to adoption. There is no doubt that if a tree grower is seeking information from various sources including Forestry Extension wing, his orientation towards this institution will grow and ultimately there exists a possibility of he becoming a member of TGS.

In nut shell, the tree growers who are innovative, seeking information about tree growing activities and who had higher perception towards Forestry Extension activities did possess a higher chance of becoming a member in TGS. This reveals the active role to be played by Forestry Extension wing to conduct regular meetings, campaigns, demonstrations in the villages which will indirectly help Tree growers to join as member in TGS.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study inferred that respondents were poorly informed of market information. Therefore, TGS can act as a service provider with respect to providing market information, prevailing demand and supply status of tree products, value addition to tree products, promotion of income generation activities such as nursery raising, vermi compost production, renting tools and equipment and any other activities bringing income to the TGS. Moreover, TGS branches may be formed at Taluk level which will be useful to enroll more members, facilitate to reach large number of farmers. So there is a need to organize training programme exclusively for the Executive Committee Members to get familiarize with strategic planning, accounting, financial management, capacity building relates to run the TGS successfully.

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