CHAPTER VI

6. PROBLEMS OF RURAL NON-FARM EMPLOYMENT

This preceding chapter presented the factor and logistic regression analysis and identified some of the factors influencing the level of RNFE in the study area. This chapter presents some important problems associated with RNFE based on observations in the field survey. Besides, a few HHs have been chosen from each village and collected the required information. This also enables to identify some selected factors operating at the HH level, which may be hidden in the preceding regression analysis.

6.1 AGRICULTURE

The agricultural HH illustrates that where non-farm activities is affected by seasons, agriculture may protect to some extent, the livelihoods of people by providing additional wage employment. It illustrates some of the consumption linkages from agriculture. If agriculture is able to generate more employment and income, on other than food items, like tea, coffee, beverages, buying home appliances. This can generate more non-farm employment but only if the slack period of non-farm employment corresponds to peak labour demand in agriculture (rainy season).

6.2 DISTRESSED FARMERS

Cultivators complain that industrialisation and better employment prospects have weaned away agricultural labourers from agricultural activities. According to farmers, the scenes of agricultural activities are becoming a thing of the past. They say that agricultural products that were sold in the previous years have now plummeted or remain in the same price. They cite two reasons for the diminishing labour force 1) the perception that agricultural activities is a demeaning occupation reserved for those at the bottom of the society, has prompted the educated among the traditional agricultural community to shun the work. 2) the education has also increased migration to more industrialised areas, making labour a dear product. Most of the agricultural HH members of current generation have left the villages and have gone to Tirupur, Coimbatore and Chennai for any non-farm jobs. A farmer in Pattakurichi village adds that the MGNREGP has also a profound impact on labour availability.

Another problem of Farm sector is fencing being laid to mark out empty housing plots and commercial establishments in the district has put the farmers in a spot of bother.
The farm lands solely depend on water from Thamirabarani river and South-west Monsoon with two season farming. Farming activities have been put on the back burner due to the failure of South west monsoon. With no farming activities the exercise of erecting fences around fields to develop them as housing plots is in full swing. Farmers said that some persons had artificially turned their fields into fallow lands to facilitate commercial activities. They also said since the monsoon has disappointed the district in the recent years, which is fast becoming a drought-hit region, fencing the plots is going on in full swing. This has made things difficult for the farmers. The fences have placed restrictions on their movement to reach their field with agricultural implements. Diversion of agricultural lands is taking place not only in this district but also beyond it. A woman farmer said she had not done farming in her land for three consecutive seasons because agricultural machinery could not go inside the field. Those erecting fencing around their field or plots also encroach upon the paths between fields, she lamented.

6.3 AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Agricultural labours mostly abstain from it because they feel that the farmers are misusing them by giving extra work without any pay. The income generated is very low compared to other occupations and one cannot satisfy the family's need with inadequate income from agricultural activities. This is a case of distress diversification in the rural area. Thus, in order to meet the basic needs, they mostly take private credit from money lenders at an exorbitant rate of interest.

6.4 SEASONALITY

Seasonality is likely to be important in enabling or constraining RNFE, if there is a peak season labour constraint. Farming is seasonal. Some forms of non-farm activity vary counter cyclically. A section of the rural workers seeks non-farm activities when employment is not available in the farm sector.

6.5 TRANSITION FROM FARM TO NON-FARM

People are looking for additional avenues to supplement farm employment in terms of employment and income generation in rural areas. It is also observed that non-farm employment is an alternative to wage employment which is sometimes preferred and sometimes an occupation of last resort. Inadequacy of agricultural incomes as well as lack of employment opportunities in farming have acted as a push factor or distress
diversification into RNFE for some HHs in all villages. There is a need for alternative sources to raise family income and to keep people busy during the slack agricultural season.

6.6 HERDING OF ANIMALS

Sheppard face a lot of problems like non-availability of grass land and drinking water for animals during summer, attack of diseases during winter and summer, not take part in any social functions, perception of demeaning of occupation and nobody is available to look after the animals in the absence of Sheppard. The current young generation does not lend any support to this occupation.

6.7 QUARRY OF STONE

Stone quarries are located nearby Ayansingampatti and Pattakurichi villages. One can find regular work here. But the salary is much low i.e. Rs. 150 to 200 for 10 working hours. On contract basis only, most of the workers employ in these quarries. The contractors also give some extra work for which they do not pay anything some times. One dimension to the growth of non-farm activity in rural areas can be termed distress diversification into unproductive or low paid non-farm jobs. Since the farm sector do not provide adequate work, the non-farm sector acts as sponge for the excess labour.

6.8 VEGETABLES AND FRUITS VENDING

Generally vegetable, fruit and onion vendors trade various perishable agricultural goods like Mangoes, Sapota, Jackfruit, Orange, Grapes, Apple, Pomegranate, Pineapple, all vegetables depending upon the season and availability. Most of the vendors are hawkers in all villages. They bicycle about 20 to 30 Kms to other villages and nearby town per day to vend the goods. They feel that this type of trade cannot be carried out throughout the year. So this trade is irregular since fruits and vegetables are not regularly available at low prices. When these goods are not available, they switch over to onion, ripe chillies and coriander vending. Though these vendors moved away from the agricultural sector, this sector continues to play an indirect role in improving his livelihoods by supplying the items they sell. This is a case of forward linkage from agriculture.

Besides, rural people always bargain and demand at low prices of any commodity. This makes some time loss to them. Some would buy the goods at credit basis which
cannot be avoided. This creates often a strain as they do not pay up regularly. Thus, this type of vocation is adversely affected by seasonal dimension. Compared to other occupation like construction worker, they get low remuneration.

6.9 FLOWER VENDING

Flower vending has been flourishing in the cluster of nearby villages. Jasmine, rose, Kanagambaram, are different kinds of flowers bought in nearby towns and sold. The prices of these flowers go up during off season which affects this vocation. Generally the peak season is from February to July and the venders find more jobs. Since flower is the most perishable good, unsold flower make some times loss to them. Flowers are mostly cultivated in Sankarankovil Taluk in the district. The farmers of this kind get only low price and they are not aware of getting subsidies from DRDA.

6.10 MECHANIC

Most of the motor mechanic or tractor mechanics are failed in 10th or below. The education of motor mechanic was terminated by their failure in 10th or less than 10th class. They learnt this mechanic trade in nearby town for some time and own a mechanic shed. On and off they repair vehicles whenever they had a chance to do so and it became the main stay of their life. They feel that they could not spend more time with the family members as well as they could not participate in social functions as others. They are satisfied with the present income. Only with the help of parents and other family members they can run the trade successfully.

6.11 CYCLE SHOP

One can find at least one cycle shop, repairing, renting out cycles in each village. But, this occupation is being lost due to the advent of modern technology of using mopeds, motor cycles etc., Moreover, the Free Cycles for Higher Secondary Class students by the Government of Tamil Nadu has affected the cycle shop’s renting out. However, repairing of the cycles continues to play an indirect role in improving livelihoods of them. This is a case of forward linkage from industry.

6.12 CABLE T.V OPERATORS

The cable T.V operators say that this vocation is being deteriorated to the advent of Dish T.Vs of different companies and competition of rival operators lead to reduce the subscription. Frequent power failure also affects mainly this vocation.
6.13 ZIP COMPANY

A zip company is located in Ambasamudram nearby Ayansingampatti village. Most of the young unmarried girls and boys employ in the company. The employees must have minimum qualification of 10th at least. The salary is very low i.e., Rs 60 to 80 per day. No fringe benefits and social security is given to the employees of this company since it is purely an outsourcing or contract job.

6.14 CARPENTRY WORK

Once it was mostly related to agriculture. During summer they found work for seven days in a week because agricultural implements, tools go for repairs. It loses out to modernisation in agriculture. This loss results in a change in the occupational pattern of employment. On an average it was 5 months work for carpentry occupation throughout the year and the HH also takes part in outdoor work. But now, it becomes a work carried out throughout the year. Mostly the woman of carpenter do not get any kind of paid work and are thus confined to HH duties only such a to look after the children and cooking food. In the present young generation who are educated who do not show interest on this vocation. There has been no change in the primary occupation of carpentry for the past 50 years. The volume of work is declining every year following the advent of modern technology in this field.

6.15 TEA STALL

Each village has at least two to three tea stalls. Half of the turnover is required to invest in buying the necessary materials. This petty business is affected in the agricultural slack season and rainy season. During this period, no work is available and thus no pay, so people reduce their buying and they buy at credit basis. However, they do not pay up the credit regularly; they shift to another tea stall while demanding the pay up and even they stop coming to the same tea stall. Sometimes it leads to petty quarrel. Moreover, the refuge of extravagant is tea stall in every village. They gossip and debate political and other matters in the tea stall only which would make difference of opinion between the tea stall owners and the rural people.

6.16 PETTY TRADE

Petty trade becomes more competitive now a day even in rural areas. One easily find at least 3 to 5 petty trade shop in each village. This is also one of the alternative
vocations for the agricultural wage employment. Most of the petty shops are being run by couples. The wives generally look after the shop in husband's absence. They also feel earning less compared to other workers. Moreover, agricultural slack season affects the business. Since it becomes more competitive now a day, they cannot sell the goods with high margin. Only with marginal profit, the petty trade shop can be run in rural areas. They also sell often goods at credit. This creates a lot of problems. Some incurred heavy loss due to credit and wind up the vocation.

6.17 WASHERMAN

Washer man serve each village, most of them are barbers having shop within the village or outside the village as well. The rural people give more work without any pay especially during the occasion of marriage, funeral, temple festivals, and other functions. Moreover, people would not give any reasonable amount of remuneration to them and also they are not allowed to do some RNFA within the village. This occupation fails to provide sufficient income so they have to do any additional works like ironing.

6.18 CASTE

Caste plays an important role in influencing the choice of RNFE activities. However, caste groups SC in the society have inferior positions of influence in the village social hierarchy and are also placed in a disadvantageous position in receiving public resources. Family relations and caste ties are strong in rural Tamil Nadu particularly in Tirunelveli district. The SC people cannot run any petty trade or tea stall or any modern non-farm activity like cable t.v, in a village where the other caste dominated.

Indian caste is rigid in its influence on occupational structure. A person born in barber caste may become either a barber or if educated can get into a non-traditional occupation. However, a person born in a caste other than of barber will not become a barber. Here is a difference between the Indian caste structure and the Western occupational structure. The same is applicable to other caste-based occupations. (For e.g. potters, carpenters, fisherman, cobblers, piggery, etc.)

6.19 EDUCATION

The level of education can be an important factor of influence on economic position. However, only professional education helps to get a better job whereas the general education does not help to get a good position. Now a day, as government often
changes the policy of recruitment, the educated persons face many problems in addition to corruption. Because of this, most of the graduates are unemployed or underemployed and work for very paid jobs.

6.20 SKILLED PROFESSIONS

In rural areas, skilled professions are pursued by people belonging to particular community such as carpenter, barber, washer man, cobbler etc., these skills are transferred from generation to generation within particular community only. Other castes do not take part in these activities.

6.21 MIGRATION/COMMUTING

Many people have to migrate or commute so as to carry out their Non-Farm Activity (NFA) mainly the construction workers have to temporarily migrate or commute to other villages or nearby towns. Moreover, cycle mechanic, motor mechanic, tractor, auto drivers, office goers, casual labourers have to migrate/commute because of better-location specific prospects. They felt that they work from dawn to dusk daily. Moreover, a portion of money is to be allotted for transport and food. However, vegetables, fruits and onion vendors involve some movement to sell their goods. Wherever opportunities for NFA exist, men show a sufficient degree of mobility to take advantage of them. The female member’s mobility into non-farm pursuits is much lower, because of looking after their children. Moreover, female construction workers have to work in the site as well as in the house too. Landless, casual labours show a higher degree of mobility towards NFA.

6.22 OTHER PROBLEMS

Most of the casual labourers, construction workers, agricultural labourers, and other workers in the rural area take gruel which is left over from the previous night’s food, which mainly consists of rice, chilly, salt and water as breakfast, lunch. Once a day, normally they eat fresh rice.

Traditional non-farm, wage labour, seasonal employment, and self-employment are the most predominant form of employment in rural areas. In the peak season of the crop (paddy) during transplantation, harvesting, threshing, the demand curve for labour shifts to the right. And also they work for long time with low wage. The rural labours are highly being exploited in both farm and unorganised non-farm sectors.