
Occupation and Asset Poverty Traps in Three Agrobiodiversity Hotspots in India: Determining the Distributional Impact of Policies

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Abstract

Rural poverty in India is enigmatic in its coexistence with high levels of agrobiodiversity - the genetic resources required for food and agricultural production. Land conversion to agriculture has increased food production for human consumption, but has come at the expense of biodiversity and the natural functioning of ecosystems at the local level, often leading to decreased food security for the local communities. While government policies exist to address this situation and enhance local food security, they do not always have the intended impact and chronic poverty and environmental degradation persists. In this study we search for the existence and determinants of poverty traps three states in India – Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Odisha in order to shed light on the effectiveness of government policies and services that are designed to help households achieve sustainable economic development. Using a combination of household survey (N=900) and focus group methodology we attempt to 1) determine if poverty traps do in fact exist and 2) the distributional impacts of social and environmental policies on the food security status of marginalized populations. A recall approach was used capture income and asset data over three generations within each household. Preliminary results indicate that over the last 20 years and across three generations within each household, there has been a general upward trend in quality of life that has been significantly impacted by government policies, although in specific examples of poverty traps do remain. **Keywords:** poverty traps, agrobiodiversity, recall approach, generational recall data, India

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