

RUBBER PRODUCERS SOCIETIES: AGENTS OF CHANGE

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Transfer of appropriate technology on a seasonal basis to the vulnerable section of the rubber planting community in an intelligible manner, coupled with timely delivery of quality inputs and equipments at cheaper rates is perhaps the largest single factor that would help maximise production and productivity of rubber from small holdings.

Proliferation of small holdings year after year on the one hand and inadequacy of extension personnel with Rubber Board to cater to the information needs of the rubber grower community on the other have been imposing severe constraints to fulfil these tasks. As a result productivity of small holdings has been remaining far lower than that of the professionally managed large estates.

In view of this the Rubber Board felt it necessary to promote "group approach" among rural small holders at the village level for timely transfer of technology and delivery of inputs during 1986, by organising voluntary associations of rubber growers in each village with an average membership of 150 to 200 growers limiting the service area of such associations to 2-3 Km. Past experiences show that membership exceeding 200 would make internal communication and

intraction among the members ineffective.

RPS

These associations were called Rubber Producers Societies (RPS) registered with the District Registrar under the Charitable Societies Act based on a draft bye-law issued by the Rubber Board. Only 7 small holder promoters need be there to register an RPS. The Board insisted that to qualify for the Board's approval there should be 50 rubber small grower members each contributing Rs. 50/- as entrance fee and Rs. 10/- as annual subscription in the beginning. Once this condition is satisfied the Board would accord its approval to the RPS after an on the spot inspection by the Board's Field Officer of the area to verify the eligibility of the members enrolled, viability to function as a voluntary association of small growers, premises where the RPS intends to operate from, calibre of the organisation etc. The Field Officer of the area is then nominated to the Governing Body of the RPS to guide its functioning for achieving the laid out objectives of improving the production, productivity, processing and marketing of the rubber of the members of the society.

The general body of the society is suggested to be held at least once in three months, preferably in a

holding of one of the members of the society and discuss the calendar of cultural operations to be followed in their holdings for trees of differing age groups during the succeeding quarter. Demonstrations by the extension officer of the Board on relevant techniques are also to be done if necessary at such meetings, such as correct methods of planting, manuring, tapping plant protection, processing, nursery raising etc. During such meetings, it is suggested that the Managing Committee should apprise the members of the progress achieved since the previous meeting and present the accounts. Frequent meetings of this type would enable to foster an intimacy between the members and ensure smooth functioning of the RPS with a sense of belonging.

Organising new RPSs

Similarly the Governing Committee of the RPS is suggested to meet once in a month in the presence of the Field Officer who is a member of the Committee and discuss the various activities to be undertaken by the society to help the members.

The number of RPS so far approved by the Board is over 1000. Region-wise break up of the RPS is as follows:-

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Region	No. of RPS	Region	No. of RPS
Nagercoil	6	Kothamangalam	37
Trivandrum	36	Ernakulam	58
Punalur	34	Trichur	41
Pathanamthitta	58	Palghat	49
Adoor	29	Nilambur	36
Changanacherry	38	Calicut	34
Kanjirappally	68	Tellicherry	29
Kottayam	51	Taliparamba	90
Palai	93	Kanhangad	48
Erattupetta	32	Mangalore	7
Thodupuzha	45	Goa	1
Moovattupuzha	48	Port Blair	1

The membership in each of these societies is around 100 on an average.

Obviously impressed by the demonstrated advantages derived by being members of RPS, brisk activities are afoot among rubber growers to organise new RPSs in village where such societies do not exist now. The extension personnel of the Board also have been organising group meetings of selected rubber growers in each region and persuading them to form RPSs. Rubber growers who have been keeping away from RPSs existing in their villages also have started enrolling as members. Ultimately it is likely that every eligible rubber small holder within the jurisdiction of each RPS would be attracted and enrolled as members in the respective RPSs. Generally, rubber growers owning rubber area of less than 0.20 ha (50 cents) are not suggested to be enrolled as members of RPSs as they will find it hard to pay Rs. 60/- and take up membership. But the RPSs have been advised to extend all the benefits to such small growers also, as in the case of other regular members. This arrangement will enable even the smallest rubber grower to avail all benefits without actually enrolling as members of RPSs.

Improving the Processing and marketing of small holders' rubber

Another area of emphasis is the improvement in the processing and marketing operations of small holders rubber through the RPSs. Study classes and demonstrations are arranged under the RPSs regarding correct processing techniques, so that they are able to make rubber sheets of better grade which will fetch higher price. Alongside arrangements for marketing small holders rubber based on the grade of the sheets they produce are also made. The fact that they can realise higher price for better grades has made the small growers 'grade-conscious' leading to improvement in the quality of the sheets they produce.

The machinery set up by the Board in this direction is to engage leading tyre companies like Dunlop, Modi, Vikrant and MRF to procure rubber sheets direct from RPSs by paying grade-wise price for the sheets. This facility had warranted adoption of fair trade practices among all those who deal in rubber even in villages. But this system

also had met with certain impediments like the tax authorities harassing the RPSs interpreting that what they do is real trade and that they are liable to be taxed.

To tide over this the Rubber Board has set up Private Ltd. Companies in all regions under the joint share participation of RPSs and the Board. Six of them will handle both Processing and marketing while remaining six companies will be mainly under taking only trading of rubber to begin with. In addition, these Companies would also be taking up distribution of Formic acid, plantation inputs and raising polybag nurseries.

Each Company will have 49 RPSs and the Rubber Board as share holders, making the total share holders 50, to be well within the stipulation of Company Law.

In the case of Companies undertaking Processing and marketing of rubber, the share contribution per RPS is Rs. 25,000/- while in the case of trading companies it is Rs. 10,000/- per RPS. In both type of

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companies the Rubber Board will have controlling shares.

In the case of Processing factories the crop from members of share holders RPSs will be procured as latex, sheet and scrap as the case may be, as far as possible.

The Trading Companies will handle all activities of the Processing Companies, except processing. Once they are commissioned and become stable in the trading activities, processing activities will also be taken up as second stage of expansion.

Distribution of inputs

Distribution of inputs to the small holder members of the RPSs is being done now directly from the Board through its Regional Offices. During 1988, it was done from one centre at Kottayam, when the number of RPSs were only a few. During 1989 the

Details about the Companies are given below:

Processing and Marketing Companies.

Sl. No.	Name and product of the Company	Operational region	Present stage
1.	Pazhassi Rubbers (Crumb Rubber)	Taliparamba Tellicherry	Shares fully paid up. Factory ready to commission near Tellicherry.
2.	Sreekantapuram Latex (Centrifuged latex)	Taliparamba	Share collection on at initial stage.
3.	Periyar Latex (Centrifuged latex)	Moovattupuzha, Thodupuzha, Kothamangalam, Ernakulam.	Shares fully paid up. Factory under erection at Kalloorkad.
4.	Kavanar Latex (Latex Crumb)	Palai, Erattupetta	Shares almost paid up. Site for factory being searched for.
5.	Pamba Rubbers (Crumb Rubber)	Pathanamthitta, Adoor.	Shares fully paid up. Factory under erection at Konni.
6.	Ponmudi Rubbers (Crumb Rubber)	Trivandrum, Punalur	Share collection on. Site for factory purchased.

Trading Companies

1.	Kanhangad Rubbers	Kanhangad	Share collection in progress. Company being registered.
2.	Kunhali Marikkar Rubbers	Kozhikode	Share collection on. Company registered.
3.	Thunchath Ezhuthachan Rubbers	Nilambur	-do-
4.	Bharathapuzha Rubbers	Palghat	-do-
5.	Vallathol Rubbers	Thrissur	-do-
6.	Manimalayar Rubbers	Kanjirappally, Changanacherry, Kottayam	-do-

centres were increased to 5. Again during 1990 the number of centres was increased to 17 to cater to the RPSs in a decentralised manner.(See Table 1).

The inputs distributed include straight fertilisers of NPK, Polythene and Adhesive for rainguarding, Plastic cups, Head lights, hand sprayers, panel protectants, fungicides, spray oil, Power sprayers etc. Those RPSs which are interested to set up Community smoke houses are given subsidy at the rate of about a lakh of Rupees to bear the cost of construction and equipments limited to about 75 %.

To those RPSs which come forward to collect latex from their members and sell it at remunerative prices to processors the Rubber Board supplies necessary equipments such as platform balance to weigh latex, Electric oven to dry sample coagulum for estimating dry rubber content, chemical balance to weigh the dried sample coagulum to find out the exact weight of dry rubber in the sample and other accessories required.

Platform balances are supplied to those RPSs which undertake the procurement of smoked sheets and scrap rubber.

To ensure effective functioning of the RPSs as a credible rural change agency, the Board has been insisting that they should adopt a work culture of total openness, enabling every member of the society to have access to the records and documents of the society. Registers for recording the accounts, minutes of meetings list of members with details of their holdings, inventory etc are

Table- 1 ITEMS OF ESTATE INPUTS ISSUED TO RPSs

Sl. No.	Item	1987-88 Quantity Issued	1988-89 Quantity Issued	1989-90 Purchased for Issue*
1.	Urea	420 MT	1733 MT	3660 MT
2.	Potash	327 MT	1365 MT	2818 MT
3.	Mussorie	977 MT	4085 MT	8500 MT
4.	Rubber Mixture	834 MT		
5.	Copper Sulphate	55MT	168 MT	375MT
6.	Copper Oxy Chloride	7MT	24 MT	70MT
7.	Spray Oil	40 KL	60 KL	350 KL
8.	Polythene sheet	28 MT	83 MT	300 MT
9.	Adhesive	121MT	115 MT	1000 MT
10.	Plastic cups-White	6 lakhs	5 lakhs	10 lakhs
11.	do Black	1.5 lakhs	6 lakhs	9 lakhs
12.	Tapping shade	1.3 lakhs		
13.	Sopkot	4.8 MT	3.2 MT	2 MT
14.	Emissan	135 kg	400 kg	2000 kg
15.	Paranitrophynol	230 kg	625 kg	450 kg
16.	Sieves-wooden	2411 nos	2675 nos	430 nos
	do -10" Aln	--	1200 nos	2400 nos
	do -12"Aln	--	800 nos	3900 nos
17.	Tapping Knives	--	2600 "	4200 "
18.	Sub soil water injector	--	59 "	--
19.	P.Girdle	--	40,000 "	50000 "
20.	Sprayer	--	--	500 nos
21.	Head light	--	3000 nos	400 nos
22.	Template	--	--	5000 nos

* Part of the material has already been issued.

supplied to the societies by the Board. The Board has selected professional chartered accountants to train the office bearers of the RPSs regarding the keeping of accounts and to audit their accounts. 4 Superintendents/ Asst.Superintendents also have been posted by the Board in 4 different zones to visit the RPSs periodically and assess how they perform to achieve the laid out objectives. Based on their inspection reports, the RPSs are given instructions to rectify defects, if any, in their working.

To enhance credibility of the RPSs, the Board has already initiated steps to promote group new planting and replanting of rubber by their members by

organising steps like collective filling and submission of applications, engaging common surveyor for preparing survey plans jointly procuring or preparing poly bagged seedlings for planting, organising joint field inspections with the help of RPS, distribution of subsidy cheques to growers at special meetings convened by RPSs etc. Selected RPSs are encouraged to raise polybag nurseries for which polybags are given free to the RPSs, while budded stumps are supplied at half cost for planting in the polybags. This programme has helped rural growers to learn correct techniques of polybagging. Easy availability of high quality polybagged planting materials with RPSs has also helped to check the

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price rise of polybagged plants in the open market.

Another demonstrated advantage of the RPS was convincingly proved at the Rain guarding campaign held in 1989 and the One lakh tappers training Campaign held in 1990. The message of rain guarding has been well driven home to the small growers, which is testified by the huge response for this programme in 1990. This year over 40,000 hectares of rubber plantations under the small holding sector have been rain guarded. The Tappers training campaign of 1990 also has been a very successful exercise in disseminating the correct techniques of tapping among rubber tappers of small holdings. Such grass root level exercises met with real success, because the Board had the added advantage of the existence of the strong base net work of RPSs at the village level, which played a key-role in joining hands with the Board for organising these campaigns. These exercises were clear instances of

peoples participation in development and resultant change.

Obviously impressed by the potential of the RPSs in managing rural change, the Institute of Rural Management (IRMA) under the National Diary Development Board at Anand volunteered to depute scholars to study about the unique features of RPSs as they consider the example of RPSs as "Something bigger than the Amul experiment with milk producers". Three IRMA scholars are right now in Kerala and are conducting a three-month long study on the strength and weakness of the RPS model. The Board is extending all assistance to these scholars, including financial, to hold this study. The outcome of the study would be utilised to strengthen the movement.

Constant communication with the office bearers and members of the RPSs in the form of personalised letters from the Chairman himself has been yet another strategy followed by the Board to ensure that the beneficiaries are taken into

confidence on every programme of small holder development.

The movement has proved beyond doubt that for ensuring agricultural change in rural economies group approach is the best for transfer of technology and motivation of farmers. This is easily accomplished because the Board has time and again reminded the organisers and office bearers of RPSs that it is "a non profit, non-political, secular, democratic, socialist fraternity of the growers, for the growers and by the growers". Most of the RPSs have lived up to expectation.

The movement is not fool-proof. Bottlenecks have to be identified and corrective step taken to see that the movement comes to stay and survives the impediments in its course. This could be ensured as rightly observed by the Chairman, Rubber Board, if only those who are at the helm "never distance themselves from the beneficiaries of the programme, maintain intimate communication with them and steer clear with a high degree of dedication and sense of direction".

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