

Sociological Perspectives of Casuarinas Cultivation in Livelihood Security of Marginal Farmers in Tamil Nadu, India

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Abstract

Casuarina was introduced into India to meet the demand of firewood for steam locomotives during the last century. It has been socially accepted as an important fuelwood species in the peninsular India. In Tamil Nadu State, it has adopted as a cash crop by farmers particularly in the coastal areas. It has high marketability as fuel wood, scaffolding in the construction industry and pulpwood for paper industry. Being a multipurpose species its services also include salt tolerance, drought resistance, ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen in symbiotic association with Frankia and sand dune stabilization. The stem form, crown and branch characteristics are highly suitable for shelterbelts and windbreaks in agroforestry systems. In the State of Tamil Nadu (Latitude: 11° 00' N, Longitude: 78° 00' E) the land holding distribution is skewed towards small and marginal farmers. Even though the small and marginal farmers occupied a major share of more than 90 per cent of the total land holdings, they were operating only about 55 per cent of the total area and the average size of holding was very meager at 0.37 hectare. However, Tamilnadu is the one of the pioneering states in adopting casuarinas in the Agroforestry systems, primarily to maximize the profits and to reduce the labour intensive agriculture crop. Due to the rapid adoption of tree cultivation in the farm lands drastically restricted the farm employment opportunities of the rural poor and disadvantaged. The technically and economically viable tree growing innovations are remotely benefitted marginal farmers over the years. On the other hand the landless and "socially disadvantaged" marginal farmers as traditional farm laborers forced to leave the native villages in search of wage employment to unfamiliar sub urban and urban areas, which involve many costs and risks. The subsistence oriented innovative technologies are required to be incorporated in the farm forestry programmes with special focus on household forestry schemes and also in common property management for the better social progress.