



Opportunities and Constraints Faced by the Rural Shital Pati Weaver for Sustainable Livelihood

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author BM designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors TKD, VS, KD and AA managed the analyses of the study. Authors KP and BG managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The migration of villagers is very much predominant in developing country like India in search of the remunerative enterprise. At present, many farmers are not satisfied with their agriculture production. The villagers struggle to get rid of subsistence livelihood. The shital pati / cool mat weaving is to be one of the potential enterprises for sustainable livelihood generation in the Cooch Behar district of West Bengal. In this perspective, the study was conducted in Dholuabari, Deochorai, Barokodali, Dhalpal villages of Cooch Behar district in West Bengal in December 2019 to January 2020 know the perception of cool mat weaver related to cool mat weaving entrepreneurship. Randomly 100 respondents who were engaged in cool mat production were selected for the study, and from each village 25, of respondents are taken. An interview schedule was designed to collect the primary information where secondary data were collected from panchayat pradhan, mediators, literature, research papers and internet. The study revealed that many farmers were engaged in this enterprise to get more remuneration from secondary agriculture and thereby improve their socio-economic status in a sustainable way.

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1. INTRODUCTION

'Murta' (*Clinogynedichotoma*, family-reed) a plant which naturally arises and cultivated by the growers for making cool mat or *shital pati*. *Shital Pati* or shital mats (cool mats) render a feeling of coolness (thus rendering the name 'Shital' or 'Sheetal') to the person sitting or sleeping on it and are intimately linked with everyday rural life [1]. Geographically *Murta* is distributed in Bangladesh, West Bengal, Assam, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Peninsular Malaysia, Borneo and the Philippines [2] In India, it is found in riverside areas like Majuli island in Assam, and in Bangladesh, the plant is found mainly in the swamp forests of Sylhet [3,4]. Hand-weaving mat is a common exercise in countries such as India, China, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan and are then taken to other countries for selling purpose [5,6]. *Murta* is the main ingredient in mat weaving. The cool mat is locally called as *shital pati* in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal in India. The making or production of *shital pati* is purely household entrepreneurship. It can be used for multi-purpose work, and the ancient people used to make different items in all round the years. According to the *shital pati* makers, the art of making cool mat was started for a long time back in the district, and in some family, it became a tradition. It was said that the art of making cool mat initially was considered auspicious regarding the rituals and religious purposes in Barak Valley. Donate cool mat in Hindu marriage is ritual or tradition since a long time back and still going on. Generally, *Murta* grows on marshy or waterlogged areas or damp hill slopes. [7] Reported that the minor forest resources provide the entrepreneur's raw materials to produce broom (Jarua) cane mats (*shital pati*), cane hats (traditionally called 'japi') etc. There is two common variety observed in this area or a nearby state. 'Khag' (local cane variety) is one of the varieties which have no joints or internodes in the plant, but there is another variety which has joints or internodes in the plant.

While making a cool mat, actually men carry *murta* from the field to their houses or working area then prepare the cane slips cutting, where women do the weaving work. Many of the artisans engaged in this craft in different parts of Northeastern states especially Assam and Bengal and various parts of India. Many places in Cooch Behar district the people are engaged in this activity. *Murta* plant is the primary material

for mat weaving. Besides different types of mat, people make other items viz., baskets, wall hangings, file covers, bags, pen stands and various other novelty items. These mats are intimately connected with the everyday needs and also with the culture and tradition of this region [8]. *Shital Pati* is considered auspicious regarding the rituals and religious purposes in Barak Valley [9]. The role of women workers is very significant in the handicrafts industry as 90 per cent of workers in *Shital pati* and *Madur* industry are female workers [10]. It is seen that most of the family in some parts of the district are dependent on this activity for his/her livelihood sustainability. It is homely made activity and it does not require any specific or larger space to run the activity, and it can be done during the rainy season also if the material (*murta*) is available. The *murta* grower is facing several health-related problems during their *murta* growing and *shital pati* making like eyesight problem, fear of bite snake when collected raw *murta*, skin disease etc. Lack of awareness is among the workers is one of the most severe vital serious issues to develop MSDs and other health-related issues. Awareness programs and local group discussions are essential for improving the health status and occupational awareness among the weavers. There should be proper lighting at the place of work so that eye strain can be minimized. The proper medical check-up should be conducted by the government for the workers from time to time to minimize occupational health risk factors [11]. At present, the emerging use of plastic causes more significant harm to our society as well as environment to more sustainable extent. However, the people were of it but did not care for it. The entrepreneurship cool mat weaving need to be the focus because it is sustainable, economically and sociable viable, suitable for the environment now a days. The study was conducted to assess the livelihood opportunity through the value-added product of *murta*, the sustainability of the enterprise, success story related to the economic profitability of cool mat enterprise.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted four villages namely Dholuabari, Deochorai, Barokodali, Dhalpal of Cooch Behar district of West Bengal in December 2019 to January 2020. Randomly 100 no. of respondent who is engaged in *shital pati* making entrepreneurship are selected as



Fig. 1. Weaving of shital pati by housewife

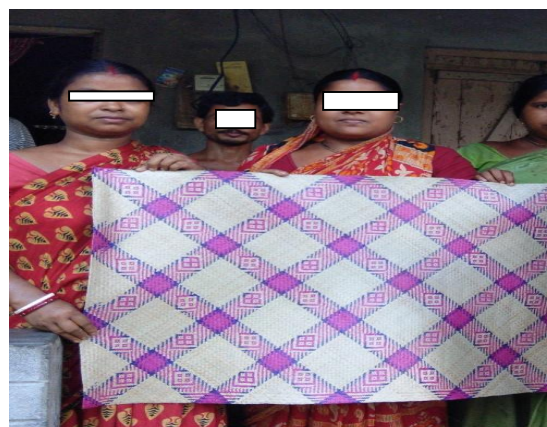


Fig. 2. Prepared jamdani pati by weaver

respondents for the study and from each village, 25 respondents are taken. An exhaustive list was prepared of *shital pati* making weavers with the help of Cooch Behar KVK professionals. The study area is mainly dominated by different community. Data were collected with the help of a semi-structured interview schedule through personal interview and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) method to generate primary and secondary information related to the study. The collected data were analyzed with the help of statistical tools like frequency, percentage and ranking. The data were interpreted in tabular form.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Received Training

In the study, it was found that majority of the weaver has not received any training on it. Because they learned the technique of cool mat weaving from their parent, grandfather and neighbours. Now a day, in various places, many micro teaching centres were established and every block conducting training in this entrepreneurship development, but it was seen that 85% of the participants were young aged person/lady. Old aged weavers thought that the need for professional training is required as the knowledge or skill related to cool mat enterprise had been acquired from parents or grandparents.

3.2 Previous Occupation

It was found that the majority of the respondent engaged in this activity since from their childhood

which they had learned from their parent. It was also observed that some of the mat weavers were cultivated rice only for home consumption but not for commercial purpose.

3.3 Income

During the study, it was found that the size of the mat defined the price of the product. The producers or weavers make the mat in different sizes i.e. 5 x7 foot, 6x7 foot and 3x 6 foot. The price of the normal *shital pati* ranges from Rs. 450/- to Rs. 550/-. The *shital pati* having the size of 5 x7 foot is considered as a standard size and has more demand in the market compared to the other size of the mat. The cost of 5 x7 foot size mat is Rs. 750/- and it takes 14hours to make the mat by the weaver or producer. Whereas the cost of mat size of 3 x 6 foot is Rs. 500/- only.

In the survey, an average size (5 x7 foot or 6 x7 foot) of *mat* which is sold by the producer to the distributor is cost around Rs. 500/- and the distributors sell it to the middlemen at Rs. 750/-. The middlemen again sell it outside the state at an average price of Rs. 2000/- or more.

3.4 Marketing Channel

The distribution of marketing channel of handicraft products, especially in *shital pati* is not in proper shape. Three categories of the agency are associated in this marketing process. The first category collects the *mat* from the doorstep of the producer at a cheaper rate. After collection of *mat* from the producer, the first agency will sell the product to the other agency that has financial stronger than first one. Moreover, the second

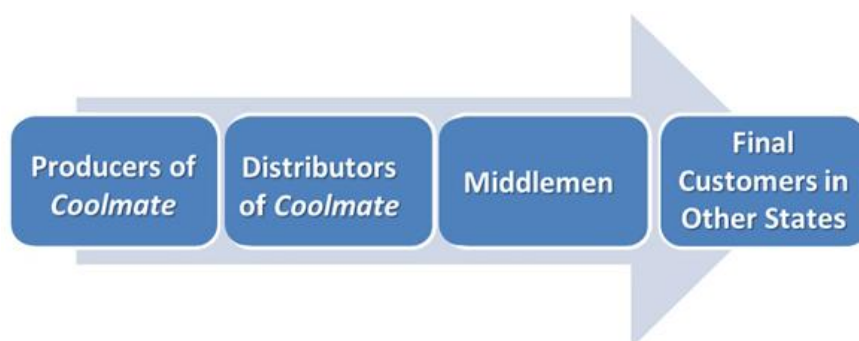


Fig. 3. Marketing channel of cool mate /Shital pati in Cooch Behar

agency was act as distributors of the products. The third party is the middlemen which exist in all system. The other party or distributor will again sales the products to the middleman with some margin at the weekly or daily local market. The middlemen will sell the products to outside the state in a higher rate. It has good demand in South India and even in foreign countries. Thus, an entire process, the middleman earned maximum benefits with minimum investment, time and human resources. In someplace, it was also seen that when the producer had many nos. of mat to sale, then he/she used to sell the

product directly to the other party in the local market instead of selling it to the first party.

3.5 Value Addition

The value addition of pati is widespread instance among the entrepreneurs when there is assure demand in remunerative prices. The value addition process helps in decoration of cool mat. For this reason, many of the weavers are not interested in value-added product development.

Table 1. Ranking of constraint faced by the entrepreneur

Sl. no.	Problems	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
1.	It is time consuming and laborious activity.	60	60%	VII
2.	Expected benefits were not obtained from the product.	78	78%	I
3.	The women workers engaged in the entrepreneurship suffer from back pain, eye problems and spondylitis.	58	58%	VIII
4.	It required land for cultivation. For weaving of cool mat the landless weavers buy the <i>murta</i> or slips from the outside or market.	70	70%	IV
5.	No established market is available in the rural areas where they can get satisfied price.	65	65%	V
6.	The met weavers are still practising this activity manually. There is no modern technology was developed for the mat weaver. At present, inferior technology is affecting their production both in quality and quantity in competitiveness market.	62	62%	VI
7.	Popularization and reduced at the price of plastic in the market giving threat to the cool mat weaver in the handicraft industry.	76	76%	II
8.	The network for credit facility by the financial institution to the micro and handicrafts sector is inferior.	73	73%	III

3.6 Communication Enhancement

The development of successful entrepreneurship requires good knowledge of production aspect, marketing aspect and professional skill. It also develops the communication network for product and marketing of entrepreneur product through the establishment of linkage among the middleman, buyer, marketing personnel, govt.: official and agencies.

3.7 Attitude towards Enterprises

It has been found that the weavers are quite satisfied with their cool mat enterprise. The plausible reason behind this may be that they can prepare the cool mats within their house premises, which not only saves their time but also helps them manage their various essential household activities. Moreover, they can engage their children in some activities related to cool mat preparation. This reasons motivate the mat producers developed a favourable attitude towards the enterprise.

3.8 Occupation Diversification

The Muslim community also perceives the interest towards this enterprise as it is less labour intensive, and the family members can also be utilized.

3.9 Constraints

Various constraints are faced by the rural cool mat/ shital pati weaver during the weaving of cool mat/ shital pati. Some of the constraints are listed below and it was ranked according to their problem faced by the weaver.

The prior problem associated with this enterprise is the nonrealization of expected benefits followed by less popularity of cool mate due to plastic mat and unavailability of the credit network.

4. CONCLUSION

It was found that day by day, many individuals are involving in these enterprises for income generation. Government need to focus in this entrepreneurship seriously in the promotion and popularizing the activity because it is economical, sustainable, environmentally viable and pollution-free whereas now a day's emerging plastic materials were causing pollution to our

environment significantly. Improvement in infrastructural facilities, development in entrepreneurship qualities, adequate institutional credit support and use of modern technology in the industry would ensure the long-term growth of the entrepreneurship.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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