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Does Community Forest (CF) Program able to Reduce Rural Poverty in the Central Dry Zone (CDZ) in the Transition of Rural Livelihood in Myanmar?

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Abstract

The Community Forest (CF) Program was established in Myanmar in 1995 to reduce deforestation and address rural poverty. The Central Dry Zone (CDZ) is occupied 43% of the total CF area in Myanmar, while the diversification of rural livelihood is a common phenomenon due to unfavorable climatic conditions. The research was conducted in Nint Kyat Khwe village, located in the Mandalay region, where farm activities are one of the major livelihoods. This research aimed to examine the livelihood strategies of CF members and non-CF members and to explore the implication of CF on people's livelihood strategies in the transition of rural livelihood portfolios. A total of 189 households were surveyed. Three focus group discussions and two key informant interviews were conducted from February to March 2022 to collect sources of income, credit availabilities, demographic data, and five livelihood assets of households. For statistical analysis, a t-test was used to compare livelihood strategies, sources of income, and five livelihood assets between CF members and non-CF members. Then multilinear regression was used to examine the relationship between the diversification of non-farm activities of households and the livelihood asset of households. The livelihood diversification of local people was analyzed through sources of household income. The result found seven sources of income: dry land agriculture, small-scale livestock, toddy palm sugar production, casual labor (farm and non-farm), small business, non-farm employment, and remittance. Then, occupational diversity was classed as farm (agriculture, livestock), off-farm (toddy palm sugar production, casual farm labor), and non-farm (remittance, small business, non-farm employment). By applying the t-test, 58% of non-CF members pursued non-farm activities, while 34% of CF members undertook it at $p<0.01$. Farms contribute 44% of CF members' total gross household income, while farm income is contributed to 37% of non-CF member households' total income at $p<0.05$. Then, non-farm activities pursued by CF member households (0.5 ± 0.8) are significantly lower than the non-CF member (1.0 ± 1.0) at $p<0.05$. The relationship between livelihood assets and non-farm livelihood diversification was analyzed by multilinear regression. Natural assets of households have a negative relationship with non-farm livelihood diversification, while social and human assets have a positive relationship with livelihood diversification. Although CF could not provide immediate benefits from the forest to local people's livelihood, it provided secure land tenure and cultivation land for its members, thereby increasing the natural asset of CF members. The increased education and social networking extend to enable higher income generating of non-agricultural opportunities for local people. In conclusion, CF members are less diversified than non-CF members due to limited livelihood assets. Diversifying into non-farm activities is a coping strategy for rural people with better education and social networks in CDZ. Thus, CF is essential for the livelihood of the agricultural land-less vulnerable family who cannot access higher-income generating non-farm activities.

Keywords: Livelihood diversification, Migration, Community forest, Livelihood assets

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