

PARTICIPATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT: A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Forest resources are of great importance to the people residing in the vicinity of the forest areas as it provides means of livelihood and is deeply associated with socio-economic life of rural communities. More than 80% of geographical area of Sikkim state is cover by forest and it provides an important source of livelihood. In Sikkim, rural women play a vital role in sharing the household responsibilities and enjoy a significant position both in society and at home, but being a patriarchal form of society, land ownership has remained matter of concern. To examine the participation of rural women in JFM and their attitude towards forest and forest related activities, primary data was collected through household survey and focused group discussion was also conducted. The finding indicates that growing restriction on the traditional rights of women to access the forest resources has had an adverse impact on the livelihood of rural women. It has been found that during the plantation programme, women groups outnumbered the male population, which reflects that women are more involved in subsistence activities and value the conservation of forest resources. The study shows that despite the importance of women's role in forest management, i.e., JFMC, they have been marginalized.

Key words: Rural women, Livelihood, NTFPs, JFM, Sikkim.

Introduction

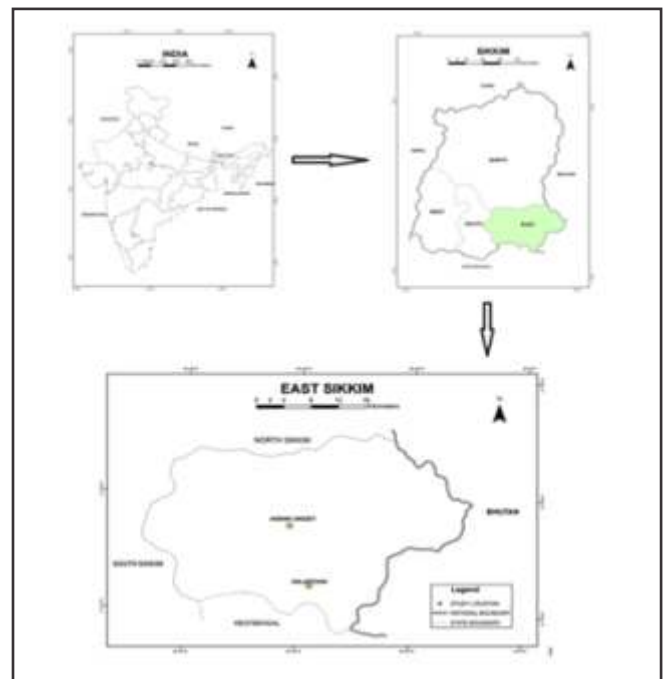
The Himalayan Region with physical remoteness forest provides the only reliable source for means of livelihood to the rural people. The growing population pressure and unsustainable harvest practice has been major responsible for declining forest cover. To check and to maintain the sustainability of forest the Government of India encourage participation of people in management of forest by introducing Joint Forest Management (JFM) programme. Sikkim being forestry state where forest land constitutes 82.31% of state geographical area and Join Forest Management Committee (JFMC) is actively function in all the villages. In Sikkim compared with other mainstream states, women play a significant role in both social and cultural affair, but Sikkim being a deeply entrenched patriarchal society, women's rights on land ownership have remained a matter of concern. The limited ownership on land, forced them to rely heavily on the existence of communally owned resources like forest. In this context, the proposed study accesses the role of rural women in forest management activities and decision making in JFM.

Material and Methods

Study area

The study area confines to the East district of Sikkim

with special reference to the two selected villages *i.e.* Assam Lingzey and Dalapchan. In East district (Fig.1), the area covered by forest is largely reserved forest restricts the local people access to forest resources. Further with



Source: Earth Explorer-United State Geological Survey (USGS)

Fig. 1: Location map of the study area.

The study site indicate that despite the importance of women's role in forest management, they have been marginalized.

the implication of JFM on common forest such as *Khasmal* and *Ghorucharan* type of forest, has raised the question on local's rights on access to common forest. These two villages were selected on the basis of active functioning of JFM within the district and JFMC of both the villages are pioneer in the implementation of JFM in village level.

Data base and methodology

The present study was based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. For creating the database the study utilize both primary and secondary data. The primary source of information was recorded from the study sites through household surveys using interview schedules (semi structured interview and open ended interviews) and focused group discussion. An interview schedule was conducted among the rural women to identify their socio-economic condition and importance of NTFPs in their daily lives. The perception, involvement, and attitude towards forest protection based on gender and caste was studied by (Ostwald and Baral, 2000). Similar study was carried out among the Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC) members about their perception, involvement, and attitude towards forest protection and JFM activities through Focused group discussion (Table 5).

The primary data was collected using household and interview survey to identify the livelihood pattern and role of rural women in social and institutional level. From

both the villages, 45 households consisting of JFMC members and non-members were selected for household survey. The secondary data was collected through government surveys, reports, published and unpublished data of government to identify the degree of rural women participation in JFMC and the policy adopted in their favour.

Results and Discussion

The present study aimed at getting deeper insight of Livelihood structure of rural women in relation with forest resources and their inclusion and exclusion in JFMC system.

Socio-economic profile of respondent

Different socio-economic factors were taken into consideration such as family structure, educational level, occupation, community type, types of fuel wood and others to articulate the socio-economic condition of the respondents (Table 1).

In both the villages, most of the rural women were directly involved in farming activities and only a few involved in non-farming activities such as daily wage jobs, small business, government services and others for livelihood purpose. The low level of education attained by the rural women was the possible reason behind large unemployed status among the respondents. The unemployed status of rural women clearly shows the high

Table 1: Socio-economic profile of the respondent.

Variables	Assam lingzey	Dalapchan	Frequency	%
Age (yrs.)				
<30	12	11	23	25.55
30-50	22	20	42	46.66
>50	11	14	25	27.77
Educational qualification				
No formal education	10	14	22	24.44
Primary	15	19	35	38.88
Secondary	13	11	25	27.77
Higher secondary	5	1	6	6.66
Graduation	2	0	2	2.22
Occupation				
Farming	22	27	49	54.44
Small business	7	4	11	12.22
Daily wage workers	8	12	20	22.22
Industry	3	0	3	3.33
Government service	4	0	4	4.44
Handicrafts	0	0	0	0.00
Others	1	2	3	3.33
Type of fuelwood				
Wood	8	24	32	35.55
LPG	3	1	4	4.44
Wood + LPG	34	20	54	60.00
Kerosene	0	0	0	0.00

Source: Field survey, 2013

dependency on subsistence agriculture and forestry activities to meet the basic household needs. It is indicated that women form majority of the labour force in forest based and household enterprises as such activities help women to earn supplementary income for the household needs (Hasalkar and Jadhav, 2004). Indeed a lot of studies (Hasalkar and Jadhav, 2004; Dasgupta *et al.*, 2006 and Awono *et al.*, 2010) highlight the importance of NTFPs to rural women, to support family economically and contribute to household food security. A number of studies reported that women spend more time in collecting firewood, the growing scarcity has force them to travel long distance increasing the time burden on women (Basik, 2012 and Bose, 2011 in (De *et al.*, 2016) and Waris *et al.*, 2014). The study revealed that 60 per cent of the household possess an LPG connection. But when it comes to utilization, more than 90 per cent of the household prefer firewood as main source of cooking fuel, often due to the fact that facility of refilling the cylinders is not easily available and is expensive. Sikkim being a patriarchal form of society traditionally women are restricts from land ownership and benefit sharing from agriculture production. Studies have revealed that restrictions and limited ownership on land has forced rural women to rely more on common resources such as forest resources (Gausset *et al.*, 2005; Oyerinde *et al.*, 2010 and Giri, 2012). However, the regulations on traditional rights to access forest resources have adverse impact on the livelihood of women.

Participation of rural women in JFM

The National Forest Policy of 1988, clearly mention that women should be involved in achieving JFM policy goals and also recognized women as a distinct social group in forestry, as such making available the increased quantities of fuel wood and fodder, benefiting the rural women (Benjamin, 2010 and Vemuri, 2008).

The finding showed that the male member has outnumbered the female members in both JFMC (Table 2).

Table 2: Participation of female and male JFMC members in Assam Lingzey and Dalapchan.

JFMC	Executive body		General body		Frequency		%	
	A	D	A	D	A	D	A	D
Female	3	3	13	19	16	22	19.27	23.65
Male	5	7	62	64	67	71	80.72	76.34

Source: Field survey, 2013.

Note: A=Assam Lingzey and D=Dalapchan

Table 3: Meetings attended by women members.

Meeting	Assam lingzey	Dalapchan	Frequency	%
Regular	5	4	9	45.00
Non-regular	5	6	11	55.00

Source: Field survey, 2013

It is found that 75 per cent of the respondents agreed that JFMC is male dominated institution, five per cent shows disagreement to the statement and 20 per cent remained neutral. JFM as a community is seen as an institution of male hegemony primarily because of the patriarchal mindset which sees forest as men's domain. The women group strongly agrees that they could have more voice, if there were more women member in JFMC. They say, if more women were included in executive body of JFMC, their voices will be heard and encourage more participation of rural women in different forest related activities.

Participation of rural women member in JFM meeting

The meetings conducted by the JFMC and the issue discussed in the meetings have a positive impact on the socio-economic structure of the locals. To examine the participation of women members in the JFMC meetings, the respondents were divided into two groups on the basis of their attendance in the meetings 1) Regular and 2) Non-Regular (Table 3).

Table 3 shows 45 per cent women members attend the meetings regularly and 55 per cent are non-regular. In this regard, they stated that various factor are responsible for their irregularity, such as- they are not informed regarding the meeting, household chores, male member of family attends, meetings are held in distance place, odd timings and few stated that topic discuss in the meetings are not relevant to them. Majority of the respondents from Assam Lingzey (91%) and Dalapchan (60%), reject the statement that the committees discuss issues related to women. However, male members of JFMC remained vocal that the issue discuss in the meetings are without being gender biased mostly related to forest. Contrary to this, the women respondents argue that preferences are given to the activities, on which male members keep more interest.

The meeting attended by non-women members is irregular in nature *i.e.* in Assam Lingzey (60%) and in

Table 4: Meetings attended by non-members women.

Meeting attended	Assam lingzey	%	Dalapchan	%	Total frequency	%
Yes	21	60	16	45.71	37	52.85
No	14	40	19	54.28	33	47.14

Source: Field survey, 2013

Dalapchan (46%). Both JFMC members expressed that women are encouraged to participate in JFM activities and meetings but due to their shy nature, household chores and long distance their involvement are restricted (Table 4).

Significantly, studies have revealed that gender disparity in JFM, which claim to be unbiased, represent men as an active sender and restricting the role of women as passive receiver, drives strength from the existing patriarchal practice, centres women on domestic sphere by excluding and restricting their involvement in forest management decision making forums (Moitra, 1996 in Sarker *et al.*, 2002 and Maksimowski, 2011). The patriarchal mindset has restricted the active involvement of women in decision making and disregards their opinion in JFM meetings.

Focused group discussion method used to determine the importance of forest resources to both rural women and men present in the discussion to evaluate their involvement and attitude towards JFM programme.

The dependency and collection of forest resources and crops grown in the forest varies between women to men. The survey result showed the items collected by rural women from forest were mainly mushroom, fern, bamboo shoot, *nakima* (local name), honey, banana, *sisnu* (local name), and other wild edibles which they mainly collect for household consumption. The surpluses gathered are sold to middle women and some they vend in local market. But the collection and sale of broom and cardamom is mainly carried out by men, which also has high demand in the market. It was evident from the above discussion that

women prefer NTFPs which enhance their livelihood whereas men merely focus on the commercial purpose. The involvement of rural women was medium in JFM meetings, high in plantation programme and low in decision making. On the contrary, men involvement was low in plantation and medium in decision making and meetings. Both women and men showed low involvement in voting process. The perception of rural women and men towards the function and activities of the JFM is low to medium. The lack of awareness, training and information among the locals, they see JFM merely as a body, overshadowed by the people who have voice and power.

Conclusion

Rural women completely depend on forest for subsistence livelihood and value the conservation of forest resources. However, the growing restriction on traditional rights to access the common forest has lead to negative implication on women's role in achieving household food security. Further, the low representation of women in JFMC has restricted their degree of influence on forest management policies and decision making. Women respondents of both the village believe that with the increase in women members in JFMCs their voice will be heard and their interest and knowledge regarding forest conservation will be taken into consideration. The unawareness of the JFMC activities among majority of the respondents signifies the ignorance of JFM towards women and forest related issue, whose inclusion is considered as fundamental in the framework of Government of India.

Table 5: Dependency, Involvement and Perspective towards Forest and JFM Activities.

Dependency			Involvement			Perspective		
Variables	Female	Male	Variables	Female	Male	Variables	Female	Male
Fuel wood	High	Medium	Guarding	High	High	JFMC Function	Medium	Medium
Timber	Medium	High	Meeting	Medium	Medium	Meeting	Low	Low
Fodder	High	High	Plantation	High	Low	Plantation Programme	Medium	Medium
Leaves	High	Medium	Voting	Low	Low	Involvement of Women	Low	low
Water	High	High	Decision-Making	Low	Medium	Information Sharing	Low	Low
Fruits	Medium	Low						
Medicine	Medium	Medium						
Food	Medium	Low						
Broom	High	High						
Bamboo	Medium	High						

Source: Field survey, 2013

संयुक्त वन प्रबंध में ग्रामीण महिलाओं की सहभागिता : पोषणीय विकास के लिए एक रणनीति

कर्मा डेटसन भूटिया और राजू डेबर्मा

सारांश

वन क्षेत्रों के समीप निवास कर रहे लोगों के लिए वन संसाधन अत्यधिक महत्व के हैं क्योंकि ये आजीविका के साधन उपलब्ध कराते हैं और ग्रामीण समुदायों के सामाजिक-आर्थिक जीवन से घनिष्ठ रूप से जुड़े हैं। सिक्किम राज्य का 80 प्रतिशत से अधिक भाग वनों से ढका है और यह आजीविका का एक महत्वपूर्ण स्रोत उपलब्ध कराता है। सिक्किम में ग्रामीण महिलाएं पारिवारिक उत्तरदायित्वों को बांटने में एक अहम भूमिका अदा करती हैं और समाज तथा घर दोनों जगह इनका एक महत्वपूर्ण स्थान है किन्तु पितृसत्तात्मक समाज होने के नाते भू स्वामित्व चिन्ता का विषय रहा है। संयुक्त वन प्रबंध में ग्रामीण महिलाओं की सहभागिता और वनों के प्रति उनके दृष्टिकोण तथा वन सम्बन्धित कार्यकलापों की जांच करने के लिए परिवार सर्वेक्षण के जरिए प्राथमिक आँकड़े एकत्र किए गए और केन्द्रित समूह विचार विमर्श भी आयोजित किया गया। परिणाम दर्शाते हैं कि गैर-प्रकाष्ठ वन उपज में पहुंच बनाने के लिए महिलाओं के पारम्परिक अधिकारों पर प्रतिबन्ध का ग्रामीण महिलाओं की आजीविका पर प्रतिकूल प्रभाव पड़ा। यह पाया गया कि रोपण कार्यक्रम के दौरान महिला समूह पुरुष आबादी से संख्या में अधिक था, जो दर्शाता है कि महिलाएं जीवन-निर्वाह कार्यकलापों में ज्यादा शामिल हैं और वन संसाधनों के संरक्षण के महत्व को समझती हैं। अध्ययन दर्शाता है कि वन प्रबंध, यथा- जे एफ एम सी. में महिलाओं की भूमिका के महत्व के बावजूद इन्हें हाशिये पर रखा गया है।

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