

Role of Women's' in Conservation and Sustainable Natural Resource Management in Chhattisgarh

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Abstract:

The local user communities are responsible for the control, protection and management of the forests. Joint forest management advocates strong community participation, bottom up planning and sustainable use of forest resources. Women are also the active users and members of most of the community forests. There are about 560 women user groups in state. Thus, women are providing an important role in sustainable development of community forests. However, their role is neither properly identified nor explored. This paper explores and analyzes women's role in development and conservation of forest for its sustainable development. It also highlights the constraints on maximum female participation in community forestry and focuses on possible ways for solving the problems faced by women in community forestry. Present study had been conducted in four villages of central Chhattisgarh. Out of these villages two villages which belong to Raigarh District are having good forest cover and remaining two villages have less than 5% forest cover belong to Janjgeer District. To formulate a systematic approach for studying about women's participation an elaborate exercise was taken for data collection. For the purpose socio economic survey of the villagers was conducted. A pre designed questionnaire along with PRA, RRA methods were used for primary data collection.

Keywords: *Community Forestry, Women Participation, Sustainable Development*

1. INTRODUCTION

To Arrest forest degradation and rehabilitation of degraded forests the Government of India issued guidelines on June 1, 1990 regarding joint forest management (JFM) stating that JFM programme should be implemented under an arrangement between voluntary agency, the village community (beneficiaries) and the forest department (FD).

Thus JFM is one of the recognized organizational systems to regenerate forest resources, meeting local needs of people and sharing expected benefits. Under the system the local user communities are responsible for the control, protection and management of the forests.

Joint forest management advocates strong community participation, bottom up planning and sustainable use of forest resources. Women are also the active users and members of most of the community forests. There are about 560 women user groups. Thus, women are providing an important role in sustainable development of community forests. However, their role is neither properly identified nor explored. This paper explores and analyzes women's role in development and conservation of forest for its sustainable development. It also highlights the constraints on maximum female participation in community forestry and focuses on possible ways for solving the problems faced by women in community forestry.

2. STUDY SITE

Present study had been conducted in four villages of central Chhattisgarh. Out of these villages two villages which belong to Raigarh District are having good forest cover and remaining two villages have less than 5% forest cover belong to Janjgeer District.

Raigarh forest division lies in the eastern part of Chhattisgarh state. Division is endowed with good Sal and mixed forest. About 42% of the land area of the division is under forest cover. In five ranges of the division about 356 forest committees have been formed under participatory management

practices. Villages forest committees namely *Charmar* and *Katangdih* under Gharaghoda range of Raigarh forest division, Chhattisgarh have been selected for study.

Janjgeer was one of the area of central Chhattisgarh that were severely drought-affected for several years. Only 4.2% of the land area of the division is under forest cover. In the division 66 forest committees have been formed under participatory management practices. Villages forest committee namely *Amlipali* and *Pakariya* forest committees have been selected for study.

3. METHODOLOGY

To formulate a systematic approach for studying about women’s participation an elaborate exercise was taken for data collection. For the purpose socio economic survey of the villagers was conducted. A pre designed question ire along with PRA, RRA methods were used for primary data collection.

4. OBSERVATION & DISCUSSION

A total 38 selected households were surveyed in four villages which is about the 10 % of total 375 household. As in JFM committee one male and one female from all village houses are members of the committee so woman representation is from all the 375 households.

Table 1. Socio Economic Description of Study site

Villages	Division	Forest Cover	Total Houses	No. Of women JFM members	Literacy %
<i>Charmar</i>	Raigarh	42%	110	110	50%
<i>Katangdih</i>	Raigarh	42%	120	120	30%
<i>Amlipali</i>	Janjgeer	4.2%	130	130	54%
<i>Pakariya</i>	Janjgeer	4.2%	110	110	62%
Total			375	375	

Results of socio economic survey have revealed that main occupation of the villagers is farming. In these village families who are having good land holdings agriculture is the chief occupation. While families who are land less and having land holding less than 1 acre mostly work as agriculture labor during the monsoon season. This paper explores and analyzes women's role in development and conservation of forest for its sustainable development. It also highlights the constraints on maximum female participation in community forestry and focuses on possible ways for solving the problems faced by women in community forestry.

Table 2. Participation in JFM

Villages	Knowledge about JFM(%)		Collection of forest produces		Participation in Forest Protection & devp.		Knowledge about forest law	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<i>Charmar</i>	70	30	100	-	65	35	05	95
<i>Katangdih</i>	75	25	100	-	70	30	12	88
<i>Amlipali</i>	45	55	70	40	45	55	05	95
<i>Pakariya</i>	30	70	75	52	15	85	05	95

It has been observed that in areas where forest cover is good as in *Charmar* and *Katangdih* women are better knowing about joint forest management programme. 70% women in Charmar and 75% woman in Katangdih are showing awareness while they are showing their 100% dependency (Table 2) over forest for collection of fuel , fodder and other forest produces like Mahua, Tendupatta, Chirongi, Sal seed etc. Which supports their earning during the agriculture lean period. women do about 75 percent of the marketing of mushrooms, fruits and mahua flowers; vi) gum collection from Gujarat forests is generally done by women (Tewari and Campbell, 1995; Nanavaty, 1996). The women collect large quantities of NTFPs from forests.

Collected records shows that in these areas woman are also active in forest protection and development in *Charmar* 65% and in *Katangdih* 70 % (Table 2) women have given positive response for forest production.

In Janjgeer forest division where only 4.2% forest cover is there (Table-1) women's participation in JFM is also meagre (Table-2). Though 75% women of Pakariya and 70% of Amlipali collect their fuel requirement from surrounding forest areas. During the PRA it has been noticed that women of these areas are very keen to raise trees in their private land. Though their response about forest protection was very poor Amlipali 45% Pakariya 15% (Table -2).

5. CONCLUSION

The close association between women and natural resources is than valid primarily in rural context especially among women of rural areas. For such women the association exists because of their social and economic role which over generations have required them to provide food, water, fuel, fodder and income from surroundings resource base(Saxena, 1991).

In all these villages large population is dependent on various non timber forest resources resources obtained from forests. Food energy fuel wood requirement of the house is met from forests. largely by women. This dependence on forests consumes long useful working hours of women in rural areas. According to Bandyopadhyay *et al* (2004) village proximity to forest, leadership and fuel wood dependence are significant factors in influencing their participation in common forestry.

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JFM activities broadly include development of protection and management strategy for JFM areas, field operations, participatory process and decision making, and sharing of usufructs. In these regard women participation in all the study site needs some better efforts for better participation of women group. During last 15 year various programme and projects have been undertaken by government for promoting peoples participation in natural resource management which has been gradually generating awareness among women. The JFM approach has undoubtedly helped in rehabilitating and improving the degraded forests.

Thus existence of good vegetation promote the JFM and women participation in community based forestry. Lise (2000) concludes that a high dependence on the forest and good forest quality enhances voluntary people's participation. In areas where forest cover is not good women are very keen for raising the trees because they are not having any alternative for fulfilment of day to day energy and fodder need. Such kind of positive efforts could be changed in aforestation movements.

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