

GENDER ISSUES IN JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT: THE ORISSA SCENARIO

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The concept of Gender issues in the protection and management of forests enjoys widespread acceptance in contemporary development thinking and policy-making. As women constitute the most important user group collecting forest produce for meeting the family's subsistence needs, sustainable forest management is not possible without their active involvement. But forest policies and forest management practices have remained gender blind and ignored the intimate relation between women and forests. This paper examines the women's role within Joint forest management and the degree of their participation. It also focuses on the constraints of their participation in Joint forest management. The article is based on the findings of case studies in four districts of Orissa done during 2009 by the author as well as by other researchers. Interview method and structured & unstructured questionnaire methods and focus group discussions and participant observation were used to gather information from the informants. Findings suggest that men have dominant role in decision-making concerning resource management at the local and state levels. In order to ensure sustainable use of these resources, the article recommends that policy makers, planners and development workers must have a better understanding of the relative and often shifting roles of men and women in forest resource management, including division of labour, access to resources, decision-making and traditional knowledge and practices

Keyword: Gender, Joint Forest Management, Livelihood, Orissa.

INTRODUCTION

Natural resources like forests in India have been a major source of subsistence and livelihood for the millions of people dependent on it. Consequently, its rapid degradation raised alarm about the resulting poverty among the forest-dependent people, especially women and landless. The role of women in forest resources management is very important. Collection of forest products to meet subsistence requirements and also to augment family's income is generally the responsibility of women. Awareness about trees, shrubs and grasses is higher amongst women than in men because women devote more time than men to collect forest produce to meet family needs. The women have to spend major part of their time and have to walk long distances daily to collect fuelwood, fodder and other Non Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) from forests. However, the institutional structures of local governance in India have largely limited the participation of women in natural resources management and men have assumed the dominant role in decision-making concerning resource management at the local and state levels. As a result, the women continued suffering and their drudgery increased as the forest degradation continued. Therefore the, the Indian national forest policy, 1988 (GOI, 1988), rightly emphasized the role of women in conservation and sustainable management of forests and recommended greater involvement of women in forestry related activities. If forest is to survive, women and men must play an equal part in its management. Therefore there is an urgent need to consider gender issues in development efforts, to promote true partnership and ensure the sustainable conservation and use of forest resources now and in the future.

Orissa has been a front-runner in participatory forest management, being the one to conceptualize the process in early eighties & launched Orissa Village Forest Rules in 1985 and brought its Reserve Forest areas under JFM in 1988. Since the implementation of community participation in forest management in the state, there have been several models of assistance being provided to village level institutions (Village Forest Committee, Van Samrakshyan Samiti etc.) through different schemes. Schemes like SIDA assisted Social

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Forestry; National Afforestation Plan (FDA), RLTA (Revised Long Term Action Plan in KBK), WFP (World Food Program), Support to VSS, Universalization of JFM, JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) assisted OFSDP (Orissa Forestry Sector Development Project) and very recently CAMPA, have been under implementation with different patterns of funding and institutional arrangements. The major objective of the project is to restore degraded Forests and improve the income level of villagers by promoting sustainable forest management. National Afforestation and Eco-Development Board (NAEB) took the initiative to promote a decentralized approach to the development of degraded forests areas and adjoining lands of through the establishment of Forest Development Agency (FDA) at the all forest division level in all states. Revised Long-Term Action Plan (RLTA) was implemented in KBK districts of Orissa with objectives to develop rural infrastructure and reduction of rural poverty. There are more than 10,000 such Vana Sarankhyan Samities (VSS) in the State with total assigned forest area of about 10000 Km.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study was conducted in Deogarh, Angul, Raygada and Koraput districts of Orissa covering four Joint forest Management models i.e. FDA(Forest Development Agency), RLTA(Revised Long Term Action Plan), OFSDP(Orissa Forestry Sector Development Project) and UJFM(Universalisation of Joint Forest Management). A total of 238 household were interviewed covering 36 villages for data collection. Interview method and structured & unstructured questionnaire methods were used to gather information from the informants. Simultaneously, Group discussion and informal interview methods have been used. Observation has been conducted through semi-participant methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Gender Issues in Joint Forest Management

Gender relations are an aspect of broader social relations and, like all social relations, are constituted through the rules, norms and practices by which resources are allocated, tasks and responsibilities are assigned, value is given and power is mobilised (Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1996). The eco-feminist discourse supports women's involvement in JFM initiatives because of their apparent 'closeness' to nature. It is felt that, this 'closeness' gives them a special stake in environmental protection and conservation (Shiva 1988). The second school of thought traces the need for women's involvement to their dependence on the resource for survival. It is argued that women, being most dependent upon forest for subsistence are sensitive to ecologically sustainable development needs. Further, as they are most severely affected by deforestation and change of species, for any form of regeneration to be successful, women need to be actively involved in different stages of planning and implementation of JFM (Agarwal 1997). This stance is further strengthened by highlighting the fact that women constitute approximately 50 per cent of the total strength of any community and that no 'real' community participation is possible without their active involvement. Studies have pointed out that poor women obtain 33 to 45 percent of their income from forest and common land which is 13 percent for men (FAO 1991). In terms of extractions from forest, a division of labour exists between men and women. While men do more labourious work like cutting of timber, women concentrate on NTFP collection, fodder, and fuelwood. It is women who are credited with more extensive knowledge about forests. Tribal women in India have been found to know medicinal uses for almost 300 forest species. Acceptance of the need for active involvement of women is reflected in the provisions made in the JFM resolutions of some states and their subsequent modifications. The Forest Policy of 1988 envisaged both women's and men's participation in the protection of forests. Further, the rules of the GOI Order of 1991 specified that at least two women should be on every village management committee in the JFM programme. This was in tune with the recognition by the government that a participatory programme such as JFM which aims to involve women as major actors needs to be particularly sensitive to gender

disparities and in addressing the constraints which prevent women from participating as equals to men. The 21st February 2000 Guidelines of Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MOEF) regarding strengthening of JFM programme prescribe that women should constitute 50% of the membership of the general body and at least 33% of the JFM Executive Committee (EC). A woman must hold at least one post -of president, vice-president or secretary. The quorum for holding meeting of such Executive/ Management Committee should be one-third of women executive members or a minimum of one, whichever is more. However it has been observed that in many cases due to social and cultural constraints the participation of women remains on paper only. In reality women play little role in the programme and the majority of decisions are still taken by men. As a result, concern for gender issues in JFM has grown.

Genesis of Forest Protection in Orissa

The history of forest protection in Orissa dates back to early 20th century where the first instance of voluntary forest protection by communities was recorded in Lapanga of Sambalpur districts back in 1936. Community forest protection had made substantial headway in the districts of Nayagarh, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Deogarh, Angul, Dhenkanal, Sambalpur, Bolangir and Phulbani. About 51,000 villagers (Vasundhara, 2010) are protecting and managing forests for their livelihood security and environmental protection. Initiated by the local school teachers and foresters, influential leaders are emerging as key motivators in the process. The village communities, organized as primary groups like youth clubs and village forest protection committees, started protecting nearby forest areas for various reasons. There was practically no uniform pattern in the motivation for such initiatives. These diverse motivations varied from acute scarcity of fuel wood, fodder and small timber to meet demands for agricultural implements and creating their own forests. At some places villagers protected their forests as an economic asset. In tribal dominated undivided Koraput district, the primitive tribes like Dongria Kondh, Kutia Kondh and Lanjia Saora initiated forest protection in order to protect the cultural heritage associated with forests. The motivation for protecting forest in Nayagarh district was an agrarian need for building carts and agricultural implements, arresting land degradation, etc. Similarly, it was the scarcity of small timber, firewood and poles for house building that prompted people in Bolangir to start protection of their forests. Motivated by such diverse reasons, communities at different places started protecting forests without bothering much about the legal status of the forests (RCDC, 2004). During 1970, sporadic conservation initiatives started emerging in various parts of the State. Again in Nayagarh, (then part of Puri district), primary school teachers introduced environmental education as a subject in schools, which soon spread to villages in the area culminating in the launching of an effort to protect a big hillock by a cluster of 9 villages. In Nayagarh, a Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) joined hands with primary school teachers to initiate protection of existing forests and plantation in bald patches. The localized protection initiatives subsequently came together to spread and strengthen the forest protection activities. These sporadic protection initiatives, which started in 1970s, took the shape of a movement and spread to other districts like Dhenkanal, Phulabani, Sambalpur and Keonjhar in the 1980s. In some other places in the State, a few energetic and enthusiastic local Forest Officers took it upon themselves to initiate the forest fringe villagers into protecting the nearby forests. In Bolangir, where forests were often the reason as well as the victim of ordinary village conflicts, forest officials and the local leaders tried to unite people to protect their forest for a good cause. Later on, the village school teachers joined the process (RCDC, 2004).

Joint Forest Management in Orissa

In India Joint Forest Management (JFM) has emerged as an important intervention in management of forest resources. In many parts of India, small village groups have started to protect and reclaim degraded forestlands through collective action. The Joint Forest Management Program seeks to develop partnerships between local community institutions and state forest departments for sustainable management and joint

benefit sharing of public forest lands. The primary objective of JFM is to ensure sustainable use of forests to meet local needs equitably while ensuring environmental sustainability. The central premise is that local women and men who are dependent on forests have the greatest stake in sustainable forest management. The official ground for JFM was prepared by the National Forest Policy of 1988 which envisaged people's involvement, particularly of women, in meeting their basic forest related needs and in managing their local resources.

In the light of the NFP 1988, JFM has been considered to be the right policy intervention for ensuring livelihood improvement of the forest-dependent poor in Orissa, who are unorganized and under-privileged due to their poverty, ignorance and impoverishment. These poor forest-dependent communities are found increasingly vulnerable in the forest-based regions of Orissa. These people indeed are principally focused in the emerging JFM concept, bringing into play the principle of equity and empowerment. This is how JFM distinctly distinguishes itself from other Participatory Management Practices (PMP). Further, it was realized that the F.D., who is the custodian of major parts of Orissa's forests, is ill-equipped to withstand the onslaught of human and livestock populations, and therefore, faces overwhelming odds to deny or even regulate access of the rural communities. In this context, JFM has emerged as a new approach to forest management. It is based on participatory processes and recognition of peoples' livelihood as well as developmental needs. Besides, it establishes forest management within the wider context of natural resource management, and encourages communities to take a decisive role in forest management, not only based on the concern for the environment, but also for food security and employment (RCDC, 2004). There are evidences of peoples' participation in forest protection and management in Orissa in the recent past. In August, 1988, the State Government brought out a resolution to formally introduce a scheme of protection of peripheral reserved forests with participation of the people of adjoining villages. These guidelines have been fine-tuned from time to time, ending with October, 2008 Resolution. One of the salient features of the National Forest Policy (1988) is to actively associate the people in the protection, conservation and management of the forests. The State Government is wedded to a policy promoting participation of local village communities in protection and management of forest (R C D C, 2004).

Accordingly, the villagers were assigned some specific roles in the protection and conservation of Reserve Forests (RF) adjoining their villages, and in turn, were granted certain concessions in the matter of meeting bonafide requirements of fuelwood, fodder, bamboo and small timber. Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) were constituted in each assigned village. Following the Government of India's (GoI's) JFM guidelines issued on June 01, 1990 (GoI 1990), the GoO modified the earlier circular to provide representation to women and minorities in the FPCs (GoO 1990). However, the JFM programme has now become the central point of future forest development programme in the forestry sector of the state of Orissa where local protection to state-owned natural forest to promote regeneration has emerged as a form of forest management through participation of local communities (R C D C, 2004). In point of fact, participatory forest management system in Orissa was very much in existence in the past, and now, continues to be of crucial significance due to substantial dependence on wood fuel as an energy source. A wood balance study conducted in 1989 suggests that RFs and PFs together continue to account for the lion's share of domestic fuel, of which 76.0 per cent is fuel wood and 49.0 per cent consists of brushwood and twigs (Saxena 1996). But, as forest resources dwindle, forest dwelling communities are forced to resort to poor quality of fuels, such as cow dung, cakes, palm fruits, stalks of pulses, dry leaves, non-wood residues of rice and maize etc. The extreme shortage of forest produce and fuel wood (besides inferior fuel wood) make local communities aware of the need for forest regeneration and also, forest protection activities.

Evidently, Orissa is one of the pioneering states in the Indian Republic for Participatory Forest Management (PFM) systems, many of which seem to have been in existence prior to 1993 JFM initiatives. Such PFMs and a number of such Community Management Forest (CFM) systems have spontaneously

emerged across the districts of the State of Orissa. The factors which have contributed are (a) aesthetic and religious feelings of the forest-dependent communities, (b) endangerment of sustenance livelihood dependent on forest produce resulting from continuous forest degradation. However, such management systems are essentially different from JFM, since these are self-initiated and carried out without the assistance of the F.D. Further, many of these community management initiatives devise their own rules to regulate extraction of forest resource and to carry out protective as well as conservative measures.

In order to make effective involvement of the local villagers in forest protection, and conservation, the GoO's Resolution No.16700-10F (Pron) 20/93 F&E dated 03.07.1993 was more transparent. Therefore, the involvement of the local community in protection of adjoining forests, formation of Vana Samrakshna Samittees (VSSs), their Executive Committees, execution of duties and responsibilities of the VSSs and Executive Committees etc are detailed in the order. But, how far these duties and responsibilities of different stakeholders are practically executed at the grassroots level is a moot point. Following this, another Resolution was passed in 30.09.1996 which tried to confer specific rights in favour of the village Committee. A total of 11,521 Vana Sarankhyan Samities (VSS) and 328 Eco-Development Communities (EDC) have been formed in the study area and 1,061,705 ha forest areas have been brought under the JFM by end of 2008-09.

Constraints for Women Participation in JFM

The participation of women in JFM is constrained by a number of factors. Women seldom know about the provisions, roles and responsibilities of JFM programmes. In addition there is a lack of clarity about the applicability and gains of JFM which often leads to a lack of interest. Forest department (FD) staffs generally consider the involvement of women as a mere formality. Very rarely are special efforts taken to understand women's point of view and to seek their active participation. In addition, inadequate training and orientation of the lower FD staff ranks has left them clueless about the ways and means of facilitating women's participation and under time pressures staff may find it too time consuming to motivate women. Women, especially those belonging to lower income groups or who are head of the household, may find it difficult to attend JFM meetings as this means loss of wages. Due to domestic and other chores women find it extremely difficult to find time for meetings which are often organised at times and venues inconvenient to women. Women participation is greatly handicapped in view of social customs. In many communities women are not allowed to sit on the same platform as men and they are expected not to speak in front of men. In a male dominated society as in the study area, the women follow parda system and do not mix with males. They are very shy of attending any meeting and if present in a meeting, they huddle together in one corner and very seldom participate in the discussions. Generally, the men respond when questions are directed even specifically to the women. At times, women are not even informed by male members about the meetings to be held for decision-making or for PRA exercises. As JFM programme is still young, most of the women are not yet convinced about the likely benefits from JFM and, consequently, they do not take adequate interest in JFM activities. Direct benefits to women are seldom discussed in the FPC meetings and as such are not prioritized. The women from elite households who may venture to participate in JFM discussions do not normally represent the interests of women from poor households.

Participation and Empowerment Women in JFM Models

Participation increases self-esteem and social cohesiveness with pride of owning the resource. Participation refers to people taking an active part in the project or process, not just as consumers but also as key contributors to the direction and implementation of the project. Participation backed by decision making leads to empowerment. The women participate in JFM activities in various ways and the level of participation in no single activity can suffice. Generally speaking, JFM activities broadly include

development of protection and management strategy for JFM areas, field operations, participatory process and decision making, and sharing of usufructs. Thus, participation of women and SC/ST communities in meetings and decision making were analyzed by using Empowerment Index (EI) and the findings are present below in Table 1

Table 1: Participation and Empowerment of Women under Different JFM Models/Schemes.

Indicators	JFM Models/Schemes			
	FDA	RLTAP	OFSDP	UJFM
	N-16	N-8	N-8	N-4
Participation of women in meetings	11 (68)	4 (50)	6 (75)	3 (75)
Participation for SC/ST in meetings	14 (87)	7 (87)	7 (87)	3 (75)
Participation of women in decision making	5 (31)	2 (25)	4 (50)	2 (50)
Participation for SC/ST in decision making	11 (68)	6 (75)	6 (75)	2 (50)
Empowerment Index (Women)	100:45	100:50	100:67	100:67
Empowerment Index (SC/ST)	100:78	100:85	100:85	100:50

Participation of women in meetings increased in more than 50 per cent villages of OFSDP (75%), UJFM (75%) and FDA (68) where as it was just 50 per cent in RLTAP. But the participation of women in decision making was dismal in all the models, except UJFM. Participation of SC/ST community in decision making meetings' was found to be much encouraging in all models. Participation in meeting was found to be higher in OFSDP, RLTAP and FDA models whereas participation of SC/ST in decision making was found to be higher in OFSDP, RLTAO and UJFM models. But the Empowerment Index for women (EI) shows OFSDP and UJFM were much stronger as compared to RLTAP and FDA. On the other hand, empowerment of SC/ST was found to be very strong in OFSDP and RLTAP Models as compared to FDA and UJFM models. Thus, it can be inferred that OFSDP had a better holding on empowerment and mainstreaming the disadvantaged group.

Group discussions form an important part of the participatory planning process for JFM. Of those women who attended the meetings, only a little took part in the discussion and the others were silent spectators. The participation of women in group discussions was thus minimal. The women were not only kept away from the meetings, but in most of the households, their husbands did neither consult them about the matters to be discussed in JFM meetings nor inform them later about the discussions and the decisions taken. The factors responsible for the lack of participation of women in group discussions were: i) women were not informed about meetings; ii) unsuitable time for meetings when women could not be free from household work; iii) social customs restraining women from attending such meetings; iv) women perceived no gain from attending such meetings; majority of the women held the opinion that meetings are mere formality, being held for demonstration to the visiting dignitaries and serving no useful purpose.

Gender and Equity

Equity and Gender refers to benefit sharing among forest users in a fair and just manner including women and disadvantaged sections. Equity considers distributional aspects across various stakeholders at an instant as well as that across time (World Bank, 2009). To assess the gender and equity in different models under study, six aspects were considered i.e. representation of all sections including women,

attendance of women, participation of women in decision making, equal opportunity for all to use revolving fund, equitable sharing of benefits and equal rights to give suggestions. The examination on these aspects is shown in the table 2.

Table2 : Gender and Equity as Means of Forest Governance under Different JFM Models/Schemes.

Gender and Equity	Symbols	MOS	Mean Score					GAP
			FDA	RLTAP	OFSDP	UJFM	Average	
Representation of all section	GE1	2	1.94	1.88	2.00	2.00	1.96	2.00
Attendance of Women	GE2	3	1.63	1.38	2.00	1.50	1.63	45.67
Participation of women in decision making	GE3	3	1.69	1.75	1.88	1.75	1.77	41.00
Equal opportunity for all to access revolving fund	GE4	2	1.38	1.13	1.88	1.75	1.57	21.50
Equitable sharing of benefits	GE5	2	1.81	1.88	1.75	2.00	1.86	7.00
Equal rights to give suggestion	GE6	2	2.00	1.88	2.00	1.94	1.96	2.00
Total	GET	14	10.45	9.9	11.51	10.94	10.75	23.21
GAP			25.36	29.29	17.79	29.29	17.79	

The mean (GET) value revealed that Gender and Equity components had been given due priority in OFSDP (11.51 out of 14) model followed by UJFM (10.94) and FDA (10.45) and RLTAP (9.9) respectively. OFSDP was found to have higher average mean over UJFM with respect to GE2, GE3, GE4, and GE6 where as it was found to be at par with respect to GE1. Further, it was found to be more effective with respect to GE1, GE2, GE3, GE4 and GE6 parameters of Gender and Equity over RLTAP. Similarly, OFSDP was also found to have advantage over FDA with respect to GE1, GE2, GE3, GE4 but found to be at par with respect to GE6 and at disadvantage in respect of GE5. Again, it was interesting to observe that FDA having advantage over UJFM with respect to GE2 and GE6. It was also found to be developed over RLTAP with respect to GE1, GE2, GE4 and GE6. UJFM model was found to be more efficient than OFSDP with respect to GE5 and FDA in GE1, GE3, GE4 and GE5 respectively. This model had also an edge over RLTAP in GE1, GE2, GE4, GE5 and GE6, but at par in GE3. Irrespective of models under study, 23 per cent gap was recorded in Gender and Equity parameter of forest governance with highest gaps in attendance of women in VSS meeting (45%), followed by their participation in the decision making process (41%). A significant gap (22%) was also observed in equal access to VSS revolving fund. Thus, focus has to be given on creation of opportunity for all, especially disadvantaged groups and women in decision making process as women play a pivotal role in resource interaction process.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that Women participation needs to be improved to ensure success of JFM programs in reversing forest degradation and improving rural livelihoods. Awareness about the value of restoring forest cover needs to be improved and the expected benefits from reforestation should be properly explained to women to create and sustain interest in participate in the JFM programme. Gender equity in benefit sharing should also be ensured. The women need to be involved from the very beginning of the programme and constant and sustained dialogue with them should be maintained. Effective extension support is necessary

to motivate women for their active participation and to sustain the same. Female extension workers should be employed with whom women can talk freely. It is desirable to hold separate meetings for women in order to get their views because of their hesitation to actively participate in meetings in the presence of men. Social changes are necessary to empower women so that they may assert for their rights equal to men in all matters. Ultimately, promoting women's empowerment and livelihood rights and opportunities are essential preconditions to their effective participation.

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