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Women's position and power in the forestry profession

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Abstract

Some of the inability of women to benefit fully from social forestry projects must be traced back to their general position vis-à-vis men with regard to education and representation in national level decision-making forestry has been a particularly men dominated profession, more so ever than engineering and the defense forces in most developing countries. The first three female professional staff members were appointed to the enormous Indian forest department in 1979 (FAO/UNO, 1980). Although it is not necessarily the case that women foresters will automatically support programmes aimed at women folk in general, it is noticeable that most of the authors who have written in any detail about women and forestry are themselves female.

Keywords: Position, power, profession

Introduction

One group of critics believes that structural changes in the forest department will be very slow they favour instead the non-governmental route to bring about change and involve women in a more meaningful way in social forestry. While there have been a few successful women's organization in this field for example the women's nurseries in India, many NGOs connected with social forestry are more concerned for the environmental aspects of reforestation and do not put much stress on social changes needed. As noted above, many of the problems that thwart women in forestry are in any case beyond the reach of local level change agents. While the role of NGOs many continue to be important on a local scale and for experiment with different approaches, changes within the forest departments themselves will probably have more long term impact.

Objectives

1. To study the background characteristics of beneficiaries of social forestry schemes.
2. To ascertain the level of empowerment achieved among various categories of rural women.
3. To collect and analyse opinion of women for use of the project implementing agency.

Methodology

The study was conducted in the 5 blocks namely, Kalyanpur, Bilhaur, Chaubepur, Kanpur City and Sarsaul in Kanpur district. Five nurseries were selected from each block. For selection of samples, a multistage sampling procedure has been adopted. The data were collected with the help of structured interview schedule. Socio-personal variables and economic variables were selected as independent variables for the study. The dependent variables were selected for the study of social forestry constraints and empowerment. The results were obtained by applying appropriate statistical tools, viz., Chi-square test, percentage, arithmetic mean, weighted mean and standard deviation.

Results

Table 1: Age-wise distribution of women respondents in social forestry

Age group (years)	Frequency	Percentage
20-30	32	16.0
30-40	104	52.0
40-50	55	27.5
50 & above	9	4.5
Total	200	100.0

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More women of 30-50 age-group are engaged in forestry reason being before 40 years of age they are considered daughter-in-law and they are still confined at home in *purda*. After reaching 30 years of age they are suppose to go outside for work.

Table 2: Distribution of women respondents occupation-wise

Occupation	Frequency	Per cent
Labour	164	82.0
Business	11	5.5
Farming	22	11.0
Farming + business	3	1.5
Service	-	-
Total	200	100.0

82.0 per cent women respondents were labour followed by 11.0 per cent women respondents were involved in farming.

Table 4: Distribution of women respondents engaged in social forestry according to skill level

Contribution	Frequency	Per cent
Low skilled	126	63.0
Medium skilled	74	37.0
High skilled	-	-
Total	200	100.00

The skill level of women respondents engaged in social forestry were measured by asking two questions and appropriate score was given to each questions and the minimum and maximum scores were divided into three low,

5.5 per cent women respondents were having business as main occupation, whereas 1.5 per cent women respondents were engaged in farming and business.

Table 3: Age-wise contribution of women in social forestry

Age-group	Contribution of respondents		
	Low medium	Medium	High medium
20-30	12	15	5
30-40	8	88	8
40-50	8	22	25
50 & above	4	5	-
χ^2	60.877*		

Age-wise distribution of contribution of women in social forestry the value of χ^2 60.877* was significant, which conclude that contribution of women respondents in social forestry is depend upon the age-group of women respondents.

medium and high skilled categories. There was no high skilled respondents engaged in social forestry and its operations. The reason being the lack of proper training.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents according to women's profession

S. No.	Statements	Yes	No	Scores	Rank
1.	Collect fire woods from forest for earning	180(90.0)	20 (10.0)	0.90	I
2.	Preparation of <i>pattal</i> and <i>donas</i>	125 (62.5)	75 (37.5)	0.63	IV
3.	Engaged in preparation of <i>bidis</i> from tobacco leave	-	200 (100.0)	-	IX
4.	Preparation of traditional hand fan	174 (87.0)	26 (13.0)	0.87	II
5.	Preparation of mats for sale	82 (41.0)	118 (59.0)	0.41	V
6.	Preparation of wooden work like toys and other accessories items	74 (37.0)	126 (63.0)	0.37	VI
7.	Involved in handicraft preparation	42 (21.0)	158 (79.0)	0.21	VIII
8.	Cultivation of medicinal and herbal plants	48 (24.0)	152 (76.0)	0.24	VII
9.	Cultivation of vegetable and kitchen gardening	136 (68.0)	64 (32.0)	0.68	III

Maximum score (0.90) falls for the respondents who collect firewood from forest for earning. 87 per cent respondents were found to prepare traditional hand fans with the second highest score of 0.87. 68.0 per cent respondents were engaged in cultivation of vegetables and kitchen gardening with the third highest score of 0.68. Minimum (21.0 %) number of respondents was found involved in handicraft preparation. None of the respondents were engaged in preparation of *bidis* from tobacco leaves.

Table 7: Distribution of women respondents according to their motivating factors in for social forestry

Particulars	Frequency	Per cent
Family members	60	30.0
Neighbours	112	56.0
Extension workers	19	9.5
Other persons	54	27.0
Self	14	7.0
Total	259	100.0

Table 6: Distribution of women respondents according to employment security

Particulars	Frequency	Per cent
Getting the employment security	36	18.0
Not getting employment security	164	82.0
Total	200	100.0

82.0 per cent were not provided the employment security from their employers. However, only 18.0 per cent of the women were provided with the employment security from their employer.

The decision-making level of 5 different aspects of women respondents engaged in social forestry were measured by asking questions on every aspects. All the women respondents can not take the important decision like educating their girl child because they think that the girl child would help her in business. Rural women are not considered in decision-making, because they are suppose to perform only household affairs. 89 per cent rural women are engaged in farming activities, but they can't take any decision either in farming or at home like, marriage of their daughters, seeing daughter-in-law of their son, education of their children etc. The y are also being ignored not only in land partnership but also in every area.

Conclusion

Women's ability to appropriate such forest management space outside any formal policy framework is shaped by diverse influences and factors. These include the degree of local scarcity of forest resources, and therefore the conflicts and competition governing access to essential forest products, the extent of migration of men from the area, women's exposure to and participation in social movements such as Chipko or empowerment programmes such as *Mahila Samakhya*, support of progressive local male leaders and the indirect impact of positive discrimination policies such as the reservation of one-third seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions or the promotion of all women *van panchayats*.

Recommendations

1. For greater involvement and greater income generation for women in forestry, it is important for various agricultural colleges, universities, KVKs, ICAR institutions, etc. to include forestry as a subject in their curriculum, so that students become aware of the role of women in the field of forestry. Women scientists should be provided special training in forestry.
2. Women who are illiterate and those engaged and/or interested in forestry should be united together and provided entrepreneurial training through CWDS for greater mobilization.
3. Experienced women engaged in forestry should organize camps and meetings in various parts of the village, district or country so that they can spread knowledge and create awareness among other women folk.

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