

ANALYSIS OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN FOREST MANAGEMENT IN MALAKAND DIVISIONDr. Badshah Muhammad¹, Dr. Rais Gul² (Corresponding Author), Dr. Sana Ullah³**Original Article**

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Abstract

Women participation and their active role in forest management have been highly recognized across the globe. Women participation and their inclusion in forest management related activities and decision making enhance sustainable forest management. This article aims at highlighting the role of women in Forest Management and the actual situation that exists on the ground in selected four districts of Malakand Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Qualitative mode of research was adopted throughout the study and our Districts including Swat, Shangla, Dir Upper and Chitral were purposively selected out of seven Districts in Malakand Division. Primary data was collected through interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), wherein the Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMCs) members were interviewed to get the needed information, while Focus Group Discussions were arranged to have more insight into the study at hand. The findings showed that lack of women representation and participation in Joint Forest Management was evident resulting in the lack of implementation of the desired approach i.e. JFM. The socio-cultural hurdles in the way of women and no share/benefit of women in forest royalty resulted in women lack or no participation of women from in the Forest Management. The study suggests that women representation in the existing JFMCs or the formation of separate JFMCs for women would be instrumental for Participatory Forest Management in order to preserve forests, ensure afforestation and overcome deforestation.

Keywords: Women Participation; Joint; Forest, Management; Gender Dimension; Decentralization

1. Introduction

Forest management has been a widely recognized issue and throughout history various approaches had been adopted to protect forest resources. In the start top-down approach was adopted by various countries to address the issue of deforestation. For instance, Yellowstone Park was declared reserved in 1872 to ensure the protection of ecosystem, biodiversity and forest resources. In the same way, a number of areas were declared protected on the pattern of Yellowstone Park (Lane, 2001; Pretty & Smith, 2004). The number

of Protected Areas reached to 144,296 sites, covering an area of 19,381,000 square kilometers, equal to 12.9 percent of the earth (Chape *et al.*, 2008). Britain has 31,380 square kilometers area covered with forests, 30 percent of such forest are managed by the government while 70 percents are owned by private sector (Nix, Hill, Williams & Bough, 1999, p. 2). The United States of America (USA) has declared 154 protected areas as National Forests. It covers an area of 188,336,179 acres (762,169 km²). These forests are under

the direct management of United States of America (USA) Forest Service.

However, this exclusion based top-down strategy did not prove instrumental in safeguarding the forest resources (Hayes, 2006; Pretty & Smith, 2004; Aswani & Weiant, 2004; Ban, Hansen, Jones & Vincent, 2009). The reason was that the local masses had no say in such management who were dependent on forest resources. Even the local communities were forced into evacuation of the densely forest covered regions. Inevitably, this affected the local dwellers and they did not co-operate with the managers in the management and protection of forest resources (Garcia-Frapolli, Ramos-Fernández, Galicia & Serrano, 2009; Hamilton, Cunningham, Byarugaba & Kayanja, 2000; Fu *et al.*, 2004; Jim & Xu, 2002; Anthony, 2007). Furthermore, the exclusion and deprivation of local people instigated them on the destruction and depletion of forest resources by their illegal activities. For instance, declaring Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in Uganda, as protected, a huge area of it i.e., five percent was intentionally set on fire by the outrageous masses (Hamilton *et al.*, 2000). The same disastrous act was replicated in Tsitsikamma National Park, South Africa (Watts & Faasen, 2009). Similarly, the exclusion of local inhabitants, forest protection was at stake in many areas (Andrade and Rhodes, 2012). Hence, Lane (2001) endorses that top-down forest management approach proved fruitless in the protection of forests.

Afterward this top-down approach was replaced by participatory approach, recognized an appropriate one for the management of forest resources (Grainger, 2003; Brown, 2003 & Reed, 2008). Similarly, Aswani and Weiant (2004) emphasize that the conservation of forests is very difficult without the inclusion and empowerment of local people and addressing their felt needs. However, involving local stakeholders in forest management is challenging task (Nygren, 2005). Especially, the involvement

and empowerment of powerless is not so simple; it causes conflicts among different stakeholders (Castro & Nielsen, 2001), as there are no agreed upon rules for the involvement of local communities and their empowerment in forest management affairs (Mascia, 2003; Wilshusen, Brechin, Fortwangler & West, 2002).

Though bottom-up approach has benefits for local communities and decentralizing the management of natural resources has proved productive in many places around the world, yet a number of factors hinder the process of such devolution (Miyuki & Boonthavy, 2004; Malla, 2000; Ribot, 2004). However, the local elites dominate the process of decentralization to such an extent that they deprive the poor and disadvantaged groups from the expected benefits of participatory approach. In this context, Davies and Yaron (2003) argue that participation by local forest users especially disadvantaged and marginalized groups in forest sector projects has been discouraged due to the insufficient incentives for them. Therefore, Ribot (2004) argues that the governments are responsible for the success and failure of decentralization in a country.

Gender Dimension of Participatory Approach in Forest Management

Participatory approach claims the involvement and empowerment of marginalized and destitute segments of the community in the decision making process. Therefore, creating awareness, building the capacity of local people women and their empowerment without any discrimination are necessary for the implementation of participatory approach to address ecological, environmental and conservation issues. According to Anthony (2007) empowerment is about people - both women and men - taking control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, increasing self confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance. Therefore,

women and forest non-owners being the marginalized groups have to be the target groups in most cases. However, in majority cases, they have no awareness and information in this regard despite the fact that stress has been given internationally on such measures. As a matter of fact, culture determines the role of women and men in a society; it also determines the way they earn income and have control over resources. Considering various cultures, women are assigned with various tasks and responsibilities. However unlike men, women are often denied to join some professions, ownership rights over land and property in different societies. Similarly, women are deprived deliberately to have technical skills and market related professions. As a result, women are placed at the bottom in the social hierarchy as compared to men, while they have different perspectives, priorities and goals and of course, development policies have different impacts on them (Sarin, 1996). In India, scheduled tribes comprised of both men and women of vulnerable settings, resided nearby forests, their involvement and empowerment played key role in the preservation of forest resources. Therefore, Indian government had to declare Forest Policy of 1988, characterized by the contribution of both sexes. Further, Government of India Order 1991 reserved two seats for women in every village management committee in the Joint Forest Management (JFM) program. In addition, in 1998 an advisory committee was set up by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, to ensure the participation of women in the forest management, suggested that 50 percent of the members of the general body of JFM must be women. Regrettably, these measures are yet to be implemented due to socio-cultural constraints. Resultantly, in practice, men managed all the related things, because of the women lowest position in Indian society (Rawat & Bedi, 1996). However, as divulged by Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996) gender equity

is now taken into consideration specifically by those donors who are funding these programs and the role of women has been redefined and reorganized in the social ladder. Although the theory of community participation is considered an effective approach to resolve all the shortcomings associated with earlier approaches for a broad-based development of poorer communities in developing countries (Chambers, 1983). It is also remarkable for its applicability in different fields such as health (Patterson, 2005), natural resources and forest management (Uphoff, 1998; Shahbaz, Mbeyale & Haller, 2008; Xue, Hong, Zhang, Xu & Shen, 2006).

Status of Forests and Joint Forest Management in *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*

The bulk of Pakistan's primary forest resources (40 percent) are situated in the province of *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*, while more than half of the total forest covered area of the province is concentrated in the *Malakand* and *Hazara* divisions. Being the largest division of the province, Malakand Division covers 29.1 percent while *Hazara* division is smaller and constitutes 17 percent of the province's area. Forest cover in *Malakand* Division is about 360,912 hectares, which is 8 percent of its total area, while in *Hazara* division forest cover an area of 316,318 hectares, which is 5 percent of its area. However, having the rich forest cover in Pakistan, the forests in *Malakand* and *Hazara* have depleted significantly over time which has created an alarming situation. Similarly, it is estimated that forest resources inventory of *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* would finish within 20 to 25 years if the demands for fuel-wood and timber remained constant with the present demand without providing alternatives of fuel-wood for used (FAO, 2005).

To have a control on the high rate of deforestation, the involvement of local communities in the management of forest resources has become momentous trait of

national forest policy and practice around the world. The programs and projects based on community involvement were funded and supported by international donors (Poffenberger, 2000; Fisher, 1999; Shackleton, Campbell, Wollenberg, & Edmunds, 2002). In 1995, community-based initiatives were taken in Pakistan for the first time by launching Forestry Sector Project (FSP). This project was started with the assistance of Asian Development Bank in 1996 and adopted an institutional approach. The main objectives were to institutionalize joint management of natural/forest resources in *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*. For this purpose, integrated approach was adopted for the management of such resources to improve the environmental and socio-economic conditions of local people. The important feature of this concept was to decentralize forest management to the local stakeholders (users groups) by involving and empowering them in forest management related activities. Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) were established for the management of forest resources. Later on, the concept of JFM/participatory approach was formally institutionalized in *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* forest management through passing an Act "Community Participation Rules 2004" as a response to the Forest Ordinance 2002 and Devolution Plan 2000. Furthermore, it aimed to build mutual trust and create a sense of ownership among different stakeholders. For this purpose, Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Women Organizations (WOs) to be formed which represent males and females respectively. These organizations would be responsible for proper use of land according to approved Village Land Use Plan (VLUP). However, JFMCs were to be established only for the management of forest resources in these areas where forests existed. In JFMCs, it was mandatory to give representation to all stakeholders such as Forest Department, forest owner, forest non-owners, women, local

councils, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

Forest Department had the mandate to involve and empower local communities in forest affairs through organizing Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) at local level with the help of local communities.

1. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature because qualitative methodology is more successful in exploring tangible aspects such as social norms and values, gender issues, socio-economic factors (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). This study was conducted in *Malakand* Division of *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* province, Pakistan, where participatory approach was institutionalized by the Forest Department for the management of forest resources in the province. For this purpose, JFMCs were formed, in those districts having forest resources, to involve and empower local communities in forest affairs. This study focused on the implementation process of participatory approach in the field.

Malakand division is covering 29800 square kilometers area which is 40 percent of the province of *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*. It consists of seven districts, however; four districts i.e. *Swat*, *Shangla*, *Dir Upper* and *Chitral* were purposively selected because JFMCs had been formed only in these districts while the remaining three districts i.e. had no JFMC. According to the Provincial Directorate of Forest Department, 73 JFMCs were registered in the selected four districts of *Malakand* Division.

It was decided to select JFMCs which had been operating for at least 5 years and were active, as the newly formed JFMCs might not be familiar with the process as the older ones. Thus, a total of 12 JFMCs, 3 from each

selected district of *Swat*, *Dir Upper*, *Chitral* and *Shangla*, were selected for this study.

Data was collected through individual interviews, focus group discussions and observation in the field. A female enumerator was hired and properly trained in each district to collect data from the local women.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Women involvement and empowerment are crucial in participatory approach. It means that development programs must be gender sensitive and women should be given proper representation in such programs. Though, women, in the study area, were in close interaction with forests. They were responsible for collecting fuel wood as well as fodder for livestock on daily basis. This was explained by a Sub-Divisional Forest Officer (SDFO) in his individual interview in district *Dir Upper*:

“...mostly women work in the fields and collect fuel wood and fodder from forests on daily basis...”

It means that women are responsible to perform such duties regularly while men visits forests for cutting trees for construction etc which are seldom. This shows the close interaction of women with forests. This was further elaborated by an elderly woman from district *Chitral* that majority of women daily collect fuel-wood and fodder from forest in the morning time. Therefore, men are not allowed to visit forest at that time. Similarly a woman from district *Shangla* remarked that after offering Morning Prayer early, she along with her granddaughters go to the forest regularly for collecting fuel wood and cutting fodder for their survival of their family as their men are away from home and working in Karachi.

At all women were observed in close and frequent contact forest resources, however, their involvement and empowerment in

decision making related to forest management was totally missing. While, Godbole (2002) argues that women inclusion and empowerment in JFMCs is of central importance for the management and conservation of forest resources. It is worth mentioning that in Roviana, Solomon Islands, the involvement and empowerment of women in forest management played a remarkable role in the conservation and development of forest resources (Aswani & Weiant, 2004). Likewise, in the Harimari village of Midnapore district in West Bengal women along with men jointly protect 100 hectares of forests through JFM agreement. Women collect dry twigs for fuel-wood and they are occasionally accompanied by men in patrolling to check any illegal activity within forests. But the irony is that not a single woman is given the membership of either the general body or the executive body of the Forest Protection Committee (FPC). Again, socio-cultural obstacles restrict women to participate in developmental activities. However, to check the problem of theft-wood, men have once again felt the need of women in the committee. Women also realized their inevitability in the preservation of the natural resources (Raju, 1997). Contrary to this, women in the study area were to arrange fodder for their livestock and fuel wood, resulting in the deforestation. This deterioration was due to lack of representation of women in JFMC and men's role just silent spectators, for the culture didn't permit them even to have an exchange of words with them. Such an action by a man can cause bloodshed between families and tribes. Therefore, men's endeavor to protect forest was ineffective in such a situation. Therefore, it is pertinent to note that social norms are of immense importance in constructing gender relations, assigning roles and responsibilities and allocating disproportionate resources to social groups (Kabeer & Subrahmanian, 1996).

Culture and traditions of the study area did not permit women to participate in public events and activities, hence; no female was observed to be a member of any JFMCs. The members of a JFMC collectively in a FGD in district *Dir Upper* stated that:

“our cultural values and traditions do not allow women to be present at a forum or attend an event where men are present. Therefore, women are not given representation in JFMCs”.

Makama (2013) argues that socio-cultural factors are responsible for gender disparity and disempowerment of women in a society. As far as this study is concerned, in light of the available record in DFOs offices no single woman was found member of any JFMC. In some other areas, NGOs had formed women organizations, however, their presence was restricted only to paper, which was just eyewash and would not serve the purpose (see Ahmed & Cubbage, 2003). In such a scenario, practically women had no role in such programs and majority of the decisions were taken by men. Similarly, patriarchal values and male dominance are embedded in Pakistani culture especially in the culture of *Pakhtun* society in *Malakand* Division of *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* province where the study was conducted. Therefore, all the economic activities are revolving around men while women are mostly involved in unpaid activities. Thus, they are economically dependent on the male members of their families. Furthermore, women are not given any share in property and similarly in the sale proceed/royalty from the forest products. It is because they have neither membership in JFMCs nor separate women organizations to play their role in the protection and conservation of forest resources. Therefore, Agarwal (2001) urged that the exclusion of women affects the institutional efficiency.

Furthermore, a member of JFMC in an individual interview in district *Shanglasated* that their women are already overburdened as they are responsible for rearing and caring the children and elders. They work in agricultural fields and collect fuel wood and fodder from forests. They have no time for joining such organizations. However, Meinzen-Dick & Zwarteveen (1998) stated that if women are overburdened with domestic businesses, then they will least contribute in group life.

Furthermore, women presence with men in such organizations was discouraged by the local cultural. This was explained by a male member from the local community in an individual interview in district *Dir Upper* that:

“women are not allowed to be the members of an organization with stranger men. Their coexistence is considered the agenda of the west. It is discouraged by the local culture and traditions”.

It was because of prevalent male dominance and patriarchal system in the study area that men were considered economically productive and symbol of social prestige for the family. Women participation was greatly hindered by the prevailing norms in the study area. The study area is purely *Pakhtun*, man-dominated and altogether patriarchal (Gillett, 2001) and women are strictly prohibited even to go the places where they can be seen by males. This situation is not confined only to the study area but exists almost in all regions of the country i.e. Pakistan (Moheyuddin, 2005). In fact, patriarchal power structure is considered as one of the main factors sabotaging the agenda of community participation in many projects and programs throughout the globe such as in Kenya (see Suda, 2000), Nepal (see Agarwal, 2001), India (see Martin & Lemon, 2001). For instance, in Nepal participatory approach was adopted in health wherein both i.e. men and women were stressed upon to participate in health promotion activities/projects. However, in the study area due to its patriarchal nature,

women cannot dare to attend/participate in the meeting of an organization (JFMC) where men are also membership in such organization. Therefore, all policies and decisions reflected the aspirations of men only. In the study area the stereotypical approach towards women was deeply-rooted. And the proverbs such as 'Khaza ya da kor da ya da gor da' (women either for home or grave) best reflect men's mindset regarding womenfolk.

It is also worth-noting that the involvement of women in forest management activities is associated with the level of their awareness as verified by Pathak (2000) that awareness among community groups, especially in poor and women, increased their confidence to take part in social activities. Ogra (2000) argues that only the presence and participation of women is not enough in a male dominant society, rather their real and true empowerment in decision making is required. It may also be noted that deforestation would severely affect women folk, for these are women who collect firewood for cooking and fodder for animals in the rural areas. Therefore, forest degradation would compel them to cover longer distance in search of firewood and fodder, which might be harmful for their physical, social and psychological health. Being in close interaction with forests, women must be given an important role in the affairs of forests; but unfortunately, women are not given representation in community organizations (JFMCs). As a result, the male dominant organizations cannot stop women from illegal activities in forests due to socio-cultural constraints. Hence, in the Bankura district of West Bengal, where male dominated Forest Protection Committees have badly failed to protect and conserve forest resources, Women Forest Protection Committees were formed, which proved more successful and effective in the conservation of forest resources (Raju, 1997; Godbole, 2002).

However, there was lack of specialized trained female staff i.e. Female Forest Extensionists (FFE); to mobilize and organize local women the management of forest resources. The issue was raised by a Regional Forest Officer (RFO) in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in district *Shangla* that there was no Community Development Officer (CDO) and Female Forest Extensionist (FFE) in the district. So, in

the absence of such staff the mobilization and involvement of women in forest management was impossible. This was further explained by a Sub-Divisional Forest Officer (SDFO) in an individual interview in district *Dir* Upper that without the availability of specialized staff (CDOs and FFEs) the implementation of Joint Forest Management (JFM) and involving local women in forest management is just a myth.

Altogether, women were deprived of their right to have property and to participate in economic activities. Such discriminations had no religious grounds as Islam recognizes women rights in property. Having subordinate position, women were always discouraged to participate in such social activities. This was highlighted by a SDFO in district *Swat* in an individual interview that:

“culture and society support patriarchy. Men are considered not only bread-earners but also a symbol of social prestige and superiority. Therefore, women are in the subordination of men and they have to act/work according to the will of their men”.

Women folk had no ownership and property rights in the given setting. Hence, it made them economically dependent on men. However, the respondents stressed that women were so much overburdened that they could hardly spare time for any other work. In addition, there were no separate JFMCs for women to play their role in the protection and conservation of forest resources while their co-working with men in the same organization was prohibited by the local culture.

Equal or equitable distribution of the benefits from the forest resources guarantees interest of all segments/user groups to participate actively in forest management and conservation activities. Those who have no or less benefits under participatory approach would not only lose their interest but would also oppose such efforts. It was noticed that 60 percent or in some places 80 percent share in sale proceeds from forest products was distributed among the male members of the forest owners and no single penny was spent on collective welfare and developmental

activities. Even women from the forest owners' families had no share in sale-proceed/royalty from the forest products. It was found that the royalty from the forest products is distributed among the male family members of the forest owners. This was explained by a woman in an individual interview in district *Dir Upper* that:

"I have a son and seven daughters while my husband is dead. My brother in-law has five sons and three daughters. The royalty from the forest products is distributed on the basis of the number of male members in a family, he gets five times more benefits than us. This is inequality which is completely against the teachings of Islam and laws of inheritance".

Contrary to this, Agarwal (2001) found in his study that usually such amount was utilized for collective welfare and development of the community.

Conclusion

The theory of community participation emphasizes on gender equality and empowerment but the practice found in the study area was different. Women had no place in Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) and the claim of the managers (Forest Department Officers) that they had employed Female Forest Extensionists (FFE) to ensure women's mobilization, and empowerment in Forest Management was just a myth. In practice, however, no FFEs were found in most cases and no JFMC had female members. The primary reason for the non-existence of women in such organizations was the socio-cultural constraints that discouraged women's participation in such community organizations. Women had no share in the property and royalty of forest resources. It was distributed only among the male members of the community.

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