

Women's Role in Non-Timber Forest Product Management: A Review

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Abstract

Non-timber forest product (NTFP) is the resource from forest other than timber like gum, medicinal plants, Mushroom, vegetables, etc., which is an important source for the Livelihood of the rural and tribal areas of a poor and developing country. India, which is having a large population majority of which lives in the village of tribal areas and mountainous terrain, has become the role of women to collect, process, and getting NTFP ready for the market and its consumption locally. The non-timber forest products have also become, over the years, a good source of household income. In this paper, a review work has been carried out to enlighten the women's role in NTFP management.

Keywords- Gender inequality, Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP), Women empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Women have always performed the role right from the beginning by managing the household economy and taking care of the livelihood of the family. In the tribal area of India, where people are highly dependent upon the forest product, the women have a greater contribution to make for its extraction. After seventy years of Independence, the condition of women is poor of poorest in these areas, the NTFP collection and marketing can increase their economic empowerment. Economic empowerment will increase women's reach to economic resources and opportunities, including employment, financial services, property, and other productive assets, skill development, and information on the markets. As NTFP exploration requires no initial investment and skills required for it are already sufficient for the tribal and

village women. So it is the most common financial activity for them. The women who indulge in the NTFP work can, therefore, increase the living standard of their family economically (Kassa, 2015). Several case studies show how NTFP has emerged as a business for the rural areas empowering women. In Cameroon, 82.3% of the rural population is involved in non-formal agriculture, among which 68.6% is made up of women (Kassa, 2015). A product *Prunus Africana* found in the mountainous area around Mount Cameroon has a good value in the international market for curing diseases. The role of women is found most critical in this extraction. Research in Nigeria (Adedayo & Falade, 2019) has shown that traditional NTFPs used in the study area by rural women include fuelwood, honey, forest vegetable, snails, wrapping leaves, mushrooms, and herbal

medicines. Most rural women in the study region received fair revenue by using NTFPs. As such, the use of NTFPs gave many rural women in the study region additional economic benefits. Many of the study region respondents received more than 50 percent of their income from the use of NTFPs. In South Africa, a study has shown that women have the main contribution in the production and trade of Marula beer and brush (SHACKLETON & SHACKLETON, 2004). Although, in most cases, men may be the main person to carve the wood, but the finishing part is going for the women and other family members.

NTFPs like fuelwood and fodder are often collected by 60-70 percent of women in India, which for them is the most common sort of economic activity (Enclave et al., 2002). The Uttarakhand state of India, which is an almost hilly region, is more dependent on women for NTFP activities as men are more active in agriculture and

migrated to cities for better income generation of the family. A study taken on a sample of 4 villages shown in figure 1 reveals that a major portion of women has contributed to all NTFP extraction activities.

A study conducted in 3072 villages adjacent to the forest in Tamil Nadu has revealed that over 50% of people who enter daily in the forest for the collection of Forest products are women (Paul, 1993).

In Jharkhand, the Tribal women collect the dried Mahua flower to make local country liquor that they used to sell at haats (Weekly market) and thus earn money to strengthen their economy (Islam & Quli, 2017). This self-employment has empowered the tribal women, and their activity right from collection of Mahua flower, drying process, processing of liquor, and selling in the market has made them independent. Figure 2 shows women selling Mahua in local Haats.

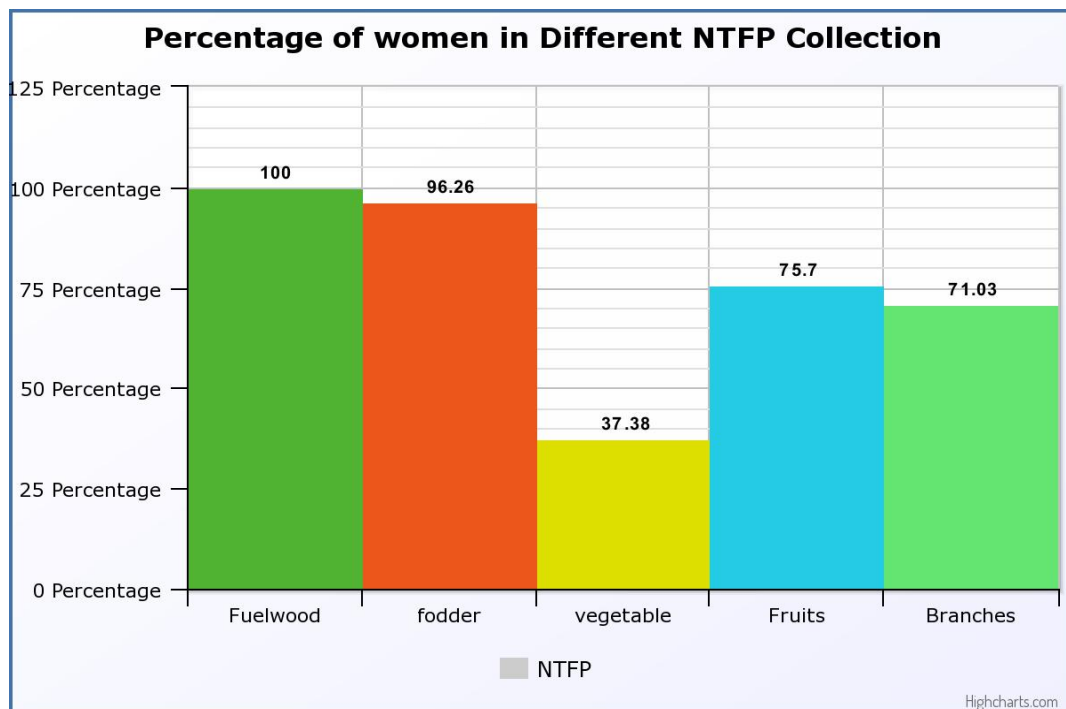


Fig. 1: Women participation in NTFP collection in Uttarakhand (De, 2017)



Fig. 2: Women selling the Mahua Liquor in local Haats (Kholi, 2018)



Fig. 3: Guichi Mushroom [<http://www.kashmirifood.com/>]

In Manipur, nearly about 90 percent of the population for their livelihood depends on forest products as a major source. According to a study made by Food and agriculture organization, about 25 thousand women were reported to be involved in collecting forest products. Similarly, in Arunachal Pradesh, 70 percent of women are involved in NTFP collection and sales. (Sharma et al., 2015). In the state of Orissa, over 75 lakh people are employed on NTFP activity like tendu leaf production FD and processing and the majority of which are reported to be women (Yadav & Basera, 2013). The Guichi Mushroom shown in figure 3 is a rich source of protein found in the high altitude of Himachal, Uttarakhand and

Jammu & Kashmir is collected by women actively and sold at a very high price in the local and international market.

CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN

Gender bias which is still the main obstruction in the path of women's success and their participation in any field but in NTFP, the physical strength and risks in forest product exploration is also there. A study conducted by SEJUTI SARKAR DE (De, 2017) in the mountainous region of Uttarakhand villages that 18.69% of women feel problem in hills during climbing and walking, which becomes more difficult during illness and old age, Around 10 % have expressed fear of attack of wild animals like there are the possibility of snake bite or bees

and ants attacking, some percent of people have mentioned about Fear of violating the Laws of the Forest Service.

In some area where the temperature remains high for most of the years, many people find it difficult to exploit NTFP under the scorching sun (Adedayo & Falade, 2019)

In a study conducted by Vinay Tandon (Getting Gender Right in NTFP Management Vinay Tandon, 2013) for the collection of wild yam, it has been found that women choose to work collectively to reduce risks of different forest problems. Such threats include wild animals, leeches, and bites of insects, rats, sinkholes, and tree limbs falling. Women join a party in the forest and then break into pairs, exchanging roles. Often, pairs are unable to locate wild yams and return empty-handed. In these cases, they're shared by those who discover tubers. Restrictions on access to non-timber forest products by local people have recently increased, and the government's intimidation and abuse of forest residents are widespread. (Agarwal, 2019). Although women are preferred over men for some particular forest work like a nursery, tendu leaf collection, and transplanting, they are given lower wages as compared to men and are subjected to harassment if they complain (Mishra, 1993). The sexual harassment and teasing of women while selling products like country liquor made from Mahua in tribal area is reported and is one of the major problems which restrict the women from their marketing role, and less bargaining power of women is also a big reason for it also.

OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN

Women have a major role from the collection of NTFP to the marketing, so the participation of

women is very vital in policymaking. The Government of India in 1991 has directed that in every village management committee in any joint forest management, there will be at least two women in committee (Place, 2002). Likewise, in Nepal, the women's participation in the executive committee of the Forest user group (FUG) has increased after 2009 due to the amendment made by Government; this has resulted in a decrease of fuelwood extraction from the forest by a suggestion made by women (Leone, 2019). As women are more indulge in fuelwood collection, so suggestion has been found to be very effective. These types of examples of women's participation in policymaking can be very helpful for environmental aspects. Food and agricultural organization (FAO), in its report, has mentioned the protection and management role of women in the conservation of forest and its products, the household income and forest resources are related to each other in tribal areas where neglecting women's participation in decision making is unavoidable (Shylajan & Mythili, 2007). In a recent case of Lockdown in India, the Ministry of Home affairs give relief to tribal people for the collection of NTFP as that was the case of their livelihood.

CONCLUSION

Women have shown a critical role in the conservation of the environment and side by side extracting the forest resources for the livelihood of the family. They have evolved this to economic benefit over the past few decades, increasing household income and thereby adding the contribution to national development. The policy made by the government and subsidies has helped them a lot in the path of their success, but more

awareness and training is required for increasing the market value of the NTFP, and a different centre of excellence is required to be established in these areas.

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