

AWARENESS OF JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT (JFM) AMONG WOMEN IN TRIPURA

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1. Introduction

Joint Forest Management (JFM) is a forest management system where the Forest Department (FD) and the forest user groups jointly take part in the management of forests in particular, for their protection and regeneration and share the benefits. In a participatory programme such as JFM, women have an important role, and therefore there is a need to recognise gender disparities and to address the factors that prevent women from effective participation in JFM activities. Women, particularly, from the poor households are mostly dependant on forests and other common property resources for meeting survival needs. Independent access and entitlement to forest resources through JFM, therefore, has particular significance for them. The criticality of incorporating women perspectives in such management and community development programmes lie in the fact that decision-making processes always start at home and at the individual level.

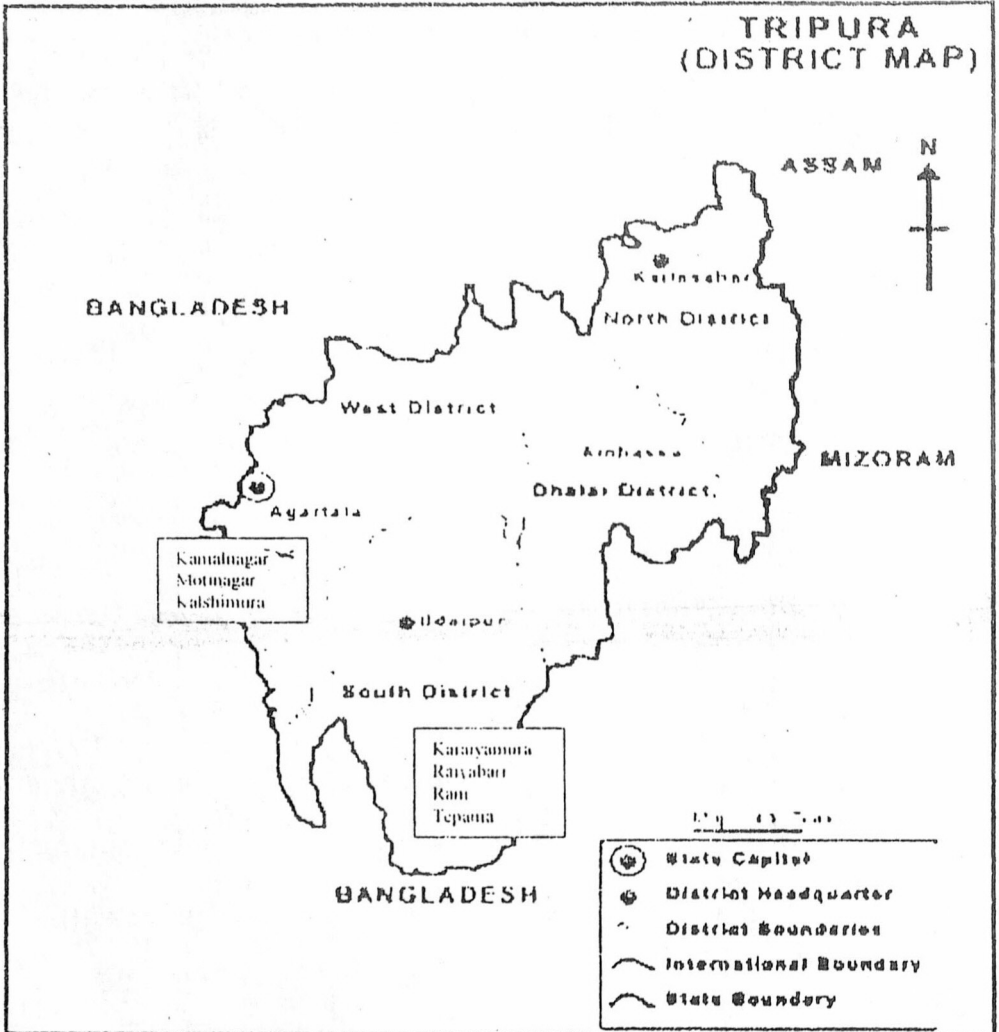
The Government of India Guidelines 2000 for implementation of JFM provides for increased participation of women in the programme. It has set rules, for promoting gender equity and giving women representation in the Executive Committee (EC) of joint forest management committees (JFMCs). Recognizing the need to involve all sections of the community, particularly women, it suggested that the General Body (GB) should consist of 50% women members, and the Executive Committee (EC), at least 33%. The participation of women in all decision-making processes will ensure that broader goals are achieved which will benefit all sections of the society. For an effective participation, women need to be made aware of the provisions made under different legislation, rules and regulations. It is therefore important to study the awareness level of the women members in the GB and EC and find out the factors which act as constraints to their effective participation. This paper assesses the levels of awareness of the women about JFM in the state of Tripura.

2. Study Area and methodology

Tripura is a small state located in North East India, and is divided into four districts and ten forests divisions. Since the state covers a very small area most of the divisions show homogeneity in terms of climate, vegetation type, soil type, community composition, cultural practices etc. The most important feature of the state is the ethnic divide. The state has experienced large scale immigration from Bangladesh. This has altered the ethnic composition of the population resulting into resentments and at places it has divided the society into two classes; the indigenous community, most of whom are tribal, and the immigrants who are mostly Bengalis.

MAP OF TRIPURA

TRIPURA (DISTRICT MAP)



Tripura was the first state in North East India to implement the JFM programme with an aim to regenerate degraded reserve forests (Tiwari et al., 2000). The state government resolution enabling JFM was notified on 20/12/91. From a humble beginning of four villages in 1991 to 327 Joint Forest Management Committees in 2004, the JFM programme has expanded to cover all four forest divisions of Tripura within a span of 13 years. This has come about due to the willingness of the people to cooperate and the interests of the forest officials at the grassroot level in the implementation of the programme.

This study was conducted in 7 JFMCs viz. Kalshimura, Kamalnagar, Karaiyamura, Motinagar, Raiyabari, Rani and Tepania. The plantation model and the age of the JFMCs are given in Table 1.

Table 1
Plantation Model and Age of JFMCs

| Division | JFMC | Age (years) | Plantation Model |
|----------|-------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| Sadar | Kamalnagar | 2 | Miscellaneous tree |
| Sadar | Motinagar | 2 | Monoplantation |
| Sadar | Kalshimura | 7 | Miscellaneous tree |
| Udaipur | Karaiyamura | 7 | Assisted Natural Regeneration |
| Udaipur | Raiyabari | 8 | Monoplantation |
| Udaipur | Rani | 11 | Miscellaneous tree |
| Udaipur | Tepania | 7 | Assisted Natural Regeneration |

The extent of awareness of people about any project or programme depends on their access to information and the

extent of their involvement in the JFM activities. The 6 components comprising of 20 issues related to JFM were considered for the women's awareness test. The components and the issues involved are given in Table 2.

Table 2
JFM Components and Issues Considered for the Awareness Study

| Components | Issues |
|---|--|
| 1. Membership Pattern in JFMC | Membership fee Women-membership Men-membership |
| 2. Functioning of General Body | GB meetings according to Government Orders (GO) Minimum quorum Responsibilities of GB members |
| 3. Functioning of Executive Committee | EC meetings according to Government Orders(GO) Women quota in EC SC/ST quota in EC Landless & Art quota in EC Tenure of EC Responsibilities of EC members |
| 4. Protection of Forests By Joint Forest | Extent of JFM area Boundary of JFM Management Committee (JFMC) AREA. Species in JFM area |
| 5. Benefit Sharing Mechanism | Benefit sharing (NTFP) Benefit sharing (Timber) Benefit share utilization |
| 6. Policy Budget | Amendments to GO Budget for afforestation |

The following awareness test was done (Jagannath et al., 2004). The members were interviewed using a well structured questionnaire and focussed on group discussion. The degree of awareness was plotted on a three-quantum scale viz., aware, partially aware and not aware. Members having complete knowledge of the various issues of the component were considered *aware*, if only a few issues are known, as *partially aware*; and if none of the issues are known as *not aware*. The responses were scored on the following scale - 2 points for complete awareness, 1 point for partial awareness and 0 for not aware to arrive at an awareness index for each respondent category. The degree of awareness was assessed for the 6 components comprising of 20 issues. Based on the overall score the awareness level was arrived at a three quantum scale of high, moderate and low awareness.

3. Findings

3.1 Awareness level among the General Body Members:

The study revealed that the women member in the general body jointly work with the FD staff in all the JFM activities such as planning, protection development of the JFM area. The awareness among the general body members was found to be high in only 29% of the JFMCs and moderately aware in the rest 71 % of the JFMCs.

The component in which the general body members were most conversant with was the protection of JFMC area, followed by the functioning of the general body. They were found to be the least aware in the benefit sharing mechanism. On issues such as policy budget the GB members were found to be fully aware in 57% of the JFMCs, partially aware in 29% and no awareness in 14% of the JFMCs. In case of benefit sharing mechanism, only 14% of the JFMCs show full awareness while 57% and 29% of the JFMCs show partial

and no awareness, respectively. Among the various JFM issues the GB members had on knowledge on issues such as Membership fee, Women quota in EC, SC/ST quota in EC, Benefit share utilization and Benefit sharing of NTFPs.

3.2 Awareness level among the Executive Committee Members:

The executive committee consists of representatives from the Forest Department, NGO and villagers including women representatives. The EC regulates product extraction and ensures equity by providing more opportunities to work and collect various forest products for their bonafide use to the poorer section of the society (Tripathi and Barik, 2004). Their active role is essential to voice the needs of the villagers especially the women who are dependant on the forests for their livelihood and subsistence.

The awareness among the EC members was found to be high in 71 % of the JFMCs and moderately aware in the rest 29% of the JFMCs (Fig. 1). Similar to the GB members, the EC members were also most conversant with the protection of JFMC area, followed by the functioning of the general body. They were found to be the least aware in the benefit sharing mechanism. On issues such as functioning of GB, the EC members were found to be fully aware in 86% of the JFMCs, partially aware in 14% of the JFMCs. In case of benefit sharing mechanism, only 14% of the JFMCs show full awareness, while 57% and 29% of the JFMCs show partial and no awareness, respectively. The EC members were found to be not aware in such issues as benefit sharing mechanism and policy budget in 29% and 14% of the JFMCs, respectively. This has a major implication on the programme as success of the programme depends to a great deal on the interest of the stakeholders. It was observed that the awareness level of GB members was less than that of EC members. 29% of the sampled JFMCs show high awareness while 71 % witnessed moderate level of awareness among the women GB members.

3.3 Extent of Involvement of women in JFM Area

3.3.1 Microplan Preparation

During Microplan preparation, the women members expressed fuelwood as their choice in majority of the JFMCs. Only 25% of the JFMCs expressed NTFPs as their choice (Table 3). In the JFM area, fuelwood species were found to contribute to 63% of the total species as compared to 22% NTFPs and 15% timber species (Tiwari and Kayenpaibam, 2006). This shows that profit from timber sale are not a priority for women and the weaker sections of the society whose need is for a system of management, which focuses on firewood, NTFPs and grasses, which provide them immediate income.

Table 3
Extent of Participation and Activities in which
Women were Involved during Microplan
Preparation (percentage of JFMC)

| Issues | | Participation in meetings (%) | Implementation of decision (%) |
|----------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Species choice | Fuelwood | 62.5 | 62.5 |
| | NTFPs | 25 | 25 |
| Area to be planted | | 75 | 25 |
| Extent of plantation | | 3.5 | 25 |
| Biomass demands | Fuelwood | 37.5 | 12.5 |
| | NTFPs | 0 | 0 |
| | Fodder | 0 | 0 |
| | Poles | 12.5 | 12.5 |

3.3.2 Protection of JFM area

Participation of women members in General Body and Executive Committee meetings was observed in almost all the JFMCs. During the framing of rules concerning who shall protect and the mode and pattern of protection measures to be enforced, women members were found to participate in all the JFMCs. However, women members of Karaiyamura JFMC were not involved in framing rules pertaining to demarcating the role of men and women in the protection of JFM area (Table 4).

Table 4
Role of Women in Framing Rules Pertaining to
Protection and its Enforcement

| Issues | Participation in meeting (%) |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Type of protection | 75 |
| Who protects | 100 |
| Mode and pattern of protection | 100 |
| Role of men and women | 87.5 |

3.4 Enhancing the role of women in JFM and management of forests

In all the JFMCs, the women members opined of their being passive participants. The women members felt that although their participation is there in the meetings but their opinions often get overridden by those of their male counterparts. The women members suggested that their participation in the JFM activities whether as Executive Committee member or as General Body member can be further enhanced if the meetings do not affect their household chores and prior information of the timings of the meetings is given.

Table 5
Issues and Suggestions to Increase the Role of
Women in JFM

| Issues | Suggestions | % of JFMC |
|--|---|-----------|
| 1. Enhance participation of women in EC and GB | Selecting a suitable venue for the meeting | 100 |
| | To conduct the meetings in free time | |
| | Prior information should be given about the meeting | |

4. Discussions

JFM to be successful requires both the community and the Forest Department staff to be well aware about the knowledge pertaining to the policy guidelines and legislations. There is also the possibility that this programme may fail if adequate importance is not given to the real resource users, who otherwise maintain the resource base. Creating awareness among the women members on all aspect of JFM, such as - concept of JFM, roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders and the benefits that will be accruing to the stakeholders is essential not only for making the programme successful but also for sustaining it.

Despite the fact that women tend to depend more on non-wood resources for household use and income than men, they frequently have less voice in resource management decisions than men, and their priorities are often overlooked. Ensuring that women's interests and preferences receive full weight in plans for forest management, in recognition of their role in product collection, processing and marketing will help in the long run. There is the potential for securing the improved participation of women, which can be ensured through sensitization, motivation and training. Creating the right conditions for making the resources available to women, especially where they have a say on the type and use of resources of their choice will help to support empowerment. Representation and effective participation of women and weaker sections communities need to be enhanced, both at the GB and the EC levels to enable them to participate in the decision making process. The study emphasizes on the need for policy transparency and more awareness and knowledge of JFM, as well as, benefit sharing and utilization mechanism so that the benefits may reach the real resource users, who otherwise maintain the resource base.

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