

Factors affecting women participation in joint forest management committees in Punjab

ANITA KUMARI¹, MK BRAHMI² and KS THAKUR³

¹Department of Tree improvement and Genetic Resources

²Department of Environmental Science

Dr YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry

Nauni, Solan 173230 Himachal Pradesh, India

³ICAR- Krishi Vigyan Kendra (YSPUHF), Chamba 176314 Himachal Pradesh, India

Email for correspondence: anita_78@ymail.com

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted in different joint forest management committees (JFMCs) of five forest development agencies (FDAs) in Punjab to assess the effect of demographic factors viz age, caste, qualification, landholding and occupation on women participation at different stages of the project. Maximum participation of women was observed in middle age group in all stages of programme viz planning (5.61%), implementation (27.33%) and maintenance (22.61%) followed by young and minimum in old age group women. Women of schedule caste category participated more at all stages of programme viz planning (7.52%), implementation (34.44%) and maintenance (29.28%). Participation of educated women was observed more at planning stage and of illiterate women at implementation and maintenance stages since latter were mostly engaged in labour-oriented work. The landholding of the participants played an important role in participation. Landless women participated more at all stages of programme followed by women with low landholdings. On the basis of occupation women from labour class participated more at all the three stages of the programme. The implementing agency should generate more awareness through meetings, consultations, group discussions etc so that women could participate at planning stage more effectively. Some incentives to the participants must be provided while attending the meetings and few income generating activities should be initiated among the women groups.

Keywords: Factors; women participation; JFMCs; FDA

INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is the nodal agency in the administrative structure of the central government for the planning, promotion, coordination and overseeing the implementation of India's environmental and forestry policies and programmes. In nineties the MoEFCC, Government of India made it mandatory to involve village communities and voluntary organizations/agencies in the regeneration activities and management of natural resources. National afforestation programme (NAP) was started in tenth working plan to avoid duplicity or redundancy and at the same time keeping in focus the decentralization agenda of the government. The main thrust of the

scheme is to develop the forest resources with people participation with focus on improvement in livelihood of the forest-fringe communities especially the poor and support and accelerate the ongoing process of devolving forest protection, management and development functions to decentralized institutions of joint forest management committees (JFMCs) at the village level and forest development agencies (FDAs) at the forest division level. Community mobilization and capacity building have become an integral part of the developmental programmes implemented by different agencies viz government organizations, non-governmental organizations and Panchayati Raj institutions (Purushottam and Singh 2005). Community organizations called JFMC (joint forest management committee)/FPC (forest protection committee/VFPC

(village forest protection committee) were formed at village level. All villagers become members and each household has to be represented by a man and women (Kameswari 2002). At village level forest land is demarcated for the committee depending upon the size of the village and availability of the forest land. The committees have to maintain and protect the area and in lieu of this they enjoy usufruct rights. Works related to the plantation, maintenance, soil moisture conservation, cultural operations etc are carried out by the committee members in accordance with the approved work plan of the FDA. Normally the weaker sections and marginalized groups within communities are given due representation in the committees because they largely depend on forest resources for their livelihood. Singh (2004) reported that women are the primary users of forest and know a lot about the uses of forest in terms of burning quality of wood, best fodder species, decomposition and quality of leaf litter, medicinal value of herbs, nutritional value of forest fruits and vegetables etc. The role of women in forestry activities is very important so they should not be ignored in all kinds of forestry activities. Their involvement is considered essential for the design and implementation of forest management and serious efforts are required to improve their level of participation. In Punjab there were 14 FDAs working under different forest divisions which had registered 492 committees. These

committees have both male and female members. The executive agency was of the view that the women participation was not up to the mark in JFMCs. In order to know the factors affecting women participation in activities of the JFMCs under FDAs the present study was carried out.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the year 2011-2012 in five FDAs of Punjab. The data on registered FDAs in Punjab were procured from the forest department. Out of registered FDAs, five were selected randomly. The selected FDAs were Patiala, Ludhiana, Ropar, Hoshiarpur and Garhshankar. Out of the selected FDAs, five committees per FDA were selected for the study. The primary data were collected through personal interviews, pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire and group meetings of women. Simple statistical methods were used to draw the inferences.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The data presented in Table 1 reveal that most of the respondents belonged to middle age group (52.27%), were illiterate (56.82%) and schedule caste (75.00%). Majority of respondents belonged to labour class and had no landholding (81.82% each).

Table 1. Demographic features of the respondents

Component	Respondents	
	Class	Percentage
Age (years)	Young (0-35)	34.09
	Middle age (35-55)	52.27
	Old (>55)	13.63
Educational qualification	Illiterate	56.82
	Primary	9.09
	Middle	9.09
	Matric	22.73
	10+2	2.27
Caste	SC	75.00
	OBC	9.09
	General	15.91
Occupation	Agriculture	18.18
	Labour	81.82
Landholding	No land	81.82
	Up to 1 ha	9.09
	1-2 ha	6.82
	2-3 ha	2.27

It is observed from Table 2 that maximum participation was found in middle age women at all stages of programme viz planning (5.61%), implementation (27.33%) and maintenance (22.61%) followed by young and minimum in old age group women (3.04, 2.22 and 5.42% respectively).

Data given in Table 3 reveal that women belonging to schedule caste category participated more at all stages of programme viz planning (7.52%), implementation (34.44%) and maintenance (29.28%) than others. Lower level of participation was observed in OBC category. At planning stage participation of matriculate women was more (3.71) while at implementation (21.20%) and maintenance (15.56%) stages participation of illiterate women was more as compared to literate because they were engaged in labour-oriented work (Table 4). The participation of

educated women could be due to more number of matriculate women those were more interactive at planning stage.

The data presented in Table 5 reveal that landless women participated more at all stages of the programme viz planning (6.57%), implementation (31.99%) and maintenance (28.95%) followed by women with landholding up to 1 ha. As the landholding increased the participation decreased. The landless women were largely depending on labour work to earn their livelihood so they took part mainly at implementation and maintenance stages of the programme. The women having more landholding participated less because they mainly remained confined to agricultural activities on their farm fields and rearing of animals hence their participation was low.

Data in Table 6 show that the women doing labour work participated more at different stages such as planning (8.00%), implementation (32.44%) and maintenance (28.04%). This could be due to their dependence on labour work to earn the bread and butter for their families.

Many workers have reported that women participation in various programmes was affected by

Table 2. Extent of women participation at different stages of programme vis a vis age

Stage	Per cent respondents of age (years)		
	0-35	35-55	>55
Planning	3.23	5.61	3.04
Implementation	12.88	27.33	2.22
Maintenance	10.85	22.61	5.42

Table 3. Extent of women participation at different stages of programme vis a vis caste

Stage	Per cent respondents of caste		
	SC	OBC	General
Planning	7.52	0.38	4.00
Implementation	34.44	3.33	4.66
Maintenance	29.28	2.28	7.14

Table 4. Extent of women participation at different stages of programme vis a vis qualification

Stage	Per cent respondents of qualification				
	Illiterate	Primary	Middle	Matric	10+2
Planning	02.94	2.28	2.94	3.71	0.09
Implementation	21.20	6.77	7.10	6.33	1.00
Maintenance	15.56	4.66	6.18	8.56	1.14

Table 5. Extent of women participation at different stages of programme vis a vis landholding

Stage	Per cent respondents of landholding			
	Landless	Up to 1 ha	1-2 ha	2-3 ha
Planning	6.57	2.47	2.38	0.38
Implementation	31.99	5.22	2.88	1.33
Maintenance	28.95	4.71	3.90	1.33

Table 6. Extent of women participation at different stages of programme vis a vis occupation

Stage	Per cent respondents of occupation	
	Agriculture	Labour
Planning	3.90	8.00
Implementation	10.09	32.44
Maintenance	9.85	28.04

different factors. Naidu (1992) reported that appropriate education, communication, persuasion and demonstration are the important factors in promoting the involvement of people. Agarwal (1997) documented that major constraints to women formal participation in JFM initiatives were traditional rule, social and cultural barrier, limited experience of women in public speaking, logistic constraints like time and double work burden.

Brahmi et al (1997) reported that there were seven factors viz economical, social, demographic, situational, institutional and technological which affected the women participation in afforestation programme. Longanandhan and Mondal (2005) stated that among socio-economic characters education, extension contact and mass media exposure had a positive and significant influence on the awareness, knowledge and attitude of the farmers.

Purushotam and Singh (2005) also reported that illiteracy in people, lack of knowledge, poor economic status, migration of people for wages, village politics and lack of visits of progressive farmers in model watersheds had influenced the people's participation in watershed projects. Bagdi et al (2002) narrated that assets possession, landholding and family size of farmers had positive and significant relationship with people participation. Brahmi and Sehgal (2008) summarized that people participation in conservation of common property resources was influenced by twelve factors viz lack of awareness and knowledge, lack of training and visit programme, poor socio-economic status, self-interest of the people, low landholding, illiteracy in aged group, village politics, lack of interest in money contribution, prevailing perception for getting subsidy, lack of transparency in the project activities, lack of coordination with staff and local people and improper usufruct sharing.

Bagdi and Kurothe (2014) concluded that farmers of Vidarbha region of Maharashtra participated moderately at planning and implementation stages of the watershed development programme whereas high level of participation was exhibited by farmers at the maintenance stage. Evans et al (2017) summarized that improving meaningful participation of women in decision-making required addressing challenges and obstacles at multiple levels; obstacles at the communal level where the future of the forests would be decided cannot be overcome without attention to the household.

CONCLUSION

The demographic factors like age, caste, qualification, landholding and occupation played important role in women participation at different stages of the project. Maximum participation of women was observed in middle-age group at all the stages of the programme. Scheduled caste women participated more at all stages of the programme. Participation of educated women at planning stage and of illiterate women at implementation and maintenance stages was found more since the latter were mostly engaged in labour-oriented work. Landless women participated more at all stages of the programme followed by women with low landholdings. The landless women were mainly dependent on labour work to earn their bread and butter. To elicit more participation the implementing agency should generate more and more awareness through meetings, consultations and group discussions so that they could participate more effectively. Some incentives to the participants must be provided while attending the meetings and few income generating activities need to be initiated among the women groups. Regular follow up of the programme activities among women folk must be taken care of for building good rapport of the executing agency.

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