International Journal of Farm Sciences **3(1)** : 135-143, 2013

Women empowerment in Forest Development Agencies (FDAs) of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab

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ABSTRACT

Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. According to FAO the most disadvantaged section of the society is woman, they are the 'silent majority' of the world's poor. Seventy per cent world's poor are women and they face peculiar social, cultural, educational, political and allied problems. Hence empowerment of women of any flock is critical not only for their welfare but also for the development of the country. The aim of forest development agencies is to empower local people especially women for their active participation as partner in the management of forest resources and sharing the benefits derived from its protection and management as they are the primary users of forests. Thus the study was conducted in 9 Forest Development Agencies (FDAs) of Himachal Pradesh and 5 FDAs of Punjab. Women in three age groups viz 0-35 yrs (young age group), 35-55 yrs (middle age group) and >55 yrs (old age group) were interrogated regarding their socio-personal characteristics, socio-economic characteristics, index of verifiers for empowerment and empowerment index. The involvement of middle aged, illiterate and economically poor women is more in forestry activities. Maximum empowerment of women is shown by their participation in planning, implementation, maintenance and representation in committees by gender and economically classes which is the main criteria of empowerment. Overall empowerment index was 54.34 per cent in HP and 26.56 per cent in Punjab which is not very encouraging. On the basis of classification and analysis of FDAs it was concluded that the women in HP were more empowered as compared to its adjoining state of Punjab.

Keywords: Forest Development Agencies (FDAs); women empowerment; empowerment index

INTRODUCTION

The forest dependent people of Joint Forest Management (JFM) play a key role and responsibility in sharing power according to mutually agreed upon memorandum of understanding. It recognizes the livelihood and sustenance

needs of the people through the principle of care and share. The aim of JFM programme is to increase community access to forests and rehabilitate the degraded forests. The JFM programme also aims at empowering local people for their active participation as partners in the management of forest resources and sharing the benefits derived from their protection and management. Empowerment as a concept was introduced at the international women conference in 1985 at Nairobi. The word power is the keyword of the term 'empowerment' which means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. It also means enabling women to take greater control of their own lives (Karubi 2006). Rowlands (1995) defined empowerment as bringing people who are outside the decision making process into it. Empowerment refers broadly to the expansion of freedom of choice and action. For poor people freedom is severely curtailed by their voicelessness and powerlessness in relation particularly to the state and markets. Thus empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives (Narayan 2002). Women have specific roles with respect to the environment. Data reveal that approximately 70 per cent of those who live on less than 1 dollar per day are women (Anon 2007a). Women work two third of the world's working hours yet receive only 10 per cent of the world's income (Anon 2007b). Seventy five per cent of the world's 876 million illiterate adults are women while of the 550 million low paid workers in the world, 330 million or 60 per cent are women. They constitute almost half of the total population in the world and out of which two third of the world's adults illiterates are women. Seventy per cent world's poor are women and they face peculiar social, cultural, educational, political and allied problems (Sharma and Verma 2008). Hence empowerment of women of any flock is critical not only for their welfare but also for the development of the country. It is known fact that women are the vital human infrastructure and their empowerment viz economical, educational, social and political would hasten the pace of social development. Investing in women's 'capabilities' and empowering them to achieve their choices and opportunities are the surest ways to contribute towards economic growth and overall development (Pattnaik 2000). The constraint for participation of women in agriculture and allied activities like forestry and in other sectors are wage discrimination, gender based technology, lack of training and credits, low level of exposure etc (Rath et al 2007). The strategy for women development needs improvement, betterment, development and upliftment to effect their empowerment. Keeping in view the present study was conducted to assess the empowerment in JFM of women by using different empowerment indicators outlined by Bhattacharya and Basnyat (2003).

METHODOLOGY

The aforesaid study was conducted through survey and surveillance in the selected Forest Development Agencies (FDAs) of the two states on the pre-planned questionnaire prepared for collecting the primary data by following the procedure as described below:

Site selection: Out of total registered FDAs 25 per cent were randomly selected for conducting the study. Initially all the FDAs were alphabetically arranged and from the first five FDAs one FDA was selected randomly followed by every fourth FDA. Out of total 9 FDAs from Himachal Pradesh and 5 from Punjab were chosen randomly viz Bilaspur, Dehra, Hamirpur, Kullu, Nachan, Palampur, Poanta, Rajgarh and Theog from Himachal Pradesh and Patiala, Ludhiana, Ropar, Hoshairpur and Garhshankar from Punjab.

Respondent selection: After FDAs selection a list of JFMCs/FPCs were prepared with the officials of forest department and from each FDA 2-4 committees were chosen from selected JFMCs/FPCs and only female members were interrogated.

Index of verifiers for assessing empowerment

Indices of verifiers were calculated as given by Bhattacharya and Basnyat (2003).

$$C = \frac{\text{“ } (n_1 x w_1) + (n_2 w_2) + (n_3 w_3) - (n_n w)}{\text{“ } W*N} \times 100$$

Where :

C_1 = Index of the verifiers

w_1, w_2, w_3—w_4= Scoring of verifiers from 1 to 5 in descending order

n_1, n_2————n_4= Number of respondents in each scoring

w= Maximum possible weights

N= Total number of respondents

After obtaining index of each verifier the average index value for each indicator was calculated by following formula:

Assigning weight to indicators

The group weightage methods was used to give due attention on people's factors of choice for the empowerment. Weights on each indicator were assigned on the basis of outcomes of the group discussion exercise. The participants of group discussions were requested to assign the weight to each criterion of empowerment. Five was fixed as the minimum weightage with 100 as total score was used for calculating the empowerment index.

Empowerment index: The empowerment index was calculated by the following formula

$$E_1 = \frac{\text{“}(I_1 w_1) + (I_2 w_2) + \text{————} (I_n w_n)}{\text{“ } w_1 + w_2 + w_3 \text{————} w_n}$$

Where :

w_1, w_2——w_n are weights assigned to indicators

I_1, I_2——I_n— value of index for indicators

Classification of empowerment index

The empowerment index was classified into four major types on the basis of the scoring. Higher the value better the empowerment and vice-versa.

Index	Scoring
Highly empowerment	Above 75
Empowered (moderate)	75-50
Least empowered	50-25
Not empowered at all	Less than 25

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present investigations were exclusively focused on the areas of socio-personal characteristics, economic characteristics, literacy rate, literacy index and empowerment index.

Socio-personal characteristics: In this age, caste, qualification and type of family were the criteria adopted for investigation. It has been observed that age does not act as an important element in imbibing any social and economic transformation. The person in older age group in general tends to be less dynamic and innovative. Therefore age of respondents was considered to be an important factor determining the people's participation in JFM. Fig1 is an indicative of the fact that 64.91 per cent women in HP and 52.27 percent in Punjab belonged to middle age group (35-55 years). Education plays a vital role for the betterment of socio-economic conditions and provides healthy as well as clean environment for a quality living through a socio-cultural life of the people living in plains as well as in hilly terrains. Education is generally believed to have the effect of widening the mental horizon of a person thereby predisposing women to new ideas. In HP 49.12 per cent and in Punjab 56.82 per cent respondents were illiterate and in general they had low level of education. This shows that education has no role in participation activities. Lamichhane (2004) also reported that the participation of women is more in age group of 29-45 years out of which majority were illiterate.

Caste still retains its pivotal position in the social structure amongst rural masses. The data presented in Fig 1 indicate that majority of the respondents in HP were from general category (65.45%) followed by schedule caste (23.64%) in contrast to the situation in Punjab where 75 per cent respondents belonged to schedule caste followed by general category (15.91%). The size and type of family influence the joint forest management to a greater extent as noticed in HP; joint and big families were more dominant in economically weaker sections as compared to Punjab having nuclear and big families in the society.

Economic Characteristics: In this occupation size of land, structural house and social participation were undertaken to express the highlights of observations. Fig 2 provides evidence that agriculture was the main source of livelihood in all the surveyed areas of HP but in Punjab labour was main source of livelihood. Size of holding directly effects the income, consumption, saving and investment of land owning households. Therefore the average size of total and operational land holdings of sampled respondents was worked out. In HP majority of the respondents had marginal land holding (60%) ie below 1 ha whereas in Punjab majority of them (81.82 %) were landless.

The socio-economic status of people is determined by the possession of house and type of house. It is depicted in Fig 2 that in HP mixed houses were predominant in case of 49 per cent respondents and 42 per cent had Pucca houses. However in Punjab 61.36 per cent respondents had Pucca houses and 20.45 per cent respondents had mixed houses. Social participation refers to the voluntary sharing in person to person and in group to group relationship beyond the immediate household needs. The respondents under the JFM programme have in general a good strength for social participation. The data recorded expressed that 73 per cent respondents in HP and 84.09 per cent in Punjab were members either of Mahila Mandals or SHGs and amongst the surveyed FDAs 27 per cent and 15.91 per cent respondents in HP and Punjab respectively were office bearers of JFMCs/ Mahila Mandals or SHGs.

Literacy Rate and literacy Index: Literacy rate and literacy index of the respondents were also worked out in both the states under investigation and in HP the literacy rate of young age group females was observed higher (69%) but the quality of education they obtained was poor. In Punjab literacy rate of middle age group was higher (52.27%) but quality of education was poor here also (Fig 3).

It was observed that maximum empowerment of women in HP (67%) and Punjab (32.07%) was shown by their participation in planning, implementation and maintenance and representation in various committees by gender and economic classes i e 65 and 45.30 per cent in HP and Punjab respectively. This index is followed by support from forest department 66 and 45.12 per cent, self-confidence 65 and 46.10 per cent, income 65 and 22.89 per cent in HP and Punjab respectively (Table 1).

Respondents were asked to assign weightage to indicators in such way that community weightage on indicators of empowerment could be ascertained. JFMC participation and inclusion was one of the major criterian for empowerment where maximum weight was assigned followed by accountability, accesses to information,

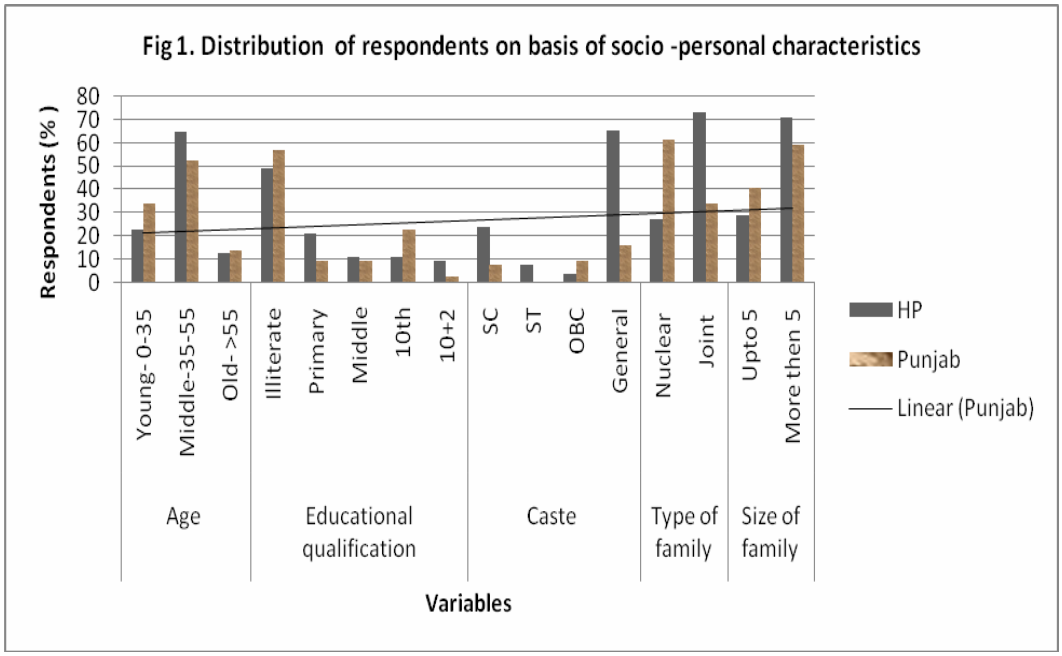
Fig 1. Distribution of respondents on basis of socio -personal characteristics
Respondents (%)
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Young- 0-35
Middle-35-55
Old- >55
Illiterate
Primary
Middle
10th
10+2
SC
ST
OBC
General
Nuclear
Joint
Upto 5
More then 5
HP
Punjab
Linear (Punjab)
Age
Educational qualification
Caste
Type of family
Size of family
Variables

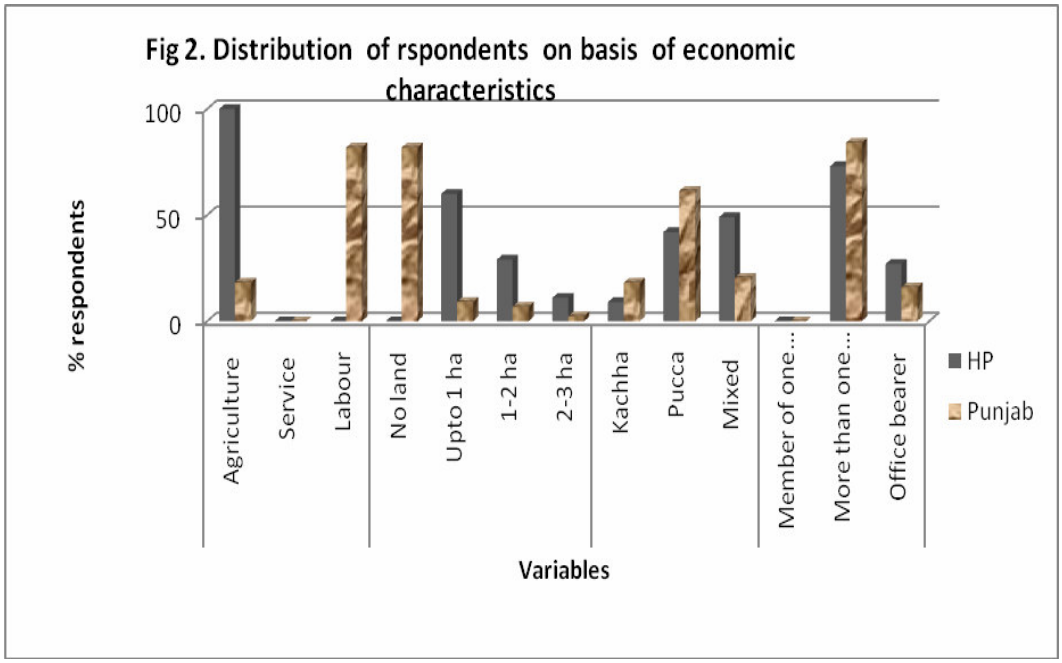
Fig 2. Distribution of rspondents on basis of economic characteristics
% respondents
100
50
0
Agriculture
Service
Labour
No land
Upto 1 ha
1-2 ha
2-3 ha
Kachha
Pucca
Mixed
Member of one...
More than one...
Office bearer
HP
Punjab
Variables

Table 1. Index of verifiers used for women empowerment

Verifiers	Index (%)	
	HP	Punjab
Representation in committees of gender and economic classes	65.00	45.30
Participation in Planning, implementation and monitoring	67.00	32.07
Record keeping	39.54	9.54
Knowledge of JFM process	43.00	15.68
Formation of committees	56.00	17.95
Formulation of microplan	39.09	19.70
Financial management	33.00	16.12
Involvement of forest department in JFM related activities regarding capacity development	60.00	44.48
Awareness of rights responsibility or activities to be carried out	55.00	12.73
Information about microplans and their activities	41.82	18.18
Support from forest department in relation to accountability	66.00	45.12
Participation of committee members in JFM activities	53.00	23.41
Income generation activities	29.09	31.62
lmplementation of micro plans	41.82	29.17
Employment opportunities	62.00	22.56
Tours and Trainings	32.00	29.16
Benefit sharing	65.00	21.21
Self confidence	55.27	46.10
Visibility and respect	54.54	29.29
Income	65.00	22.89
Resources	55.64	15.61
Employment	63.00	19.24
Decision making	55.27	10.61
Bargaining power	47.27	10.00
Regeneration	51.64	20.27
Forest conditions	60.36	27.27
Conflicts and its resolution mechanism	56.36	17.73
Meeting/group discussion/ personal communication	52.00	16.97
Implementation of decision	51.00	9.09

access to service, capacity development, material and perceptual change etc (Table 2).

Index of indicators observed that maximum value was obtained for participation and inclusions (66% and

Table 2. Community weightage to indicators of empowerment

Attribute	Score	
	HP	Punjab
Participation and inclusions	20	15
Access to information	10	5
Organizational capacity development	10	10
Accountability	15	10
Access to services	10	15
Perceptual changes	10	15
Material changes	10	10
Relational changes	5	5
Biological sustainability	5	5
Organizational sustainability	5	5
Total	100	100

38.6% in HP and Punjab respectively) followed by material change 61.21 per cent and biological sustainability (56%) in HP and access to services (26.74%) in Punjab. Minimum value was obtained for access to information (41.27%) in HP and relational changes (10.31%) in Punjab. Overall empowerment index was calculated as per the formula described in methodology (Table 3).

The overall empowerment index was observed to be 54.34 per cent in HP and 26.56 per cent in Punjab – not so encouraging and on the basis of classification of empowerment indices explains that women were more empowered in HP as compared to Punjab through FDAs. Bhattacharya and Basyant 2003 also noticed that women of VFCs/JFMCs were more empowered as compared to FPC (Forest Protection Committees) which were prevalent in Punjab.

It is concluded from the above observations that the forest resources used in JFMCs were physically and financially more sound to regenerate the degraded forests in HP as compared to Punjab. The JFMC members' livelihood was also more dependent on forests as compared to those of FPC members which leads to better situation of empowerment indices in VFCs as compared with FPCs.

Table 3. Indices of indicators used for women empowerment

Indicators	Index (%)	
	HP	Punjab
Participation and inclusions	66.00	38.6
Access to information	41.27	12.61
Organizational capacity building	47.02	24.56
Accountability	53.96	24.86
Access to services	45.98	26.74
Perceptual change	54.98	37.69
Material change	61.21	19.25
Relational change	51.27	10.31
Biological sustainability	56.00	23.67
Organizational sustainability	53.12	14.60
Overall empowerment	54.34	26.56

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors are thankful to National Afforestation and Eco-development Board, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India for funding the study.

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Received : 12.7.2012 *Accepted : 19.8.2012*