

EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN THROUGH THEIR PARTICIPATION IN AGROFORESTRY

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Agroforestry as a new term was coined in 1977. Initially it was taken as a science to rehabilitate the degraded lands. Agroforestry encompasses a diverse set of integrated land use system for a variety of purposes. It takes an interdisciplinary approach to land use, requiring the combination of social, ecological and economic factors. Paul and Singh (1998) defined agroforestry system as an ideal combination of trees 'or shrubs with agricultural or horticultural crops or livestock for optimizing land productivity, conserving soils, environment, reducing risks and producing timber, fuel wood and forage on a sustainable bases. For social scientist, the term "Agroforestry" represents a combination and interrelationship between people, domestic animals, crops and trees designed to rehabilitate land or to sustain and increase production of certain desired social benefits. In other words, Agroforestry is a collective name for land use systems and technologies where woody perennials (trees, shrubs, palms, bamboo, etc.) are deliberately used on the same land management unit as agricultural crops and/or animals, in some form of spatial arrangement or temporal sequence. Thus, agroforestry concerned with the structure and functioning of human ecosystem and not merely biophysical system. Such type of management practices should be compatible with the cultural practices of the local population to contribute to the economic well being of rural population and community development.

TYPES OF AGROFORESTRY SYSTEMS:

Several agroforestry systems are being used in different areas. Following are the common agroforestry systems in India on the basis of nature of components:

* Agrisilviculture (trees + crops) * Boundary plantation (trees on boundary + crops) * Block plantation (trees + crops) * Energy plantation (trees + crops during initial years) * Alley cropping (shrubs + crops) * Agrihorticulture (fruit trees + crops) * Agrihortisilviculture (trees + fruit trees + crops) * Agrisilvipasture (trees + crops + pasture / animals) * Silvipasture (trees + pasture/ animals) * Forage forestry (forage trees + pasture) * Shelter belts (trees + / - crops) * Wind breaks (trees + / - crops) *

Hortipasture (fruits trees + pasture / animals) * Live fence (shrubs / Under trees on boundary) * Homestead (multiple combination of trees, fruit trees, vegetables etc.) Entomoforestry (trees + sericulture) Aquaforestry (trees + fishes)

NEED OF AGROFORESTRY SYSTEMS APPROACH

The need to approach agroforestry with social science knowledge has become imperative due to following well-known factors—

- * The social scale in which we are operating is large and diverse.
- * Deforestation is more often a function of underlying institutional and cultural problems than failure of technology.
- * Afforestation, reforestation or any other form of natural resource management can effectively be achieved through social or organizational technologies rather than biophysical technologies only.
- * Agroforestry is an intervention in ecosystem. to increase socially desired benefits.
- * If practiced as a multiproduct and community directed activity, based on local people's experience, knowledge and needs, agroforestry can solve many key issues facing all the developing countries such as food security, energy shortage and unemployment.

Drawing of theories from various social sciences (Sociology, political science, anthropology, geography, history and psychology) can provide agroforestry with a unique angle of vision for analyzing people-forest interaction and can be used for the well being of the human society.

IMPORTANCE OF AGROFORESTRY SYSTEM

There is a vital relationship between socio-economics of agroforestry and agroforestry. The status of agroforestry in a given area is directly related to "How the related society views and values it"; and the status (well being) of a society in turn equally dependent on the status of agroforestry. So understanding the fundamental dynamics between social values; economic values; and status of agroforestry is essential for those interested in development of agroforestry. Divergence between

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social and economic objectives can kill the spirit of agroforestry. For example overemphasis on economic benefits has led to ways of extracting surplus from the fund; and there by unsustainable development. But the better understanding of socio-economic aspects can be aid to sustainable development. So, importance of agroforestry system for the society is as follows;

A) HOUSE HOLD BENEFITS FROM AGROFORESTRY:

(a) Fulfillment of basic needs of rural poor Agroforestry can fulfill the following four basic needs of the rural poor. Viz:

(a) Food grain b) Energy (fuel wood) c) Fodder (for increased milk production and cash) d) Shelter (for housing).

(b) Employment potential-Agroforestry can generate additional employment broadly in two ways firstly: by putting additional labour to maintain trees & to harvest the agroforestry produce secondly by supporting new areas of employment!"

(c) Reclamation of degraded soils-Several benefits for soil fertility and nutrient cycling are expected from integration of trees into land use systems. Agroforestry helps in; improving soil fertility, soil conservation, moisture conservation, reducing wind erosion, providing Shelterbelt, extending shades and in providing biological barriers.

(d) Risk management-Adoption of agroforestry system may reduce or increase risks. to household livelihood security like: diversification of family income and unsuccessful agroforestry venture may increase the risks also due to poor planting material, lack of knowledge unusual drought condition and poor market prospects.

(B) SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Agroforestry also makes social and environmental contribution in several ways like: agroforestry may replace less stable systems, it protect remaining forest resources by providing ,the alternative supply of tree products, it provide employment and income for rural poor and also helps to slow migration from rural to urban areas.

WHY WOMEN ARE NOT INVOLVED IN AGROFORESTRY?

Despite the crucial role of women in the development process, development projects continue to be designed without consideration of their effect on women or the role of women in their implementation. A study of 43 World Bank forestry projects, for instance, found that only eight made specific reference to women (World Bank, 1980). Agroforestry projects are no exception. In part this state of affairs to some extent is due to the masculine

images the word "forestry" conjures up. The reality is however, diametrically opposed to the image. Women have traditionally played important roles in agricultural production and in the use and management of trees. The importance of these roles is, however, often obscured by the following prevailing myths about the roles and status of women.

Women as housewives-The first myths is that women are just' housewives. in fact in many if not most rural societies, wome's bear the major and sole responsibilities for food production. Research studies ha Ie pointed out that women's labour and women's decision making are all solutely crucial to agricultural production and development (F AO, 1982). Women are responsible for small stock husbandry and the feeding of large livestock. Thus agroforestry projects that involve fodder, trees, the servicing of crops by trees or intercropping of crops and trees must include women. Since it is after women who grow the crops or care for the liwstock.

Forest products as the domain of men-A second myth is that only men are users of and responsible for trees. In fact, women are the primary users of forestry products such as fuel wood, wild fodder and food. Wood et al (1980) noted the women are primarily responsible for wood collection and utilization and often they initiate establishment and tending of the wood stock around the village. Men are more likely to be interested in forest products for commercial sale and in the products with end-uses farther from home. Where as women collect fuel wood as well as food IIW both humans and animals from forest and individual trees. Women are knowledgeable about the burning characteristics of various species and about species that have food values. Women also use forest products for medicine making and basket making etc. Thus women's intimate involvement with forest products and agricultural production olten results in their having a greater knowledge or environmental problems than mell. It is women who know, what is needed; which trees arc suitable and which are not and who will use the final product. Thus the presumption that it is only men who are involved in forestry/ agroforestry is often totally wrong.

Men heads of households-The third myth is that every woman is a member of a male-headed household. But women headed household is an increasing common social unit nowadays. Some time this is by choice, where as some time it is the results of personal events (ie. Death of a spouse, divorce, male cut migration etc). Whatever the cause, women headed households are found in substantial number in every region of the world. It is estimated that between 25 and 33 percent of all households in the

world are defector headed by women (Buvinic and Youssef 1978). As a result of heading their own households, women have assumed new roles and takes decisions. In minor forest products it is often only who are involved in agroforestry chores and decisions.

Women as ;passive community members-A fourth myth is that women are passive members of communities in which public influence and public action is a sphere restricted to men. It is not always true; women have important influence of women's informal association in both private and the public spheres. "The chipko movement" is a classic example of he/the message of forest conservation and discussion especially among the women in the hilly district or Himalayas. Within the domestic sphere, women exercise influence public events through their information link, which are based on linkage ties and on their ability to withhold goods (foods etc) necessary for man's public participation. They may also participate in leadership roles in formal institutions.

WHY AGROFORESTRY NEEDS WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT?

It is now well realized that we can not achieve sustainable development without taking women's vital roles in to considerations. Following are the reasons why women should be involved in Agroforestry projects.

1. Women are better informed about environmental concerned.
2. They are most sufferers from environmental degradation.
3. Women are main managers of environmental and natural resources because they are more involved in managing community lands than men.
4. They are more responsible for after care and harvesting of field crops and for ensuring adequate nutrition for family.
5. Restoring and recognizing of symbiotic relationship with natural world is necessary.
6. Most of rural and tribal women as producer and caretakers wholly dependent upon renew-ability of natural systems.

From above points it become crucial that women be given a relevant position if the messages concerning the environment and sustaining the same is to be developed. In other words whenever we talk of agroforestry women should be the important figure. In short, if a women is educated on advantages of agroforestry, when the entire country will be enlightened and consequently the whole world. So, women must be given relevant position in agroforestry projects.

FOR WHICH KINDS OF ROLES WOMEN'S BE INVOLVED IN AGROFORESTRY?

Under the third National Agricultural Policy (1998-

2010) and 10th five-year plan more emphasis has been given to agroforestry system and women's involvement as means to sustainable agricultural production. So, for shaping the future projects of agroforestry women should be involved in the following roles/activities.

1. Consultant for designing the agroforestry projects, their strategies and policies.
2. Conducting systematic base line survey for studying socio-cultural backgrounds of the communities.
3. Studying the socio-cultural perceptions of rural people regarding forestry products, connections between the major problems (like population growth, poverty, unemployment) and agroforestry system.
4. Land shaping, water conservation and establishment of fruits plants. reforestation, improvement of degraded soils.
5. Selection of cropping pattern for providing food, fodder, wood and shelter security.
6. Identification of species of trees, shrubs and herbs popularly used by local community to satisfy their needs.
7. Women's specialized knowledge and experience can be used in identification of species which have medicinal values and useful for fuel, fodder and food products. ∴ For tapping the local people's potential and resources available with them. ∴ Encouraging rural women to start agro forestry based economic activities and get economic independence.
8. Finding out the causes of destruction of forests, cutting down of trees and changes in cropping patterns.
9. Promoting and utilizing agroforestry by creating awareness among people about the role of agro forestry in environmental conservation and solving environmental problems

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH AGROFORESTRY:

Meaning of Empowerment: Empowerment as a concept was introduced at the international women's conference in 1985 at Nairobi. The word "Power" is the key word of the term "Empowerment" which means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The material assets over which control can be established may be of any type - physical, human, financial; such as land, water, forests, people's bodies and agencies, labour, money and access to money.

Intellectual resources: knowledge, information, ideas are examples which can be included in intellectual resources. Ideology signifies the ability to generate, capacity to propagate, capacity to sustain and institutionalize specific sets of beliefs, principles, values, attitudes, actions and behavior: Virtually it determines how people perceive, think and function in a given socio-economic and political environment.

Definition of Women Empowerment-World Population Report (1994) stated very clearly that

“Empowering women means extending choices, choice about if and when to get married, choice about education, employment -opportunities controlling the social and physical environment: choice about if and when to get pregnant, and ultimately about family size. violence or abuse, in which women are free use community services on the basis of equality.”

International Women’s Conference (1985)- defined empowerment as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favour of women.

UNIFEM in its, guidelines on Women’s Empowerment (1997) interpreted empowerment “as a process where women individually and collectively become: aware of how power relations operate in their lives and gain the self confidence and strength to challenge gender inequalities at the household, community, national, regional and international levels.”

UNIFEM identified following four components of Women’s empowerment. .

Acquiring knowledge and an Understanding” of gender/power relations and ways in which these relations may be changed; Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one’s ability to secure desired changes and right to control one’s life; Gaining the ability to generate choices and thereby acquiring leverage and bargaining power, and Developing the ability to organize and or/ influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic; order, nationally and internationally. Gurumurthy in a paper on “Women’s rights and Status” published by UNDP (1998) makes a useful distinction between empowerment and self-empowerment. According to her: “Empowerment” is an externally induced process involving the creation of condition that enable women to exercise their autonomy; and “Self empowerment” is a process where women find time and space of their own to begin to re-examine their lives critically and collectively.

PARAMETERS OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Following parameters have been identified for the Empowerment of women;

1. Enhance self-esteem and self-confidence in women. 2. Build a positive image of women by recognizing their contribution to the society, polity

and economy. 3. Develop in them an ability to think critically. 4. Foster decision-making and action through collective process. 5. Enable women to make informal choices in areas like education, employment and health especially reproductive health. 6. Ensure equal participation in the developmental process. 7.. Provide information, knowledge and skill for economic independence. 8. Enhance access to legal literacy and information related to their all kinds of rights.

HOW WOMEN CAN BE EMPOWERED THROUGH AGROFORESTRY?

Agroforestry has great potential for all round Empowerment of women viz;

1. Easy accessibility and availability of food products at cheaper rate may empower women physically. 2. Organization of women in self-help groups and co-operatives for agroforestry-based activities may empower them socially. 3. Technical knowledge regarding agro forestry systems may help them in their technological empowerment and can increase their mental horizon. 4. Establishment of self-employment, lent ventures and enterprises agroforestry project areas may empower them economically. 5. Easy and near by accessibility of fuel wood, fodder and food products may help in reducing women’s drudgery. 6. Participation in agroforestry projects helps women in their capacity building, Which develop among women positive attitude, stimulate self-confidence, made them self-reliant and expand the horizon of women’s aspirations. 7 Exploitation of women by moneylenders can be prevented if they earn money from agroforestry project. 8. Leadership qualities can be Developed among women through their participation at each level of agroforestry project planning and management. 9. Organization of rural women in self-help groups and co-operatives for running agrobased enterprises may help them in establishing suitable linkages with credit and financial institutions. It will increase their access to the benefits of Government schemes. Networking of their SHGs will impose high moral standard, which may increase their confidence, expectations and may improve their self-image along with empowering them morally. 10. Gender discrimination in the field of agroforestry can be reduced by women’s participation.

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