

SMALL SCALE FOREST BASED ENTERPRISES IN INDIA

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ROLES OF WOMEN

A SUMMARY

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Small Scale Forest Based Enterprises with Special
Reference to the Roles of Women - A summary

A study by the Institute of Social Studies Trust for the
Forestry Department of the Food and Agriculture
Organisation

Development programmes, today, need to dwell deeply on the requirements of, the constraints on, and the growth potential of forestry and allied activities. It is with growing concern that we note the extensive degradation of rich forests, the destruction of traditional forest based occupations and the displacement of scores of people who have survived on the forests in the past. With this thought in mind, ISST decided to undertake a study on "Small Scale Forest Based Enterprises (SFE) in India" supported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. As any forest related policy/programme has a strong influence on the women involved, it was agreed that the study would focus on the roles of women within the SFE.

The study was therefore entitled "Small Scale Forest Based Enterprises in India with special reference to the roles of women".

In what follows, a highly condensed version of the scope of each component of the study and initial information indicative of policy programme and data interventions is presented.

AIM

To collect information on women's roles in relation to, Small Scale Forest Based Enterprises, in order to influence relevant policies and programmes, with a view to enhance the socio-economic status of women in this sector.

OBJECTIVES

- (a) to get an understanding of Small Scale Forest Based Enterprises in India with special reference to the women employed in them.
- (b) to increase awareness of any S.F.E. which have till now remained unidentified.
- (c) to undertake case studies on two or more micro level S.F.E. related to women, so as to understand the processes and linkages involved, and to design/ activate suitable projects by the Forest Department, National Wasteland Development Board (NWDB) and other relevant institutions in favour of women.
- (d) to study and propose any policy, organisational and other strategies to enhance women's roles, incomes and opportunities within the S.F.E. and to enhance the viability of the S.F.E. themselves.

The study was divided into three reports which were to be presented separately or to be combined into a single document.

The three reports were to be:

- i) The National Review Paper [NRP] which was to give an overall analysis of Small Scale Forest Based Enterprises in India with special reference to the roles of women in them.
- ii) The Karnataka State Overview Paper [KSOP] which was to present an assessment of SFE, again with a special focus on women, within Karnataka, and to outline a strategy for the micro-level case studies.
- iii) Two or more case studies, which were to focus at the micro level on the identities, roles, constraints and supports of the workers involved, especially of poor women.

METHODOLOGY

This study has been based on both primary and secondary information, as well as on discussions with individuals from a number of government and non-government bodies.

The study being segmented into three distinct sections, three different levels of inquiry have been followed. At the first level, i.e., in the NRP, a wide set of data related to women in SFE across the country,

has been collected. The KSOP, which forms the second layer of the study, being restricted to Karnataka, the data base used in it differs substantially from that of the NRP.

The case studies have been undertaken with the primary aim of being able to draw up a set of specific recommendations to assist the women engaged in these SFE - this aim has been kept in mind, both while choosing the case study activities and while analysing them. The two case study activities differ in terms of nature of activity, persons involved, raw material used, location of site and problems present. Therefore while broadly both the case studies are based on primary information collection, observation, secondary data collection and interviews with villagers, N.G.O personnel and government officials, the actual step by step process of information collection has been specific to each.

The one factor which has been a part of all of ISST's research projects and which in view of ISST's and FAO's strong emphasis on policy and action recommendations has been given considerable importance in this study as well, has been that of information dissemination and awareness creation. At each level of inquiry, ISST has sought to make villagers, NGOs working in the area of forestry and policy makers like the forest department, planning department and NWDB

officials aware of the aims of the study and of the possible policy programmes which could emerge out of it. One of the results of this constant effort at awareness creation has been the NWDB's agreement to consider organising a round table conference on this study.

The scope of the three components - a resumé

(i) THE NATIONAL REVIEW PAPER [NRP]:

The NRP undertakes a sweeping analysis of the status of SFE in India and considers the roles of women and the extent of their involvement in these SFE.

Different definitions of Small Scale Industries have been considered and an appropriate definition which takes into account all the relevant characteristics of forest based small scale enterprises which involve women has been drawn out. This crucial definition distinguishes between the unit of organisation and the unit of production, makes special note of the type of technology involved and incorporates collection and not just processing as a criterion for categorising SFE.

SFE has been broadly classified into 'wood based' and 'minor forest produce (MFP) based enterprises. These broad sub-divisions have been further categorised into,

- (a) collection and extraction based enterprises
- (b) processing based enterprises

To this classificatory scheme the criterion of type of technology is applied and a final distinction between four types of enterprises is made.

Type 1:

- i) Collection gathering, cleaning and grading of

forest products either as self-employment or as a house-hold activity.

Type 2:

- i) Collection, gathering, cleaning and grading of forest products in non-household cottage industry type of organisations.
- ii) Processing of forest products by using local skills and local village level technology as self-employment enterprise, as a household enterprise or non-household cottage industry.

Type 3:

- i) Collection, extraction, cleaning and grading of forest products in factory type of organisations.
- ii) Processing of forest products by using village level technology or mechanised and chemical processes in factory type of organisations.

Type 4:

- i) Processing of forest products in integrated plants in factories.

On taking into account the definition adopted, Type 1 and Type 2 emerge as SFE.

The NRP then proceeds to identify those SFE in which women play a significant role, and by using National Sample Survey data, indices of female participation in each type of enterprise have been prepared.

The NRP assesses certain dominant forest based activities like fuelwood collection, fodder collection, MFP collection and the harvesting and processing of different minor and major forest produce.

The N R P then discusses the status of SFE in India under broad sub-headings like,

- a) S.F.E. and the 'National Economy'
- b) S.F.E. and its influence on women
- c) The market structure of S.F.E.
- d) S.F.E. and the Government
- e) Competition to SFE
- f) The raw material base of SFE
- g) The financial and organisational structure of SFE.

From this analysis emerge a list of conclusions.

(ii) KARNATAKA STATE OVERVIEW PAPER (K.S.O.P)

Innumerable women in Karnataka are engaged in activities which are dependent on the use of forest produce. Some of these tasks fall within the umbrella of the organised sector, some are a part of the unorganised yet money based market economy, others contribute to increased consumption without increasing money income, while still others form the very foundation of the survival

It is impossible to understand or assess the varied forest based activities undertaken by women in their entirety or to enumerate the different forest based enterprises which exist. An attempt has however been made in the KSOP to identify, classify and understand Small Scale Forest Based Enterprises (SFE) under certain broad categories, and to establish the extent and type of participation of women in these enterprises.

Female participation in SFE has been analysed in terms of

- a) main and marginal workers
- b) the household and non-household sectors
- c) different classes of workers like employees, employers, family workers etc.

Variation in employment in SFE across the different districts in Karnataka and over the last two decades has

been discussed.

As in the NRP an analysis of the effect of technological change on female participation in SFE, the raw material supply and demand structure of SFE and the supports and constraints faced by SFE in general and women within SFE in particular have been studied.

Further, a few specific processing based SFE have been analysed and the forest based activities of collection and extraction, studied, to obtain a wider understanding of their means of functioning.

Finally the last chapter reviews the entire analysis and presents the obstacles faced and consequent loopholes that are to be found in KSOP.

(iii) MICRO LEVEL STUDIES:

Micro level studies have been undertaken on two different forest based activities with the aim of investigating the nature of supports, constraints and possibilities of womens' employment in these activities. The end output sought here is a tangible set of policy and action recommendations which can strengthen the hands of the women engaged in these SFE.

Case Study 1:

The first case study has been based on the collection of the Uppage fruits (*Garcinia cambogia*) by the villagers living in and around the Evergreen forests of Uttara Kannada District.

Uppage, as it locally known, is a minor forest produce which has recently caught the attention of the commercial world and which today has become a major source of employment for a number of people, especially women during the months of July and August every year.

Till a decade ago, the Uppage rind was considered valueless but slowly the awareness of a market for these, as a souring agent used in cooking, in the neighbouring state of Kerala, lead to a number of businessmen and villagers entering the fray for Uppage collection. Another dimension of this issue is that of the associated problem of deforestation which now looms

very large.

This case study on the collection of Uppage, seeks to analyse the entire situation and to putforth specific recommendations which will ensure a sustained and more productive employment base for the women collectors.

(iv) CASE STUDY II:

The second SFE selected for a micro level study deals with the craft of lac-turnery popularly known as 'Laquerware', prevalent primarily in the Channapatna taluka and three villages in the neighbouring Ramnagar taluka - 50 kms away from Bangalore City in Karnataka. This craft came into existence in Channapatna, owing to the abundant supply and availability of 'Halé wood' (Wrightia tinctoria) in the neighbouring forests. This wood has extremely close grains and is of moderate hardness, making it ideal for turning into circular shapes and which could be well utilized by the Chitragar community who were adept in wood turning. This craft also depends on yet another forest based product - 'resin lac' - a gummy deposit of the insect 'Technatria Lacca' which is processed into various colours by the artisans and applied in a dry state by means of frictional heat on the turned articles.

This craft is presently practiced as a household activity as well as a small scale industry.

This case study aimed at -

1. Determining the extent of Female Participation in this SFE and comparing this with estimates of the level of female participation two decades ago through village and institutional level interviews and analysis of the available secondary data.

2. Analysing the data thus obtained both qualitatively and quantitatively on the basis of field experience.
3. Specifically studying the effect of technological changes on the extent of female participation in this art and the subsequent economic and social changes.
4. Presenting policy and programme recommendations to enhance female participation and to improve the economic and social status of women and listing the necessary linkages which need to be established to achieve the same.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS - an initial presentation:

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the data obtained at the national and state levels on women in SFE.

The NRP and KSOP both indicate that a large number of women are engaged in SFE. While the NRP states that in India SFE provide a minimum of 1622.677 million mandays of employment of which 571.851 million mandays relate to women, the KSOP states that a minimum of 461955 persons are engaged in SFE in Karnataka of which 51% are women.

At the all India level, data indicates that the FPR is higher in self employment, household and non-household cottage based SFE relative to others. This conclusion holds true at the Karnataka State level, in that, more than 50% of SFE workers are engaged in household enterprises and amongst non-household enterprises the largest sub sector in terms of employment is the self employment and co-operatives based sector.

Another important result thrown up by both the national and state papers is that of female participation being higher in simple village level technology based enterprises as against mechanised and integrated factories. The information obtained

indicates that with a shift from hand type technology to mechanised technology, women in forest based enterprises are likely to be displaced by men. The decline in the FPR thus indicated is higher in rural SFE relative to urban SFE. Early impressions at the micro level based on the case study on the lacquer workers in Channapatna, seem to reinforce this conclusion. Observations indicate that the adoption of the power lathe has lead to a large number of women opting out of this profession.

In Karnataka State, employment in SFE seems to have constantly risen since the 60's, with more and more women becoming involved. Both the increase in employment and specifically of female employment can be primarily attributed to the growth of the bidi industry in Karnataka, which is dominated by women workers.

Apart from the main workers engaged in SFE in Karnataka i.e., workers who participate in forest based activities for more than 6 months every year, a number of other persons undertake small forest activities on a less regular basis - such workers are called marginal workers. More than 80% of all such workers are women.

In the household sector a large number of women i.e., about 75% of all the female workers in this sector, work as family labour - they work without any direct compensation in the form of cash or kind. The

Karnataka State results also indicate that the FPR is rather low in jobs which involve the direct use of entrepreneurial skills and the services of hired labour.

A few specific recommendations presented in the KSOP are as follows:

- (a) A shift of emphasis and attention from major forest produce to minor forest produce is essential with regard to employment and raw material supply.
- (b) The setting up of forest based co-operatives and rural training centres will help in increasing employment opportunities especially for poor women.
- (c) Incentives given to the self employment and co-operatives based activities amongst non-household SFE are likely to reach the largest subsection of women in these enterprises.
- (d) Amongst wood based SFE, encouragement given to purely family labour utilising enterprises will assist the largest sub-section of workers, especially women workers and also the largest set of workers who are the most economically and socially handicapped.
- (e) 26.6% of the total number of female main workers other than cultivators and agricultural labourers in Karnataka are SFE workers, therefore while making pro-women policy decision, this sector needs to be considered as a priority sector.

The National Paper points out that deforestation and loss of traditional rights over the forests have lead to the collection of MFP becoming an extremely arduous and problem ridden task. The NRP indicates that the government's efforts at afforestation have remained independent of the requirements of collection activities.

The NRP further states that the accessible markets to SFE are small, limited and uncertain and this pushes women to a position at the lower end of the technology spectrum and also results in lessening their surplus.

Data collected in the NRP indicates that returns to capital are high in SFE and the Karnataka state paper shows that this especially is true of women dominated SFE. However, the KSOP also cautious against the use of indicators like net value added because, to a large extent, women's efforts in SFE remain hidden and invisible.

The NRP holds the view that government intervention has lead to no noticeable improvement in the status of SFE. However, instances in Karnataka state seem to indicate otherwise.

The case studies throw light on the dynamics of the interplay between development agencies, local inhabitants, business persons and N.G.Os.

In the Sirsi-Siddapur Forest Division of Uttara Kannada District where Uppage is found abundantly the Divisional Forest Officer and his department, the Uppage contractor and the villagers are all caught in a situation of inter-dependancy. The contractor plans to set up an Uppage processing unit in Uttara Kannada District, and therefore needs the support of the Government for renewing his contract, as well as that of the villagers for a continuous supply of the raw material. The villagers in turn are dependent on the contractor for income through the sale of Uppage. The development agency, i.e. the Government Forest Department, is in an excellent position where it can bargain with the middleman (the contractor) for fixing the minimum payment made to the rural collector per kilogram of Uppage collected and sold.

This is a classic example of a situation where the development agency has the choice of stepping into the battle ground to help the poor, an action which will definitely result in a decline in the surplus of the industrialist, or of remaining silent and letting the status quo continue.

In the case of the Lacquerware artisans in & around Channapatna, the central and the state handicraft development agencies and the Karnataka State Department of Industries and Commerce have played a vital role in

sustaining the growth of this craft. An exclusive Lacquerware complex, consisting of a production centre and residential facilities, and various training units have been established by the above mentioned agencies. Moreover in the last few years, the market openings for the craft both within India and abroad have steadily increased. However in spite of or because of this tremendous growth in all directions over the years, female participation in this small scale forest based activity has gradually declined in the last two decades. An initial understanding of the dynamics of this situation seems to indicate that this phenomenon can be attributed to large scale mechanisation of this craft and the lack of training inputs to women in the production of mechanised work.

Further, the raw material scenario, here, is not absolutely promising. Halé wood the traditional wood used as raw material has a harvesting cycle of 20-25 years and hence official supply is always inadequate. Substitute wood is being experimented on by the Central Forest Research Laboratory at Bangalore, but this experimentation seems to be conducted in isolation. A broad based research programme involving the artisans, business personnel and other related government agencies is likely to be more fruitful.

At present there is no N.G.O operating in this area. Keen interest taken by an N.G.O in the activities of the Lacquer workers would perhaps lead to an enhancement of the position of women workers in particular and of all workers in general - to whom the rewards of growth have trickled down but which have been in no way as substantial as those to business persons.

The case studies also present a picture of the crucial differences that exist between short term and long term effects of commercialisation and development.

Women belonging to the high caste Havyak families in the villages of Uttara Kannada, earlier used to collect only the Uppage seeds, out of which an edible oil is extracted. Today they collect the seeds and rind - the seeds for home use and the rind for sale.

Commercialisation has however lead to a number of people, especially men, lopping the Uppage tree branches for collecting the fruit. While women usually restrict themselves to collecting the fallen rind, certain middle class and rich women who used to earlier only collect the seeds, now, tempted by the prospect of earning income; are known to engage labour to climb the trees and lop the branches.

If the trend of lopping branches is not controlled, the Uppage yield is likely to decline and gradually

become non existant. The associated ecological effects are also likely to be enormous. Therefore the issue of the villagers' self perception and awareness about their own actions instigated by commercialisation becomes important. If the Uppage trade is to continue not only should forest rules be more stringently by executed by the authorities, but further the sad story of the implications of their actions needs to be convincingly presented to the villagers, if possible by N.G.O. efforts. It is however possible that the availability of permanent employment will make the villagers re-think their plans of action.