



International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development



IJMIRD 2014; 1(6): 135-138
www.allsubjectjournal.com
Received: 20-10-2014
Accepted: 13-11-2014
e-ISSN: 2349-4182
p-ISSN: 2349-5979

T. Babji Reddy
Post Doctoral Fellow (ICSSR),
Department of Anthropology,
Sri Venkateswara University,
Tirupati – 517 502.

M. Padmaja
Assistant Professor, CEAP
Studies, Sri Venkateswara
University, Tirupati.

Income generation of women through the utilization of forest resources in tirumala foothill villages

T. Babji Reddy, M. Padmaja

Abstract

This study is aimed to explore how the women accessing the natural resources in general and forest resources in particular for economic and household purposes. The fieldwork was conducted in the villages adjacent to Tirumala foothill forest in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh. This study is qualitative micro level study and the main thrust is laid on how the women in Tirumala foothill villages utilizing the forest resources for income generation for shaping their livelihoods and associated strategies.

Keywords: *Forest Resources, NTFPs, Income Generation.*

Introduction

Natural resources are main source for people's livelihoods and these are required as raw materials for procuring anything. Natural resources provide food and a wide range of other products, such as fuel, fodder, timber, medicines, building materials etc. Moreover, natural resources provide services including watersheds, carbon sequestration and soil fertility on which all human activity depends (Roe, 2003).

Rural poor in developing countries are the most directly dependent on natural resources for their livelihood and food security. According to World Bank (2002) more than 1.6 billion people depend to varying degrees on forests for their livelihood. Out of this, 60 million people are almost wholly dependent on forests and 350 million people live within or adjacent to dense forests for subsistence and income (Chozule C & Kedilezo K. 2011). Rural women have considerable knowledge of the characteristics, distribution and site requirements of indigenous trees, shrubs and herbs. Women play a leading role in maintaining populations of valuable wild plant species, as they know about the diverse and multiple uses of plants. Women's traditional knowledge of the uses of plants for food, fuel, health and crafts can play an important role in the conservation of different species and varieties according to their usefulness to the community (Bhawana Upadhyay, 2005). Empowerment is often viewed as both a means to a specific end and as an end in itself (Narayan and Deepa. 1995). Income generation of women through the utilization of natural resources is crucial in the success and sustainability of development. The empowerment of women occurs in reality, when women achieve increased control and participation in decision making that leads to their better access to resources, and therefore, improved socio-economic status. It is seen in the study villages adjacent to Tirumala foothill forest. Women in access to natural resources stands for the first level of economic empowerment, since women improve their own status, relative to men, by their own earning and economic organization arising from increased access to natural resources. To meet family needs, women in the villages walk long distances to collect fuel wood and naturally available wild cooking vegetables, fruits etc.

It is a known fact that resources are the gifts of nature which form one of the primary assets of the nation's economy and play a major role in the economic success of the nation. Soil, water and forest are three important basic natural resources and assets for the economic and social development. The survival of God's creation depends upon them and nature has provided them as assets to human beings. The utilization of natural resources to meet people's requirements has been practiced since the prehistoric period. The villagers in Tirumala foothills fulfill their day-to-day needs with the utilization of natural resources like land, water and forests. The villagers of Tirumala foothills are utilizing the forest for grazing, fetching firewood and food material like tamarind, wild vegetable leaves, edible tubers, herbals and other non-timber forest products for both human and animal consumption and commercial purposes.

This paper is intended to explicate the utilization of natural resources for income generation and sustainable livelihood of women particularly focusing on forest resources. The main focus of this paper is to understand the utilization of forest by women for her income generation.

Correspondence:

T. Babji Reddy
Post Doctoral Fellow (ICSSR),
Department of Anthropology,
Sri Venkateswara University,
Tirupati – 517 502.

The study area

The study area falls under the forest region of Tirumala foot hills in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh. The Tirumala hills also known as Seshachalam hills; seven hills; or Palakondalu (part of Eastern Ghats). The hills transverses more or less 80 kilometers along with the mandals of Renigunta, Tirupati, Chandragiri, Chinnagottigallu, Yerravaripalem and K.V. Palli mandals which are belongs to Chittoor district. The subsistence strategies of the villagers inhabiting near to Tirumala foothill forest shows the direct and indirect dependency on this forest for their different modes of survival. Tirumala hills and its neighboring forest areas which form green covers of different depths based on elevations and depressions of the hills are indeed constituted by a wide variety of plant and animal species specific to such ecological niches. In these hills several prominent peaks interspersed with narrow and wide valleys. The elevation of hills in the study area varies from 150 to 11,130 m. The bedrock is of archean igneous origin and consists of granite. The surface rocks are sedimentary type with rich shally intercalations. Though the area falls in semi-arid tropics, due to elevation and undulating topography of the hills, there is an admixture of deciduous, semi-evergreen, evergreen, hydrophytic and xerophytic species have established in different micro climatic zones on the hill ecosystem.

The study villages located along with Sri Venkateswara National Park. The total area of the park is 353 km³. Sri Venkateswara National Park is known for its many water falls. There are about 365 named *therthams* (sacred falls both perennial and seasonal) on the hills as per the sacred Tirumala *stala purana*, including Talakona, Gundalakona and Gunjana. The water is soft and many plant species might also contribute their rich organic exudates to richness and glorification of the sacred falls (*punya theertams*). The floristic wealth of hills in all represents about 1500 plant species belonging to 176 families and 178 species of birds are identified. The valuable red sanders (*Pterocarpus santalinus*), which is only found in the Tirumala hill ranges, is getting depleted due to unabated smuggling to other countries.

Methodology

In order to understand the economic relationship between the natural resources and the village women, and trace out the modes of resource utilization, the specific study was randomly carried out in the villages adjacent to Tirumala foot hill forest covering within Chittoor district premises. The present study is basically an empirical, qualitative micro-level study for understanding the process of the utilization of resources for empowering women. For the collection of the data primarily qualitative anthropological research tools was used. The main techniques used for qualitative data are participant observation, non-participant observation, guided field walk and formal and informal interviews using a detailed checklist. Interviews were conducted with women who utilizing natural resources in various modes for income generation. Group discussions were conducted with the villagers to take cognizance of people's understandings on resources. The present study adopted Participant observation to get information pertaining to the process involved in the utilization of forest resources. Intensive discussions were conducted with all the sections of the people to collect data on forest utilization of women for income generation.

Utilization of Forest for income generation

Rural women rely heavily on natural resources for the survival of their families and shaping their livelihood. Forest is the most important natural resource of the villagers for providing both substantial needs and economic needs. The villagers rely heavily on the forest for meeting their day to day needs like fetching firewood, fodder for their cattle, getting raw material for making agricultural implements and household furniture and also earning their livelihoods by utilizing various NTFPs available in Tirumala forest. The utilization of various forest resources is given below:

Utilization of grazing resources

Forest is one of the main grazing resources of the villagers for raising herds like cattle, sheep and goats. Tirumala foothill forest provides plenty of grazing resources for livestock rearing. Topographically the area consisting hummocks, rock mounds, valleys, steams and hillocks; these are providing large extent of grazing fields for feed cattle, goat and sheep herds. Livestock rearing is a key livelihood and risk mitigation strategy, because it provides essential food products, drought power, manure, employment, household income and export earnings. The role of women in cattle rearing is very crucial. Studies in India on gender roles in livestock rearing have indicated that tasks such as feeding, milking, cleaning and care of animals, as well as the administration of medicines, are carried out mostly by women (WRI, 2003; Niamir- Fuller, 1994; FAO, 2002). Livestock rearing at the household level is largely a women led activity, and therefore income from livestock rearing and decisions related to management of livestock within the household are primarily taken by women. Women reported that cattle rising are the only cash generator throughout the year and it has been playing the very crucial role of making cash available to rural families in the times when they need it most. Thus, livestock rearing contributed significantly to the economic empowerment of women and an increasing role in decision making at both the household and village level.

Income through firewood collection and selling

Fire wood is very important fuel for cooking heating and lighting in rural areas. All most all villagers depend on fire wood besides a few of natural gas. According to 2007-08 survey by NSSO (National Sample Survey Organization) in rural India, over 77% of households in the country continue to depend on firewood and chips for cooking, with only 9% using LPG. The villagers fetch firewood from forest and their agricultural fields. Women mostly collect fuel wood from the nearest forest for own consumption rather than selling. The collection of firewood reducing the expenditure on fuel wood and this amount spent to other necessities. There are some people cutting fuel wood from the forest and selling it to town dwellers for income generation, besides their main occupation.

Basketry

The baskets have been traditionally made by women for use in harvesting and storing grain, winnowing and collecting and transporting vegetables, flowers etc.,. The weaving process takes time from a few hours to days depending on size, quality and type of basket and design. Basketry weaving and selling is one of the significant economic sources among the people inhabiting in the villages along with Tirumala foothill forest. The main source material of basketry is

bamboo and this bamboo has abundant availability in Tirumala forest. The people fetch bamboo from the nearest forest for weekly once or when they need. Sometimes the basket weavers purchase the bamboo sticks from others for Rs.50/- per faggot. They weave different types of baskets depending on the orders and seasonal demands. Each variety of baskets consistnt independe costs.



Generally the farmers ordered tomato or flower baskets. The weavers sold the tomato basket for Rs.15/- per one basket. The women weave approximately 50 baskets per a day (if she involved in weaving entire day). The contractors collect these basket weekly once from all weavers and sold it in the surrounding towns or cities for get additional price.

Beedi Leaves Collection

Plucking and selling of *beedi* leaves/ *Tuniki aku* (*Diosphyrus melanoxylon*) is one of the important seasonal economic activities which providing employment rather than income generation to the poor households for 2-3 months of summer season. In the collection and selling of these leaves mostly engaged by women. She collects the leaves from the surrounding forest area. The gathered leaves are paved as fagots consisting 100 leaves per fagot and sold at the rate of one rupee per fagot to the contractor. The A.P. Forest department appointed contractors in rural areas for buying from the gatherers.

Collection and selling of other NTFPs

The economic importance of NTFPs (Non-timber forest products) in forest livelihoods can be divided into two categories; a) collection of NTFPs for household needs, for which they do not pay any money but, if they purchase these products from the market, then they have to spend money for that; and b) collection of NTFPs for marketing or commercial purposes, from which they earn money and that money they use for different purposes (Ghosal 2011:160). Apart from their main occupations, the village women collect forest products for their domestic requirements as well as to sell. For instance, the villagers stitched by hand to produce leaf plates which are locally known as *istharakulu* (handmade leaf plates) using the leaves of *marri* (banyan), *thada* and *modhuga* trees. They preserve some quantity of *pattharlu* (oodles of dry leaves) for yearly household consumption and then the remaining sold to middlemen. Tirumala forest is rich in several types of minor forest produce which the villagers collect for their subsistence. Collection of NTFP requires covering long distances ranging from 3-20 km. Both males and females participate in the collection. They collect commercially valuable seasonal forest products like *sarapappu*, *tadakulu* (leaf plates),

ganusugaddalu, *kunkudu* (soap nuts) and various types of edible tubers and medicinal seeds and roots for their own consumption as well as trade for earn money. Some people bring the raw wood material from the forest for making agricultural, furniture and household implements. The herders also bring some fruits, nuts, household materials like *rokali* (mortar), *pappuguddi* (grinding stick), poles etc., along with them when they go for graze their animals in the forest.

Income through Wild fruits/tubers



The women generate income through the collection of edible fruits/tubers like *eethapandlu*, custard apple, *bikki*, *velaga*, *gutti*, *kalimi*, *ulindha* etc. Collection of *eethapandlu* is one of the seasonal livelihood activities of the people in the study villages. The fruits are available in forest during April-June months. The people collect these fruits from the forest and sold it to nearest towns or neighboring villages. During the fruit availing season, the people go into the forest and bring them in bamboo baskets (*pudaka*). Mostly the women go for selling these fruits for getting some income. Some of the people fetch these fruits for their own consumption and they also distribute to their kin groups. They sold one *cheru* or kilogram of fruits for Rs. 30 to 40; the rates vary from the village to urban areas and also depend on the availability of the fruits. Some women gather some kind of vegetable leaves locally known *Gyadharaku*, *Atikimamidaku*, *errabaddhaku*, *chenchalaku*, *pulichithaku*, *yelkanchevulu*, *kundhinjavulu* etc., from surrounding resources and sold in local weekly markets.

Collection of *sethaphalam* (custard apple) is very significant economic source in the villages of Tirumala foothills, especially in the villages like Bhakarapet, Devarakonda, Nerabayalu, Gundalabayalu and other it's surrounding villages. The women considerably collect custard apple from the nearest forest, hummock and hillocks and sold to the middlemen or directly to the consumers at Bhakarapet or Piler junctions. They sold one basket of fruits for Rs. 100-250 based on quality and ripeness. The rates are depends on the availability or yielding of the crop.

Income generation through honey collection

Honey is one of the most important sources of livelihood to some of the people in the village especially for Yanadi community. They collect honey from forest and sell to others. Honey is available during April to June. Lesser amount of honey can be found throughout the year. During April, May and June months, huge quantity of honey is collected from various sources such as tree trunks, rock gorges, mountains, cliffs, tree hollows, tree bushes and ant hills. Honey collection is main source of subsistence

economy for *Yanadi*, a tribe inhabiting this area. The Yanadis perform rituals to protect and preserve their honey deposits. The ritual rites are simple but the due results are believed to be effective. Not only the yanadis, but the other communities are also earning some amount of money by selling the honey.

Women gather many of cooking wild vegetables, tubers, mushrooms and leaves from the surrounding forests. Through the collection of freely available such like materials has helps directly or indirectly to reduce the expenditure on food materials. Women also collect broom grass form surrounding forest and traditionally processed as broom sticks and sold to the middlemen for getting additional income along with their main occupation.

Conclusion

The evidence of the utilization of natural resources for the livelihoods has shown that these are providing an important contribution to the survival of people in terms of economic and social development. Through the understanding of the importance of natural resources for economic development, it would be wise to protect and promote the conservative actions in order to reduce exploitation of natural resources. So it is necessary for the environment lovers, academicians, social and environmental scientists, planners, government and non-government organizations to take care to study and document several natural resource utilization systems and practices in a more scientific way to enhance sustainable livelihood.

Acknowledgements

The authors are very thankful to the Indian Council of Social Science research (ICSSR) for providing financial assistance to study on natural resources in the villages adjacent to Tirumala foothill forest.

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