

Impact of community forestry on women's workload and the use of chemical fertilizer

Rabindra Ray

Community Forestry Division, Department of Forest Email: royr81@hotmail.com.

A case study of Gaukhureshwor Community Forest User Group (FUG) of Kavrepalanchwok district shows that community-managed forests over the past several years has increased the supply of forest products particularly leaf litter. An increased supply of forest products has significantly reduced the workload of women in the area. In addition farmers have significantly reduced the use of chemical fertilizer in their farmland. These two positive effects of community forestry can have a favorable impact on the sustainable rural livelihoods.

Community forests contributes to reduce women workload

It is common that a number of activities such as preparation of meal, fetching water, collection of fuel wood, fodder, leaf litter and animal bedding are done by women in the rural area. Shortage of fuel wood, fodder, leaf litter and water caused women to walk more distance to get the things done that increase their workload. In the study time consumed by the women in doing such activities was compared before and after the FUGs was formed.

This study has identified a net saving of 3.6 hours per family per day after the formation of the FUG, resulting in over 46 thousand hours of saving a year for total households. At the rate of 8 hours working day, and Rs. 75/day, the monetary value of this saving is equivalent to Rs. 0.434 million per year (Roy, 1999).

Almost all the respondents expressed that the community forest has helped the women to save their time from day to day activities by increasing the availability of fuelwood, fodder, leaf litter, and water in the nearby area. In the past, women had to spend a lot of time in walking just to get a bundle of firewood and fodder. These days, women do not have to walk a long distance since they get it from nearby community forest. It is clearly seen that the women can perform such activities in less time than they used to spend earlier. The saved time is used in taking extra care of their children and other household activities.

Community forests has reduced the need for chemical fertilizer

Most of the farmers in the area have been using chemical fertilizer so as to increase the productivity in the limited agricultural land. However, they are now interested to reduce the use of chemical fertilizer as they realized that the excessive use of the chemical fertilizer resulted in compaction of soil, which made tillage works difficult. They discovered that it also deteriorated the quality of soil and feared that in the long run the soil may be useless for cultivation. The farmers have started to consider the compost fertilizer more than ever before replacing the chemical fertilizer. However the large quantities of demand for compost materials, including leaf litter is not available in the forest. Recently, the use of chemical fertilizer is decreasing due to the availability and increased production of leaf litter. Almost all the farmers believe that the soil condition has using as a result of increasing use of the compost manures in the field, which obviously encouraged the farmers to use leaf litter rather than chemical fertilizer. They also realized that the use of fertilizer does not increase the yield as it does in the first year. Instead, chemical fertilizer negatively affects the soil quality in the long run (Roy, 1999).

To conclude, community forests have provided to improve rural people's livelihoods, it has helped to reduce the workload of women and have also helped to substitute chemical fertilizer by organic manure. A further study is however needed to explore class and caste dimension of women and the differential impacts of chemical fertilizer and compost on yield and soil properties.

Reference

Roy, R. 1999. Assessment of rural livelihood through community forestry. Project paper for partial fulfillment of the requirement of BSc forestry degree, IOF Pokhara Campus, Pokhara.

