Gender-positive Benefit Sharing in Social Forestry Projects in Bangladesh

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Gender relations in Social Forestry (SF) have been undergoing a process of considerable change over the last three decades. Women’s changing roles have also given rise to a range of new challenges that resulted in shifts in policy, plan and law. Conceptual issues of gender participation in SF projects are examined and analyzed with respect to opportunity to participate in the SF projects and access to benefits. A random sample of 220 SF participants (98 female), 218 non-participants (101 female), and 108 forestry field staffs were interviewed across four physiographic regions of the country. Women differ significantly from men in various participatory activities in SF. Men are found more efficient in group activities, conflict resolution in case of pilferage of crops and violence linked to land use. However, women are equally capable in forestry activities and project level decision-making as men. Although impacts of patriarchal society is a major impediment for women’s participation, but access to benefits of SF resulted in women empowerment away from traditional and social constraints. The Constitution of Bangladesh in its Fifteenth Amendment in 2011 categorically states that the State shall endeavour to ensure equality of opportunity and participation of women in all spheres of national life. The Government has adopted National Women Development Policy in 2011 that emphasize encouraging women in afforestation with equal rights. The Forest Act, 1927 has been amended in 2000 to include social forestry and women’s participation in SF. The Social Forestry Rules (SFR) have been framed in 2004 and amended last in 2011 that provide equal rights and benefits to women. The SFR provide that if a participant is married male, his wife shall be treated as a beneficiary and vice versa. In the event of divorce both may continue to be beneficiaries on equal shares during the continuance of the agreement. The National Budget (2012-2013) calls for ensuring 50% women’s in SF activities with priority. Despite the hindrance daunting women’s participation in SF, their participation in SF is increasing steadily over years. During 2009-2012 women’s participation has increased from 18% to 29%. Now it’s the women and their families to remove the mental barriers to bring gender balance in SF.