

Gender-responsive approach in FGR management of Native Fruit Trees (NFTs) in Western Ghats, India

Identifying knowledge differences between men and women from different socio-religious and cultural groups, and subsequently providing exposure on value chains and product development for NFTs were critical steps that led to positive changes in livelihoods, gender equality and social inclusion, and forest genetic resource management. The research process started with participatory exercises to understand, share and learn from the men and women in the village about their knowledge of native fruit trees. N. Hegde of 'LIFE Trust', H.A.H. Lamers and M. Elias of 'Bioversity International' had discussed this on the 'Landscapes for People, Food, and Nature blog'.

Awareness was created among local villagers about various native fruit trees (NFTs) in their surrounding forests at a village in Western Ghats of southern India. Particularly women from different ethnic groups get united and explored a lot about the abundance, threat status and to some extent the sustainable management of NFTs.



Women participants depict the natural resources of their adjacent landscapes.

“For the first time in our village, women of different ethnic and caste groups decided to form a women’s group called *Matrabhoomi* (Mothers’ land) and started producing ‘kokum’ juice concentrate. ‘Kokum’ is common name of *Garcinia indica*, a tall fruit-bearing tree of the family Clusiaceae. The fruit concentrate has potential culinary, pharmaceutical and industrial uses. We managed with great success, as the first batch of 350 liters was well received by shopkeepers as a natural product of high quality. Throughout the process we learned a lot about various Native Fruit Trees (NFTs) available in our village and surrounding forests, their abundance, threat status and to some extent how to manage them sustainably,” said Mrs Nagaveni, leader of the women’s group from Kalagadde-Kanchigadde village.

Kalagadde-Kanchigadde village is located in the remote forest area of the central Western Ghats, where more than 75 percent of the land is under forest cover. Farming, agricultural labouring and gathering of forest resources are the primary livelihood activities of villagers. Many marginalized socio-religious and tribal communities, including *Siddis* and *Khare Vokkaligs*, live there below poverty line.



Tribal woman collecting wild fruits



Kokum product

For the research, participants were separated into four groups according to gender and age and there were 8 to 10 participants in each group. Each group conducted the same activities and presented its findings to all participants to stimulate discussion across groups. Resource mapping consisted of villagers drawing the map of their landscape to understand the village setting, identify and locate local NFTs, their availability, usage and management. Four Cell Analysis was used to understand the diversity; degree of occurrence of NFTs as common, unique or rare in the village and surrounding forests. Fruit Calendars further helped to understand the phenology (flowering and fruiting behaviour) of specific tree species, whereas activity calendars revealed information on the different tasks, knowledge and skills related to the propagation, collection or cultivation, harvesting, processing, home use and sale of NFTs and their products.

Women of all ages and diverse socio-cultural groups felt that their knowledge about NFTs and markets for their products had increased throughout the research process. Women shared specific knowledge about NFT recipes, medicinal uses, and nutritional values and processing techniques, which the men's groups did not have, and the men's groups appreciated women for having expertise in these areas. Several of those women spoke for the first time in front of a mixed-gender group, especially the illiterate women who constituted the majority of the participants. Collective learning related to NFT diversity and processing activities increased the local knowledge, built social capital, and boosted women's confidence.

The remoteness of the villages, illiteracy, difficult socio-economic conditions, lack of skills in processing, packaging, labelling and market access were some of the critical

challenges in promoting the conservation and use of NFTs. Nevertheless, the strategy of engaging the diversity of participants in the research process and having them come together to share knowledge, their own persistence to collaborate and the experience of the facilitators working with local communities for the past 20 years in the region contributed to the success of the project, which has been simulated in two other villages with hopefully many more to come. Besides value addition and marketing, villagers at present have started to think of implementing the sustainable harvesting measures for the threatened species. Domestication and cultivation of NFTs have already been started in the village.

Information source:

<http://www.biodiversityinternational.org/news/>

<http://tft.atbiodiversity.net/>