

ISSUES PAPER

**EXPLORING INTEGRATION OF
GENDER DIMENSION INTO NEPED**



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**Nagaland Environment Protection and Economic Development (NEPED)
Through
People's Action**

What are NEPED's Objectives ?

1. *Enhance environment by reducing soil erosion, increasing soil fertility and forest cover on jhum lands while promoting and managing bio-diversity.*
2. *Increase the cash and in kind incomes of the jhum cultivators.*
3. *Increase the capacity of the farmers to improve jhum cultivation practices.*

What are NEPED's Expected Outputs ?

1. *Improved agro-forestry techniques (intercropping of trees/plants and foodgrain and vegetable crops) applied to and increased bio-diversity promoted in selected jhum Test Plots.*
2. *Improved plots show higher yields and profitability.*
3. *Farmers are trained to apply and support techniques for agro-forestry in Jhum lands.*

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NEPED is implemented by a Project Operation Unit in Nagaland*

Introduction

The objectives of the Nagaland Environment Protection and Economic Development Project are to promote : the economic well-being of the people through conservation of the environment, bio-diversity and improved management of the natural resource base. The Project purports to follow a participatory approach through *people's action*. The Project design, however, does not outline the actions and role to be undertaken by women in order that their well-being is equally affected. Certain measures, therefore, must be taken to integrate the gender dimension into the planning and implementation of the *actions to be undertaken by the people* and inter alia in information and knowledge sharing and management. The measures planned must address the NEPED project concepts and objectives and, as far as practicable, should fit within the NEPED structure.

Basis of Analysis

The NEPED project is agro-forestry and land based and thus any gender analysis for programming purposes must take into consideration women's role in agriculture and their land rights.

Land is the most significant form of property in India, including in the tribal territories. It is a critical determinant of economic well-being, and thus of social status and political power. There is substantial evidence that household economic resources, in general, mainly benefit the male members of the household and do not benefit the female members in an equal degree because the male members enjoy the rights to property and land. Lack of women's rights to property, especially

"We want arable land, all the rest is humbug".

— A landless woman in India—

land, has led to economic, social and political subordination of women, in India. Several researchers have emphasized the importance for rural women of owning a small piece of land as security. Several other studies in matrilineal societies show how women's situation and self perceptions differ from those in patrilineal societies. Women of matrilineal heritage do not share the feeling of powerlessness and bear a degree of confidence that is absent in women of patrilineal societies. Based on evidence, independent ownership of economic resources, including land, is considered to be of crucial importance in promoting the well-being and empowerment of women.

Given that land constitutes the most significant form of property and productive economic resource in Nagaland, and the fact that women are virtually excluded from any effective control over property and land, the scenario of women's powerlessness in society and politics and thus exclusion from most public decision making bodies is a familiar one in Nagaland as well.

A brief review of the status of women in Nagaland, and their role in the rural-based agrarian economy is presented in the following section. In this context, land and property rights of women in Nagaland are reviewed.

Women's Status in Nagaland

Property and Land Rights:

Land is an important form of property in all tribes. Patrilineal ideology determines succession and distribution of property in the majority of the tribes. In general, with only a few exceptions, property is divided among the sons only. In the absence of a son, a close male member of the family inherits. Daughters have no right of inheritance, particularly of landed property. In certain tribes, such

The Naga society is andro-centric in nature.

— Naga Society : Kumar -

as the Angami, women can be given a certain share of parental property but an adulterous woman will lose the inherited landed property although an adulterous man does not lose property. In certain other tribes, gifts of land (termed asouzu) can be given to daughters by their parents. In some tribes, fathers can allow daughters to use a piece of land on a temporary basis, as well.

Administrative, Political, Leadership and Religious Rights :

In most tribes, men serve as jural heads of families and only male siblings are entitled to inherit positions of authority. The status of a woman compared to that of a man is lower even in tribes which allow women to inherit property. Traditionally, in the political and religious sphere, very little role is played by the women. They hardly ever acquire positions in village administration. Nor can they become chiefs of clans or tribes as the tribes conform to predominantly patrilineal ethos.

Every village in Nagaland has a Council of Elders, consisting of senior men chosen from the various clans. Women are not members of the Councils. Thus, decisions affecting an agricultural society, in which women play a critical role, are taken without their participation. The Village Development Boards, however, reserve 25% of the seats for women members. But non-adherence to this regulation is not uncommon. Twenty Five percent of the development funds the VDBs receive from the State Government is also reserved for women, to be kept in a separate bank account. Separate accounts are not routinely maintained for the women's share of the funds. Nor are there systematic accounts of how the women's share is used in the various villages.

Economic Role :

In all tribes, women play a significant economic role within and outside the family. They undertake major agricultural activities and they are the primary gatherers and managers of biomass goods. They collect plant, fuel, building materials, medicinal herbs, nuts, fruits and other articles from the woods. Women are also responsible for the processing, storing

and use of these goods. Women carry water, care for the children and the domestic animals. They also weave shawls and other articles for sale and home consumptions. All such activities make them the primary managers of the domestic economy.

Role in Jhum Cultivation : Particularly in the jhum fields, which require prolonged manual labor, it is the women rather than the men who have greater roles to play. The role of women in jhum cultivation is so large that jhum has been termed as "primarily a female farming system". Women do all the work, from weeding, sowing and transplanting, to harvesting and carrying and stacking of produce. Typically, women often decide on the crop varieties to be sown in the jhum fields. Women also collect wood produce, fuel, fodder and manure while returning from the fields. Because of the nature of their work, women are, in general, knowledgeable about the identification of various types of plants and herbs, other biomass products and their uses and, most likely, also about methods of pollarding etc.

The women in Nagaland are, therefore, vital to the agricultural economy of the State and they contribute significantly to the family income even though their status remains lower to that of the men.

Marriage and Education :

Marriage and divorce laws are not particularly kind to the women. Customary laws demand bride prices from the grooms. The practice is symbolically degrading for women as it represents a purchase price. In many tribes, women can be divorced on grounds of infertility. Also, most of the times, the custody of children goes to the father after the divorce.

Formal education is favored for both men and women. The latter feature is believed to be a product of the spread of Christianity. Education enables women at least to find employment and some women are even buying property. While in the olden days, women's participation in religious and political affairs was not permissible, in the contemporary context, educated women's limited role in administration, religious and political activities is acceptable.

The Salient Features

Certain general conclusions can be drawn from the brief description, above, of women's role in the economy and society, women's property and land rights and their overall implications for women's status and empowerment prospects, in Nagaland. A review of women's and gender studies literature provided certain theoretical perspectives which were found to be useful in the interpretation of the conclusions and extrapolation of the implications.

Lack of Effective Control on Productive Resources :

In Nagaland, arable land is the most valued form of property, for its economic, social and politically symbolic importance. It is a productive, wealth generating and livelihood sustaining asset. With industrialization in its infancy in Nagaland, non

*To my brother belong your green fields
O father, while I am banished afar.
Always you said, your brother and you
are the same. But today you betray
me....*

— A verse from a folk-song sung by
women-

land-based employment and income generating opportunities are only few. In Nagaland, 98% of land is under people's ownership. Agricultural land (including jhum field) can be owned by individuals, families and communities and/or clans. It is clear, however, that women in Nagaland (Angami tribe is a possible exception), by law and in practice, have little property or land ownership rights. Ownership and inheritance laws are essentially patrilineal. Given that land is in effect under people's and not government control, the discriminatory practice of preventing women's inheritance is particularly unpalatable.

Women obviously play a large and a very significant role in agriculture and jhum cultivation (and their labor input into jhum is much greater than

that of men). But these cannot be the indicators of their economic status, when no property rights exist. Even when women cultivate communal land, they do not hold titles to the fields. Women or groups of them can be given rights of temporary use. Or informal concessions to land can be granted by individuals or clans and communities to women. But only access, without legal rights, can ultimately deny the women control of the land and its produce, in the longer term.

Economic Dependency :

Women's position is basically one of economic dependency as they do not control or own productive resources. Even as a result of their involvement in cultivation and other economic activities, which have prospects of generating an income, women hardly gain economic independence.

As most research findings on women in rural households show, women typically spend their income from their involvement in economic activities on family needs rather than as a means of building economic security and welfare for themselves. It is assumed that any incomes that the Naga women have from getting involved in family jhum fields and/or marketing of the agricultural produce, are used for the family's welfare. Such incomes do not generate financial independence and/or improved empowerment prospects.

In any case, as stated earlier, employment and income generating opportunities that are not land based are so few and far between that even for educated women, who might be conscious enough to consider employment as a means of economic security, opportunities are not readily available.

"Neo-classical and Marxist economists treat the household as though it were a wholly cooperative, altruistic unit. Today, they are confronted by certain anomalies as empirical evidence of economic conflict and inequality within the household unfold..."

— A quote from N. Folbre's Paradigms of Household Economics, 1986-

Male Dominance in Judicial, Public and Decision Making Institutions:

One may conclude that women's lack of control over the main economic/productive resource, i.e., land, also leads to male bias and dominance in administrative, judicial and other public decision making bodies. The property that is under communal or clan ownership remains effectively under the managerial control of selected men, through their dominance in both traditional and modern institutions : clan councils, village councils or village development boards. As a corollary, invariably, men exercise dominance over the instruments through which their existing advantages over property ownership and control get perpetuated, such as the institutions that interpret and implement customary laws and regulations, and the mechanisms and bodies that exercise control over property etc.

As indicated above, women now have a 25% reservation in Village Development Board membership and a 25% share of the total development funds made available to the villages. Doubts have been expressed about the realities of existence of these shares and about actual women's participation in the village decision making body. However, the fact that village self-governing institutions recognize both women's right to a share in the common fund and their role as members as well, indicate a certain measure of progress in women's status.

Inequality of Land Rights Reflected in Gender Disadvantages in Political and Social Spheres :

The lack of both financial independence and control on productive resources can certainly negatively affect women's position, relative to men. It can particularly affect women's ability to challenge male dominance, decision making and perhaps

***"We had tongues but could not speak.
We had feet but could not walk.
Now that we have land,
We have the strength to speak and walk".***

— A group of women, when given the right to a piece of land-

oppression within the home and in the wider society. Thus, inequalities in land rights are definite gender disadvantages in the social, ideological and political spheres, as well.

Features Favorable to WID Programming and Its Acceptance :

The brief analysis on women's status in Nagaland will remain incomplete without mentioning two positive features: a free and seemingly equal gender socialization pattern and a high percentage of literacy in women, in Nagaland. As the ensuing analysis will show, these features may not necessarily be the indicators of gender equity. Nonetheless, they will help promote a favorable acceptance in Nagaland of the plans proposed for the integration of gender dimension into the NEPED project.

It is apparent to anyone interacting with Naga men and women in social situations that women act very freely in male company. There appears to be a striking difference between women's social interaction patterns in certain other parts of India and those of the women in Nagaland. This is a distinctive feature of tribal societies which, according to anthropologists, have achieved a profound realization of democratic values and those of the freedom and dignity of the individual. In such societies, free mixing is the norm rather than the practices that promote female seclusion, control of women's mobility, sexual freedom and so on. Yet, this particular characteristic only lends a semblance of gender equality. It does not satisfy the strategic gender needs, such as overcoming economic subordination, removing institutionalized forms of inequity, such as the right to own and control property and productive resources and establishing political equality.

Women's literacy rate in Nagaland is higher than the female literacy rates in the majority of the Indian states. Nagaland ranks fourth in India in female literacy, with over 54% of literate women. This percentage of female literacy is considerably higher than the national average. Besides, education for children, both for boys and girls, are strongly valued by the people. The spread of education and literacy is attributable to the advent of Christianity in Nagaland. Education and literacy are considered to be

factors which help promote women's empowerment. In Nagaland, Christianity has brought about certain positive changes, as mentioned earlier. But the impact is not adequate to promote intrinsic and/or structural changes in the status of women. The postulated reasons are : (a) the Christianity spread in Nagaland is of a nature, which has not proved to be a radically liberalizing factor. Rather, it has established a conservative trend; (b) just literacy, without the power of legal rights or control over the productive resource of land in primarily an agrarian society, has not given an extra mile to the womenfolk. This is most likely because property ownership and control most significantly affect ideological assumptions about women's needs, work roles, status in society and politics etc.

In general, however, it is expected that an equitable relation between men and women, at the level of social interaction and a more literate, and thus presumably better aware, womenfolk will speed the process of integration of women into the NEPED project structure.

Finally despite the lack of full adherence to the established rules, the mere recognition of women's participation in Village Development Boards has created a favorable condition for women and the acceptability of introducing measures for the benefit of women.

WID Programming Prospects

Programming to Address Strategic and Practical Needs :

Notwithstanding the limitations, scope exists for the successful integration of a gender component into NEPED. With the above analysis in the background, programming prospects for introducing women's role that will satisfy women's strategic and practical needs, can be considered .

In women's studies literature, strategic needs are referred to as those needs that would help women to overcome subordination, including removing institutionalized inequities, such as rights to own and control property and land and establishing equality of access to policy making and decision

making institutions. In general, addressing women's strategic needs, demand structural changes. Practical gender needs, on the other hand, are needs of subsistence, including some income generation and access to (with at least temporary control over) productive resources, such as land. Satisfaction of these needs does not challenge the current status of women in the society or a given distribution of property and/or political power. It must, however, be recognized that the process of fulfilling practical gender needs cannot be totally de-linked from that of fulfilling strategic gender needs.

It is obvious that within the context of the NEPED project, the strategic needs cannot be addressed because it is not realistic for a single development project, with specific objectives, to launch a movement for introducing structural and institutional changes, particularly when the project was designed without any gender considerations. To retrofit gender considerations into the project framework, only limited possibilities to address the practical gender needs exist. The program possibilities could nonetheless promote women's role as beneficiaries, participants and decision makers (all be it in a limited way) in certain activities, related to the project.

Addressing Practical Gender Needs through Access to Land :

Although, as argued earlier, only access to land, without legal rights, will not ensure women's effective control on the land resource, this avenue could at least provide them income earning opportunities. Given the complex hurdles in the path of making women's land rights a reality, there is still a strong case for taking steps in the direction of provision of access through (a) reserving some of the Test Plots for women's groups and (b) providing land and support to village women to establish village nurseries that will raise, maintain and supply for a reasonable price, saplings and seedlings for the jhum fields. The Nagaland Government, through the Project Operation Unit, can play a noteworthy role in making such access possible.

Introduction of these measures will:

- (a) Financially benefit the women because of income generation from crops harvested from the Test Plots (at least for the two years that the plots will be under their control and supervision) and the sale of the seeds and saplings of the nurseries;
- (b) Promote women's direct participation in the project;
- (c) Promote women's role as decision makers because women will be involved in the planning, management and operation of both the Test Plots (temporarily) and the nurseries (on a more long term basis).

Empowerment Training : The Road to Consciousness and Opening of Options :

The risk will remain that any longer term benefits or gains to be derived by women from the Test Plots could be eroded because they do not have any legal rights on the land. Therefore, although they will benefit in the short term from the crop harvest, any permanent gain from the fuel or timber trees planted in the test plots may not accrue to the women. This risk will increase if the test plots that are allocated to the women are owned by individuals and not communities or clans.

One of the ways that the risk could be minimized will be to provide some form of empowerment training to the women involved in the test plots. Empowerment is often defined as a process that enhances the ability of disadvantaged and powerless individuals and groups to challenge and change, in their favor, the existing power relationships that place them in subordinate economic, social and political positions. This process, particularly when manifested in acts of group mobilization, can address the strategic needs of women by insistence on structural changes for the removal of gender inequities. In the context of NEPED, empowerment training can act as a facilitator in making women conscious of and contest

the gender inequities and claim full share of the fruits of their toil from the Test Plots. Access to the Test Plots and the land for the nurseries can be used as somewhat of a bargaining instrument by the women, even if it is symbolic, in contesting the inequities.

At times, women's compliance with the ideologies and practices of the male dominated society that disadvantage the women results from a process of socialization which leads women to internalize the systemic inequities. But in certain other instances, overt compliance may result from a feeling of powerlessness and a perception that no option other than compliance exists. Empowerment training can be beneficial in both circumstances. It can raise the awareness of women in the first group and make them realize that they deserve better while it can also make those women who feel powerless to recognize that they can get a better deal and lead them to consider options to challenge the system. The empowerment training coupled with the access to the test plots and control of the nurseries (which will serve as bargaining instruments) would dually benefit the women.

Empowerment, in its strictest sense, can be a long drawn out process and, thus, must be preceded by a systematic awareness generation or consciousness raising process. Through the creation of a knowledge base of relevant facts, consciousness raising aims at providing a target group with information on a particular situation, e.g., the status of women in the society, relevant for empowerment. A participatory approach is

normally followed with the target group in order to promote group mobilization. Awareness raising through organizational mobilization in certain tribal areas of West Bengal has led to the women realizing their *shakti* (inner strength, power and ability), *kshamota* (capacity and strength)

Shakti (strength) and Khshamota (power and ability) will give women a Porichoy (self identity).

– From a Study of Santhal Women of Bankura, West Bengal–

and the subsequent development of a social identity. The consciousness raised, led them to depart from their past identity of subordination and use their group acquired power, strength and capacity for wider social, economic and political recognition. Such a process inextricably link awareness raising and empowerment.

It is expected that the strategy of conscientization of women in Nagaland, through the linked process of awareness raising and empowerment, will mobilize the formation of women's support groups which will play vital roles in the process of integration of the WID dimension in the NEPED project.

It is envisaged that these activities comprise only the first step in introducing gender sensitization and in pioneering actions for the promotion of gender equity, within the NEPED project framework. While these plans become operationally effective, gender equity ideas should crystallize and germinate further in making an equity path a reality for the women of Nagaland.

BOOKS CONSULTED

This paper is not meant to be an academic research paper. It is a practical piece to help initiate actions for the integration of gender concepts into the project framework. For the purpose, some basic information on women's position in Nagaland had to be compiled. Scarcity of books and articles which provide relevant information on women in Nagaland, however, proved to be a definite constraint.

Some material, to gain a theoretical perspective, on women and land rights was also reviewed.

Given that information available on Nagaland is limited, analysis in this paper is also based on information gathered during field trips and discussions with men and women in field situations.

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EMPOWERMENT IN GENDER TERMINOLOGY : WHAT IT IMPLIES ?

At the Process Level

- Empowerment is a process aimed at changing the nature and direction of systemic forces, which marginalize women.
- Empowerment is an enabling process of building capacities and confidence about participating effectively in taking decisions that affect women's lives at the family, community and societal levels.
- The empowerment process is one of collective reflection and decision making, through building up of group cohesion and promotion of group action to ensure equal participation of women in the process of bringing about social changes.
- Empowerment is a process of awareness raising at an individual and collective level about one's rights and responsibilities and of the socio-economic, educational and other opportunities and, ultimately, ensuring access to such opportunities, through collective action.

At the Results Level

- Empowerment is collective and individual autonomy and, through critical thinking, gaining control over one's life and knowledge and awareness of one's self and society.
- The empowered gain a positive self image and a confidence in their own potential to take action in areas affecting their own lives.
- The empowered gain knowledge and awareness of the availability of resources (such as health facilities, legal rights, technological innovations and other social and economic resources) and how to access them.
- The empowered women become agents of their own development, are able to exercise choices, set their own agenda and are capable of challenging and changing their own position in society.

Empowerment is about Emancipation and Equality



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