Women’s Work and Changing Workforce Participation in Rural Arunachal Pradesh: A View from the Field

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Introduction

- Access to productive employment is one of the important means of securing well-being.

- Unequal opportunities for learning and education, socially constructed barriers, along with patriarchal ideologies have been found to be responsible for women’s unequal participation in income generating employment opportunities.

- Providing productive employment opportunities has been a cornerstone of policy making in order to make development more inclusive.
The study is an attempt to understand the changes in women’s work in relation to changes in the economy and in the ecology.

Using both qualitative and quantitative approach, the paper attempts to understand household work, workforce participation, and gendered division of labour in rural Arunachal Pradesh.

Arunachal Pradesh is a relatively resource abundant state, but there has been rapid deforestation and depletion of resources in the last three decades.

The state’s economy has undergone substantial changes, and as a result, the livelihoods patterns have also changed in many different ways.

The institutional set up has changed to a great extent and at the village and household levels the rules for access to various natural resources have been altered in many ways.

All these changes have a bearing upon women’s well-being as well as their work burden.
The study is based both on secondary as well as primary data.

In order to study the changes in the work participation rates at the district and state level, secondary data has been used.

While to investigate the gendered division of labour (in SNA, extended SNA and Non-SNA work) in the state, primary data has been used.

It is being conducted in three districts, namely, West Kameng on the western side, Changlang on the eastern side and East Siang in the central part of the state. The selection of the districts was on the basis of geographical location and ethnic diversity in such a way, so that the study covered one hill district and one plain district and one having both hill and plain areas in the State of Arunachal Pradesh.

Nine villages, three from each district was selected on the basis of infrastructural development and access to forest.

Household information of individuals, from randomly selected 450 households in the nine villages of the three districts is being collected through structured questionnaire method. In the time-use survey, both yesterday approach and activity approaches are being used. This is being supplemented by informal discussions and personal observations.
Location of Arunachal Pradesh
As far as the work participation rate of India and north eastern states are concerned, it is found that in 1971, the proportion of both male and female workers in Arunachal Pradesh was high, but female work participation rate was nearly five-times higher than the national average.

The reasons could be the labour intensive nature of the cultivation process, as well as the prevalence of shifting cultivation and family farming in the state.

In 2011, female work participation rate of the state of Arunachal Pradesh continued to be above the national average, but the male work participation rate was lower than that of the all India work participation rate at 53.26 percent.

The female WPR in Arunachal Pradesh has declined from 51.28 per cent in 1971 to 35.44 per cent in 2011.

Among the north eastern states FWPR of Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim were higher than that of Arunachal Pradesh in 1991 as well as in 2011. On the other hand, in 2011, except for Meghalaya all other states had higher male work participation rates than that of Arunachal Pradesh.
FWPR in Arunachal Pradesh and India: 1971-2011

FWPR in Arunachal Pradesh and India: 1971-2011

FWPR Arunachal Pradesh
FWPR India
Why Time-Use Survey?

- In case of Arunachal Pradesh, the time use survey has an added significance, given the relative importance of subsistence production and low levels of commercialisation of the economy.

- It is observed that the problems of underestimation of women’s work are found to be far more serious in the State.

- As a consequence of economic transformation, the occupational distribution of workers has also changed, and there has been a steady move away from agriculture.

- But there has been a gender-specific occupational diversification, as women get concentrated in agriculture and other primary sector activities, while men move to non-traditional, urban and service sector employment.
In 2011-2012, it is found that out of the total workers in Arunachal Pradesh, 79.7 per cent were self-employed, while nearly 6.1 per cent worked as casual labourers and the rest worked as regular salaried workers.

The proportion of self-employed workers was remarkably higher in the rural than in the urban areas.

In fact, it is regular salaried employment that has the largest category of employment in urban Arunachal Pradesh.

The share of self-employed was around 93 per cent in rural female categories, while it was 40.5 per cent among urban females.

In terms of social groups, the share of regular salaried employment was remarkably low in the case of ST workers (9 per cent) than non-ST workers (27 per cent). Casual labour category also had a lower share among the ST than the non-ST. In rural areas, as high as 90 per cent of total workers and 95 per cent of women workers in the ST category were self-employed.
For the state as a whole, the employment growth was negative for all workers but, more significantly for the female workers. Location-wise, deceleration in employment growth was sharper for urban males, urban females and rural females.

There was a contrasting pattern of employment growth for non-ST and ST workers – while for non-ST workers in general and non-ST female workers in particular, the employment scenario worsened, for the ST workers employment gains were substantial. Thus, the overall negative growth in employment was because of a strong decline in employment of the non-ST workers.

The limited coverage of the data makes it difficult to conclude regarding the growth of employment at the industry level. However, there was negative growth in sectors like agriculture, electricity, gas and water supply, transport, finance and business services, public administration, education and community services, while employment increased in manufacturing, construction, trade, hotel and restaurants. In fact in the latter period, rural employment growth was robust.

Also remarkable was the fact that rural females gained in sectors like construction, trade, hotels and restaurants, apart from public administration during 1999-00 to 2011-12.
As far as the share of female workers in the broad sectors in Arunachal Pradesh is concerned it was found that their share has declined in sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, construction and increased in sectors like trade and hotel, community and social-personal services and remained more or less stagnant in sectors like non-farm sector during the period from 1993-94 to 2011-12.

The overall female workers share in the combined sectors has declined from 39.04 per cent in 1993-94 to 32.05 per cent during 2011-12 in Arunachal Pradesh. At a disaggregate level in sectors like trade and hotel it increased from 3.54 per cent in 1993-94 to 13.59 per cent in 2011-12 in the state.

Similarly in community and personnel services also it increased from 11.54 per cent in 1993-94 to 18.80 per cent during 2011-12.

While on the other hand, in sectors like agriculture share of female workers declined from 46.86 per cent in 1993-94 to 40.62 per cent during 2011-12 and even in manufacturing it declined from 27.89 per cent in 1993-94 to 2.76 per cent in 2011-12.

Thus we see that the overall share of the women workers in the various sectors has declined over years. (Sahu, 2013).
Along with the changes in the structure of production, the sectoral distribution of the workers in Arunachal Pradesh has also undergone some important changes.

The share of *primary sector* workers came down from 80.40 percent in 1971 to 62.27 percent in 2011.

The share of workers engaged in the *secondary sector* increased from a negligible 0.44 per cent to 11.41 per cent during the same period, and

the share of the *tertiary sector* workers went up from 19 per cent to around 36 per cent during the same period. While changes in the distribution of workers broadly follow the direction of changes in the structure of production, the pace of changes in the employment structure is much slower.
Changing pattern of Employment

Two important aspects of this changing pattern of employment in Arunachal Pradesh are,

- *firstly*, the pace of transformation has been much slower in the rural than in the urban areas; and

- *secondly*, women in general and rural women in particular, are moving out of agriculture rather at a much slower pace. Even in 2011, for example, 74 per cent of rural workers were still engaged in the primary sector. In the case of female workers, their share in primary sector was as high as 89 per cent in rural areas and 82 per cent in all areas.
Distribution of weekly average time spent (in Hours) on different activities in the surveyed areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Activities</th>
<th>East Siang</th>
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<th>West Kameng</th>
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<tr>
<td>SNA Primary</td>
<td>26.55</td>
<td>32.13</td>
<td>29.38</td>
<td>31.71</td>
<td>35.23</td>
<td>32.41</td>
<td>29.36</td>
<td>33.68</td>
<td>31.41</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNA Secondary</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>7.74</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>3.65</td>
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<td>SNA TOTAL</td>
<td>51.47</td>
<td>39.84</td>
<td>45.49</td>
<td>52.32</td>
<td>47.46</td>
<td>47.52</td>
<td>52.21</td>
<td>42.42</td>
<td>47.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended SNA</td>
<td>10.95</td>
<td>45.76</td>
<td>28.63</td>
<td>15.60</td>
<td>41.21</td>
<td>28.34</td>
<td>13.39</td>
<td>43.42</td>
<td>28.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non SNA</td>
<td>128.98</td>
<td>109.61</td>
<td>120.26</td>
<td>171.69</td>
<td>185.42</td>
<td>177.92</td>
<td>151.87</td>
<td>147.89</td>
<td>148.72</td>
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Source: Field Survey, 2015-16
Forests and Livelihoods in Arunachal Pradesh

- Agriculture continues to be the main source of livelihood for the majority of people in Arunachal Pradesh, notwithstanding a rapid expansion of nonfarm sector in general and the service sector in particular during the post-independence period.

- Agriculture in Arunachal Pradesh, as in many other hilly states in the region, is mainly of a subsistence nature and productivity levels are much below the national average.

- The traditional shifting cultivation system (Jhum) which is based on elaborate networks of mutual insurance and collective action at the community level, is being gradually replaced by permanent cultivation in the valleys and slopes.

- The most prominent feature of the agrarian structure is the move towards smaller holdings, although there exists considerable diversity in the agrarian structure of the districts.
Peasant differentiation is generally found to be sharper in the densely populated plains than in the hills.

The levels of commercialization of agriculture is fairly low, although in some pockets there has been a significant move towards cultivation of fruits and vegetables, spices and high-value aromatic and medicinal plants (Harriss-White et al., 2009).

Thus the overall agrarian economy of the state, notwithstanding some localized or crop-specific exceptions, is dominated by small-holders with partial monetization, poor crop productivity, weak integration and a substantial subsistence producing segment.

At the same time it is important to note that production for market is gradually becoming the norm, particularly in the villages by the roadside and areas with better road connectivity.
Deforestation in the region

- The entire northeastern region in general has witnessed a phenomenal degree of environmental degradation over the last few decades.

- Although forest cover in the states of the region is higher than that in the rest of the country, they are witnessing an alarming surge in deforestation.

- While shifting cultivation is routinely blamed for deforestation in the region, opening up of timber markets has also contributed to it.

- Commercial extraction of timber and other forest resources has played an important role in transforming the local economy, particularly in speeding up the process of monetization and commercialization of production relations even in relatively inaccessible areas of the state.

- The restrictions imposed by the Supreme Court on the commercial extraction of timber has resulted in closure of timber based industries as well as loss of employment and income for those dependant on timber trade, but there has been an increase in area under forest cover.
The commercialization of forest products, however, has had a major impact on the economy.

First of all, commercialization as a process weakened the property rights regimes in many parts of the region, which had some form of collective rights over forests and agriculture land.

The commercialization of the timber trade altered the functioning of indigenous institutions of local governance to a substantial extent.

The access of the elite to timber markets led to a differentiation and the gradual emergence of a local ‘capitalist’ class (Upadhyay, 2012, Mishra, 2004, Nathan, 2000).

Some of these contractors emerged as mill owners and integrated themselves with the national markets for timber and other forest products. Although the restriction on commercial extraction of timber has slowed down this process, the significance of forests for rural households has not entirely reduced because of this.
Impact of Deforestation on changing work pattern in Arunachal

- Forest dependency is a gendered phenomenon, as the burden of and gains from forest related activities are shared unequally within households.

- The collection of forest products is revealed as a gendered process.

- Women contribute more towards the collection of certain forest items, such as fuelwood, grass, leaves and food items, while men were more involved in the collection of bamboo, medicinal plants and house building materials. Collection of timber was typically a male activity.

- Thus while relatively high-value produce for markets (such as timber) and heavy yield produce required occasionally for domestic consumption (such as materials for building houses and fencing) are collected predominately by men, women are mostly engaged in the collection of forest items for subsistence purposes.
Further, it was observed that degradation of forest had led to a situation where women in the hill as well as in the plain districts had to walk greater distance to collect firewood, tubers, leafy vegetables, leaves and medicinal plants and spend more of their in collection of these items.

The degradation of forest has led to an increase in women’s work burden in the state (Upadhyay, 2011; Mishra and Mishra, 2012; Upadhyay, 2013).

It was observed that the degradation of the forest was much more in the plain district of East Siang, where timber was being commercially exploited to be sold in the bordering state of Assam, despite a Supreme Court ban on felling of trees for commercial use.

Further, in the villages of the plain district it was observed that as men moved out and joined the non-farm sector the work burden on the women folk increased manifold. Both in the hill and plain districts, despite the fact that the work burden of the women were much more than their male counterparts, they did not have much say in important decision-making.
All important decisions in the household were being taken by the men of the household in all the six villages of the two districts.

The secondary as well as the primary data clearly reflects that the female work participation rate is higher in the villages of the hill district compared to that of the plain district.

Women in the hill district have higher work burden, as they work in the *jhum* fields, which is very labour-intensive and also because of the difficult hilly terrain and lack of road connectivity.
Contrary to the popular perception of more egalitarian gender relations in tribal areas, it was found in the study villages that the intra-family division of work burden was heavily skewed towards women.

In fact, it was observed that women in the villages of the hill district were more burdened with work compared to that of women in the plain district.

Further, it was also observed that as women were predominately responsible for the primary-SNA and non SNA work that was very much critical for household survival, they tend to suffer more in terms of work burden, if the households were primarily dependant on *jhum* cultivation and were away from the urban centers as well as the forests i.e. there is lack of physical infrastructure and road connectivity and the forest is far away from the villages.
In the hill district, the majority of the households were dependant on agriculture, while in the plain district they depended on non-farm occupation.

It was observed that women in the villages of the hill district performed all the work in the family farm, collected vegetables, grasses, fruits and leaves for manure from the near by forests. They even performed those work, like clearing of the jungles in the *jhum* fields which was traditionally performed by the men, as the men folk move-out to work as daily wage labourers in the construction sites where roads and bridges are being built.

It was further found that the women folk also worked as daily wage labourers at the construction sites in the hill district of West Kameng. This was not to be found in the plain district of East Siang.
Work Burden on Women

- It is observed that the work burden of the women in the hill district is much more compared to that of the plain district.

- There are many factors which have an impact on women’s work burden. Total work burden is defined as the percentage of the total time devoted to work, which includes both economic activities and household work (that is, SNA plus extended SNA).

- It is observed that the dependence of household on jhum and animal husbandry increases women’s work burden substantially. The distance of the agriculture field from the house also has an impact on their work burden. Education of female worker decreases the work burden, but the coefficient is not very significant.

- Although women perform some of the most onerous and tedious tasks and spend a considerable time and energy in doing unpaid domestic work along with a host of ‘productive’ and income-generating activities, their contribution remains undervalued and unrecognized. Any policy design for rural development in general and that for empowerment of women in particular needs to take into account these aspects of women’s work. What is clear of course is that in the study districts at least the over all work burden of women is higher than that of males, but their participation in ‘gainful economic activities’ is less than that of men.
Summary

- What is clear of course is that in the study villages at least the overall work burdens of women is higher than that of males, and among the two districts the work burden in the hill district is much more than the plain district, but their participation in ‘gainful economic activities’ is less than that of men.

- Environmental degradation in terms of declining forest cover, results in a number of problems for the survival of people in rural areas. Longer time required to fetch water, collect various non-timber forest products, which are vital for the livelihoods of the households, and hence increases the work burden of females.

- Any policy design for rural development in general and that for empowerment of women in particular needs to take into account these aspects of women’s work.
Towards a Policy Framework for Inclusive development

Several policy implications could be noted on the basis of the existing employment situation in Arunachal Pradesh in order to make development more inclusive.

There is an urgent need for a serious revaluation of the employment generation strategy in the state, keeping in mind the local specificities.

- There is a need to integrate the problems of unemployment and poverty simultaneously.

- As regards to the self-employed poor, cultivators in rural areas, are concerned there are only two viable policy options:
  
  a) to increase productivity and profitability of agriculture; and
  
  b) to provide alternative sources of earnings and employment in non-agricultural occupations

- The alternative is to provide education and gradually shift labour from low productive to high productive occupations.
Policy Implications...

- The role of the government in promoting economic growth and development should be... 

- The implementation of effective policies requires a comprehensive understanding of... 

- The importance of innovation in driving economic expansion cannot be overstated... 

- The challenge of balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability is... 

- The need for international cooperation in addressing global economic challenges...
Thank you!