

# **Case Studies on Women in Forestry**

**C**



# MS. THIMMAKKA AND HER PROUD CHILDREN

K. Narayana Gowda <sup>1</sup>

## SUMMARY

Ms. Thimmakka, a 70 year old widow, who hails from a remote village, has done commendable work in the development and conservation of forests and in creating awareness among people about afforestation . She is actively involved in the government NGO and individually-sponsored tree planting and eco-conservation programmes .

Recognising her yeoman service in the field of forestry, the Government of India has recently conferred on her the coveted National Citizens Award for the year 1995.

A childless couple, Ms. Thimmakka and her disabled husband, were determined to give birth to and bring up children in the form of trees. As her husband was disabled, Ms.Thimmakka took the lead in greening the 3 km barren stretch of land along the Kudur-Hulikal road . Apart from working in a nearby quarry for the couple's hand-to-mouth existence, she took pains in digging pits, planting, nursing and protecting the banyan trees for 10 years . Now the direct and indirect benefits of these trees to society are worth more than US \$30 billion .

Social service clubs, NGOs, corporate and government organisations have extensively utilized the services of Ms. Thimmakka in all of their afforestation programmes as a trend setter. Her favourite pastime is to involve herself in the social and cultural programmes of school children, which she effectively utilizes in educating the children on afforestation . Her awards have failed to free her from poverty and even today she lives in a hut . For having utilized the services of the 'mother' of the trees, it is the duty of every citizen and the government to help poor Ms. Thimmakka to live happily in the company of birds, animals, children and trees which she loves so much and effectively use her success story in greening the earth in years to come.

## ROLE OF WOMEN IN FORESTRY:- MS.THIMMAKKA AND HER PROUD CHILDREN-A SUCCESS STORY

For Ms.Thimmakka, who won the prestigious National Citizens Award in 1995 for her involvement in afforestation and eco-conservation, life has not changed for the better, economically, although she has rendered yeoman service to the society around her .

The 70 year old widow in Hulikal Village in South India is a celebrity today. The young and the old in her area applaud her achievements. Her neighbours watch in awe, as well-dressed people carrying cameras come in cars and jeeps to visit Ms.Thimmakka. Many governmental and non-governmental organisations are vying with one another to honour her and to make use of her as a catalyst in afforestation-related educational programmes.

Trying hard to cope with her new identity, the old and lonely lady is wondering what the national award, which has brought her all these honours, actually means . And for her, the award has been more of a hope belied! For the illiterate Ms.Thimmakka, a plaque, a citation and a certificate matter pretty little .

---

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Extension, University of Agricultural Sciences, Hebbal, Bangalore 560 024, India.

The award was conferred on her, recognising her contribution in afforestation, eco-conservation and creating awareness among the public in afforestation programmes.

Long before environmentalism was even heard of, the poor Ms.Thimmakka achieved through love and hard work something that should put our inefficient government departments to shame. She and her husband ( who is no more ) planted and nursed them with affection, treating them as if they were their children and grew the wonderfully shady banyan trees along a 3 kilometre stretch of the Kudur - Hulikal road in Karnataka, the trees which will live for hundreds of years .

The couple had no land or property and they toiled in other people's lands and did manual work, including cutting stones from huge rocks . They had no children of their own and pined for a child. Children, they felt, would protect them in old age and perpetuate their line when they were no longer around .

As things turned out, the couple could never have a child . But they did not allow this to break their hearts . They wondered why they could not be like the coconut fronds, which leave a mark when they fall to the ground . Could not they leave anything for future generations to remember them by?

It was at this point that the idea of planting trees occurred to them; why not plant trees and tend them as they would tend children? Trees live for hundreds of years . With their usefulness to society, they would surely perpetuate their memory.

Once the decision was made, Ms.Thimmakka and her husband, Mr.Chikkaiah chose the barren land of the treeless Kudur-Hulikal road but their task was not easy .

Ms. Thimmakka`s husband was a disabled person, hence she had to work as a labourer every day and did not have the time for anything else. Firm in their resolve, they took great pains to dig pits on either side of the road. Their next task was to choose suitable banyan saplings which they finally planted and put up guards around, to ensure that the cattle did not eat up the tender trees as the cattle menace was the major threat for the survival of saplings .

Ms. Thimmakka brought water in pots from a long distance and poured it at the foot of the saplings every day . During the rainy season she poked at the roots of the trees to make them go deep and, as the area was not fenced, she kept a constant vigil and nursed the plants for 10 years . It was time spent, it had given her fulfillment and pride.

Even as the couple were nursing the saplings, she was working in a quarry for their hand-to-mouth existence. If she could not go to the quarry they would have nothing to eat that day. True, her work was back-breaking, but she could not neglect the trees either . She would go to the Kudur road and attend to the saplings before the break of dawn. And the trees, like children who live in an atmosphere of love and caring, responded to her call and grew up

The great work done by widow Ms.Thimmakka remained unsung for a long time . The good news is that she has now been given 2 acres of government land free of cost . And the director of a local watershed scheme has taken upon himself the duty of repaying, in some small measure, the society's debt to Ms.Thimmakka . He will be digging an irrigation pond on her land and providing her with agricultural implements.

The timber value of each tree grown by Ms.Thimmakka is about US \$100,000 . The approximate worth of her contribution to the society comes to more than US \$30 billion . This is however a matter of dry statistics, which mattered little to the widow. "There is no way of calculating the real worth of the trees grown on either side of the highway in terms of their impact on the climate and ecology of the area. It is inestimable",says the Assistant Conservator of Forests, Mr.P.Lakshminarayana.

Another Assistant Conservator of Forests, Mr. Dase Gowda, admirably points out that her lasting contribution is maintaining environmental balance. The red soil of the area is erosion-prone and the

trees planted by her have prevented soil erosion to a large extent . They have also provided fruits and shelter to birds, foliage to cattle and above all oxygen to the living beings .

As Mr. Dase Gowda puts it, it is not a big thing to plant trees, what is more important is the effort and patience involved in the protection of young trees from damage by cattle and miscreants . She knew about this and must have felt a sense of pride as she watched the little saplings grow into strong and sturdy trees .

Apart from adding greenery to the mother earth, her greatest contribution is in creating awareness among the general public a sense of commitment, sacrifice, and to join hands in afforestation programmes . Dr. Doddahanumaiah who hails from the same area and who is an Associate Professor in the local Agricultural University says: "In recent years her contribution in educating the public in general, young and school children in particular is immeasurable and she has been considered as the trend setter " .

Even at this age she actively participates in all the tree planting and eco-conservation programmes organised by the local government or an NGO in her area and sometimes at distant places like Mysore which is located 300 kms from her village and inspires the people to involve themselves in a big way in development and conservation of green wealth.

Social service clubs such as the Lions Club and the Rotary have extensively utilized the services of Ms.Thimmakka in all the rural development programmes in general and forestry programmes in particular . Her favourite pastime is to involve herself in social and cultural activities of school children and she made use of every opportunity to educate children on afforestation and social duties through simple songs and stories . In one of her songs the mother asks her child to plant trees along the road, build irrigation tanks and put *up Aravattige* ( way side sip-in shelters ) where thirsty passers by could help themselves with butter milk, *panaka* ( jaggery water ) or plain cold water kept in a mud pot. The mass media including the local dailies and television channels are extensively making use of her in their afforestation-related educational programmes as a champion of mass eco-conservation programmes .

Whenever she meets people her talk always begins with a question: 'Mother earth is kind enough to give us all the requisites for maintaining our lives, in turn what are we reciprocating to her with? The only way to reciprocate to her contribution is by planting and nursing the trees to grow' .

It was Mr. Dase Gowda who brought the selfless service of the widow to the notice of the Forest Department . In 1994 the Forest Department honoured Ms. Thimmakka with an award called *Vanashri* ( Forest Angel ) and the National Citizens Award - 1995 by the Central Government.

Meanwhile, award or no award, Ms.Thimmakka remains the same, her love for nature has not diminished one bit. She gathers fodder and feeds cattle. She has built a clay mud barrage across the streams to make pools for thirsty cattle to drink from.

Childless and a widow Ms. Thimmakka has no aspiration in her life except the love for trees, animals and children. Awards which were given by the Government and others have not met her day-to-day requirements. At this age she can't work on the land given by the Government . For having utilized and used the services of the `mother` of trees, the Government could think along the lines of providing facilities to help poor Ms.Thimmakka to live happily in the company of the trees, birds, animals and children which she loves so much and use her success story as a bullwark for greening the earth in years to come. Ms.Thimmakka's work serves as a constant inspiration to future generations.

# WOMEN LEADING FORESTRY ACTIVITIES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

Christine Verheijden<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The 'Rural Forestry Development' project trains rural men and women of the Ecuadorian mountains in the conservation and sustainable exploitation of renewable natural resources, as a contribution to improving the quality of life. It began recently, and at first it was generally the men who took the decisions during planning and implementation. The women had to do most of the work, however, because the men were away during the week. The men still take most of the important decisions at family and community level, although small changes are evident in the position of the women. They are now less submissive, expressing their interests and needs and giving their opinions and suggestions. Furthermore, some women have gained space in their communities and are recognized as leaders in forestry activities. This is, of course, a slow process, and much remains to be done. In many communities, however, there is still resistance by both men and women to recognizing the role of women and their value in the community. The participation of women in the project means they are taking on an extra burden. Yet they remain interested because they are being trained and obtaining benefits.

**Key words:** Forestry development; improvement of the position of women.

## INTRODUCTION

Since October 1994 the 'Rural Forestry Development' (RFD) project has been operating in Ecuador's Inter-Andean Corridor between 2 000 and 3 800 metres above sea level. The aim is to improve the quality of life of the rural population, especially the women, in this mountainous region, by supporting them with forestry activities so that they can initiate self-sufficient development and sustainable exploitation of their natural renewable resources.

The activities developed by the project in the communities are the production of plants in communal nurseries, (agro)forestry plantations, plantation management, management of native forests, soil conservation work (slow formation of terraces with beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), ditches, etc.), and the management of small basins [*microcuencas*].

The project has three elements. One of these is to ensure that the benefits accrue equitably to both men and women. This means, for example, that women should participate not only in producing plants but also in decision-making so that they can develop a better image of themselves. In this way their position vis-à-vis that of men is improved.

---

<sup>1</sup> Agriculturist/ex-APO in the project mentioned below. Present address: Korenbloem 1, 7422 RG DEVENTER, Netherlands.

The following case study concerns the work of the project in communities in Chimborazo Province, Sierra Central, about 200 km south of Quito. The rural population is entirely indigenous. The people speak Quichua, and many of them, especially the women and the older people, can express themselves only in this language. There is much poverty in the area. Most of the plots of land are on very steep slopes, and the families have very small areas of ground. Many of the men go to the city in order to obtain additional income, since the families do not have sufficient for survival. The women normally remain alone in the community in order to carry out all the (re)productive and communal activities. Yet the men take most of the decisions. Most women can only take decisions about matters having very little economic significance.

### **THE CASES OF THE COMMUNITIES OF SANTA MARTHA AND LA DELICIA**

The communities of Santa Martha and La Delicia joined the project in 1995. In the first year only the men participated in both places in the planning activities for the next year. The women attended the community meeting but did not express themselves: their participation was passive.

However, it was principally the women who had to perform the activities, since the men worked away from the community. Evaluation revealed that the plans were too ambitious for the women. The figures for plants produced were rather low, approximately 20% of those planned (a total of 21 000 plants including native and exotic plants) having been achieved. The same was true of the number of soil conservation schemes (slow formation terraces).

In the community of Santa Martha the Rural Forestry Development project promoted its activities. The population was enthusiastic and analysed the problems relating to natural resources before planning how many trees they wanted to produce and for what purpose. The forestry activities were planned during one weekend; both men and women attended the meeting. The men eventually decided to produce 21,000 plants. They went to work away from the community and the women tried to meet the target. Evaluation revealed that they produced 4000 plants, a fifth of what had been planned. When the extension workers held discussions with the community and the women it emerged that the women's views had not been taken into consideration with regard to either their requirements for plants or the time available for producing the planned quantity.

This situation led to intensive work aimed at raising awareness of the role of women in the family and the community. The next step was to demonstrate that women have many abilities for decision-making within their traditional roles. If they could take decisions in that sphere, why not also in planning? In other words, they should express their interests and needs in forestry matters. Furthermore, women already had some experience in the production of plants and knew how much effort was involved.

It is very important to take into account that women and men have different needs and interests in so far as trees are concerned because of the roles they traditionally play in the home and the community. The uses to which they put a certain tree or bush may be different. In general, women prefer native species, which give good firewood and provide manure and

fodder. Men, on the other hand, show a considerable preference for exotic species, since they are a source of income. This distinction cannot be said to be altogether rigid, but the tendency exists.

During the planning process for the next year, the less nervous women gave their views and consequently the number of plants which the community wished to produce was smaller and more realistic than in the previous year.

Thanks to prolonged and intensive work by a federal promoter, the women, or at least some of them and especially those having received some form of education, usually the youngest, expressed their views more during community meetings, made suggestions and indicated their problems. These women gradually began to motivate others to give their views and to express their ideas about the different activities they carried out in the project. It is now possible to say that women actively participate in planning, meetings, etc.

### Community promoters

The communities eventually began to nominate Forestry Committees or community promoters, who are gradually replacing the federal promoters. They undertake to direct forestry activities in their communities.

In the indigenous rural communities the public functionaries are usually men. However, in La Delicia the men and women elected a Forestry Committee of 5 women, one of who was formally designated community promoter (head).

The explanation given by some men was: 'the women carry out the activities in the nursery, etc., so we think the time has come for them to play the leading role in this work and take the appropriate and necessary decisions. We are not involved in the production of plants because we travel away to work, except that we occasionally contribute when the nursery work [*minga*] is being planned at the weekend. But generally it is the women and the older people who attend to this, and so we think they should take the decisions'.

In Santa Martha, on the other hand, a mixed committee of one man and one woman was formed. In contrast to other communities with mixed committees, in which the man is usually designated as the promoter and the women as the secretary, in Santa Martha the women is the community promoter.

The following table shows the numbers of women and men who are community promoters and the participation of women in forestry committees. The change that occurred between 1995 and 1996 is also indicated.

	Federal promoters		Community promoters	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
1995	4	4		5
1996	2	4	3 (14)*	17

\* 3 women recognized as community promoters, although 11 others are on forestry committees.

Women can be good leaders. In La Delicia and Santa Martha they are recognized by their menfolk, who underlined the participation of women in the forestry committee. Change is slow, especially in indigenous communities.

### Not everything is 'moonlight and roses'

Various factors do nevertheless inhibit the progress of indigenous rural women and their access to national society. Firstly, the lack of formal and informal education for most women, who speak only Quichua and are illiterate. This restricts their prospects for training. Secondly, many women who have been educated and speak Spanish nevertheless have obstacles placed in their path by their husbands or the community. They are not regarded as possible candidates for leadership positions or for posts as community promoters, they are not accepted as federal promoters in communities, their interests are not always taken into consideration, they are not listened to in meetings, etc. Thirdly, in Ecuadorian society there is discrimination against women, especially indigenous women.

### Too much work

It is important to examine the excessive amount of work which women have to do. All developmental measures increase the workload on men and women. It is important to seek technological ways of diminishing this burden. The standpoint of the project is that women should decide if they want to participate in certain developmental activities despite the fact that this will increase the amount of work they have to perform. The rural women are clear about this: they initiate and maintain activities that give them economic or social benefits. If women are not convinced of the advantages of something their enthusiasm rapidly wanes and they cease to participate. The continuing learning process is also a very strong motivating factor, as the following quotation shows.

'It is good for me to get new knowledge, because this allows me to show that, as a woman, I too have abilities, and what is more the new technologies are a great help to me. Also I am beginning to take decisions for myself.'

However, in communities where the men go away to work on a considerable scale, many women indicate that working on the project has increased their workload.

'In order to take part in the nursery work [mingas] or courses I got up at 4.00 a.m. that day instead of 5.00 a.m.'

Apparently the extra work associated with forestry activities does not worry them because they are getting trained and benefiting from the plants. Furthermore, their work in the nursery meets their strategic interests: 'It is good to work alongside the other women, because this enables us to discuss what is happening in our homes.'

Involvement in forestry development increases the work that women do, and they wish to participate and continue with their activities because they feel a need to produce and to conserve and protect their natural resources, since the decline in forest resources has a significant impact on them. It is they who stay in the community and who are most aware that the scarcity of these resources restricts their capacity to fulfil their (re)productive tasks. More time is spent on gathering firewood and water and less grazing can be found for animals.

### CONCLUSIONS

If women and men are considered equal in the developmental process they should have equal opportunities. It is therefore important for both to be involved in forestry activities so that the views of both are taken into account.

By adopting a gender approach [*enfoque de género*] it is proving possible to achieve a change of attitude among women and men in some communities. Women are gradually becoming more active in decision-making at family and community level. The change from a passive to an active role is seen in the planning and evaluation of forestry activities.

At planning meetings and in forestry practices women are participating more actively. The ice is being broken in particular by young women. Women now participate in drawing up Community Forestry Plans, whereas previously their views were ignored by both the men in the community and the project's extension personnel.

The process has been gradual, involving small changes such as learning about new technologies, gaining knowledge, training community promoters, and suggestions made by women. The entire training process has increased women's self-esteem. They no longer remain silent but instead give their opinions. Men are now realizing that not only they can make decisions on family matters, since women, through their knowledge and work, contribute to family and community development. Some women have the potential to train as, for example, community or federal promoters, and to specialize in various techniques. They can also serve on forestry committees and thus achieve recognition. Recognition and appreciation by councils, promoters, community members, etc., reflect a change of attitude towards women. Through these activities they move away from marginalization and improve their position vis-à-vis men. However, the potential of women is not recognized in all communities.

The role of extension workers has been very important throughout this process. They had to motivate women to participate actively. It is essential for extension workers to know WHO performs the forestry activities in the community, so that these people can be actively involved in planning. Women need to be asked specifically about their needs, because they often still remain silent at meetings. In this way women participate and indicate their preferences in accordance with their interests and needs.

NOTE: Parts of this article are taken from the draft of: 'Gender relationships in forestry development. The use, access and control of natural resources from the standpoint of a gender approach in Chimborazo Province'. Document (in preparation) based on a participatory diagnosis. Authors: Christine Verheijden and Ineke van de Pol; Quito, 1997.

# IT IS OUR TURN TO TALK...

Zeliha Unaldi<sup>1</sup>

## SUMMARY

Women are the major users and managers of the natural resources like forests, water and land. They are the first to realise the environmental problems and most directly affected by a degradation in natural resources. But they are rarely recognised as agents in many development projects and extension activities in forestry or agriculture. Although they are de facto resource managers their voice is rarely heard in decision making bodies. Women cannot benefit from the development process equally with men if they are not direct participants. Therefore, participatory methods should be used to integrate women's desires and knowledge into the planning process. To achieve sustainability in development, there is need for a culture of participation, which embodies a partnership of the state, international organisations, national NGOs' universities and the local people themselves. Such a culture sets the ground for organising grassroots activities.

Two separate but complementary projects in a forest village in Turkey; "The Development of Appropriate Methods for Community Forestry in Turkey" and "Regional Rural Women's Workshops" depict a successful example of how the creation of a "culture of participation" is in the making. This is a story of stages of success, approximating towards a more harmonious relationship between people and their habitat. It is the story of women taking their turn to talk.

*"You must have taught these women to talk this way.  
How come you managed in one day! "*

*A High Rank Bureaucrat  
in Adult Education Directorate  
attending Women's Conference in town centre*

## The Village of Women Longing for Their Beloved

Çorakyüzü is a place where the jolly songs are sang only by the very young girls. As they grow up they learn to miss; miss their father, miss their husband, miss their son, who go afar to earn a living. Then these jolly folk songs turn out in the *tevdit* (farewell)s performed with closed eyes, mourning faces and still bodies. *Tevdits* are full of requiem patterns, praying God to save the beloved who are far away now. Nevertheless, this story is not a story of the victimised or the wretched women. This is the story of women who have a word to say in planning their own future and who have the lust and power to change the environment they live in.

Çorakyüzü is a forest village in Duragan, Sinop, in the Central Black Sea Region. It is one of the poorest regions of Northwest Anatolia with a population of 618, composed of 99 households. Arable lands are rare and eroding day by day. As a result, agricultural production is restricted to a few grains (wheat and barley) and few vegetables (potatoes and beans), production of all of which can

<sup>1</sup> Gender and Women's Studies Program, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey.

only sustain subsistence needs rather than generating income. Nutritional status of the population is -expectedly- low. They consume eggs, cheese, *keskek* (prepared with yoghurt, cracked wheat and corn), bulgur and rice. The vegetable menu is limited to potatoes and beans. Forest is another source of food for the villagers. Women gather mushrooms and rosehips from the forest.

Men of the village migrate seasonally to bigger cities (Istanbul, Çorlu and Sinop) to get an interim job. They are usually employed in unqualified, low skilled labour markets especially the construction sector (with no life security and high risk of lethal job accidents). Men are the absentees in the village for five to nine months of the year to supplement the family's livelihood. Not only men but also male children aged between 7-15 years of age are job seekers outside the village. They are rented out as shepherds, for 5-6 months in the summer, to large landowners in the neighbouring province. Although rare, there are some female children going to Istanbul as maids, for an additional income.

The poverty conditions people live in, together with the scarce resources for income make villagers highly dependent on the forest for food and fuelwood collection which are vital for their survival. Fuelwood collection is done continuously, far exceeding the legal firewood collection period of two weeks in October as allocated by forestry authorities. Although fuelwood collection is by definition, a man's task, in practice it is done by women because men are away for seasonal work. Besides, since there is no running water in the homes it must be carried from the three water fountains in the village. Thus water fetching is an other cumbersome responsibility of women.

Women live with their remaining children alone in the village with their burdens ranging from village affairs to household chores to agricultural work and to the procurement of fuelwood to fetching water. They are the ones who are the daily witnesses of the eroding land and the growing deforestation. They experience the reality of shrinking forests as they have to walk longer distances and spend more time to utilise the food and fuel resources of the forest. Women are the *de facto* resource managers in the environment in which they are trying to survive.

Although women are the continuous inhabitants of the village, traditionally, they do not have a say so in decision making about the village matters. Men are still considered the household heads and women have a secondary role not only in village level decision making but also in household decision making. The development projects which directly target men rarely ask what the women want for themselves or what they can do for themselves. This reinforces the structure which keeps women's voices secondary if not household head. For the first time, in the context of a participatory problem identification project, women were asked to have their own problems, think about solutions, and what they can do to solve these problems especially as they relate to the diminishing forest.

'Regional Rural Women Workshops' project - a participatory problem census - which aims to develop community mobilisation through local women's groups was held in Çorakyüzü and was carried out or rather initiated by a group of academics (experts in Women in Development) in co-operation with an NGO (Turkish Development Foundation) already working in the area. Workshops were held in March 1997 but the story started five years ago in the framework of a community forestry project: "The Development of Appropriate methods for Community Forestry in Turkey", carried out by a four-party partnership consisting of the state, an international organisation, an NGO and the people. What made it possible to hold a successful participatory problem census with women in Çorakyüzü was the initial success achieved in a community forestry project. This project paved the way for further action by establishing mutual relationships of trust with the villagers. The later initiative for organising problem identification workshops with the village women was received with enthusiasm and curiosity.

First to clarify this vital link between the two projects, I will talk about the community forestry project which started in 1992 right after a two years base line survey between 1990-1992. The rest

is the story of how the disillusion of 'local women, the silent mass', faded away and how they demonstrated their will to participate in defining their own problems. They filled the conference hall and bravely addressed the officials sitting among the crowded audience. At this moment the conference hall vindicated a cross-road of the public and the private; the 'informal' look of women with the babies in their arms blurred the formality of the grey walls.

### **The Development of Appropriate Methods for Community Forestry in Turkey**

"The Development of Appropriate Methods for Community Forestry in Turkey" project was initially funded by the Swiss Government and executed by the Ministry of Forestry on behalf of the Government of Turkey, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the Turkish Development Foundation (TKV, a national NGO) and the villagers.<sup>2</sup> The project has been implemented in two geographically different regions in Turkey: Erzurum/Tortum and Sinop/Duragan. Çorakyüzü<sup>3</sup> is one of the very poor 90 forest villages in the project site.

Forestry extension activities, in general, are very limited and arranged in accordance with an exclusive objective of protection of forests. They are not in a way organised to improve the **income of the villagers, so they are not as popular as agricultural** extension programs which aim to generate additional income for the target group. The community forestry project in contrast, was initiated with an objective of "establishing resource management systems or to help to create income generating fields of activities to improve the declining socio-economic conditions of the forest villagers, while at the same time to reduce the pressure on local natural resources" (Arançlı and Stevens; 1995: 2).

Forest management in Turkey, where 98% of all the forests are owned by the state, has been traditionally handled through top-down methods; planned at the centre by the experts and the bureaucrats (whether top-down planning and scheduling is consistent with project participants' participation in development effort or not) without asking the inhabitants of the forest villages. This traditional approach which avoids people's participation has only intensified the existing strain and suspicion between the local people, who are accused of encroachment, illegal felling and afforestation by the forestry authorities, and the government, who are perceived by the local villagers as the people who can expropriate their land at any time.

This relationship of suspicion, with the record of protective extension activities in forestry and women's experience of playing hide and seek with the forest guards to collect firewood, would have been expected to cause resistance from the villagers against the implementation of the project; but the way the project had been introduced and implemented made it a celebration of collaboration rather than a story of resistance.

The Development of Appropriate Methods for Community Forestry in Turkey, as described above, started as an NGO-Government-International Organisation initiative. While FAO and the Ministry of Forestry had been providing technical and financial support for rehabilitation of natural resources, the field work had been carried out through the field experts of TKV. TKV organised the villagers and identified the income generating activities to be supported with a technique of Participatory Rural Appraisal. Conventional forestry projects in previous years tended to follow a 'single issue-single solution' approach. But within this community forestry project where participatory community development methods have been used in co-operation with TKV, the conventional approach was left out and people were asked about their needs and plans.

---

<sup>2</sup> Project is still going on but TKV is carrying it alone now.

<sup>3</sup> The place where the workshops were held was Çorakyüzü but women from Sariyar and Çerçiler attended the workshops as well. However, since these three villages are neighbours sharing similar geographic conditions in terms of land erosion and deforestation and since all three are included in the community forestry project, I will refer to them all as 'Women of Çorakyüzü'.

Suspensions in the field of agriculture and tree plantation (in the form of free seeds and seedlings) were provided in the very first phase of the project. This helped to build a relationship of trust between the villagers and the project team and showed the team's commitment to income generating activities. During field experts' frequent visits to the village (three times a week) this relationship had grown into a relationship of partnership between the villagers and the project staff of TKV, in which everyone started to know each other as individuals. This ensured the enthusiastic involvement of villagers in the project implementation.

Things accomplished in the framework of the project can be summed up in three categories:

1. Creating employment and improving income (by promoting and supporting husbandry, providing beehives and grape and poplar seedlings).
2. Development of human resources (by training and extension activities, capacity building activities to increase the awareness about the environmental issues).
3. Management of natural resources and protection of the forest (by demonstrations of erosion control, promoting fodder crop production and grazing management, introducing efficient stoves, promoting plantation of sainfoin and trees on erosion prone areas).

The project is still going on and is contributing consistently to the improvement of the natural surrounding and the well-being of the population. Now the villagers demand for the necessary seeds, take turns to plant sainfoin to save their land against erosion or propose new projects to various governmental organs. They buy their own seeds and seedlings, prefer to use new stoves which they buy through the credits available. A co-operative is established in the village. They are trying to build their own fountain with the money they collected in their common saving fund.<sup>4</sup> Besides these, most striking of all is how all this have been managed.

Community forestry attempts to improve the quality of the community. Therefore, it is not a mere plantation system but a life supporting system and when carried through participatory methods and grassroots initiatives, the chance of sustainability increases. For the sake of sustainability reckoning targets' own will is a *sine quo non* element.

Who are the targets and beneficiaries? Administrative texts frequently start with policy, bureaucracy, and only later mention people or participants. The focus is top-down, rather than bottom-up. Here it was started with the participants. This owes a lot to the bridging role of an NGO in between the state and the villagers. TKV was not only a successful partner with the Ministry but also managed to put pressure on the provincial governor and the mayor to provide resources for the project.

When a group of academics and Women in Development (WID) experts came to Çorakyüzü to meet with women, they were the direct beneficiaries of the relationship of confidence and the culture of participation that has been developing. Although Çorakyüzü is a de facto 'women's village', the men of the village are still the first ones to meet the outsiders. If only the "outsiders" can establish a link based on trust, then those who follow would have a better chance to reach the women of the village. Outsiders first encounter the public side of the village: i.e. the men. When the Regional Rural Women's Workshops Group asked to hold the workshops in Çorakyüzü with the help of TKV, they were most welcomed due to the previous work and could reach women (i.e. the most private of all) easier.

---

<sup>4</sup>Seeds and seedlings were not provided free. Farmers had to pay small amounts of money for them to TKV and this money was collected in a special fund to be spent for the common expenses of the village.

### **Regional Rural Women's Workshops: Women Re-identifying Themselves**

Development policies and programs, even when a participatory approach is intended, often introduce a male bias to project interventions because of the basic premise that 'men are the heads of households'. As a result men become the primary participant and the beneficiaries of the projects. There was a marginal women's dimension of the community forestry project in Çorakyüzü. There were a limited number of training sessions for women about natural resource management and women were encouraged to take part in co-operatives and other types of organisations. Even within this limited experience, women's eagerness to participate in the decision making mechanisms of community management became evident.

Regional Rural Women's Workshops II4 (RRWW)<sup>5</sup> which aimed at bringing grassroots women into identifying their priorities and strategies with regard to environmental and socio-economic problems, was initiated by a professor of WID. The project under the auspices of the Turkish Sociology Association was financed by UNDP and co-sponsored by TKV. The process began with training of trainees in WID and participatory group approaches, who later made up the core of the project team.

The most essential aspect of RRWWs is to develop strategies for community participation through mobilising local women's groups. It is nothing but to provide an opportunity for women to define and articulate their own problems, priorities and solutions. The assumption is that women have to become active participants in all stages of development.

RRWW is carried out in two stages: first is the group work. Groups of 20-25 local women are arranged. Each group has a facilitator who is really *only* in charge of facilitating the process. Women are asked to discuss their problems at the personal, household and village level. Once the problems are listed, the women are asked to prioritise them, then to come up with possible solutions for each problem, what can they do towards solving the problem and what they expect others to do. At the end of group discussions each group elects a spokesperson among themselves. The second stage of the project involves a panel discussion of the results. In the panel, speakers present the results of their own group to a public audience in a public place. Regional governors and bureaucrats and the general public are also invited to the panel.

Group sessions were held in the village. There was enormous participation, more than expected even by the field experts of TKV. Over 100 women registered to participate in the workshops. Five women's groups and one men's group were arranged. These 'Workshops' were far from the literate meaning it has in the academic world.<sup>6</sup> Here the facilitators were learners rather than teachers, conforming to the rules and conditions of the rural women rather than imposing the formal academic framework of conventional workshops. Consequently, the process appeared to be more of an informal gathering rather than a serious, formal meeting.

Eight observers, who were mainly female bureaucrats from relevant ministries (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Forestry and State Ministry responsible for Women's Affairs) accompanied the project team. There was a great deal of suspicion on their part as well as others who were invited to panel as to whether the women would actually talk or not. For many, it seemed a difficult task to make **'silent', 'conservative', 'shy', 'traditional' and 'uneducated' village women** become articulate.

Village women talked! They talked about their problems, just like village men did. Some of the problems were just technical problems about erosion and energy saving when heard from the men but these problems became problems of real life when verbalised by women, derived from their daily and engendered practices. They were talking about the same thing but in a different way, in a way

---

<sup>5</sup>The first one was held in S.Urfa in November 1996.

<sup>6</sup>On the academic side, the objective is to develop methodologies for producing local knowledge through community involvement.

that we have never heard before. They were really determined to take their turn to talk... After the workshops women were asked whether they would come to the town centre to repeat these problems before the governor and the other "big men and women". It was anticipated that women would prefer to hold the panel in the village rather than go to a strange place. But what happened? Much to everybody's surprise, they enthusiastically accepted but on one condition: after the panel the governor had to come to their village and see the threat of erosion for himself. The governor accepted and the women came...<sup>7</sup> They bargained and won!

Panel day was like a carnival, nearly all the women, maybe more than those who participated in the workshops, came to the panel with their children and babies in their arms. Some of the children and babies were left behind with their fathers in the village. Maybe for the first time in their lives men were left at home for baby sitting while women were out to do 'something' for the village, for the household and for themselves. For the first time, women sat on the front seats where men stayed behind. Panelists told everyone about their problems, how their husbands and children go away to work, how they miss them, how their children are growing up without knowing their fathers, how their forests are fading away, how much they have to work to carry water and firewood, how they can not send their children to school because of poverty, how they want job opportunities in their own region.

This kind of a participatory approach helps women to de-code their own concepts of themselves constructed through the attributes of others and re-inscribe a new identity for themselves which is more self-reliant and powerful than it was before. They realise the internal strength together with a motivation to co-operate with the other women. Here it is not only the village women who re-identify themselves but also the women in the project team, observers and panel attendants who all entered into a phase of 'unlearning' about the previous perceptions of village women. They started to question their own positions vis-à-vis others .

Women of Çorakyüzü, as in many parts of the world, are the ones who first recognise environmental problems because they are most directly affected by them. They are the primary users and managers of land, forests, water and other natural resources. They have primary responsibility for gathering fuel, food and fodder from forest areas and women's traditional use of these natural resources has generally ensured their availability for future use. In Çorakyüzü "silent women" talked, and demanded what they need with enthusiasm. They showed that they want to have a say in protecting and managing the environment which will be inherited by their grandchildren and signalled a breakthrough towards sustainable development and empowerment.

That is why women's participation in the planning process is vital. They are the most significant agents of rural life and environmental protection so no development policy or extension activity should be left to the rule of solely technical considerations. Encouraging women's participation "...with a focus on legitimizing their (women's) knowledge and experience and on empowerment by developing their self confidence and capacity to organise for change"( Dawson; 1994: 80) should be one of the most salient features of community development projects.

Çorakyüzü people were poor and hopeless. They are still poor but now they know more about their environment, they are trying to protect their own forest and, most important of all, they are not hopeless. This experience of two complementary projects enabled them to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and to act. The community forestry project introduced the participatory culture and RRWW offered equal positions for women in this participatory culture and legitimized women's role as an agent. Women of Çorakyüzü are no longer invisible, they are determined to share with men more than their fate. They also want to plan their future with their

---

<sup>7</sup> Special thanks go to Sinop Vice-governor, Cengiz Kentli, for accepting the women's demand.

men. This is a success story written by the collaboration of people, NGOs, academics, an international organisation and a government agency sympathetic to new methods and co-operation. It shows how a culture of sharing of information, of methods, of field experiences between NGOs, government, local people and academia can be created to contribute to the sustainability of development.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- **Arançl', S. and Stevens, P.** (1995) "Case Study: The Development of Appropriate Methods for Community Forestry in Turkey" (unpublished paper presented in a training workshop held in Izmir, Turkey, 30 Oct.- 3 Nov. 1995)
- **Çakmak, M.** (1994) "Economic and Social Status of Women and Their Participation in The Project of Development of Appropriate Methods For Community Forestry in Turkey" (unpublished report)
- **Dawson, G.** (1994) "Development Planning for Women: The case of the transmigration program" *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 69-83
- **Ertürk, Y.** (1996) "Alternatif Kalkınma Stratejileri: Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Kadın ve Eşitlik" (Strategies for Alternative Development: Gender, Women and Equality), *METU Studies in Development*, 23 (3): 341-356
- **TKV Kırsal Kalkınma Koordinatörlüğü (TKV Rural Development Coordinator)** (1997) "1996 Yılı Kırsal Kalkınma Faaliyet Raporu" (Activity Report for 1996) TKV, Ankara
- **Wieringa, S.** (1994) " Women's Interests and Empowerment: Gender Planning Reconsidered" *Development and Change*, Vol. 25 (4) pp. 829-848