

**MASS COMMUNICATION MEANS OF RURAL AREA DEVELOPMENT
FOR SUSTAINABILITY OF NTFPS NON TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS
VIS-E-VIS MEDICINAL PLANTS IN NORTH KASHMIR**

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ABSTRACT

The research work was carried out to find out the importance of mass communication and mass media as a communication tool to reduce communication gap in between two main stakeholders of forests that is people mostly dependent on different forest related activities and on the other hand forest department which are main body to control and disseminate policy driven information that too regarding the NTFPs (Non Timber Forest Products) vis-e-vis medicinal plants to bring sustainable development. In order to find the importance of communication and its main barriers which make this section of forestry (NTFPs particularly medicinal plants) vulnerable . What are the reasons behind communication gap which has been widening every passing day between the main stakeholders.

Keywords: Rural Area Development, Forestry, NTFPs (Non Timber forest products), Medicinal Plants, Sustainable development, Rural Communication, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Interview, Content Analysis and Forest Development.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an integral part of any attempt to come to a more inter-sectoral approach to forest policy¹. Mass communication plays vital role in disseminating information among public in no time. Rural areas are so complex in terms of receiving information or their dependence on mass communication that they face lot of communication gap compared to the other stakeholder of the society. The importance of improving the forest sector's communication with society relates to the need for policy to be legitimated and accepted by society (Karvonen 2004). Reason behind the situation is that media exposure vary in terms of many other factors like education, finance condition, size of family, education, social participation, occupation social norms and values and other social as well as financial constrains above all a number of studies indicate that the public is deeply concerned about forests, including the still unsatisfactory situation of forest

health and the perceived threat of forest biodiversity lossⁱⁱ. In this paper we find out how different factors which are directly or indirectly responsible for communication gap among the rural people and how traditional as well as main stream media plays role of catalyst in development of rural areas as some of the reasons which are identified by international bodies that extension services are often under-equipped in terms of staff, transport and accommodation as well as inadequately trained for effective communicationⁱⁱⁱ.

Communication has been an integral part of society in all ages (Rosengren 2000). on our day to day life we are witnessed and experience that present era is period of 'information society' and communication it has taken central stage and has becomes essential than before. The rise of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is one of the elements of the growing literature on the so called "information society". As it has taken the central stage which indicates the rise of information and communication among scientists and politicians alike. Most important part of communication process when analysis takes place is to know the sender which channel are being used to transmit which message and why, how and which way the receiver reacts (it can be passive reaction also). Often thrust are given to differentiate and analyzing target group when drawing up communication strategies. At the end of day, it is important general distinction before making a division of different types of target group.

The area which is chosen by the researcher is village namely Rajwara at Tehsil Handwara in district Kupwara this is area close to forests and 92km away from capital of Jammu and Kashmir Srinagar .Kupwara has large forest area i.e. The district has vast area under forests being LOC thick forests exist all along the LOC. About 70% of land is under forests as per the census carried out in the district. Due to forests the district has rich potential to take up forest based activities such as Wood & Herbal Industries^{iv}. The Kupwara area has rich biodiversity of medicinal plants. The herbal medicine is gaining wide currency and acceptability and the documentation of invaluable indigenous knowledge about medicinal plant species is assuming urgent priority due to the recent controversies that have sprung up from the illegal bio-piracy. The precious indigenous knowledge, when supplemented and validated by the latest scientific insights, can offer new holistic models of sustainable development that are economically viable, environmentally benign and socially acceptable.^v

In context of Kashmir regions medicinal plants knowledge of health care is transmitted from generation to generation. But from the last few decades it has been eroding due to rapid socio-cultural change. Besides , medicinal plants are being overexploited at an alarming rate. The traditional uses of medicinal plants in Jammu and Kashmir have not been reviewed properly and there is dire need of comprehensive documentation, diseases treatment by the traditional

medicinal plants and scientific guidelines for the conservation and management of medicinal plants of Jammu and Kashmir.^{vi}

The Unani pharmacopoeia Sub- committee on identification of drugs, constituted by the Govt of India, feels that the Himalayan ranges especially J&K retains a variety of plant species till now unexplored and unexploited. More than 50 % of the plants used in the British Pharmacopoeia are reported to be growing in this region^{vii}.572 plant species have been reported to be of medicinal value by various survey units. They have been identified and classified by Botanical survey of India as belonging to 109 different families of plants.” Availability of medicinal plants according above sited figures this section of forest is not less than main stream forestry (Timber production) in terms of economy. Now only thing which can bring change is communication, if it happens between two main stakeholder positive change will come automatically in terms of sustainable development .

METHODOLOGIES

To find out the communication gap between the two stakeholder that is people living close to forests and forest department, methodologies like PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal), Interview and Content Analysis were used. To unearth the flow of information about medicinal plants these rural medicinal-plant-extractors get from and means of communication using by forest department. PRA was conducted on public those who are directly or indirectly associated with forestry especially Medicinal Plant extraction (which in general come under the category NTFPs) at places, Rajwar villages in which group of 20 people from age group 25 to 50 years old male participants were assembled in big hall. Questions like how they get maximum information, what kind of role forest department play to provide instructions to extract medicinal plants in sustainable manner, presence of mass media like radio, television and newspaper in the area, main source of new means and sustainable approach information mass media or forest department are some of the question which research let them discussion during the PRA. Interviews of forest department officers that include DFOs (Divisional Forest Officer) and Range Officers were conducted in which question like, what kind of mass media they use to approach people living near forests which are expected to earn their livelihood from the forests, how forest department communicate innovative methods to attract the attention of medicinal-plant-extractors, how they convince them to use sustainable means of extraction and how they earn their goodwill and trust among the forest dwellers so that they cooperate with forest department to communicate information related to non timber forest products particularly medicinal plants. In the last was content analysis method, a regional language newspaper and one radio program was chosen to perform content analysis in order to check the flow of information and presence of information available in mass media platforms. The frequency of

newspaper and radio program was six months in which availability of concern information were gauged .

RESEARCH QUESTION

To study the role of mass communication in disseminating information and knowledge of NTFPs vis-e-vis Medicinal Plants between main stakeholders of forests.

To study the availability of information related NTFPs forests Medicinal Plants in regional Mass Media.

HYPOTHESES

Reducing communication gap with the help of mass communication can bring sustainable development in rural areas and particularly in extraction of Medicinal Plants.

Mass Media plays vital role in rural areas development.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This research paper is indented to show how reduction of communication gap with different mass communication in rural areas can bring sustainable development in rural areas special focus on NTFPs (Non Timber Forest product) Medicinal Plant.

In context of Kashmir this study can becomes important as in terms of availability of medicinal plants Kashmir region has rich biodiversity of such NTFPs. If both rural area people and concern government able to communication through proper mass media approach in turn it can play vital role in boosting economy of the state.

VARIABLES

Dependent variables are source of information about medicinal plants acquired by forest dwellers and tools of communication used by forest department to disseminate information among forest inhabitants. While independent variables remained type of family, size of family, education, social participation and occupation. First methodology to get data from dependent variable was PRA method as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is one of the most appropriate approaches for the identification of community problems and for understanding the socio-economic and cultural aspects of the community more over this tools have mixed applications: stakeholder identification, decision-making, planning, conflict management, information collection, and other uses^{viii}. Interviews were conducted to get collect data from forest department of how they disseminate information and knowledge among the concern peoples.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTION

According to UNO development 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) which previously was (MDGs) Millennium Development Goals and had focused only on development has changed now which is sustainable development. To balance the economic, social and ecological dimensions of sustainable development, and place the fight against poverty sustainable development approach has to adopt in the entire world. The study was also carried out while keeping one of the goal in consideration i.e, Goal 12, Responsible Consumption and Production and in the same goal 12.8: By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

The two stakeholders, first public (medicinal-plant-extractor) who directly or indirectly are dependent on forests whether for their food or other basic needs. On the other hand is forest department whose work is to conserve the forest in best possible manner . After using three methodologies, PRA, Interview and Content Analysis the data which is collected after proper analysis showed there is wide gap of communication and lack of management to utilise other mass media tools to make best out of it (medicinal plants) with mutual collaboration between these two stake holder. There is less than 10 per cent exchange of information between forest dwellers (or medicinal-plant-extractors) and forest department that takes toll of natural resource . Forest department are not that much acquainted with communication strategies so that they can disseminate pro and cons of extraction of medicinal plants to the extractors because of lack proper awareness that would have saved some species which now have reached at the verge of extinguish. Forest department has yet to earned that much confidence on the public so they can share daily happening (illegal extraction of medicinal plants) in forests. As such there is no frequent communication between them except cases like confiscation or illegal extraction or any official visit of higher authority that is only mass communication means happening in exchanging the forest related information predominant between the two stakeholder. Nor in radio neither in television and newspaper ample information about the activates related to NTFPs (non timber forest products) and particularly medicinal plants were present or information about the sustainable approaches have been discussed, according to data analyses in the frequency of monthly coverage in print as well as electronic media topic on NTFPs issue was discussed less than one program in a month that too was indirectly relevant to medicinal plant. These non frequent programs mostly discuss importance of medicinal plants in terms of health purpose, topic such as proper extraction or monetary portion of it is always missing that can lead to the sustainable development of NTFPs. Coverage scenario was same in electronic as well as in print medium of mass media.

Few suggestion which can be drawn on the basic of findings are enlisted given below:

1. Communication gap is the main reason behind the vulnerability of medicinal plants as both stakeholders lacks mutual understanding, in terms of traditional information which inhabitants of forests possess from their predecessor (which is the only source to identify rare medicinal plant species even some time expert botanist doesn't have) that can be proved beneficial for the department to identify species of medicinal plants and on the other side policies of forest department which can be help for them to extract medicinal plants in proper and legal manner. But the message often couldn't reach to the concern masses due to lack of communication management and strategies from the department side. Now to avoid this communication gap forest department has to approach the communication experts to design such kind of communication settings that will disseminate their departmental message and policies in effective manner so that laps of precious natural resource can be utilised in sustainable manner .
2. Main stream media should come forward and assign special correspondents or reporters for the coverage of rural development and government policies happenings. They should be acquainted with the knowledge and policy of both rural area and the forest departments so they can give volume coverage in their media houses either in print or electronic media in professional manner. A reporter who is assigned such beats should from the same background so that they can present technical terminology in understandable manner so that concern public can understand easily. At the same time it is need of hour that forest department should employ communication experts like PR or someone who time to time inform media house and update them about important happening of the department. In short coordination between Forest department and media houses are important to make information public in constructive manner.

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