STUDY AND EVOLUTION OF WOMEN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE PARTICIPATION OF RURAL INDIGENOUS

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Abstract:

Present article sketches out major issues related to health, social, cultural, and economic wellbeing of the women. Most prevailing problems are related to malnutrition, sociality, sanitation, shelter, education, and livelihood, cultural and economic development in modern human ecological system A survey, focus groups, participant observation, and adaptive collaborative management methods are among the tools used throughout a two-year time. period. Researchers discovered that men make up the majority of harvesters for eight different forest products, women make up the majority of product sellers and have some influence on household income. A majority of men and women believe that women participate in decision-making, but that participation was of low efficacy. Women face significant obstacles to effective participation in forest decision-making in the community: weak community organization, pressure by spouses, difficulty organizing among themselves and informal sanctions. Improving meaningful participation of women in decision-making requires addressing challenges and obstacles at multiple levels; obstacles at the communal level, where the future of the forests will be decided, cannot be overcome without attention to the household

1.0 Introduction

indigenous women's participation in decision-making about community forest resources depends on a complex and interlinked set of interactions at multiple levels within the community. By analysing the gender interactions at both community and household levels, we are able to identify the barriers to a more interactive and empowering participation for women. We argue that, while the data suggests that women have some important decision-making power over forest resources and potentially over forest-based income at the household level, meaningful participation in decision-making in the communal arena key to the future of indigenous forests is very weak; obstacles at the communal level, however, cannot be overcome without attention to the gender relations within household. In the following sections, we describe the context of the research site, the theoretical framework, material and methods, findings and conclusions **[1].** Our analysis of participation uses Agarwal's typology of participation and our approach to gender analysis draws on Colfer's Gender Box and is complemented with theory on gender justice developed by the overall goal of the action research has been to improve women's tenure rights to forests. While focusing on participation in community forests both in decision-making and livelihood benefits to develop a clear understanding of the obstacles to, and the motivations and conditions necessary for the emergence of active participation by women in decision-making and in positions of authority over natural resources **[2].**

Indigenous community governance:

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Governance refers to the evolving processes, relationships, institutions and structures by which a group of people, community or society organise themselves collectively to achieve things that matter to them It encompasses both formal and informal structures and processes In Indigenous Australian settings, community governance involves actively strengthening Indigenous decision-making and control over their organisations, and building on people's skills, personal and collective contributions, and shared commitment to an organisation's chosen governance processes, goals and identity It is important in its own right and for improving service delivery and raising the health and prosperity of Indigenous communities One of the fundamental challenges in Indigenous community governance is a lack of agreed understandings. Each community is different and local decisions need to be made about:

- group membership and identity (who is the 'self' in their governance)
- who has authority within the group, and over
- agreed rules to ensure authority is exercised properly and decision makers are held accountable
- how decisions are enforced
- how rights and interests with others are negotiated
- What arrangements will best enable the achievement of goals good governance is a contested issue.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Culturally-based values define it and normative codes about what is 'the right way' to get things done It is generally agreed that good governance comprises legitimacy, leadership, power, resources and accountability Participation of local people for the management of rural development programmes is the key to sustain the success of the programme which also plays a vital role in context of the economy, society, culture and environment. Many researchers across the globe have stressed the need and importance of local people's participation in managing developmental activities in rural areas. They thus have categorised such activities under various headings **[3].** By reviewing already available literature, many studies can be found from tourism perspective also relates to the local people's participation in developing their tourist destinations **[4].** There is one large group of studies that involved local people in tourism activities by exploration of their attitudes towards the development of tourism through empirical studies by conducting surveys and interviews, and hence contribute in consolidating the needs of local communities of the tourist area into planning destinations and framing policies accordingly **[5].** A substantial number of studies subsequently appraised the existing advances that take account of local communities in tourism development defined the participation must involve local people's participation in decision -making builds ups, enforcing programs at ground level, dividing the profits of development programs, and measuring the effectiveness of such programmes from time to time **[6].** Stressed on community-based management which is basically the involvement of the beneficiary communities in the managing the sustainable rural development facilities stressed that role of beneficiaries in anti-poverty initiatives, is an imperative if the objectives are to be achieved.

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Indigenous governance capacity-strengthening programs

To strengthen Indigenous community capacity to negotiate with governments to address local community priorities and government capacity to work in coordinated, innovative and flexible ways with Indigenous communities by addressing fragmentation and lack of coordination of government programs High-level government representation in the OIPC (rarely given to Indigenous affairs issues) created opportunities for Indigenous groups to tap into the skills and funding base of government departments in more seamless ways The Australian Government implemented two interrelated reforms— Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) and eight COAG trials. SRAs require an Aboriginal community to make certain commitments towards achieving its nominated goal in return for government committing funding or services. Early attempts to implement capacity building through SRAs resulted in tensions and confusion about what the implementation of efforts to strengthen Indigenous capacity meant for both Indigenous organisations and government, and who should provide the leadership for such initiatives

Capacity-strengthening programs targeting Indigenous organisations:

Leadership capacity strengthening is a long-term process. Indigenous organisations provide important social, economic and cultural services to their communities. Research through the Indigenous Community Governance Project documented highly competent Indigenous organisations that balance their cultural imperatives and practice within the requirements of government funding programs and incorporation There are also Indigenous organisations that struggle or fail Issues include low levels of staff literacy and numeracy, and a risk that training programs under the guise of capacity building are used as a substitute for sound education from primary through to tertiary levels Other challenges include lateral violence as in gossip and jealousy, under-resourcing and an inability to meet the needs of clients. Recent studies recognise a link between a need to strengthen leadership capacity and the need to heal past trauma as well as attitudinal and behavioural change, rebuilding confidence and self-belief and the transfer of knowledge and skills Programs have been developed to educate directors and managers of Indigenous organisations on their statutory obligations and strengthen their administrative and other skills However, there has been a lack of training programs to teach board members how to deal with difficult issues, such as legal and business issues, and how to deal with external stakeholders. The Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC) developed and provides a range of corporate governance training programs for Indigenous corporations and their governing committees/boards The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Indigenous Employment Program and Indigenous Business Australia have also funded many businesses development projects and programs in recent years. Box 2 describes the evaluation of a recognised governance training package developed for Indigenous people.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

External evaluation found that decision-making by various governing bodies associated with the project was improving. Decision makers were developing capacity to

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obtain and consider all relevant information and its implications before making decisions. Community ownership and control of benefits meant that people were more likely to engage and build further development opportunities. This has been extended to an ability to advocate with external agencies and there has been some success in leveraging additional government resources

Survey results:

The household survey had two main objectives: 1) to understand the roles of men and women in forest activities and 2) to understand perceptions of women's participation in decision-making about forest resources. Although this survey was not initially structured to assess women's participation based on Agarwal's typology, we subsequently used Agarwal's framework to interpret main survey findings. We found that the typology was useful, but has some limitations to interpreting constraints or barriers to participation.

Table: Forest resources extracted. Source: Survey data

Forest products	Households	Males	Females
Timber	51.12	48.3	2.75
Posts	38.32	37.7	0.72
Firewood	71.32	68.7	2.56
Animals	52.25	42.0	0.35
Fruits	46.32	32.3	2.42

Nevertheless, women also use and benefit from forest resources. Women and children make use of the firewood for cooking as well as many of the other products for household subsistence. Perhaps surprisingly, though women are not extracting much, they participate substantially in sales that although they may not take part of extraction, that does not mean that they are excluded from other processes, such as the use or sale of some resources According to those interviewed, all of the products extracted are used more for household subsistence than for sale, of which firewood is the most noteworthy, especially for its crucial role in food preparation. Nevertheless, a third of households are involved in timber sales, and noteworthy percentages of families also sell bushmeat or other animals, fruits and posts. With regard to sex-differentiation in sales, men more often sell the timber resources (timber and posts for construction) and fauna, while women sell other non-timber products like fruits, artisan materials and herbs.

Table: Opinion of level of involvement of women in decision-making about the forest. Source: Survey data

	All	Male	Female
Household	84.32	88.25	80.22
As a member of a community group	76.25	80.63	78.25
In local council meetings	55.23	74.12	56.74

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In meetings with other stakeholders e.g. NGOs, researchers etc	42.43	28.05	34.12

In the case of the men, participants typically included the leaders such as the with, the syndics, pastors, teachers and elders. In the case of the women, participants included the ACM co-facilitators, teachers and representatives of women's groups, with limitations on open community participation. This power over participation was sometimes exercised to exclude women who were viewed as stepping outside the bounds of accepted gender roles. For example, in community K, Ms. E had actively participated as the ACM co-facilitator. She had begun to demand accountability from the leaders about financial accounts and inquire into their activities. She also successfully argued for the opening of community meetings to women. However, her activities provoked a backlash by male community leaders, who decided that she should no longer participate in the ACM process. Ms. E was forced to stop participating in ACM, and so she dedicated her energies to selling vegetables in the neighboring town and gave up her community leadership activities. In a very real way, this control by the traditional leaders over the participation in the ACM process reflects how the public spaces in the community – meetings, assemblies, workshops – are spheres that are very much under the control of men, and male leaders in particular. For instance, in a meeting organized just with women in order to evaluate the women's participation, the with argued that he needed to participate and also invited another man, in spite of our insistence that only women should be present. There were 19 women and 2 men at the meeting, and most of the time, the two men and six women spoke, while the rest were silent. We also saw how male leaders influenced women's opinion and did not allow them to talk freely; one man said, "if you don't know, you don't talk We have also noted the striking contrast in the levels of participation of women during activities in the forest versus in community meetings. This was unexpected, as we had been warned by various male community members that women would not want to work in the forest at all. In contrast, during monitoring activities in the field, women participated enthusiastically in the activities, and there were instances when women took the initiative to lead reflective discussions.

Conclusion:

The survey demonstrated that, at the household level, women in the communities studied are directly involved in the extraction of few forest resources, yet in many cases they participate in the use of forest products as well as, in some cases, their sale. In general, men and women agreed that women can engage in and benefit from forest products, with the former being the more likely of the two to say so. Women also have some say in how the money they make from these activities is spent. The fact that women are more likely to control the revenue from activities in which they also control the sale is significant, even if their numbers are low. Many men and women surveyed believed that women's engagement in decision-making was rather high, but that it was waning as they moved out of the home and into more public settings. Most people deemed women's participation in decision-making

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"sufficient," but one-third of the women polled objected. Finally, the opinion of 26% of both men and women that the quality and capacity of women's participation in forest management decisions is good or very good suggests broad agreement on the weakness of this participation Currently, women encounter significant barriers that continue to exclude them from such positions and from more active participation (empowered participation) in the community sphere in general. These are linked to exclusion by men and opt-out by women themselves. There is also a complex interplay between the family (micro) and community (meso) spheres, and the research suggests that it is not possible to understand or address one without the other. The obstacles interact in both spheres: lack of confidence, gender conflicts, experience, time, spousal support and community support make participation a challenge for women.

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