

Abstract:

The state of forest resources in the Himalayan region is not very encouraging despite the fact that forest cover in India have increased. This increase was due to change in methodology and mapping trees outside the forest area. The forest cover is depleting due to increase in human population in the Himalayan region for household energy demand and industrial demand of timber and non-timber forest products (NTFP). This has a significant bearing on the household and village food security in the region. This paper has investigated the impact of deforestation on young women's daily life and health from a gendered lens and their coping strategy. Food security of villages located in fragile Himalayan environment is primarily dependent on eight prime forest products viz. timber, non-timber forest products (NTFP), grass, fodder leaves, hunting (not legally permitted), grazing, shifting cultivation (this is environmentally prohibitive) and fuel wood. Village reliance on forests has resulted in depletion of quality of Van Panchayat's forests (Village level forest committee). This has severe implications on young women's day to day life and health in this region since they are solely responsible for the environmental goods collection (EGC's). Van Panchayats are formed to stop over exploitation of forests and have set of rules and hold meetings at regular intervals. Women are generally not represented and their voices are barely heard in these committees. The current study has measured the fourth dimension of EGC's i.e. time taken to collect the fuel and fodder along with the distance, height and head load by trekking women with the help of handheld Global Positioning System (GPS). Apart from this focused group discussion (FGD's), in-depth individual interviews (IDI's) with the female groups, committee members and Sarpanch (head) were undertaken during February, March and December 2009 and January 2010. Analysis was conducted using Atlas/ti version 5.0. The data reveals over the period (10 year) women are increasingly facing the shortage of fuel wood, fodder and grass in the forests and have to spend on an average 8 hours, traverse more than 12 kilometers a day and climb on an average 1200 meters in a day with a head load of 35-40 kilograms. This has health implications. As a result of this women are finding it difficult to cope with the work pressure and are left with no time for recreation and rest. Depletion of forest has adversely impacted the household fuel wood and fodder security which is instrumental in defining the food security and economic security of village. Women have reported that they are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the domestic need of energy and fodder. Shortage of fodder has lead to difficulty in

maintenance of livestock in many household and low input of animal protein in diet. This is posing a threat to household nutritional and food security. Women are at the receiving end of policies of Van Panchayats, state government and central government due to restrictive policies without addressing the root cause and providing alternate source of energy and fodder.