

INDIA



SADIYA, ASSAM

CLIMATE JUSTICE
FEMINIST
PARTICIPATORY
ACTION RESEARCH
2017-18

COUNTRY PROFILE

India is a major contributor to global climate change. Its impacts place the country's vulnerable population - Adivasi, indigenous, tribal, Dalit and other marginalised communities - at huge risk due to diverse climate and varied topography. As a result, Agriculture, the country's primary economic sector, is facing a serious threat due to the unsupportive policies to tackle climate change. The increasing economic gap between the rich and the poor further deteriorates the capabilities of vulnerable communities. These communities bear the brunt of climate change-related catastrophic events like floods, erosion, landslides, droughts, erratic rainfall, tsunami etc.¹

India's National Action Plan (NAP) on Climate Change addresses climate change challenges, and states are directed to have their own climate change policies based on local needs. However, women's participation in the implementation of these policies remain abysmally low even though they are recognised as a stakeholder in the policies.²

Including women's voices in Panchayat development plan for women-led livelihoods and climate change adaptation strategies

This Climate Justice FPAR was conducted by Sanmita Nari Adhikar Suraksha Mancha (SNASM) and North East Affected Area Development Society (NEADS) in Assam, India. The research covered three Panchayats (local governance structure covering a cluster of villages), and 12 villages in Sadiya sub-division at the eastern most corner of India.

The FPAR worked to identify sustainable livelihood activities of women, and obtain support for these livelihoods practices through the Panchayat system.



IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON WOMEN IN SADIYA

Through the Climate Justice FPAR process, the women identified that erratic rainfall, increasing temperature, siltation, and major changes in weather patterns in their area have reduced agricultural production and deepened poverty. In addition, the government policies - on agriculture, market access or climate change - do not include women or address their concerns.



Increasing work burden: As agricultural income drop due to climate change, the men have been migrating out of the villages. The women are left behind with the children and the elders, becoming sole earners and caregivers. Consequently, their burden of domestic, care and agricultural work has increased. The support they used to get earlier from men in agriculture has vanished. They face increasing vulnerability and insecurity within their homes and outside.

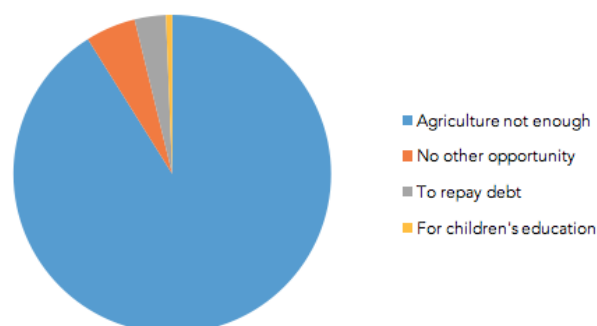
Before migration, even the regular drudgery had a pattern and some respite. Ambika Gogoi (72) remembered, 'We had time to dance during the festivals.

In winters, we would chat with women friends over ripe Pomeloos with salt and chillies in the afternoon.' She added, 'Now, we wait for the rain and nothing gets done. When it is time to rest, the rain descends. Last year, heavy rain came when the paddy was full grown and destroyed everything. We ran to the fields to see if we could save any paddy. We get no rest these days.'

Deepening Economic Crisis: Most participants, in the FPAR, stated that the men have been migrating to improve their economic conditions and to find better opportunities. In reality, though, the crisis seems to be deepening. In the absence of men, most families find it difficult to cultivate the land. Families are reducing number of crops they cultivate and/or the amount of land they cultivate.

Those who have migrated for work earn not more than

Reasons for Migration



US\$150 a month. Most of them cannot send money home regularly. When they do send money, most of it goes to repaying debt or meeting healthcare needs.

38 out of the 61 women who shared their stories said that they live in abject poverty. They are unable to meet their basic daily needs. For at least 3-4 months in a year, they survived by borrowing rice from the neighbours. Their children are enrolled in schools as it is compulsory but often do not go to school due to lack of clothing, books etc.

Worsening Health Condition: The continuous

Pratima Mech, 46, a widow, lives alone as her son works in a wood factory in Arunachal. Earlier, she worked as a daily-wage labourer. Since her leg was broken, she cannot do much work these days. She does not have agricultural land and finds it difficult to buy rice. She plants vegetables in her homestead, and sometimes even sells them. However, due to erratic rainfall, she has not been able to cultivate anything in the past year. Pratima is facing more difficulties within the community as she lives alone, has no land and climate change is impacting her source of income. Her broken leg has increased her healthcare expenses. Without basic health facilities, state support or social security, women like Pratima live in daily misery.

back-breaking work that the women have taken on under these circumstances has taken a toll on their health. The reduction in food production and loss of varieties of vegetables and plants have impacted the nutrition intake of the communities. This in turn has consequences on women's health. The women mentioned body aches, stomach pains, menstrual irregularities, eye problems, and other health issues during the discussions. Lack of basic healthcare facilities in the area add to their sufferings.

Domestic Violence: Domestic violence in the area is common and increasing. Women related the increasing anger amongst family members to the economic stress and vulnerabilities created by changes in their roles within the families, due to migration. Hard work and worries about future often lead to fight amongst family members, including between husband and wife, parents and children, siblings and parents-in-laws, and daughter-in-laws, etc. In the absence of their husbands or sons, women find that other male members in the families feel they have more dominant authority over the women now.

Kuntibala Gogoi (42) has a small plot of land which she cultivates with her husband. They have two daughters. In the past three years, they have not been able to get much profit from the farm, and are facing financial problems. They often fight with each other now. "If I mention buying anything, for example what the girls need, he gets angry. And he will take it out on our daughters and me. He abuses us and tries to beat us. But he cannot as I can stop him physically," she said.



BARRIERS IN SUPPORT FOR ADAPTATION

Assam has a State Climate Action Policy (2015-2020) in place. This policy talks about aligning different government departmental activities to help support rural communities in climate change adaptation. The policy is supposed to be incorporated into the Panchayat development model. The Panchayat governance system allows for villages to make their own development plan, and receive funding from the state for the same.³ However, women's participation in the Panchayat's decision-making processes is low. Even elected women representatives are often not consulted during the planning process. Corrupt and powerful men make plans and budgets for Panchayat. Most of the time, the plans do not include women's needs and concerns.

WOMEN-LED ACTIONS

Learning and Mobilisation: SNASM, along with the research team, conducted a range of activities for one and a half year. The activities aimed to deepen the community's understanding of climate change, build women's capacities to document their experiences, and suggest solutions. Armed with knowledge about climate change, related policies and their own experiences, they are now vocal on public platforms and discussions on climate justice and development.

Participation and Advocacy: SNASM mobilised the women to participate in the local governance process and include their voices in village development plans. They have been attending panchayat meetings regularly, and submitted their demands that include support from the agricultural department for sustainable agriculture, creating a yarn bank for the women, and setting up weaving collectives to increase their income.

Due to the actions taken under the FPAR, the women from the communities are now part of discussions at the panchayat and sub-divisional level on government policies, programmes and their implementations. For the panchayat meetings, and public hearings and planning meetings called by the Sub-divisional Officer, women are now invited to participate and put forward their views on these policies.

The FPAR created 12 weavers collectives in the project area who are now demanding a yarn bank for women weavers. SNASM members have also been connecting with other women's groups like All Adivasi Women's Association of Assam (AAWAA), Women in Governance (WinG), to contribute to the larger women's movement.

WOMEN DEMAND

- The Panchayat must ensure that women are consulted in all panchayat activities and decision-making processes.
- The next Panchayat Development Plan must include setting up of yarn banks at panchayat levels. These yarn bank should provide quality and affordable yarns to women at zero interest rate.
- Sericulture and textile departments should support weavers collectives with trainings on silkworm rearing, textile design and equipment, etc.
- The textile, handloom and rural development departments should set up mechanism to procure products from weavers collectives at fair price.
- The state climate change policy discussions should reach out to rural and indigenous women and include them in policy implementation.

1. Retrieved from <http://envfor.nic.in/>

2. Retrieved from <https://www.scidev.net/global/climate-change/feature/india-climate-change-facts-and-figures.html>

3. Retrieved from <http://www.moef.gov.in/sites/default/files/Final%20draft%20ASAPCC%20document.pdf>



ASIA PACIFIC FORUM ON WOMEN,
LAW AND DEVELOPMENT

NORTH EAST AFFECTED AREA
DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY



*Produced with the generous support of Sida,
Foundation for a Just Society, and Ford Foundation*