

FOREST PRODUCES AS A SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD AMONG NAGA WOMEN

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Forest has been an important source of sustenance and livelihood for millions of people across the world. Forest provides with all the basic needs such as food, fuel, wood, fodder, medicine and timber etc. At the same time, forest related activities are a major source of income as the forest produces and products are sold in both the rural and urban markets to meet the consumers need. Moreover, the gathering of forest produces and trading of these produces provides an important source of livelihood income to many people, especially for women.

Naga women have always played an important role in the socio-economic life of their family and community. As mothers, Naga women shouldered most of the family's burden of work, at the same time many of them are the major providers for their families. The present paper focuses on how Naga women depends on the forest produces for their household sustenance as well as a means of earning their livelihoods. It also discusses the consequences of deforestation and decreasing forest resources on their livelihood and highlights how the societal traditional practices limits the Naga women's ability to manage the forest resources, thus having a negative impact on their livelihoods and consequently their social and economic status.

Introduction

Forest is the very basis of our survival and have been identified as a necessary resource which plays a significant role both in social and economic development of a community and can improve the quality of life in general (Bajwa, 1987: 210). It contributes to all aspects of life, providing food, fodder, fuel, medicine, building materials and materials for all sorts of household items as well as providing a variety of cultural and symbolic functions for many communities. This is significant for the indigenous people, tribals and communities living in and near the forest, as the forest produces like timber and Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) are an indispensable part of their livelihood strategy.

According to World Bank (2002) more than 1.6 billion people depend to varying degrees on forests for their livelihood. Out of this, 60 million people are almost wholly dependent on forests and 350 million people live within or adjacent to dense forests for subsistence and income. In developing countries, about 1.2 billion people rely on agro forestry farming to sustain agricultural productivity to generate income. Worldwide, forest industries provide employment to 60 million people and 1 billion people depend on pharmaceuticals derived from forest plants for their medicinal needs (Kikhi and Kikhi, 2011: 4). In India alone it is estimated that over 50 million people are dependent on NTFPs for their subsistence and cash income.

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For the tribals in India, forest has always been an important resource and has immense direct and indirect value. Building material, fuel, food supplement, materials for crafts, medicines are all acquired from the forests and it also provides employment for them. The tribals collect a large number of forest produces such as animals, insects, plants vegetables, fruits, flowers, seeds, tubers, mushrooms, honey as dietary supplements; in addition, fibres and weaving, dyeing material and medicinal plants and herbs for traditional way of treatment are also gathered from the natural forest. Such forest produces are used for home consumption and are also sold in the local markets to supplement their livelihood income.

Livelihood can be understood simply as the means of living and sustenance. But it includes a much wider cluster of factors, rooted in the everyday reality of the people's lives. Chambers (1995) defined livelihood as the 'means of gaining a living, including tangible assets (resources and stores), intangible assets (claims and access), and livelihood capabilities' including coping abilities, opportunities and sundry freedoms. For Wallman, a definition of livelihood should include all the productive tasks such as finding or making shelter, transacting money, preparing food to put on table or exchange in the market place. At the same time, it is equally a matter of the ownership and circulation of information, the management of social relationships, the affirmation of personal significance and group identity, and the inter relation of each of these tasks to the other (FAO, 2011). Livelihood also refers to 'the assets (natural, physical, human, financial and social capital), activities and the access to these assets (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual or households (Ellis, 2003: 30). Livelihood, thus fundamentally entails people's living spaces, their economic spaces and income, food security, resources and knowledge and their way of life and culture. It deals with people, their resources such as land, labour, knowledge, money, social relationships, what they do with these resources and what impact it has on their access to the resources, and how it influences their social, political, economic and cultural life. And it also includes risks and uncertainties the people face, the choices they have to make, and creating and embracing new opportunities.

The livelihood strategies of men and women in the society vary usually basing on the socio-culturally created differences between them. Basically women are consigned to the domestic sphere of production whereas men are involved in more luring and productive work. Generally, such socially constructed division of labour based on gender where women are involved in activities mainly for sustaining livelihood that are invisible and unaccounted and men taking over the more productive and economically viable activities have undermined women's contribution to their family's livelihood. But it has been observed that in many society women besides doing all the household chores, most of the tedious work in the field like sowing, harvesting, weeding are done by women. Also many women undertake forest-based activities near their homestead so that they can combine

these income earning activities with their domestic chores. However, women's contribution to family earnings, in financial terms, is considered lesser and not commensurate with the amount of work they do. This is because their work is usually not calculated as income. The nature of their work is considered mainly as household work or they work in their own fields, for which no financial remuneration is given. In addition, their ability to own, control or claim the assets and resources on which they depend for their livelihood is determined by the social rules and norms which further control the access to them. In many parts of the country women are primarily responsible for providing the family food, but do not own and/or control the necessary resource base, and may or may not have the right to take decisions about resource management (Krishnan, 2007: 16). And though women are extensively involved in many forest-based gathering and processing enterprises they often have little access to land, forest and capital resources, which greatly restrain their activities. Such factors have been detrimental for women and their livelihood.

For women in different parts of the continents, forest and its resources is one of the important means of livelihood. For example, women in Southern Ghana earn by selling cola nuts and wild palm fruits (Abane, 2009: 30), according to FAO, in Southern Nigeria, the retail trade of *Irvingia gabonensis* fruit and seeds provides an important source of income for many women and most of the Asian women are largely dependent on the forest for their livelihood. Even for tribal women in India, collecting and trading of wild fruits and vegetables, mahua flowers and tendu leaves are an important means of earning. Like most of the tribal Indian women, many Naga women depend on the forest and its resources for their livelihood, spending most of their labour and time tending their agricultural field and foraging the forest to meet the subsistence needs of their families and also for income. They have a very close relationship with the environment they live in and can be called the "guardians of their biodiversity" and caretakers of most agricultural and livestock resources (NEPED and IIRR, 1999: 168). The food security and the welfare of their families depend on preserving the environment as they rely much on collecting and trading of forest produces such as wild leaves and vegetables, mushrooms, broom grass, betel vines, bamboo shoots, honey, roots and tubers, herbs and medicinal plants. Yet the full potentials of Naga women as resource managers and as users of forest produces and services remain unrealised.

The Nagas

The Nagas are an indigenous group of people traditionally inhabiting the present state of Nagaland in the North-Eastern region of India. The land of the Nagas is bounded by their neighbours the Assamese in the west, Myanmar on the east, Manipuris in the south and the Arunachalis on the north. The Nagas comprises of Aos, Angamis, Changs, Konyaks, Lothas, Sumis, Chakhesangs, Khiamniungams, Phoms, Rengmas, Sangtams, Yimchungrüs, Zeliang and Pochury tribes and other

sub-tribes, with each tribe having its own distinct and unique customs, language and tradition. Naga traditional life revolved around the village. Each village was sovereign and self-sufficient in itself (Nuh, 2002: 16), having its own village land with distinct demarcation and under the governance of the Village Council or the Village Chief. The village system and its functions are an important source of the cultures and customs of the people and it is held together by social, economic, political and religious ties. Agriculture is the mainstay of the Naga people, with most of them practising jhum cultivation except for some tribes like the Angamis and Chakesangs who practise sedentary terrace cultivation. The Nagas are also largely dependent on their surrounding natural environment for their needs and sustenance and forest is one of the main sources of livelihood for them.

Forest in the Life of the Nagas

Forest and land symbolises more than a physical entity or political boundary for the Nagas; it is the basis of their economic system and cultural life, which gives them their identity and holds the family, clan and the tribe together (Longchar, 1995: 71). For the Nagas, the use of forest land underlies all other aspects of their society. Their social and political system, ceremonies and festivals and in a way the entire way of life of the Nagas are woven around their land and forest. Their way of life demonstrates its depth essence of ecological knowledge and rich social and cultural norms. They have a deep sense of veneration and respect for nature as they regard the land and forest as God given and therefore sacred. They see their life as intricately woven with nature as they are dependent on the land and natural environment in which they live and work. To aid such interaction and dependence, they learn to interpret the signs of nature, thereby developing their socio-cultural ethos. This has been well recorded in their folk songs and folk tales. Their local knowledge system, culture, forest and economic activities are supportive to each other and are manifested by a sustainable utilisation of natural resources.

The prominence of forest is apparent in all the Naga practices and traditions; from selecting the site for the formation of their village, to their social, economic and religious practices. Usually among the Naga communities, they set up their villages in virgin forests located on the summit of a hill and which is conducive for habitation, is near the water spring, free from land dispute and has abundant arable land and forest. Forest products are used by them in every aspect of their social and cultural life. For instance, the Naga people have survived through the centuries with the diverse uses of bamboo and its products. From the cutting of the umbilical cord with a bamboo splinter during birth to the mats that wrap the dead for burial, bamboo has been integral to the life of the Nagas. The forests produce like the plantain leaves are also used during birth to wrap the placenta and while performing rituals to wrap the offerings and sacrifices. Besides some species of tree are considered as sacred and different species of plants like the *Naga Tenga* (*Rhus*

semialata), *Ruomvu* (*Rubus ellipticus*), *Tsiesenyu* (*Adtharad avasica*), *Sungshe* (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*) etc. are used in their traditional healing practices.

Moreover, the Nagas traditional religious beliefs which are intrinsically linked with the land and forest have a significant bearing on the conservation of their forest. Traditional Naga religious system was based on the beliefs in the existence of benevolent and malevolent spirits. The forests and trees, paddy fields, bamboo groves, streams, peaks and caves were considered to be the abodes of the spirits and were used for performing social and religious ceremonies. They also have a conviction that the land with which they are deeply associated is imbued with the spirits of their ancestors. Such beliefs made them to mark certain areas of the land and forest as 'ritual' or 'sacred' places from where extractions of forest produces is a taboo. Even today, areas like the *Saramati*, *Yakoo*, *Hellipong*, *Longnangba*, *Changjanglong* (Aier and Changkija, 2003: 359), *Kabviinhou* and *Ngade* (Zehol and Zehol, 2009: 36) are considered sacred and protected by the communities. Such beliefs and practices related to sacred groves have saved many endangered plants and animals in the forests and thus, preserved the rich biodiversity of the region.

The Naga economy has also much to do with the forest and forest resources. Agriculture being the main occupation, more than 80 per cent of the Naga people are subsistence farmers, who practises jhum cultivation and the Naga way of life revolves around this system of cultivation which governs most of their life, culture and tradition. Works associated with forest constitute a major activity of their economic life. It ranges from collection of food, firewood, fodder and building materials to hunting and cultivation. Forest produces like wood and bamboos are used during the construction of houses, weaving baskets and mats and making agricultural tools and implements. Even household items consist of wooden plates and cups, and hollow bamboos are used for carrying and storing water. Their diets consist mainly of vegetables, leaves, wild mushrooms, tubers, the shoots of the bamboo which is used as a delicacy by the Nagas and wild fruits collected from the forest. Forest products like firewood and timbers are a source of income for the Naga villagers; especially many Naga women collect Non Timber Forest Products like wild mushrooms, green leafy vegetables, fruits etc. from the forest and sell it in the markets to earn their livelihood.

Like most of the tribals all over the world, the Nagas intimate relationship with their environment has given rise to their traditional forest knowledge which is deeply linked to their day-to-day experience and survival needs, resulting in the sustainable use and management of their forest. For instance while searching for a new jhum site, the Nagas usually observe and measure the trunks of trees in order to determine the richness of the soil fertility of the area. Another indigenous practice of the Naga tribes is the observation of 'good' or 'bad' days according to the waxing and waning of the moon for extraction of forest products like bamboo, timber, palm leaves, etc. It is believed that the days when the moon waxes is a 'good' day

for extracting the forest produces whereas the materials extracted during the waning of the moon or 'bad' days get attacked by insects and decay fast. Such practices regulate the extraction of forest produces and has helped conserved the forest and environment. The alder tree-based shifting cultivation practised by the Nagas, particularly by the Khonoma farmers of Angami Naga tribe consists of proper use of forestland and managing the soil fertility in the jhum fields by planting the nitrogen-fixing alder trees (*Alnus nepalensis*). It has been found that the alder-based shifting cultivation system allows the soil to regenerate faster and the jhum cycle can be managed as a four year cycle with two years of cropping followed by two or more fallow years (Aier and Changkija, 2000: 355). They also grow different varieties of locally adapted crops to minimise the risk of total crop failure and food security. Apart from such practices, the Nagas have a rich knowledge about how different forest produces are a good source of nutritious diet, its medicinal values, plants that are herbal or aromatic, or which produce is good for making a particular product, its importance in maintaining the environment, and the economic and social value of each forest produce. Some of the plants they use as nutritional supplement as well as home remedies based on their indigenous knowledge are:

- (a) Turmeric (*Cucuma aromatic L.*): It is used as spices and as stomach tonic and blood purifier.
- (b) Ginger (*Ziniber officinale*): It is used as spices and used for treatment of common cold.
- (c) Pepper (*Piper nigrum*): It is also used as spices and used for caring stomach trouble, lowering blood sugar.
- (d) Tree tomato (*Cyphomandra betacea*): It is used as vegetable, for making jam and jelly and is a good source of protein, fat, minerals and vitamin A.
- (e) Yongchak (*Parkia roxburghii*): Its tender shoots and pods are eaten as vegetables and lotion from the bark and leaves is used to treat sores and skin infection.
- (f) Gooseberry (*Emblica officinalis*): The fruits are the rich source of vitamin C and it is used in the treatment of diarrhoea and dysentery.
- (g) Naga tenga (*Rhus semialata*): Its fruits are edible and are used for treating allergy, dysentery, diarrhoea, headache, indigestion and food poisoning.
- (h) Mechinga (*Zanthoxylum acanthopodium*): The leaves and seeds are used as spices and it is used in the treatment of stomach disorders.
- (i) Indian Pennywort (*Centella asiatica*): Leaves are used as vegetable and are used for cholera, tuberculosis, dysentery and high blood pressure.
- (j) Common Buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*): The roots are used for dewarming.

- (k) Mejancker (*Litsea citrata*): The fruits are used for caring cholera, diarrhoea, constipation, headache, fever, vomiting, food poisoning and suppressing effects of alcohol.
- (l) Raspberry (*Rubus ellipticus*): Its roots bark and young shoots are used for dewarming, stomach ache, malaria and fever.
- (m) Lhinetta (*Swertia chirayita*): It is used for treating fever, tuberculosis, gastritis and high blood pressure.

Thus, forests and its resources are an integral part of every Naga life. Their intimate acquaintance and dependence on the forest on which their life and culture depends has led them to manage and maintain their forest as a sustainable resource system. The traditional ownership and management of the land and forest by the community is a practise that has been followed since the times of their ancestors and has relevance among the Nagas even now. Thus according to their customary law, ownership of land, including forests, is private and is vested with individuals, clans, khels and the village as a whole. And the management of the land and forest is under the administration of the Village Council or the Chief according to their traditional customs and practices. Therefore there is no concept of the Government or State ownership of the land and the forest. In fact, the present Government land for administrative purposes has been either donated by the villagers themselves or has been bought by the government from the villagers.

Today, the traditional practices and cultural beliefs of the Nagas are recognised and protected by the Constitutional provisions of the nation. The Constitution Act 1962, Article 371 A of the Constitution of India provides the following provisions: No Act of Parliament in respect of, (a) Religious and social practices of the Nagas, (b) Nagas customary laws and procedures, (c) Administration of civil and criminal justice involving decision according to the Naga customary laws, (d) Ownership and transfer of land and its resources, shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides (D'Souza, 2001: 21). Also the Nagaland Forest Act of 1968, Sections 28 to 30, recognises village forests and makes a provision for the framing of rules for the protection and improvement of such forests. At the same time, the management of village land and forest by the Village Council is recognised under the Nagaland Village and Area Council Act of 1978 (*ibid*: 27).

Naga Women in the Society

“Many women in more civilized parts of India may well envy the women of Naga Hills their high status and their free and happy life; and if you measure the cultural level of the people by the social position and personal freedom of its women, you will think twice before looking down on the Nagas as savages”(Haimendorf, 1939:101). These words of Prof. Haimendorf clearly describe the women in Naga society.

The Naga society is marked by a sense of equality based on community participation irrespective of gender. Throughout her life as a daughter, wife and mother, Naga woman enjoys considerable freedom and plays an important role in the family as well as in the community life. The birth of a daughter in the family is always welcomed. Naga women are dutiful to their menfolk and are an equal partner, whose guidance and opinions are always regarded highly by their husbands. As mothers, a Naga woman has a significant role to play in the family. The mother looks after her children, teaches them social etiquette and moral conduct, takes care of the elders and make sure that the needs of the family is meet with satisfaction. Besides taking care of the children and the elders at home, most of the domestic affairs are in the mother's hand. Cooking food for the family, washing and cleaning, marketing for the family, looking after the kitchen garden which is a source of dietary supplement for her family, making sure that the children are ready for their schools in time, looking after their studies and needs, helping out her husband, maintaining the household and ensuring the needs of her family, all these are the responsibility of the women. With her wise and efficient management, her family earns respect and reputation in the society.

Besides, Naga women contribute in various ways to the social life of the community. The coming of Christianity and the introduction of education has been a liberating influence for the Naga women. Unlike in their traditional religion which excludes them from religious ceremonies, they now take active part in different Church activities in the female literacy rate today stands at an impressive 62 per cent. Education has helped immensely in ending their isolation and opened contacts with other societies. Today many educated Naga women have achieve in various fields and are working as administrators, entrepreneurs, educators etc. They have also formed organizations through which they voice their opinions on important social issues. Naga women organisations like the the Naga Mother's Association, All Naga Women's Federation having been taking up issues like women's right and protection, eradication of alcoholism and drug abuse, and promoting active participation in the socio-political sphere. The various Naga women's organisations has also been actively involved as peace negotiators between the Government of India, the Naga militants and the Naga people by negotiating and meditating for peace and justice for the Nagas.

However, Naga women seem to occupy a perplexing position in the society. Naga women appear to enjoy a certain degree of freedom and respect in the society but at the same time their voice and participation in the wider social arena are unheard and invisible. The Naga society being a patriarchal society, there is a sharp distinction between men and women with regard to their rights, roles and status. Inheritance is principally a male domain; no female can inherit the family ancestral property, except in some exceptional cases where landed property is given to the daughter as a marriage gift. However, any gifts such as agricultural land and

houses given to their daughters should not be an ancestral property that has been passed down the male line but should be acquired or bought by the parents themselves. In case there is no male in the household, the property goes to the nearest among the clan member. This customary practice still continues in the Naga society. Women enjoy considerable autonomy with respect to decision making and management of their household. They even have specific roles assigned in cultural ceremonies and rituals. But when it comes to discussing and making important decision for the community they are debarred. Even in the governing system like the Village Council only male members can participate and no women are allowed to be a member. Moreover, the patriarchal system followed by them has led to gendered division of labour between the men and women in the Naga society. Women are relegated to the domestic sphere of production whereas men take over the more economically productive sphere.

Naga Women and Forest Economy

Women in many countries depend directly on forest resources for food security and cash income. They bear the responsibility of supplying food for their families and households. Women are involved in collecting, processing, cooking, rationing and storing food. While women's activities generally revolve around the nutritional and subsistence needs of their households, women also make important contributions to the household's cash income. They support their family by engaging in forest-based income earning activities, such as processing and sale of forest products and wood. This is typically done while still tending to all the other subsistence needs of the household, namely food supply and child care. The processing of the forest products for later sale on local markets or for their own use are usually done near their home as it is more convenient for the women to combine such activities with household chores. The income generated from the forest products such as fuel-wood, fruits, mushrooms, insects, honey and medicinal plants often make a significant contribution to their household economy.

Like their counter-parts, Naga women down the centuries, have cultivated the fields, raised families, woven cloth, provided food and marketed local produce. The impact of all these on Naga society from then to now has been significant. Around 70 per cent of Naga women are engaged in agriculture and allied sectors, such as cultivating various kinds of cereals, vegetables, etc. and collecting minor forest products. They have been relying on the collection of edible plants and vegetables, wild fruits, herbs and medicinal plants, and other forest produces to meet their daily subsistence and earn money by trading these produces. For most of these women, they have few resources of their own and have no other source of earning hard cash, except for whatever they collect from the forest or the little extra they get from cultivation, which they bring to the market and sell (Government of Nagaland, 2004: 150).

The Nagas depend on the forest to meet their daily requirements like food, medicines, fodder, fuel wood and timber. They use a variety of forest produces to supplement their daily food requirements. These include forest produces like fruits, seeds, roots and tubers, leaves, vegetables, mushrooms, honey, wild animals and insects which provide important nutrients and vitamin-rich supplements. The collection of dry leaves or twigs and branches for fuel, collecting green grass and fodder for the cattle and collecting edible plants and herbs for household consumption are all done by the women. They often maintain home gardens where they grow traditional varieties of vegetables, herbs and spices selected for their nutritious, medicinal and culinary value. Such foods provide important micronutrients in the diets and are vital for survival of the households during food shortages.

Naga women being the primary collectors of wild plants, edible fruits and leaves, tubers and roots for food, they possess extensive knowledge about wild plants, roots and herbs that have medicinal values and useful for achieving household food security and nutritional well-being. But as mentioned earlier, since there is a gendered division of labour among the Nagas, the different tasks and responsibilities of women and men result in acquisition of different types of local knowledge and skills. This is because even their needs and priorities are different. Given that women do most of the labour of gathering, women have more knowledge of various plant substances and their use. Similarly the trees that are best for fuel, their regeneration and harvesting are matters that women would tend to know more about than men. Possibly more important is women's knowledge of multi-tier, multi-crop cultivation both in the jhum field and in the home garden. For example, they generally grow staple foods such as maize, millet, Job's Tear across the slopes and cover crops such as soy beans and velvet beans along the contours of the jhum fields to check soil erosion (NEPED and IIRR, 1999: 50). They practise natural method such as using of common salt for weed suppression, checking the growth of thatch grass by planting cassava and applying of lime on tree trunks to protect it from pests infestation (*ibid*: 58- 60). Inter-cropping of leguminous crops along with the main crops of paddy or maize, using ashes for specific vegetable crops such as chilly, onion, eggplant, crop rotation, use of forest litter, farmyard and green manure have also been widely practised by Naga women as traditional methods of enriching soil fertility. Women are also involved in selecting and storing seeds of many traditional food crops with specific attributes such as being cheaper, available in small quantities, better adapted to local conditions, easier to obtain, and possess qualities for food preparation, ceremonies or even rituals. Such knowledge and practices have contributed to the livelihood survival of Naga Women.

A study was conducted of the women vendors in the local markets of Kohima, the state capital of Nagaland and Dimapur the commercial hub of the state, to

examine how the forest produces contributes, to the livelihood income of the Naga women. The respondents comprise of women vendors from Supermarket, Naga Bazaar, POC market, side streets of TCP junction, Razo point and PWD junction in Kohima and women vendors from New market, Supermarket, Signal Bazaar, Sub- jail junction, Purana Bazaar market in Dimapur. Based on the study it has been observed that 90 per cent – 95 per cent of the vendors in the markets are women from different destinations such as nearby villages like Para Bosti, Kohima village, Jotsoma, Jakhama, Viswema, Khonoma, from far flung areas like Wokha, Phek, Peren, Jalukie, Zunebhoto, Tsemenyu and Mao (Manipur) and some of them residents of Kohima and Dimapur itself. Depending on the distance from their destination to the market, they have to travel about 10 to 120 kms. Some of the women, who can't go to the market to sell, go house to house selling their goods in the nearby neighbourhood. The findings of the study reveal that some of the women vendors have their own stall in the local market shed and sell their goods there regularly. They have to pay a nominal rent to the Municipal Committee or the owner of the particular market building for using it. On the other hand, some women bring their produce to the market early in the morning and as they do not have their own stall they sell their produces at wholesale rate and buy back other essential commodities such as salt, meat, milk, children clothes and books etc. and return to their villages in the evenings.

TABLE 1: PRODUCTS COLLECTED AND SOLD BY THE RESPONDENTS

<i>Serial nos.</i>	<i>Categories of the Products</i>	<i>Names of the products</i>
1.	Vegetables	Yam, Potato, Lentil, Cucumber, Pumpkin, Squash, Tree tomatoes, Bitter gourd, Soya, different varieties of Beans, Bamboo shoots, Mushrooms, Egg plants, Onion, Peas, Chilli, Raja Mircha, Coriander etc.
2.	Fruits	Fig, Walnut, Peach, Plum, Pears, Orange, Goose berry, Banana, Pine apple, Rasp Berry, Lemon, Jackfruit, Naga Tenga, Wild apple, Litchi, Lime, Passion fruit etc.
3.	Leaves	Fern, Leek, Mustard leaves, Indian Pennywort, Common Buckwheat, Mechinga leaves, leaves of passion fruits etc.
4.	Spices	Turmeric, Ginger, Garlic, Pepper, Basil, Cardamom, Cinnamon, Clove, Mechinga seeds.
5.	Others	Honey, Betel leaf and vines, Cane fibres, Ginseng, Dry wild flowers and Orchids, Broom grass etc.

Source: Fieldwork, 2012.

TABLE 2: DAILY INCOME OF THE RESPONDENTS

<i>Income in Rupees</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Less than 200	Nil	0%
201-500	32	59%
501-800	14	25%
801-1000	06	11%
Above	03	05
Total	55	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2012.

TABLE 3: OWNERSHIP OF LAND OF THE RESPONDENTS

<i>Types of Ownership</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Individual Land	2	4%
Family Land	25	45%
No Land	28	51%
Total	55	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2012.

Forest Produces Sold by the Naga Women Vendors

Table 1 indicates the various forest produces sold by the women vendors. They earn their daily income by marketing local produces like vegetables such as egg plant, different kinds of beans, pumpkin, chilli, raja mircha (king chilli), ginger, leek, squash, tree tomato, cereals varieties of indigenous plants and vegetables according to the season and availability, and produces that they collect from the nearby forest like edible plants and herbs, wild vegetables and fruits, tubers, roots, bamboo shoots, different kind of edible leaves and produces like honey, mushrooms, Naga tenga etc. The wild species of vegetables leaves and fruits, meat of wild animals are a delicacy for the Nagas and are highly in demand, thus it is a good source of income. Apart from the vegetables, spices and products which have high economic value in the market like betel vine, cane fibres, broom grass, medicinal and aromatic plants, wild flowers etc. are gathered and sold by the women vendors.

Income of the Respondents

Table 2 shows the daily income earned by the women from selling forest produces. The finding indicates that majority of the respondents i.e. 59 per cent earns around Rs. 201-500 per day, 25 per cent earns around Rs. 501-800, 11 per cent earns around Rs. 801-1000 and only 5 per cent earns above 1000. Sometimes when they are not so fortunate they also end up in deficit. At days when there is not much customers and plenty of goods are left, they have to sell at much cheaper price in the evening or gave it away in wholesale rate as carrying it back would be an extra burden as the goods would be mostly spoilt by the next day. Moreover, these women have to hurry to catch the vehicles back so that they can be at home in time to cook

for the family and take care of the children. It was also found that they expend their earnings for household needs, children's education, clothes and food for the family, house rent, transportation and travelling expense from their home to the market, rent for the market stall, taxes to the town committee as well as the underground factions. With the meagre income they have to struggle to manage all these expenditures and there is hardly any left for their own health care and personal development.

Landownership of the Respondents

Information based on interviews with the women vendors reveal that almost all of them do not own any land neither do their family. Even for those women whose family owns land, the field where they work and get the produces for sale is usually under the husband's name or the male member of the family and they have no rights whatsoever.

Table 3 shows the land ownership rights of the women. The data indicates that 51 per cent of them does not own any land at all, 45 per cent have family land and 4 per cent have their own individual land. It was revealed that the land owned by the women has been bought for them by their own parents as they don't have any other means of earning.

Marital Status of the Respondents

The findings of the study also reveals that many of the women vendors are single parents, widowed or divorced which is the reason why they have to solely depend upon agriculture and forest products for their livelihood. They have to take up all the responsibilities of taking care of the children, making sure that there is enough food on the family's table everyday and providing all the other necessities for the family. Even those who are still married, their husband are marginal earners like taxi and auto drivers, working in the lower division of the office, or working as hired labour. So these women have to depend on the sale of agricultural and forest produces as a means to support and supplement their family livelihood.

Educational Background of the Respondents

The literacy status of the respondents reveals that most of them are illiterate i.e. 33 per cent have never attended school, 36 per cent have studied till primary, 27 per cent attended till the high school level and only 4 per cent of them have studied till higher secondary level. The main reason for not studying further are due to poverty at home, either one of the parent got sick or pass away so they have to give up studying to help take care of their siblings and help in the household work. Another factor was the absence of proper school facilities in the village. Their lack of education has always been a hindrance to their life. It has resulted in their lack of access to training and lack of marketing information. They explained that since

they are not educated, they cannot join any good vocation so they don't have any other options but to work hard in the field, collect the produces from the forests and sell it in the market to earn some cash so that they can at least buy the basic necessities needed at home.

Challenges faced by the Naga Women Vendors

- (a) **Transportation Problem:** The women vendors have to face many challenges and constraints as they strive for their daily livelihood. Transportation and travelling has been and is still a problem, especially for those women coming from far places. The longer the distance the more the transportation and travelling charge, they have to spend around Rs. 50-200 daily in transportation. This becomes more difficult when there is no good means of transportation like poor road condition, no connectivity and no public means of transport as they have to travel by private taxis where they have to pay more. The study reveals that it becomes more difficult during the rainy seasons as the roads become very muddy and they don't have any means for transportation of their goods since no vehicles are willing to travel in such conditions. Thus, sometimes when they cannot travel for days all the produces become stale and becomes wastage. Lack of infrastructure like storage facilities where plants that have short shelf life can be preserved and their goods can be stored for overnight, adds to their increasing difficulties.
- (b) **Lack of Marketing Space:** Another difficulty faced by the women vendors, especially those who do not have a place in the market shed is the lack of space to sell their goods. Retailing the goods is more profitable than selling it at wholesale rate, so they try to sell the goods by sitting at vantage point on the street sides but many a times they are evicted by the Municipal Councils as they are allowed to sell only on certain designated locations. For instance women vendors in TCP gate, Kohima says that since they do not have their own stall in the local market to sell, they come early in the morning and sell in the side pavements of TCP gate junction as its one of the main town junction where they can get access to customers. But as they are not allowed to sell there, they have to leave after the early hours and goes to the Phoolbari area in the evening to sell the remaining of their goods. If they are caught selling in such unauthorised places they are fined and sometimes their goods are taken away which is a great loss for them. They are also often harassed by the other shop keepers who chase them away when they try to sell their goods in the shelter of the shop verandas. It is also very difficult for these women during the monsoon season as without any proper place, they don't have any protection from the rain and even their products gets spoilt when it gets soaked by the rain.
- (c) **Lack of Proper Market Infrastructure:** Most of the local markets in Nagaland does not have proper infrastructure such as buildings for marketing, cold room,

storage facility where the goods can be preserved, rooms to stay overnight for those who come from far flung areas and canteens. Lack of such facilities means the loss of many of the goods especially those vegetables and plants that have short shelf life, thus resulting in the wastage of their goods and loss in their income.

- (d) **Competition from other Shop Vendors:** These local women vendors have to compete with the more organised businessmen who have better marketing facilities and linkages. Most of the businessmen have their own shop, good storing facilities where they keep their goods and access to marketing support and information which the women vendors lack.
- (e) **Restrictions in accessibility to Forest Usage:** The reservation and privatisation of the community forest is one of the main factors that have immensely affected the livelihood strategies of the women vendors. Earlier women could easily get access to the community forest to gather the produces as the whole community has the right over its utilisation but with the reservation and privatisation of forest ownership the control and use of the forest land became limited only to the rightful owner. Thus it is a setback for the women as their resource utilisation rights become limited and their access to the forest is restricted to certain areas only in the community forest which is diminishing day by day due to privatisation of the forest land.
- (f) **Lack of Assistance:** The finding of the study also reveals that the women vendors do not get any assistance or support from the State Government. It's not easy to take loans from the banks for their capital investment as they do not have the resource and access to the credits. It was also revealed that whenever there is a government project or scheme such as distribution of seeds and saplings, financial assistance to start projects, development schemes for women etc. they do not have any chance of benefitting from it as most of this are taken over by the officials themselves, their wives or given only to those who have connections with the higher ups.

In spite of the number of barriers that they face daily such as harassments and evictions, lack of access even to local markets, poor transportation and infrastructures, these women work tirelessly for their livelihood because for them providing for their families is more important. Thus Naga women of all ages and from all corners are largely dependent on agricultural and forest produces as it provides them with a good means through which they can provide for their families and at the same time enhance their family's place in the society as well. For instance, a 27 year woman vendor in New market, Dimapur says that she has been accompanying her mother to sell the vegetables and the various products since she was 6 years, now she is married with two children and she still continues to sell the produces to support her own family as her husband's income is not sufficient for

the family. On the other hand, an 82 year woman in PWD junction, Kohima, says she has been selling vegetables and other products from the field and forest to support her family. Though all her 8 children are married and she has 21 grandchildren now, she still continues to sell the vegetables so that she can support herself and her husband. She mentions that her children and grandchildren help her to procure the goods and though they can take care of her, she enjoys being self-reliant and independent. Thus agricultural and forest produces are an important source for Naga women through which they can provide for their families, be self-reliant, and be socially and economically empowered.

Deforestation and its Consequence

The once luxuriously forest covered land of the Nagas is experiencing extensive degradation, massive deforestation and forest conversion due to increasing population pressure, decreasing cycle of jhum cultivation, urbanisation, privatisation of community forest and exploitation of timbers and other forest produce for commercial purpose. Demographic factor has been one of the major causes of deforestation. With the increase in population there is more pressure to bring the forest land under cultivation for increased food supply, forest areas being cleared for settlement, more trees are cut down as demand for fuel wood increases. It has also resulted in the unsustainable practice of traditional agriculture i.e., jhum cultivation due to reduced crop cycle that allows less time to the land to reclaim its nutrients through natural process. The reducing cycle compounded by rapid soil erosion has led to the degradation and barrenness of the forest land, thus compromising the yield per unit of land and making less harvest available per family. The privatisation of forest for monoculture plantations of economically profitable species has moreover resulted in the loss of natural traditional vegetation and forest cover, destruction of habitats and reduced regeneration. Deforestation has been also caused by profitable but unsustainable practice of illegal timber trade. Though the timber extraction is allowed in the state under highly regulatory mechanism set by Supreme Court appointed SIT, the reckless and uncontrolled felling of trees for timber and firewood for cash income has resulted in destruction of the forest and its resources. And urbanisation of the countryside leading to change in land use, increase in municipal waste generation and also a loss of aesthetic value and high rate of unemployment giving rise to exploitation of the forest resources has also led to widespread damage of the forest and its environment.

Deforestation has resulted in environmental damage affecting the climate variables, the land and water system, crucial sectors like agriculture and decrease in the resource sector. More importantly it has an intense effect on the livelihood of the people who are dependent on forest for their sustenance and livelihood. The consequences of deforestation are a great detriment especially for women who rely on the forest and its resources as their livelihood for a secure livelihood is

threatened. The same can be said of those Naga women who are struggling to earn from selling whatever produce they can manage to collect from the forest and the fields. It is a crucial source of income for them but with the scarcity of the resources due to deforestation, they cannot satisfy the consumers demand, thus they have less chance of earning more. There is a high demand for wild leaves and vegetables, mushrooms, honey, fruits, bamboo shoots which is a delicacy for the Nagas. Even dried wild flowers and orchids, cane and wood products are in demand from the people. The high demand means a good chance of earning more but when the resource in demand is available in less quantity, it becomes very difficult for them to obtain it, thus curtailing off their means of income. The resource degradation due to deforestation also adversely affects the women more as they have to travel longer distances to fetch the forest resources for their household use and cash income. Consequently they have to spend more time and energy, leading to an increase in their work load and drudgery, decrease in their diverse knowledge relating to food security and nutritional well being thereby, causing feminisation of poverty and posing more challenges to their livelihood. They also cannot devote much time for other activities like raising children and personal development. The privatisation of forest ownership also not only causes the degradation of forest but it's a setback for women as productive resources utilization rights are decentralised, limiting access to and control rights only to the rightful owner. As said by Mies and Shiva (1993), women and nature work in partnership with each other with a special relationship. If the land is degraded and eroded, both the land and women suffer a decline in productivity. The decline in productivity affects women more because she loses her subsistence, resource and her social status (Kikhi and Kikhi, 2011: 37). Creating awareness about the effects of deforestation, and managing and using the forests in a sustainable way can help in the conservation of the forests thereby increasing the resource pool for those who depend on it and thus securing their livelihood.

Traditional Practices and its Consequent Limitations on the Role of Naga Women in Managing the Forest Resources

The pressure of old traditional customs and norms continues to determine the society's attitude towards women. The patriarchal society looks upon women as the second class citizens and not as the half part of the society. Thus their voice and participation has always been ignored. As stated by Wali that in India, the cultural conditioning, the socialisation pattern, customs, rituals, traditions, value system and religious ethos have been rather different for male and female, that a female develops a voiceless personality.

Naga women share the same problem like any other women in the society. The patriarchal customs of the Naga society has been a restraining factor for their women. For the tribals, land and its relationship are vital to their identity and history, but

this is also a criterion that excludes women. Similarly for the Nagas, cultivable land is also the most valued form of property for its economic, political and symbolic significance. It is a productive, wealth-creating and livelihood-sustaining asset. It also provides a sense of identity and rootedness because it has a durability and permanence, which no other asset possesses. Over and above this, in the Naga context, ancestral land has a symbolic meaning (Government of Nagaland, 2004: 152). The Naga society being a patrilineal society, men can inherit the most important and productive wealth i.e., land for free, but it does not apply to women the same way. Naga women cannot own ancestral property, and so they cannot inherit land; therefore, Naga women are rendered valueless from this perspective. Moreover, absence of land rights has restrained their access to land and forest resources on which they are largely dependent as a source of income, thereby endangering their livelihood. And the effective exclusion of women from possession and control of land is largely the basis of their subordinate and dependent position in the society. Their lack of land rights has deprived the Naga women socially and culturally and has also reduced the well being of their family. Introduction and implementing of policies in relation to women's access to and control over productive land can improve the social and economic status of the women because land are not just a source of economic production but also a source of prestige and power which can increase the bargaining power of women. And women's access to land rights can secure sustainable livelihoods with increased productivity, reduce level of poverty and gain better social relationships and cultural values.

Even in the governing system and decision-making bodies, Naga women are voiceless as such bodies are meant exclusively for male members of the community. Though in some cases, there is an informal space for women to be consulted but these remain token spaces because generally women are excluded from any formal decision making process. As land and forest are male domains and decisions regarding the management of the resources are taken by the governing bodies like the Village Council, women are not allowed to have any say in such matters though it concerns their livelihood. Their role in forestry and agro forestry has always been limited to providing labour only. The exclusion of women in decision making for management and preservation of the resources has also led to the underestimation of women's local resource knowledge with which they are more acquainted and have often resulted in the loss of conserving the resources and decrease in their diverse knowledge relating to the resources and their use. Such customary practise of excluding and marginalisation of women from all important decision making has made a negative impact on their livelihood and results in the exploitation of the women, giving them a low social and economic status in the society. It must be recognised that women are equal partner and efforts must be made to empower them by ensuring that women get actively involved in decision-making and benefit sharing of forest produce and resources.

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