CASE STUDY in Pakistan

Indigenous women of Thal desert

Being part of shifting communities, women in Thal desert were in complete charge of life and livelihood making; the men used to care only of taking livestock, mainly camels, to pastures for feed.

The deprivation under-hand

In this process of colonization and modern development and policy, indigenous peoples were deprived of their potential towards food production (cultivation of food crops, vegetables, fishing and mutual exchange of food), local medicines and local literatures.

The above mentioned groups of indigenous peoples and women, though having different livelihoods and knowledge, are ecologically bound and face common discrimination. They need to unite under common or inter-woven ecologies and hence discrimination. They need to become an alliance and open their discourse towards international horizons of climate change and indigenous experiences and hence strategies.

The government of Pakistan towards IPs

The government of Pakistan, despite being signatory of ILO Convention 107, and recent sighing of UNDRIP, have been dumb and deaf towards IPs and hence there is no mention of indigenous women in any water and forests development programmes. Even the Ministry of Women Development (in its first article)

There is no exact data on indigenous peoples and women of river Indus, as they were never counted as citizens in the national census. The indigenous women currently face the following losses:

Health: No modern health facility, including reproductive health, while the indigenous health treat mechanisms have been destroyed due to ecological destruction e.g. Rati Booti, etc.

Education: No education facilities for tribal women of Suleiman mountains, river Indus and Thal desert.

Traditional livelihoods: Rieverine forests, date palm trees, etc have been cut for cash cropping.

Decision making: Deprivation from decision making in rearing ecologies and ecosystems and producing food, in fact, deprived women of decision in all other spheres of life, most noticeably family affairs i.e. from choosing size of family (Reproductive Health), marriages, etc.
Land and water rights: The modern development, particularly the Green Revolution, and subsequent modern cultivation of cash cropping deprived women of land ownership.

Consequent domestic violence: The indigenous peoples had an ideal gender relations based on equal responsibilities and hence mutual understanding of rights. Since the destruction of traditional ecological relationship of IPs, the indigenous men, due to their livelihood dependence on neighbouring settled communities, dominantly Muslim, have learned discrimination and hence the indigenous women face extreme domestic violence. The indigenous women in Damaan area are the most vulnerable in this regards.

But how the climate change is inflicting a global loss, and depriving IPs of their opportunity to learn from each other (and unite for their natural rights) and stand for their rights, is what we expect to learn from the forum of AWIN.

Eucalyptus plantation – an unseen contributor of climate change and threat to indigenous livelihoods

Land under eucalyptus plantation in the world is increasing by more than 175,000 hectares each year. No other tree in the world has been so widely promoted for its being a quick timber source. So called scientific evidence recommends it for effective control of water logging and salinity.

While spectacular results have been reported regarding eucalyptus plantation, there have been some adverse opinions from indigenous peoples. Eucalyptus are usually chosen for their fast growth, but this very characteristic nullifies its significance. It consumes water resource and soil nutrients lavishly, sometimes turning the region into an arid zone. On August 10, 1983, the farmers of Baraka and Holahalli villages in Tumer district in Karnataka, India, marched en masse to the forest nursery and pulled out millions of eucalyptus seedlings, planting tamarind and mango seeds instead. According to them, eucalyptus plantation in the catchment area of the streams, feeding their agricultural lands, had made them go dry.

In Pakistan, its plantation has diminished soil nutrients which, in turn, damages soils capacity for biological productivity. Being and exotic tree, it disturbs the food chain, inhibits the growth of native vegetation, and destroys the environment for soil faun that are at once ‘factories for producing soil fertility. The farmers in three districts of Thal desert (Leiyah, Bhakkar, Muzafargarh), when contacted expressed similar complaints. Ejaz Khan, a retired school headmaster, narrated his experience in words, “I was persuaded by an official of the agriculture department to plant sufeda (local name for eucalyptus). Its growth was spectacular. In just four years’ time, I was able to sell the wood. It was 1996. Since then, the land, under eucalyptus plantation is lying barren. I have tried many crops, not a single one has been successful”. Many indigenous peoples denied its profitably too, “No fruit, to shade, no fodder for livestock, nothing can grow beneath and around this tree, how it can be profitable?”, asked Muhammad Hussain of district Leiyah. Massive plantation of eucalyptus in all regions at all time has inflicted irreparable damage to soil ecology.
The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), in 1988, published a document titled ‘The Eucalyptus Dilemma’. While recommending this exotic species as a precious time source, FAO listed 38 countries where the land under eucalyptus plantation was on the rise. Interestingly, most of these countries had been colonies in the past. The tree was crucial to the British Empire as it opened up internal markets. The demand for sleepers in the railway enabled both European and Indian traders to make profits, but they often cut too many trees, turning the larger tracts of wood-land into desert.

Pathogens, plants and animals, introduced by the settlers, helped them to overwhelm and displace local people and ecology. Eucalyptus is the perfect example in this regard. Loss of some native species results in further loss of some other species. Dr Ghulam Akbar, director of Range Resource Institute said, “Although it is a precocious species, it must not be planted on farmland, button forestland”.

During the 1980s, the government of Pakistan encouraged eucalyptus plantation to control water logging and salinity.

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