

Women forest dwellers daily use of forests in Poland

Wiesława Ł. Nowacka

Department of Forest Utilization, Faculty of Forestry, Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Poland,
tel.: 48 22 5938120, fax.: 48 22 5938139, e-mail: Wieslawa.Nowacka@wl.sggw.pl

ABSTRACT

Forests are playing an important role especially for inhabitants of small towns and rural communities. The goal of the research was characterization of the actual means and directions of the use of forest resources by small communities, with emphasis on the importance of women. The objective of the research was to determine most important ways of use of forests in rural areas and their role in social development of families. This paper discusses achievements of survey done in Poland. Data were collected through quantitative questionnaires. A total of more than 1000 female inhabitants responses are statistically worked out and partly presented in this paper.

KEY WORDS

women forest dwellers, non timber use of forests, forestry.

INTRODUCTION

Following the results of current research it can be concluded that consideration of multi-functionality of forests, being one of the elements of environment, has been more and more focused on the socio-cultural functions of forests. Forest management and wood processing are important for human populations in rural areas. Most of obtained wood is used in regional and local wood processing companies that brings income for development of local economy and improvement of well being of inhabitants and families living in these regions. The economic priorities have been lately replaced by social aspects with a special emphasis on job creation and financial support for local self-governments' budgeting through availability of forests for education on environment and its conservation, qualified tourism, games and other services for society. In many countries, among

them Poland, forests no longer play their former main role of provider as raw source of wood. Emphasis has shifted to other uses beyond industry. Employment and environment are among the two most important issues in today's Europe. Forestry is involved in both – particularly in the context of rural development.

In countries which have undergone significant social transformations, the phenomenon which heretofore was not a threat – unemployment has made its appearance. So-called structural unemployment has become of special significance, affecting regions previously encompassed within a planned economy model for agriculture, in which villagers were assured full employment in National Agricultural Collectives. Following their privatization (demise), the local populace was not offered alternative means of employment. For many tens of thousands of families living in small settlements, villages and small towns, forest became a real source of

income of various character. Advantages flowing from the proximity of forests are influencing an improvement in the living conditions of these families.

The role of women in Polish families, transforming over centuries, has now created conditions of equal participation by women in providing for their families' welfare, food and stability. This equality is expressed differently in urban and rural families. Opportunities for remunerated work are scarce in small communities, especially for women. Consequently, their activities toward the welfare of the family are more often tied to domestic work, and to extracting benefits from the forests. Mushroom gathering, wild fruit, herbs, etc, and their sale, are activities which are often the only source of financial support for the family. In small communities, following local traditions, women process in their kitchen fruit and mushrooms. This processed food is a substantive supplement all year long to the family's diet.

Women along with children, living in small villages, are the primary users of forests. Gender aspects have been increasingly recognized as an integral part of sustainable development, and therefore of SFM. The implementation of the principles of this concept entails formulation and fulfilment of the following requirements:

- guarantee that socialization of the decision-making process in forestry will proceed,
- assumption that the whole forestry sector should be the subject of society involvement,
- the need of rural women involvement as important part of rural and local communities in forestry policy aspects.

The level of cooperation characterizing the contacts between those who use forests and forestry administrators is a relevant factor influencing possibilities for multi-directional approach of forest utilization by small communities.

RESEARCH GOALS

The goal of the research started in 2004 was characterization of the actual means and directions of the use of forest resources by small communities, with emphasis on the importance of women. The intent was to determine to what extent forest were essential to the func-

tioning and development of families in small settlements, villages and towns.

Another goal was to ascertain the level of contacts between inhabitants of small communities with representatives of the administrative bodies in charge of National Forests.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research used standardized questionnaire tool comprised of 48 questions (primarily quantitative but also qualitative). Questions contained therein related to issues of: family financial situation, family needs oriented toward forests, actual means of utilizing forest resources, envisioned future uses of forests, cooperation with forestry officials. The questionnaire was containing closed questions (as a rule there were questions with cafeteria alternative answers, and partly with dichotomy answers) and half-open. Closed questions belonged to questions with multiple choice, some of them were questions with five-step scale.

The verification stage for questionnaire inspection was planned. Testing was done with a help of 40 women volunteers participated in a separate ergonomic investigations. Some minor changes were introduced to the questionnaire final version. Explanation sentences regarding aim of investigations, instruction for respondents, label questions were involved into questionnaire. Questions contained therein related to issues of:

- family financial situation,
- family needs oriented toward forests,
- actual means of utilizing forest resources,
- envisioned future uses of forests,
- cooperation with forestry officials.

The questionnaires were responded by women from small hamlets, villages and town located inside large forest expanses, or near their edges. The questionnaires were distributed to the women directly by the person gathering data, rather than via mail or other means (students of forestry, foresters, author herself). Those polled were not seen as anonymous respondents, therefore one can surmise that their responses were highly likely trustworthy.

Collected data from 1020 questionnaires was coded and entered into pre-formatted spreadsheet. Part of questions were not answered and some missing data

caused that some analysis are using not full range of questionnaire data. Preliminary statistical analysis was accomplished using Excel software. More precise analytical analysis is currently being performed. The use of SPSS software facilitates producing exact results showing interrelationships between various factors depicting utilization of forests by small local communities.

In this paper only a part of the responses was used, those relevant to the topic in question. Research is ongoing.

RESULTS

Data regarding women respondents

Respondents represented diverse group of forest users. As it is shown below (Fig. 1) they were representing mostly little villages with not more than 1000 inhabitants.

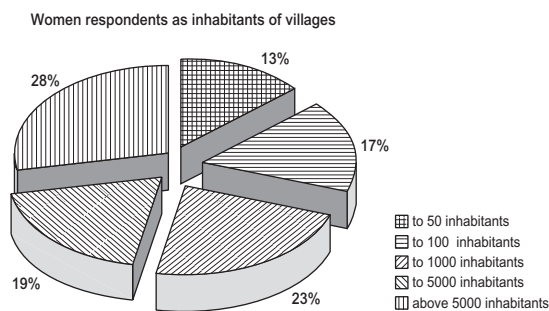


Fig. 1. Respondents as inhabitants of town and villages (N=1020)

Typical economic status of the family is shown below (Fig. 2)¹. More than 66% of families in the investigation were living below social minimum. Comparing that with Polish statistical data is giving the assumption that respondents were representing rather poor group of citizens. Depending on forest products for those families was very typical and understandable.

¹ Research started in 2004. The minimum existence monthly income was fixed in this moment as 1 018 PLN for a 4 person family (with 2 children). It means 255 PLN per person. The legal minimum was fixed as 1 264 PLN for a family the same type. It means 316 PLN per person in a family. All those families with income below 600 PLN can be seen as living below social minimum (almost 60% of Polish population in 2004) (Data GUS- National Polish Statistic Office).

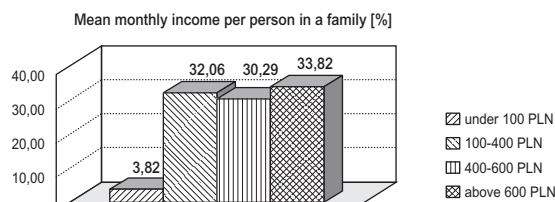


Fig. 2. Monthly income per capita in the respondent families (N=890)

Not more than 30 promille of respondent were younger than 15 years. Most of them (92%) represent woman in age between 16-55 years old (Fig. 3). The oldest investigated woman was 77 years old.

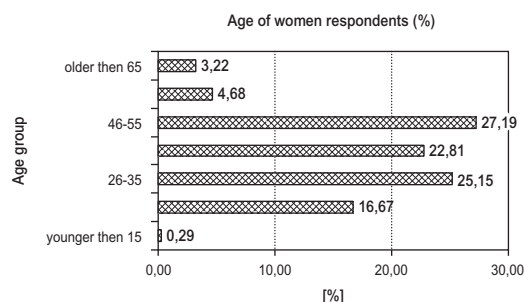


Fig. 3. Age of respondents (N=900).

The first statistic analysis are proving the strong relation between quality of family life and their interest in using NTFP for their income.

The study also offers information on some aspects of the social characteristics of forest dwellers families (Tab 1.)

Almost 44% of families were representing families with children below 14 years old. Not more than 6% of women were living alone, as one person family. Most of investigated women and families were exploiting forests as resource of products for selling and giving a possibility to earn money. In those families more often children were working picking mushrooms or forest fruits. Only 18% of respondent families were depending on agriculture activity. More than 67% of respondents granted that advantages flowing from the proximity of forest are very big. The surveyed women assessed importance of forests for their family income. Forests influence the family improvement and living conditions. Forests and their utilisation constitute the economic basis and often

the only means of survival for many people, or families wellbeing growth.

Tab. 1. Socio-demographic data of forest dwellers involved in surveys (N=980)

	Respondents [%]
Family situation/status	
Unmarried	25
Married	70
Widowed	5
Persons in a family	
One	5,76
Two	14,85
Three	23,94
Four	32,73
Five	15,76
More than 5	6,97
Education profile	
Elementary school	14,66
Secondary school	59,53
University	25,81

Means of Forest Utilization

Research has given data characterizing means of forest utilization benefiting local communities and rural families. Results are shown in table 2. The most important income –generating factor are mushrooms and fruits picked for sale.

There is seen growing interest in finding job connected to forestry industry, and having holidaymaker too (agro-tourism). This assumption is coming from comparing data possessed in 2004 with those from 2006/2007. The growing role of forests as a source of servicing is well expressed in obtained data.

In the context of forestry management needs important are answers given by women users of forest regarding the usage of forest and its forest products. Only 8,58% of respondents are prepared for being forced to pay for permission for picking NTFP, or a need to possess such licence.

Tab. 2. Means of typical forest utilization

Means of utilization	Percent of users
Mushrooms picking for family use	70%
Mushrooms picking for sale	35%
Forest fruits picking for family use	64%
Forest fruits picking for sale	45%
Fuel wood (buying cheaper as families live close to forest)	20%
Forest herbs picking (also flowers)	10%
Odd job	10%
Holidaymaker	6%
Brushwood (free without spending money)	4%
Pasturage	1%
Bee keeping	1%
Snails picking	1%

Cooperation between local inhabitants and representatives of forestry administration

Data relating to the quality of cooperation between those using forests with representatives of the National Forests administration is presented in the table 3.

Tab. 3. Contacts with State Forests Officers

Relationship-contacts	Percent of respondents
Very good – without any problems, friendly	74,27%
Good enough, sometimes problematic, not friendly	15,79%
Very unpleasant	9,94%

CONCLUSIONS

The research gave the information regarding future challenges for forest management. The pressing needs of local societies are growing. Some conflicts between forest owners, administration representatives and primary users will arise in near future. One can identify some implications regarding future integrated qualitative research in the context of using of NTFP by local communities and forest policy in general.

REFERENCES

- Grouwels S. 2001. Community forestry: gender and natural resources management. Proceed. "Women in forestry – strategies to increase women's participation in the forestry sector in Europe". 2-6 April 2002, Viseu, Portugal, 309-310.
- Karim W. J. 1993. Gender studies in southeast Asia. Southeast Asian Journal of Social Studies, 21 (1), 98-113.
- Minibas T. 1997. Forestry and Women. Proceed. "XI World Forestry Congress", 13-22 October 1997, Antalya, 59-61.
- Narayana Gowda K. 1997. Ms. Thimmakka and her proud children. Proceed. "XI World Forestry Congress", 13-22 October 1997, Antalya, 64-66.
- Nowacka W. Ł. 2007. Kobiety w polskim leśnictwie – wybrane problemy. Leśne Prace Badawcze, 1, 77-95.
- Prasad A. 2000. Strategy for sustainable NTFP management in India. Forest and society: the role of research. Proceed. "XXIIUFRO World Congress", 7-12 August 2000, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, 11, 199-200.
- Vargas M. 1998. Latin America and the Caribbean. Rural women and food security: current situation and perspectives. 96-117.
- Verheijden C. 1997. Women leading forestry activities in their communities. Proceed. "XI World Forestry Congress", 13-22 October 1997, Antalya, 67-71.
- World Rainforest Movement 2004, Movimiento Mundial Por Los Bosques. WRM BULLETIN, 79, English edition.
- Wiersum K. F., Elands B. H. M. 2002. The changing role of forestry in Europe: perspectives for rural development. Forest and Nature Conservation Policy Group. Wageningen.