

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Family until recently has been considered as the basic form of household organization and wage labour the most important source of family subsistence. Under these conditions, the great bulk of domestic work consists of the production of use value through the combination of commodities brought in the market and domestic labor time.¹¹⁰ Such products contribute to the reproduction and help in the proper functioning of the economic system. However, analysis of agricultural society like the Naga society reveals that it does not really fit neatly into the above categorization because of the lack of clear division of what constitutes productive and reproductive works. For instance, the gathering of NTFPs, firewood, growing vegetables or even cooking, etc., contributes to the economy of society. Despite a clear definition of sexual division of labor, men and women's work are integrated in time and space. The separation between productive and reproductive activities is often artificial, symbolized, perhaps, by a woman carrying a baby on her back while working in the fields¹¹¹ or a woman vegetable vendor carrying out her business whilst holding a small baby in her arms. The work of the Economist Ester Boserup marked a landmark in understanding the position of women in developing economies and the way in which women's position was being interpreted. She was the first to point out that economic growth in the developing world did not benefit women and men equally. Boserup's work '*Women's role in Economic Development*' was a watershed in development literature where she recognized that women were not merely passive in the development process but also an active participant in production and reproduction which was necessary for poverty reduction and economic growth. The exact nature of women's work varies from society to society. Feminist writings point out that the works of women are often underestimated be it in complex capitalist society or in a simple agricultural society.

¹¹⁰ Beneria Lourdes and Gita Sen (1981), *Accumulation, Reproduction and "Women's Role in Economic Development": Boserup Revisited*, p- 292

¹¹¹ *Ibid* p-292

Eco-feminists such as Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies have through their work unfolded the linkage between nature and women. They believe that there is a deep connection between earth and women and hence the term ‘Mother Nature’ or ‘Mother Earth’.¹¹² Cultural eco-feminism identifies a powerful and positive link between women and nature by explaining the special affinity with nature through their reproductive rights. Whilst Bina Agarwal has seriously raised broader issues about the management of gender relations in connection with environmental management strategies and stressed the role of customs, laws and social structures in determining women’s relationship to their environment.¹¹³ This intimate relationship between women and nature has helped women to understand its surroundings. The process in which nature and women work together has created a special bond making women the true custodian of biodiversity. Naga women are aware of the fact that if nature is disturbed and destroyed, their daily requirements are at risk. Therefore, they make it a point to conserve and preserve the biodiversity leading to conservation of environment and its natural resources. Women are also considered to be more environmentally sensitive than men because of their traditional caring and nurturing role. This connection has placed women in a better place than men as advocates of nature. It is suggested that life giving quality between women and nature makes both equally vulnerable to male domination. Therefore, any negative change in nature is bound to have a negative impact on women as well.

Set against such theoretical foundation, the present work had sought to analyze the nature of women’s participation in agriculture and contribution to the rural economy by delving into the role of Naga women in Jhum cultivation and in management of the natural resources. Agriculture being the mainstay of Naga society, a major portion of

¹¹² Mikkelson Caecilie (2005), *Indigenous People, Gender and Natural Resource Management*, p-153

¹¹³ Pandit Ram Chandra (2016), *A Gender Perspective on Environmental Movements, Concern and perception in Dhanaraju Vulli and Kh. Narendra Singh Contesting Gender History, Politics and Identity*, p-84

the population depends on it for their livelihood. The present study highlights the significant involvement of both men and women in agricultural activities of the society. However, a comparison between the engagement of males and females in agriculture as per existing statistics points to the fact that on an average, the number of female cultivators as against total female working population was 28.6 percent more than the male cultivators against the total male working population (table 3.4). This belies the general understanding that agricultural and other productive activity is often termed as a men's domain and house or domestic work as women's job. From the social definition of women as housewives follow the definition of men as the breadwinners, the separation between the private sphere of the house and the public sphere, the sphere of production and reproduction and the subordination of the latter under the former.¹¹⁴ When one talks about the private and public sphere, it can be understood that the division of labor is assumed to be based on gender lines with men working outside the home and women work at home. However, the present study clearly brings to light that rigid distinction between productive and reproductive work is neither possible nor feasible when one examines the gender integrated roles in agricultural activities and the management of resources in the Naga society.

Though considered by many as economically inefficient and ecologically harmful form of cultivation by environmentalists, shifting cultivation continues to be widely practiced in many parts of the districts with up to 90 percent of cultivable land under this form of cultivation (Figure 3.2). The community still holds deep sentiments towards various socio-cultural activities associated with shifting cultivation. A systematic study of the nature of participation of men and women in the intricate steps involved in the Jhum cultivation points to the integral role played by women in the process of agricultural

¹¹⁴ Mies Maria (2012) *Dynamics of Sexual Division of Labour and Capital Accumulation in Padmini Swaminathan Women and Work*, p- 59

production in the state (Table 3.6). Right from the process of site selection to the harvesting and storage of the paddy, the study has found the clear-cut division of labor by gender as well as harmonious blending of gender roles. While the tasks of site/plot selection and distribution for the current jhum cycle is exclusively the domain of males in line with the patriarchal nature of Naga society wherein ownership of all immovable property rests with the menfolk, thereafter, all other aspects of jhum cultivation sees the full involvement of both males and females. The distribution of jhum plot is normally followed by what is known as ‘slashing’ which basically refers to the clearing of unwanted vegetation from the selected plot. At this juncture of the process, the present study shows that in most villages of Nagaland, this task involved both men and women according to 68.99 percent of the respondents. Slashing is followed by burning wherein both men and women work in tandem as pointed out by 67.04 percent of respondents.

Cutting trees is somewhat predominantly reserved for men as it involves much physical strength. The present study found that 88.55 percent of cutting trees was done by men. On the other hand, leveling of the plots which follows the cutting of trees is normally regarded as a female task with 66.76 percent of it performed by women folks on average. Any jhum field requires a field hut for protection from the elements of nature, so also for cooking purpose. This task of construction is carried out generally by males in Naga society. One area of activity where both men and women are equally engaged is in the process of creating bunds in the jhum fields for the purpose of checking soil erosion. Thereafter, one of the most crucial steps in the jhum process, i.e., the selection of seeds and crop follows, which is exclusively reserved for womenfolk in Naga society with cent percent of the Respondents affirming this fact. After the seed selection is finalized by the women, the sowing of seeds take place wherein, without exception, it sees the full participation of both men and women equally. Once the seeds start

growing, it is a constant battle to keep the weeds in check so that the fledgling paddies are not suffocated. This backbreaking task of weeding is carried out predominantly by women, according to 99.44 percent respondents. At the time of harvest, both men and women are equally involved again. Threshing of paddy after harvest is one activity which is never done exclusively by men; either it is done by women as is seen in 44.41 of cases or it involves both men and women as indicated by 55.59 of respondents. Therefore jhum farming sees the extensive involvement of women at all stages. It is pertinent to point out here that the domestic role of women is extended to the productive arena wherein most of the cooking in the fields during the farming process is carried out by women.

In addition to their integral role in the cultivation of rice which is their staple diet, in the process of shifting cultivation, Naga women also cultivate different varieties of vegetables and cereals in the jhum fields at strategic locations throughout the year. All jhum cultivators manage multi-crops in the adjacent land alongside paddy. The additional vegetable crops cultivated serve to supplement their diet and are used primarily for household consumption. Often any surplus accruing out of these crops are sold in the local market to augment the family income. In the selected villages under study, it was learned that the farmers grew at least 30 or more varieties of crops alongside the paddy (Table 4.2). While jhum cultivation in itself is subsistence type of farming, it was basically from the sale proceeds of such surplus agricultural products that most farmers met their pecuniary requirements.

Not only do the women market the products from their fields, but they are also found to extensively forage, collect and market the NTFPs accrued from forests in the village vicinity. Beside their agility in the agricultural workforce, Naga women are active participants in management of various resources found in nature. The present study

shows that women visited the forests regularly to forage and gather the wild edible fruits, vegetables and other faunal species. Out of the total respondents, a majority of the female respondents at 62 percent were found to be engaged in this activity. There are at least 55 NTFPs collected by the rural women from nature's bounty (Table 4.1) for their sustenance. The nutritional status of rural Naga households remained secured in large part due to the significant role played by women in making use of the natural resources.

The study found that most of the respondents at 77 percent used the agricultural produce from their jhum fields and the forest products not only for domestic use but with a duality of purpose, i.e., for both household consumption as well as for sale. The marketing of such surplus products in Naga society is found to be the exclusive domain of women (Figure 4.7) with 84.3 percent of all marketing carried out solely by women while 15.69 percent of female respondents undertook the marketing task carrying their young children. This provides a classic illustration of the interweaving of the productive and reproductive role of Naga women. The present study clearly indicates that Naga men do not participate in the marketing of agricultural products.

For the Naga people, forests are considered as the second most important natural resource after water. Thus, the forest provides the people with food, fuel, medicine and other raw materials for different purposes. So much so that when women, as the primary gatherers from the forests forage there, they do not go about randomly or wantonly. Rather, the forest and its resources are treated with utmost respect and care is taken to ensure that they pick only what is essential for their needs and the rest are left to regenerate. They are particularly careful not to uproot any plant unnecessarily. While foraging, they would not defecate or pass urine in any water bodies but maintain a good distance from it to answer nature's call.

The traditional engagement of the Naga women in particular and the people in general with their forests and environment exhibits high environmental ethics partly due to their dependence on its resources and also importantly because they own a sense of spiritual connectedness with their ecosystem. The natural elements around them such as a forest or mountain is believed to have a spirit of their own which needs to be treated with respect lest their wrath falls on the people. Till date, there are certain parts of the forest which are taboo for people such as that found in Longsa village under Wokha district.

Due to their reliance on the resources of the forests, women are found to exhibit a deep sense of responsibility towards nurturing and preserving the biodiversity in their locale. No doubt both men and women have acquired traditional knowledge from living in close proximity with nature for generations. The division of work along the gender lines has shaped their knowledge system where men and women have varying forms of expertise in administering and protecting biological diversity. Women's daily activities, experiences and knowledge have made them a major stakeholder in protecting biological diversity. The diverse knowledge which they have has proved to be a factor in preserving the varieties of flora and fauna. As the gatherer, gardener, domesticator and seed custodian, they developed an intimate connection with nature.

A significant role played by Naga women in using the resources and actively contributing to the conservation of their biodiversity is to be found in their seed preservation role. Women are the primary seed selectors as well as preservers in all the districts of the state. Cutting across districts and irrespective of tribe or village, cent percent of respondents affirmed this fact. Whether it is preservation of paddy seeds, vegetables, pulses or fruits, they undertook the responsibility in all seriousness based on their traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) which had been handed down orally through the ages. It is a difficult task as it requires several steps to preserve and the

method of preservation also differs depending upon the type and varieties of seeds. With the right knowledge about the seasons, quality, suitability of environment, and based on the requirements of the household, women had been playing this role for millennia in Naga society.

However, with the merger of hybrid seeds and the upsurge of cash crop, there is declining practice in seed preservation. The hybridization of seed was an invasion into the seed itself. In many parts of the world, the increasing use of hybrid seeds has caused an alarming factor in reducing the quality of seeds. As Kloppen Burghas stated, it broke the unity of seed as food grain and as a means of production. In doing so, it opened up the space for capital accumulation that private industry needed in order to control plant breeding and commercial seed production.¹¹⁵ The most affected of such uncontrolled occurrence would be rural women who are dependent on seeds for their food security.

Seed conservation is also weakening and in danger of becoming lost in the future. As most young generation prefers to venture out for different jobs and their indifference towards working in the field, they are losing the knowledge of traditional seed preservation. It is found that in most villages under study, older women have preserved the traditional knowledge but there is a huge gap among the younger generation as their interest in learning is diminishing. It is therefore difficult to assume that such knowledge would continue to exist in the future.

Another threat towards traditional seed preservation is the new patent law, Seed Act 2004 and Genetic Use Restriction Technology (GURT) which in many parts of India are causing a serious menace by denying women's traditional role in seed saving. According to the Seed Act, it is compulsory to register the varieties of seeds and an unlicensed variety of seeds is considered as illegal. The Patent Act in the US, Scotland,

¹¹⁵ Shiva Vandana , *The Seed and the Earth Biotechnology and the Colonization of Regeneration*, p- 157
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Germany, UK and the European Union has prevented farmers from exchanging uncertified seeds. With globalization and commercialization on the rise in Nagaland, it will in the future pose a serious threat to the traditional knowledge of preservation and conservation of seed. This will severely set women in a disadvantaged position as their generational role as seed protector will disappear.

It is pertinent to add that not only preservation of seeds, but the female cultivators also exchanged different varieties of seeds at the intra-village, inter-village and inter-state level as well which has lead to the enhancement of biodiversity in different locales through the years.

In addition to the agricultural and the foraging activities of Naga women, they also extensively practice kitchen gardening, with almost every household maintaining a small garden in their backyards. These provide additional fresh vegetables and herbs throughout the year to the households. The kitchen gardens are predominantly the responsibility of women in Naga society though in some cases both husband and wife may manage it together. Data from the present study shows that 96 percent of the respondents practiced kitchen gardening out of which 96 percent was maintained exclusively by women. Besides domestic consumption, surplus products were often shared with neighbors and relatives which boosted affinity and social solidarity in society. The kitchen gardens also served an educational function of teaching young girls the art of agricultural activity from a young age. Also, many women used it as an experimental laboratory to test out a new variety of seeds to check its suitability to the local environment. Any surplus accruing out of the kitchen garden, after fulfilling domestic and social uses may be sold in the market.

Another important activity that points towards Naga women's contribution to the economy of the state and to household income in the present study is through their

participation in self-help groups (SHGs). The involvement in and contribution to productive agricultural activities by Naga women is not confined only to the household level but is extended to the public domain through their involvement in Self Help Groups (SHGs) which are found in all villages. These homogeneous groups have successfully carried out different small projects (Table 4.3) which have emerged as an effective instrument to promote entrepreneurship. Some village such as Longsa had as many as 25 SHGs which were all comprised of women members. An examination of the activities undertaken by the SHGs in the villages under study brings out the fact that most of them are engaged in agricultural and allied activities. This could be due to their familiarity with this sphere of activity but it also underlines their limited knowledge about other activities pointing to the need for skill development and capacity building of rural women in general. Some of the activities undertaken by the SHGs in the study were such as cultivating cash crops like ginger, tomatoes, cucumber, etc., for sale. Other than these activities, they also took up weaving, piggery, making traditional necklaces, etc. to generate income for the group.

As per the accounts of the female respondents, many husbands were initially reluctant to the idea of their wives getting involved in the SHGs, but with the realization of the positive impact through participation in the groups especially in the form of additional income, acceptance dawned. Besides the financial benefits, additionally, the confidence of the women in their decision making abilities developed which is significant in light of their gender role in society wherein traditionally males dominated in the arena of decision making whether in public or in the private sphere. As they are now contributing to the economy, their opinions are taken more seriously with regard to child care and other family decisions. The emergence and rapid multiplication of SHGs in Nagaland are becoming a phenomenon in the development scenario. Their

accessibility to loans and engagement in micro-enterprises has facilitated greater freedom and has empowered them to work not only within their confined village but in a larger arena.

The question over control and management of the proceeds earned from the sale of agricultural and other NTFPs products, as also the income from their activities in the SHGs assumes great significance in light of the pivotal role played by the rural women in marketing. The present study reveals that women had relative autonomy over the money earned through the sale of forest and agricultural products (Figure 4.8). A substantial number of respondents at 48 percent responded that it was women themselves who managed the income. Joint management of the income was also indicated by 34 percent of respondents were men and women together decided on the mode of its usage and only 18 percent of respondents pointed to males as being in charge of the money. So when one considers the fact that female cultivators constitute 62.20 percent of the total female working population in the state, along with the findings from the present study which shows that women cultivators assume primary responsibility in the production and marketing of agricultural products, it can be concluded that the hypothesis concerning women as the backbone of agricultural workforce remains validated.

At the same time, their management of natural resources and participation in the SHGs and contribution thereof to the rural economy indicates that women play a predominant role in the rural economy. The significant role played by women in the rural economy has to be viewed against the larger picture of their reproductive role in the domestic sphere. It is pertinent to point out that whilst both men and women involve themselves in productive labor, it is generally the women in Naga society that is held responsible for reproductive labor. Division of labor by gender often rests on the notion of

‘appropriate’ gender roles which are determined by the cultural norms of a given society. It differentiates men and women’s work by prescribing and proscribing what men and women should and should not do. Hence, household task and public tasks are allocated on the basis of gender attitude and values learned through socialization. In production relation, gender relations take the form of the appropriation of women’s household work. In labor market, it takes the form of discrimination in wages, inadequate access to resources, lack and control over land etc.

In the context of the study, some of the domestic chores considered were such as cooking, cleaning, washing, taking care of livestock, fetching water, collecting firewood, etc. It was found that on an average, women performed 83.79 percent of all household chores (Figure 3.7). This finding is supplemented by the fact that majority of the women respondents spent between six to seven hours a day on domestic work and agricultural work (Figure 5.3). Additional responsibility such as caring for infants, care of the sick and elderly, often described as a family obligation, falls on the women too.

These responsibilities can be subsumed under reproductive labor as they are performed within the private arena and are considered to have use value rather than exchange value. Such tasks are outside the remunerated realm and so often go unnoticed and unaccounted for. The undervaluation of women’s reproductive labor has led to an undervaluation of women’s work in general which often accounts for gender gaps in many areas of public life, more specifically reflected in gender wage differentials as is also found in the present research work.

Female agricultural laborers in many parts of the world experience discrimination with regard to the wages earned. Such gender wage difference indicates the status and position of women in Naga society. Gender wage differences are a central feature of gender inequality both in its economic aspects and in the social construction of gender

identity. Socialist feminism assumes that if patriarchy exists as a system of social structure and practice, gender will play an important role in determining the work division between the genders. The question of the role of wage rates is important because it gives an indication of how far Naga women are equal and how far gender have been playing an important part in identifying the position of women in Naga society. Though women in Naga society played such an integral role in the agricultural process, they still faced gender discrimination when it came to labor wage. In all the villages studies, it was found that women were paid less for the same nature of work, though the rate varied from village to village and between districts. However, on an average, women in Nagaland earned 36.67 percent less than their male counterparts in daily wages for the same work performed (Table 5.1). This is a strong indicator of gender inequity in the economic and social arena of Naga society. And it also reflects the patriarchal forces at play in the larger societal level.

Naga society displays some classic characteristics of patriarchy such as the denial of inheritance rights to female offsprings and most notably, the debarring of women from traditional seats of political power such as the village council and the *Naga Hoho*. Ownership of land rights is also vested wholly with the males in society. For the Naga people land is more than just material wealth; it symbolizes their identity and rootedness to their culture; it determines the status of an individual, family or clan. Therefore, the control and management of land always rest with the men folks. This situation poses a paradox when one regards it vis-à-vis the immense contribution and integral role that women played in the production process and the securement of livelihood for the household and the rural economy in particular. Since no Naga woman can claim a right to the land they toil upon, it implies that they do not own any land asset in the true sense of the term; they are either toiling on their husband's or father's land.

An examination of the status of land ownership among the single (unmarried or widowed) female respondents in the present study brings to bear the dispossessed status of Naga women as far as the right to land was concerned. All the widowed respondents were found to be toiling on their late husband's land for sustenance with the understanding that upon her death, it would be taken back by her deceased husband's lineage; the unmarried women were tilling their fathers' clan land; widows with adult sons were found to be using their sons' land for cultivation. All these points to the fact that the female respondents in question had only users' right, but no proprietary right over the land they toiled on. Therefore, they did not possess the right to manage, control or develop the land at will – in a nutshell, they did not have any decision making right over the land.

The marginalization of women from land ownership and political institutions has gender-wide ramifications in Naga society. Customary laws and the socio-cultural system have often projected women as secondary citizens. Though men and women work in tandem in all agricultural operations, when it comes to controlling over resources and decision making matters, it is men who take the ultimate decisions. Though women are the primary foragers of forest resources, they have no control over the management of the forests. Should the men folk of the village decide to privatize the forest, or turn it into a reserved forest; the women will have no say at all. Thus their perceived autonomy over access to forest resources and agricultural production process is always precarious without real security in the absence of decision making power. One may conclude thereof that Naga women have mere access to resources without ownership rights through their relationship with a male member of society. Therefore, though women had access to the use of resources since they did not have proprietary

rights, they are marginalized in decision making concerning resource management which validates our second hypothesis.

With the emerging trend in farming where there is a shift from subsistence farming to cash crop or commercial farming, the relative autonomy experienced by rural women within the jhum cultivation and dependence on NTFPs is at risk. The study found that the area of cultivated jhum land has decreased substantially over the years. Rice being the staple diet of the Naga people have helped sustain the practice of jhum cultivation; yet, the yields being at subsistence level only, people are turning to commercial farming to better their economic situation in the face of increasing monetization of the economy and rise in consumerism culture. This trend is clearly indicated through the present study wherein 52 percent of the households were found engage simultaneously in both commercial and jhum farming. With larger section of the rural population gradually taking up cash crops, there is the eminent danger of fragmentation of clan or community land in the villages. This will indeed pose a threat to the easy access enjoyed by Naga women presently over clan and community forest resources because once land is privatized, it will be out of their bounds. The conversion of clan land into individual commercial farms has shrunk the common property resources which tend to adversely affect women who are directly dependent on natural resources. So also, cash cropping involves monoculture, which implies that the diverse biodiversity that is characteristic of Nagaland will be lost. The relative autonomy enjoyed by women over the management of NTFPs and income generated from such could be adversely affected which will impact on their overall position in society as well.

Decline in traditional agricultural practice and access to natural resources will have far-reaching consequences with regard to the tremendous traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) currently borne by the rural women of the state. Once their constant contact with

nature's bounty and the practices associated therein loses its vigor, their knowledge about wild edible fruits and vegetables, preservation of seeds, etc will gradually wither away, in the absence of documented knowledge since all traditional knowledge had been passed down orally through the generations. With the changing environment and emerging climate dilemma, women are seen as invisible environmental activists who by their daily role have maintained ecological stability and sustainability of the resources. The tremendous increase in the quantity and complexity of human's demand has resulted in a serious ecological hazard. The main actors often the women are the most affected population as they are more connected with nature and they depend chiefly on natural resources found in the forest and land. While the environmental knowledge of women is increasingly being recognized in the past decade, their knowledge is at risk as it might be lost before fully understanding it.

A significant feature of the agricultural practice of the Naga people pertains to the association of the agricultural cycles with different major festivals of the people. Though the advent of Christianity in Naga society through the proselytization of American missionaries in the 19th century had brought a halt to the indigenous religious systems of the people, yet one sees the continuation of many traditional beliefs and practices till date. Whereas in the olden days, the agricultural cycles were preceded by taboos and live sacrifices, today, they are replaced by prayers for good harvests. All the Naga tribes still observe major festivals to coincide with the harvest time, sowing time, thanksgiving after harvests, etc., which are followed propitiously particularly in the villages (Table 3.5). The many festivals of the Nagas revolving around shifting cultivation and the community work involved show the social solidarity and oneness of the cultural life of the Naga people even at the present age rendering it inadmissible to dissociate the practice of jhum cultivation with the cultural life of the people. This

validates the hypothesis that jhum cultivation is an extension of the cultural and economic life of the people.

Based on the findings from the present research work, some suggestions are herein presented below:

The present study has highlighted women's pivotal contribution to the economy, livelihood sustenance and agricultural workforce. It is very clear that Naga women are major stakeholders in cultivation and natural resource management; yet, by virtue of their gender, they remained marginalized in decision making institutions at all levels. The Nagaland Biological Diversity Rules, 2011 have not deviated from this conventional gender attitude wherein decisions regarding the usage and conservation of the state's agro-biodiversity have been limited to the state officials and Village Council members of the local communities. This has to be seen in light of the fact that only males can be members of village councils in Naga society. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) points out that women directly bear the cost of poor participation in community institutions designed for natural resource management. Women's participation in community organizations that manage natural resources not only is an equity issue but also affects efficiency and effectiveness. The IFAD Poverty Report of 2001 notes that women are often excluded from community organizations or committees that manage natural resources such as water or forests, even when the projects are intended to benefit women. The exclusion of women may marginalize women from such valuable physical assets such as irrigation water or forest products; and human assets, such as training, credit or other benefits earmarked only for the group or organization members.

Therefore, keeping in purview the integral role played by women in the agricultural production process and conservation of biodiversity through their reproductive role, a

review of the Nagaland Biological Diversity Rules is necessitated to make it more gender-balanced so that both men and women are equally central to all policy making. The principle of Gender Budgeting needs to be applied in all policy decisions of the state.

As discussed in the preceding sections, Naga women play a predominant role in the rural economy of the state. Hence, it is imperative that building upon this role, capacity building training should be imparted to the women particularly in the field of financial literacy. Since most of the women have autonomy over the agricultural and NTFPs proceeds, such training will enable them to invest their income knowledgeably and better their economic position in society. Also, with the inevitable decline in the subsistence agricultural activities in the coming years or decades, capacity building of rural women may be directed towards entrepreneurship since they already exhibited a propensity towards this profession through the marketing of agro-forestry products, albeit on an unorganized scale.

Related to this aspect, the matter of discrimination in daily wages of women needs to be seriously taken cognizance of. The Indian Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 which aims at providing equal remuneration to men and women workers and prevent discrimination, particularly against women on the ground of gender need to be implemented in letter and spirit. Section 4 of the said Act specifies that equal remuneration should be made for the same work or work of similar nature, irrespective of gender.

In Naga society, the growing conflict between need and greed, the money culture and the extraction of natural resources beyond its capacity is starting to build unfavorable environmental dilemma. Bringing in the wisdom of women into decision making with their vast TEK can play a pivotal ameliorative role. The knowledge of Naga Women in conserving and preserving the flora and fauna is learned orally for generations.

Therefore, it is important that women's TEK need to be urgently studied and documented before it disappears with the passing away of the older generations. It was also observed from the present study that the younger generation has little or no knowledge regarding the usefulness of TEK.

Women's daily task and activities guide them to protect and conserve the biodiversity. This partnership between women and diversity has kept the world fed through history, at the present time, and will continue to feed the world in the future.¹¹⁶ Being closer to nature, women have greater chance to contribute in balancing the environmental issues. Naga Women are not owners of the land or resources but their manifold contributions in conserving and preserving the environment can result in saving the various natural calamities. As they have tremendous indigenous knowledge relating to nature, it is suggested that academic focus on women and their environmental ethics will lead to positive insights in tackling the present environmental issues, not only locally but globally as well.

Access to land is a central issue because it is a crucial asset for food production, livelihood security and as an identity marker in a traditional society like the Naga society. Equitable access and right to land can result in alleviating women's poverty and exclusion from major decision making in relation to land. In Nagaland, access to and control over land resources is governed by customary laws. Considered against the modern human principles of gender equity, aspects of the customary law which discriminates against women need to be seriously debated and made relevant as per modern ethos.

Achieving gender equality and women empowerment is one of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 of the United Nations. The goal emphasizes to undertake

¹¹⁶ Shiva Vandana (2011)*Staying Alive*, p-xii

reforms to give women equal access to and control over productive resources. Hence, the State Government through its relevant agencies should prioritize the challenges of Naga women through innovative strategies by considering their vulnerability and closeness to nature. In this regard, as seeds form the most important element in the sustainable agricultural productivity, more emphasis should be given to local and organic seed breeding instead of drawing greater attention towards marketed seed or hybrid seeds. By focusing on the objective and goals, it would provide an unprecedented opportunity to refocus women's role in seed production and management. Hence, developing well-trained, self-reliant, self-motivated and visionary women seed producers can contribute to reduce the quality seed scarcity and ensure food security for the future of humanity.

A trend of privatization of community land in the form of a shift to commercial farming has been highlighted through the present study. Given the high dependence of rural women on common property resources, it is imperative that studies on the impact of commercialization of agriculture on Naga women be undertaken to understand the nature of impact as well as to suggest mitigating policy measures before extensive damages occur.

Naga women make specific contributions to agro-forestry value chains. These are important for their incomes, and in turn for the well-being and food security of their households. However, women's roles in value chains tend to be poorly supported by policy-makers and extension services. The perpetual lack of gender-disaggregated data hampers the development of policy interventions to address the issue. Hence, it is imperative that gender disaggregated statistics in agriculture be generated through research. This will allow the differential and specialized role of women in agro-forestry in the state be given priority by policy maker. In order to achieve this, the state

government can provide different capacity development services to improve the skills of state statisticians, researchers, planners and policy makers to collect, tabulate, analyze and use gender disaggregated data. These measures, if implemented properly, will capture gender differentials in rural poverty, access to and control of productive resources and economic opportunities, as well as nutrition and food security issues.

Finally, the conceptual obstacles to gender equity in Naga society stem from the failure to acknowledge that women are central not only to agricultural production but to the rural economy as well. Due to this failure, women are perceived to be unproductive dependent actors in society who need not be considered directly in development planning process. However, it has to be acknowledged that women are central to the processes of social change and therefore, they need to be at the center of any policy decisions of the state. This requires a multi-pronged approach of gender sensitization through proper education and creating gender awareness along with an earnest effort by all conscientious citizens to end the marginalization of women in political seats of decision making.