PREFACE

Common lands especially forests, contributes in varied ways to the rural economy in terms of providing food, fodder and fuel for the day-to-day use of the poor people. Degradation of common property resources pulls people away from productive activities towards gathering—simply collecting non-wood and minor forest products. In most forest bound economies, women play a primary role in food gathering and fodder collection and as such become victims of environmental deterioration. Women spend long hours in resource collection which affects their time allocation to other activities like income generation, education and participation in decision making.

This study analyses the interrelationships between environment, poverty and gender in rural forest villages of Tinsukia district during the period 2005-2010. It traces how the environmental degradation in these forest villages has adverse implications for the poor especially for the female members of the rural households. Various governmental and community-initiated responses to environmental degradation and natural resource appropriation are also examined in this study and the necessity of gender-directed policies has also been highlighted.

Among the adverse gender effects noted in this study, it has been seen that due to environmental degradation there have been increase in women’s and girl children’s time and energy spent in fuel and fodder collection on one hand and a decrease in women’s time allocation for other necessary domestic activities on the other hand.

This study has various implications for the regions of high gender-environment-poverty vulnerability which needs special attention in terms of schemes that gives poor women a greater control over economic resources in general, and common property resources in particular. Women’s active participation in forest protection schemes is especially important not only for improving family welfare, but also for ensuring scheme success, promoting gender equity, enlarging local knowledge systems, increasing women’s participation in various public decision making bodies, enhancing women’s bargaining power both within and outside the household and also contributing to their overall empowerment.