

A STUDY INTO THE FARMERS' AWARENESS ABOUT THE ADVANTAGES OF FOREST PLANTATION AND THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS ITS EXISTENCE

Abdur Rahman Qazi, Syed Sohail Abbas & Kishwar Ijaz

*Department of Rural Sociology,
University of Agriculture, Faisalabad*

Forests, being the most important ecological unit, are not only closely associated with the environment but also strongly influence, directly or indirectly, the socioeconomic life of the people. They also have an important role in determining the human behaviour and is known to have some demographic impact as well. This study was conducted in two plantation sites, selected at random out of the four plantations, in Faisalabad district. The sample size comprised of 150 farmers who were cultivating any piece of land within a radius of 5 kilometers from the centre of the forest plantation. Data, collected through interview schedule, were statistically analyzed and tabulated. The farmers had great knowledge about the advantages of forests/trees as a source of wood for fuel, building material and had poor awareness about the environmental, edaphic, socioeconomic, medicinal, strategic advantages of forests. The farmers' attitude towards the existing forest, regarding its existence, was not favourable due to low literacy rate, insufficient role of mass media and extension services and poor socioeconomic status of the farmers.

INTRODUCTION

Trees have an important role in the life of all living organisms on the earth. Unfortunately, their role has not been realized and kept confined merely to a source of wood for fuel and timber for furniture and building material. Over half of the world population uses wood for cooking purposes only (Ali, 1992).

Trees are basic to satisfy all the three fundamental necessities of life i.e. food, fibre and shelter. Forests help in improving the quality of soil as they produce green manure to the farm. They reduce the extent of changes caused by the environmental destruction. Forests moderate the flow of water and, thus play a key role in the management of water resources. In this way, they can successfully tackle gigantic

problems like floods, water erosion, water losses, etc. Trees keep the soil protected against its direct exposure to the sun as well as hot/dry winds and, thus, not only improve the edaphic conditions but also enhance its fertility. There are certain nitrogen fixing trees which can be planted on the agricultural lands along field borders to improve the soil fertility and to increase the crop yield (Anonymous, 1985). The wood, the food, and the income, the forests provide, are basic to the well-being and even the survival of over 200 million people (Ansari and Iftikhar, 1985).

The accelerating deforestation all around the world is a matter of prime concern. Trees consume the greenhouse gases from the air and release oxygen into the air. The destruction of this valuable resource has disturbed the natural mechanism of air pu-

rification and thus made the environmental conditions miserable. Consequently, the quality of life and life span on earth is declining day by day.

People have no sufficient knowledge about the important role trees/forests play in their life. If people, at all levels, have sufficient knowledge regarding the advantages of trees, they would not only grow more trees but also rear them as being their issues. This study was, therefore, designed to:

1. determine the farmers' awareness level about the advantages of forest plantation,
2. study the farmers' attitudes towards the existence of forest plantation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Universe and sample: The universe for the present study consisted of state owned forest plantation sites in faisalabad district. The forest plantation was defined as the area existing in a radius of 5 miles from the centre of the forest plantation. There were 4 major forest plantation sites in the district and 2 were selected at random namely: Chakku (site A) and Gatwala (site B). There were about 55 and 52 villages within these 2 selected sites, respectively. Although, villages at both the sites had an easy access to the institutional facilities but things had been existing in more favourable and modern manner at site B.

The total sample size for the present study comprised of 150 respondents, taken from a total of 10 villages (5 villages randomly taken from each site). A sub-sample of 15 respondents (those who were cultivating any piece of land within the specified area of site) was drawn from each of these 10 villages. In order to collect the data, an interview schedule was used which was developed in English language but exercised

in local dialect. The collected data were then analyzed.

Conceptualization

I, Awareness: Defined as the knowing or realizing about anything. For the present study, it refers to the farmers' knowledge about the advantage of forests. In order to quantify this variable, the number of advantages of forests, known to a respondent, were counted (which were maximum 9). In order to determine the level of farmers' awareness, the number of advantages were distributed as:

Advantages (No.)	Awareness (Level)
1-3	Poor
4-6	Medium
6+	High

II, Attitude: Acquired or learned behaviour and established tendency to react towards or against something or somebody. It is evidenced by either approaching or withdrawing type of behaviour and the object of reaction becomes by either positive or negative value from the subjects viewpoint (Fairchild, 1964).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Most of the respondents (81.33% of the total respondents) had low level of awareness regarding the versatile advantages of forests.
2. A very large proportion (94.66% of the total respondents) of the respondents, had awareness about the economic advantages of the forests (as a source of wood and other byproducts) and 73.33% were aware of the ecological advantages. It shows that respondents paid more emphasis to their individual benefits from forests than the benefits for the whole community.

3. The present study has pointed out that respondents having non-agricultural activities had better level of awareness about the forest advantages as compared to those living on agriculture merely. The reason being that respondents having non-agricultural activities were generally required to travel outside their villages frequently, thus had more exposure to the world outside the village and learnt about many other uses of forests such as the establishment of forest parks at Changa Manga, gatwala (Faisalabad) and use of wood in chipboard, plywood and paper industry, etc. etc.
4. A positive association was found between respondents' level of education and the level of their awareness about the forest advantages.
5. A very high proportionate (93.33% of the total respondents) of the respondents reported that the existing forest had no attraction for them because they could get no occupational, economic or other benefits from the forest.
6. It was found out that respondents residing at a closer distance from the existing forest had less favourable attitude towards the forest existence than those residing at a greater distance.
7. Respondents, living at a short distance from the forest, had more exposure to the problems due to forest/forest park. These problems, as reported by the respondents, were forest staffs exploitation and a continuous threat to their local existing value system due to visitors to the forest parks. They reported that the visitors did not care about local values and often did such practices which were unacceptable in the local value system.
8. The present study has shown that younger respondents had more favourable attitude towards the forest to exist there than middle-aged and older respondents. It shows that as age increases, public attitude towards forest existence becomes less favourable.
9. It was found that respondents with high level of education had more favourable attitude towards the existence of forest than those who had primary and matric level of education.
10. Owner cultivators had less favourable attitude towards the existence of forest as compared to tenants and owner-cum-tenants.
11. So far as the role of occupational status of the respondents in determining their attitude towards the existence of forest was concerned, it was found that respondents having non-agricultural activities (in addition to agriculture) had more favourable attitude towards the forest existence than those who were living on agriculture merely.
12. The present study showed that respondents with poor income status possessed more favourable attitude towards the existence of forest than those who belonged to middle and rich class of income status.

REFERENCES

- Ali, S.M. 1992. Paradise Polluted. The Daily Pakistan Times, Lahore. August 21,
- Anonymous. 1981. Population Census Report for Faisalabad Division. Population Census Organization, Statistics Div., Govt. of Pakistan, Islamabad.
- Anonymous. 1985. Forest Wealth. The Pak. Agri. 7 (11): 5-6.
- Ansari, MAA. and M. Iftikhar. 1985. Food and Forest. The Pak. Agri, 7 (11): 25-29.

Donahue, R.L. and J.E. Christiansen. 1986. Managing Forests, Exploring Agriculture: An Introduction to Food and Agriculture. 6th Ed., Prentice-Hall Inc., New Jersey, USA, 385 p.

Fairchild, H.P. 1964. Dictionary of Sociology. Littlefield, Adams & Co., New Jersey, USA.