

AN INTROSPECT INTO MANAGEMENT ASPECTS OF THE INSTITUTIONS - CASE STUDY OF THE SELECTED FPCs IN THE FOREST DIVISIONS OF MIDNAPORE DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

S.K. SARKAR* AND R.N. CHATTOPADHYAY**

Introduction

The Joint Forest Management or the Participatory Forest Management is a shot in the arm of the forest officer to arrest degradation of the sylvan resources. Foresters rather fought a lost battle for the last half century to keep their bastion infallible. At last they realised that without people's involvement it will be mere farce to keep the forest intact. The newly formulated National Forest Policy also directed to involve the fringe people in forest management and seek their co-operation, particularly in protecting forests. Accordingly various States of India adopted J.F.M. including W. Bengal, which is pioneer in this respect and their achievement was recognised internationally, when W.W.F. had bestowed the Forest Protection Committees of this State the coveted J. Paul Getty award.

But after the initial success whether the same zeal and enthusiasm will continue is required to be probed and to find out whether the Institution, particularly the FPCs which are the kingpins in the participatory forest management will be viable and buoyant or not. This calls for analysis of functioning of FPCs on one hand and understanding of the maturity of the

institution on the other. With this objective in mind, 15 FPCs were selected from the four Forest Divisions of Midnapore District, based on the criterion of per member area of forest managed and the study was concentrated on the following aspect of Institutional functioning:

1. Information and awareness.
2. Status of resources.
3. Duties and functions.
4. Participatory actions.
5. Attitude towards changes.
6. Conflicts and conflict resolution.

It was observed (Table 1) that about 90% of FPCs manage upto 4 ha of forest area per member and hence all the 15 FPCs were chosen from among those FPCs only.

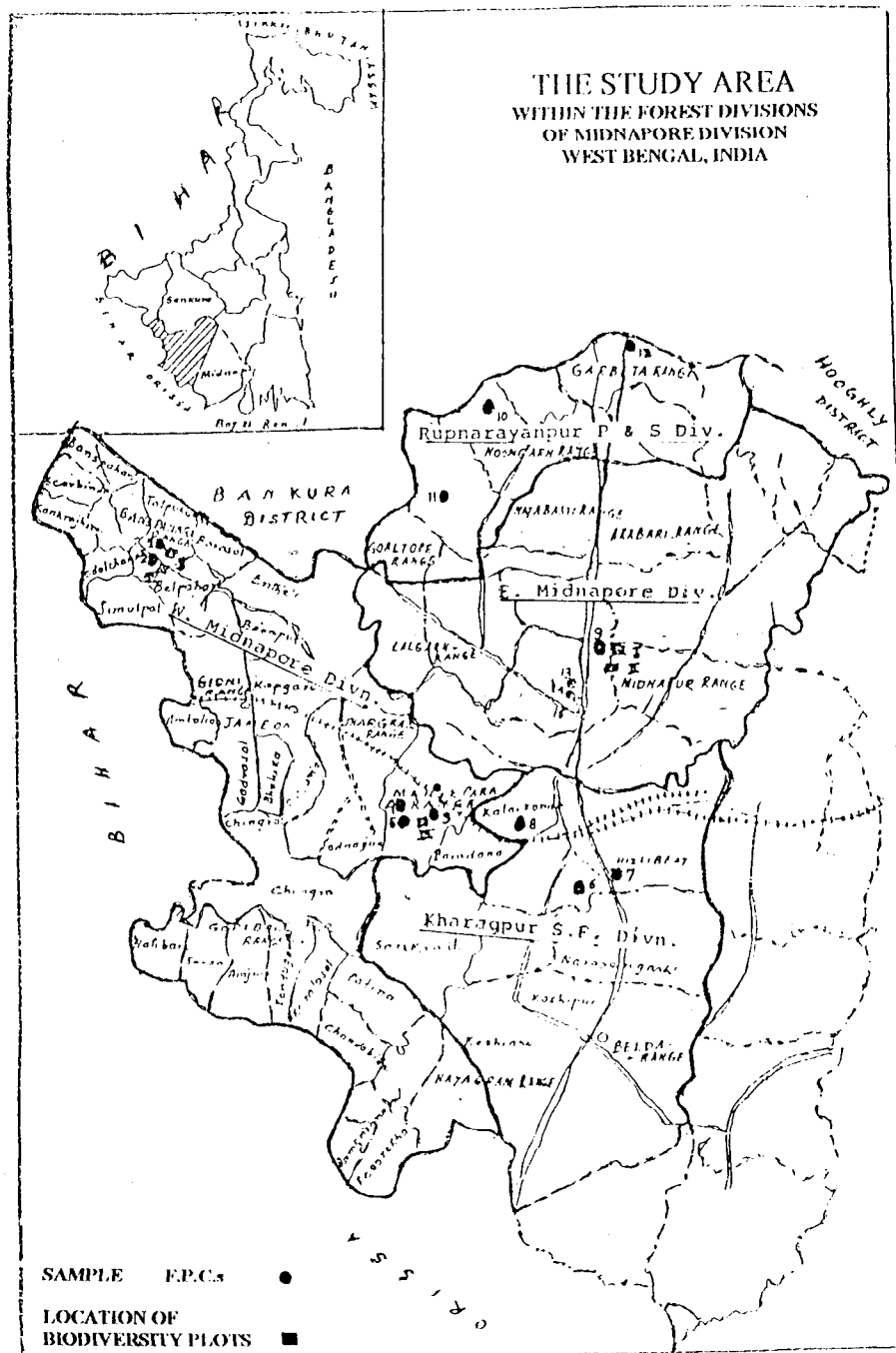
However adequate attention has been given to pick them up in a manner so that they are well distributed within the four Forest Divisions of Midnapore. Distribution of FPCs by Forest Divisions and area per member are shown in Table 2.

The basic features of the selected FPCs depicting their location, area managed, number of members, protected area per member etc are presented in Table 3.

* Chief Conservator of Forests, Research and Development, Calcutta.

** Head of the Deptt., R.D.C., I.I.T., Kharagpur, West Bengal.

Fig. 1



The survey was conducted between 27.02.97 to 07.05.97 by self and assisted by Shri S.S. Dey, Divisional Forest Officer, Working Plan Division South-I, Midnapore and other local forest staff through a set of questionnaires. The entire questionnaire set along with the replies related to style of management, functioning, participation, future course of action etc. are compiled for all the sample FPCs.

The technique of survey was however a serious PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) exercise only. During interaction it was assured that at least a few Executive members were present. However in most of the cases the members present in PRA were male. During the course of interaction the social-cum-resources maps were drawn by the children in consultation with the elderly members of the FPCs.

Information and Awareness

(1) *Name and location of the FPC*: Regarding identification of the FPCs most of the members in all cases could correctly spell out the name of FPC and indicated its location within the Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samity, Beat, Range and Division. Only in few cases the members did not know about the Forest Division in which the FPC has been included after the reorganisation of the Divisions (i.e. Aulia, Pitli, Ajodhyagarh FPCs).

(2) *Reasons of formation of FPCs*: The primary reason for formation of FPCs was the expectation of getting 25% usufruct benefit from the forests (10 out of 15 FPCs). Few others have formed the FPC to get sustained supply of dry sticks, house-building materials and agricultural implements. Only two groups mentioned

that they formed the FPCs for environmental reason.

(3) *Motivator*: In all cases local forest staff were the motivator. In some cases, however in addition to the forest staff, local teachers and village elites took the leading role to motivate the villagers (i.e. Kodupura, Balibhasa, Aulia, Pitli and Barasuli).

(4) *Date of formation and date of registration of FPC*: In most of the cases the members did not remember about the date or even the year of formation of the Committee (about 60% FPCs know the year of formation).

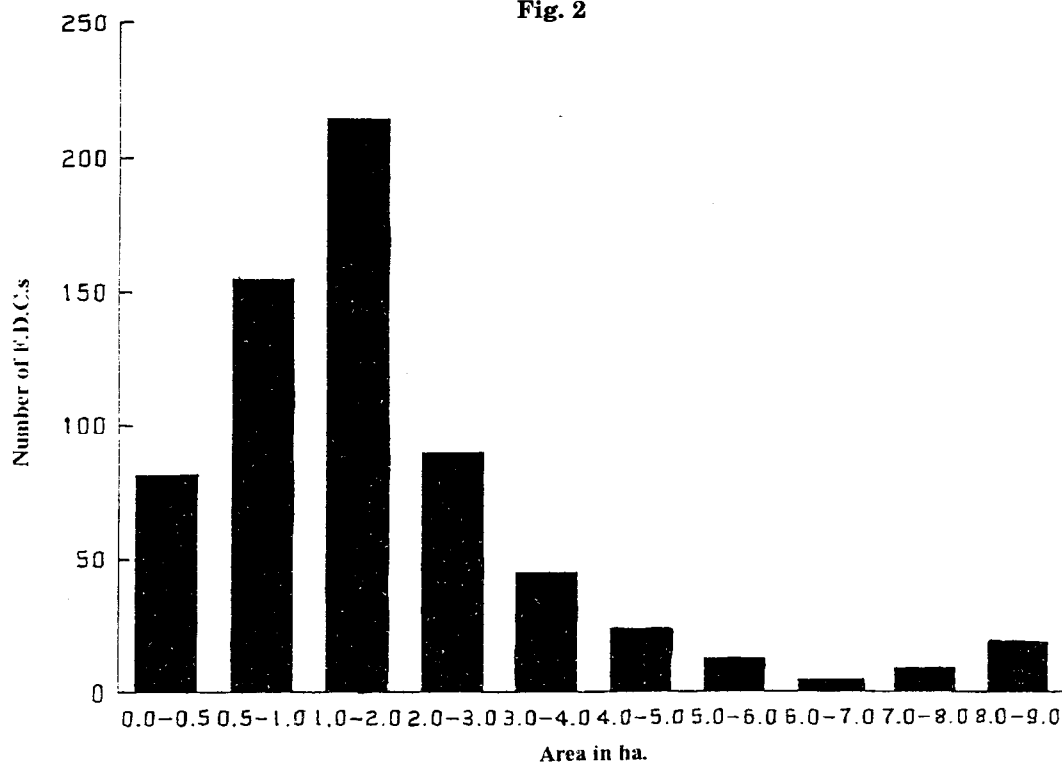
(5) *Name of mouza within the FPC is situated and the knowledge about the boundary of FPC*: Almost in all cases the members were knowing the information.

(6) *How the boundaries are demarcated*: The members could reply correctly that the boundaries of the FPCs were demarcated either by pillars, roads, trenches, ails (field boundaries), artificial lines, ring on trees, canal or surrounding agricultural lands. Only in one case, they did not know how the boundary was demarcated (i.e. Vatmara).

(7) *No. of households in the village and number of members in the FPC*: In most of the cases the villagers knew this information except three FPCs (Kodupura, Vatmara and Baghmari).

(8) *Reason for non-inclusion of some households in the FPC*: The members opined that the main reason had been the splitting of families. However in some cases, the reason was indicated to be political rift (Kodupura) or lack of interest of some families to be within FPC (Tulsibani) or

Fig. 2



Areawise Distribution of FPCs

their absence in the first meeting during formation of the committee (Guptamani).

(9) Joint membership of husband and wife :

In most of the cases they were not aware of the fact that both husband and wife are joint members. As a result, till now only male members of the households are treated as the members of the committees. Only in Ajodhyagarh FPC both husband and wife are the members. In fact, only in that FPC some women members were also present during the P.R.A. In Baghmari, though one woman member was present, she did not take part in the discussion or knew anything about the FPC.

(10) Method of forming FPC : This was done

mostly by holding repeated meetings and motivating the villagers about the need for FPC formation.

(11) Method of formation of Executive Committee : Apart from the nominated members, the other members of the Executive Committees were mostly selected (not elected in the true sense). Mostly literate, village elite, or person having a background of doing social work, influential or enthusiastic persons had been selected as members of Executive Committees.

In brief, it appears that in most of the cases the local forest officers took the initiative to form the FPCs by discussing with or motivating the villagers mainly as

Table 1
Classification of FPCs by area managed per member in Midnapore District

Area per member (ha)	No of FPCs*	Percentage of total FPCs	Cumulative (%)
A. Upto 0.50	82	12.5	12.5
B. 0.51 - 1.00	155	23.7	36.2
C. 1.01 - 2.00	214	32.7	68.9
D. 2.01 - 3.00	90	13.7	82.6
E. 3.01 - 4.00	45	6.9	89.5
F. 4.01 - 5.00	24	3.7	93.2
G. 5.01 - 6.00	13	2.0	95.2
H. 6.01 - 7.00	5	0.7	95.9
I. 7.01 - 8.00	9	1.4	97.3
J. Above 8.00	18	2.7	100.0
Total	655		

* Classification has been done based on availability of information from 655 out of 1016 FPCs of the district.

Table 2
Distribution of Sample FPCs, Forest Divisions and area per member

Forest Division	Area protected by member (ha)					Total
	Upto 0.50	0.51-1.00	1.01-2.00	2.01-3.00	3.01-4.00	
E. Mid.	-	1	2	-	1	4
W. Mid.	-	2	1	-	2	5
Rup. S.C.	-	-	1	2	-	3
Kgp. S.F.	2	-	1	-	-	3
Total	2	3	5	2	3	15

per Government policy. Superior directives to fulfill the target to bring the forests under the coverage of participatory management were also important. Sometimes it resulted in some unhealthy competition among the Forest Divisions to form larger number of FPCs under haste without considering various other factors like size of FPC, availability of resources, sustainability etc. In most of the cases the villagers joined in this participatory programme just for getting sustained supply

of fuelwood, agricultural equipments and household materials (poles etc) and also for availing 25% usufruct in exchange for protecting the forests. So neither national interest nor the environmental cause has been the motive force behind the formation of FPCs. However, this should also not be expected from them. Even after formation of FPCs, very little effort had been given to bring those families (households) who remained out of its ambit of activities, within the fold of FPCs.

Table 3
Name, Location, Area Managed, No. of Members of Sample FPCs

FPC	Beat	Range	Division	Area under Management (ha)	No. of Members	Area protected by each member (ha)
Kodupura	Belpahari	Belpahari	W.Mid.	89.31	26	3.43
Tulsibani	Belpahari	Belpahari	W.Mid.	59.78	71	0.84
Balibhasa	Balibhasa	Manikpara	W.Mid.	135.00	114	1.18
Guptomoni	Balibhasa	Manikpara	W.Mid.	145.00	181	0.80
Barasuli	Balibhasa	Manikpara	W.Mid.	125.00	32	3.90
Kella Pratapur	Porapara	Hizli	Kgp.S.F.	58.40	153	0.38
Ajodhyagarh	Hizli	Hizli	Kgp.S.F.	69.79	65	1.07
Baghmari	Kalaikunda	Kalaikunda	Kgp.S.F.	86.82	313	0.28
Metal Sitarampur	Godapeasal	Godapeasal	E.Mid.	200.36	107	1.87
Aulia	Amlasuli	Hoomgarh	Rup.P&S	122.00	56	2.18
Pitli	Barapatasol	Goaltore	Rup.P&S	99.56	42	2.37
Vatmara	Mondal Puskarini	Garbeta	Rup.P&S	132.16	96	1.38
Katuria	Bhadutala	G.P.Sal	E.Mid.	155.00	149	1.04
Dhanyasol	Bhadutala	G.P.Sal	E.Mid.	400.00	103	3.88
Balijhuri	Bhadutala	G.P.Sal	E.Mid.	96.00	121	0.79

The most discomfoting feature is that in majority of cases the women in general were kept out of the programme and the possibility in near future to involve them actively in planning and decision making (except in Ajodhyagarh) has been remote.

Though lot of ideas have been said about the women's participation in J.F.M., the real involvement of women remained very discouraging. Information of Executive Committees hardly any enthusiasm was noticed to elect the members. Mostly the vocal, village elite, literate, local influential leaders had been getting places in such committees.

Status of Resources

(1) More than 50% FPCs did not know the

area of protection in hectares they are managing.

(2) The nature of forests seemed to be varying at the initiation of protection. But in most of the cases the forest comprises of Sal coppice growth, *Eucalyptus*/Aakashmoni plantations or degraded, blank and scrub/bushy areas. In some FPCs the Sal forests were completely destroyed and even the rootstocks were taken out. (i.e. Aulia, Ajodhyagarh).

(3) In most of the cases the forests/ plantations definitely improved due to protection afforded or the decision taken by the members in favour of doing no further damage to the site. In several cases, even after the formation of FPC

the plantations were mass looted followed by regular illicit removal by the FPC members (e.g. Kodupura, Vatmara).

In brief the lack of sincere involvement of the members are indicated by the fact that they do not know the total forest area they are managing though they were aware of the names of mouzas and the boundaries of the forest they are protecting.

In majority of the cases the quality of forests and plantations had definitely improved due to protection afforded directly or indirectly and extension of human fence surrounding the forests. However in some FPCs due to internal conflicts even good plantations were damaged and the entire crop had been destroyed even after the formation of the institution (Kodupura, Vatmara).

Duties and Function

- (1) In all cases the FPC registers were maintained though many members were not aware of such registers, neither they were sure enlistment of their names in the same (more than 40%).
- (2) All the groups replied that they were present in the last A.G.M. (except Kodupura, Tulsibani FPCs) but most of them did not remember when the last A.G.M. was held. Metal-Sitarampur, Dhansole, Katuria and Balijhuri - all of E. Midnapore Division could remember the dates may be due to their higher level of awareness resulting from their proximity to Midnapore town.
- (3) Though the minute books are kept in all the FPCs, in many cases, the minutes of the meetings and attendance of

members were not regularly recorded in those.

- (4) The activities of the Executive Committees were reported to be varying in different FPCs. In some cases the meetings were held 15 times in a year (Guptamoni) or almost monthly (Balivasha), but in most cases, it became an annual or biannual affair. In Kodupura, Katuria, Dhansole and Balijhuri however, no Executive Committee meeting had so far been held. In general, the members of Executive Committees attended almost all such meetings. Other than AGM and Executive Committee meeting, some other meetings were reported to be held whenever it was felt necessary. The major issues discussed in above meetings, in order of priority are :-

- (a) Protection issues (in all cases).
- (b) Distribution of usufruct (7 cases).
- (c) Work programme and harvesting of forest crop (3 cases).
- (d) Local administration and micro-planning (3 cases).
- (e) Conflict resolution (3 cases).

The claim of the FPC members that the cost of protection is much more than usufruct they get is not true everywhere. In most of the cases it appears that the protection afforded to the forests is not due to the direct watching and patrolling in the forests. This might have been true to a certain extent for some FPCs at the initial years of their formation.

It was reported that the protection afforded were mostly due to indirect efforts, which are as follows :

- (1) Decision taken by the members directly

not to cause any further damage by way of illicit felling though members can freely remove dry sticks, leaf litters, NTFPs. However, they resort to uncontrolled grazing in the forests though concerned Act does not approve so.

- (2) Causing human barrier surrounding the forests, so that outsiders cannot enter into the forests. Even the boys engaged in grazing the cattle or children as well as women engaged in collecting dry sticks or leaf litter inform the elder male members, about any such attempt to cause any damage to the major forest produce. In some cases, voluntary watching is done by making a duty roster, which shows patrolling by members by rotation (twice in a month or so). But that too is done, only when the situation warrants, particularly in the lean seasons, when jobs are scarce. Joint patrolling with the forest staff is also done in few cases (3 FPCs).
- (3) Fire also takes place in the forests and hardly any attempt is made to extinguish the same. Some FPCs reported that firelines were made to isolate the fire. But the field evidence does not corroborate the same. However due to rampant floor sweeping, the fire incidence has been less in many areas.
- (4) Uncontrolled grazing is also continuing in the forests, though in new coppice areas (RDF) and in young plantations the grazing is somewhat restricted. Sometimes such watching is conducted by paid watchers engaged by the Forest Department (i.e. Ajodhyagarh FPC).
- (5) In several cases the forest areas remained under encroachment before

the formation of FPC. In some cases, however the members vacated the same (Kella-Pratappur, Metal-Sitarampur) but in some other cases they did not.

- (6) It is also worth mentioning that in most of the FPCs no offenders were apprehended during last 3 months. This indicates that either the direct protection has not been effective or the incidence of offence has been minimised as a consequence of FPC formation (in Vatmara 3 nos. and in Baghmari only one offence was detected).

Keeping the above in mind the programme of the institution in terms of duties and functions may be summarized as follows :

- (1) The FPCs are not serious about maintenance of registers and minute books and recording the subject matters of discussion.
- (2) The AGM and executive committee meetings are not held regularly.
- (3) Rather than total management of forests they are mostly concerned with protection issue.
- (4) The protection of forests is mostly done indirectly. The cost of protection (in terms of mandays) is not much. A small number of offenders are apprehended and a few offences are detected.
- (5) Floor sweeping in the forests is rampant. The litter is mainly used as fuel.
- (6) Grazing in forests is unrestricted except in young coppice coupes and plantation areas.

- (7) Old encroachments have not been vacated in most of the cases. New encroachment are seldom noticed since the formation of FPCs.
- (8) Members are rarely concerned about forest fire, which reduce biodiversity.

Participatory Actions

In Policy as well as in Govt. Order (1989) forestry and programmes related to rural development have been considered as major fronts of participatory forest management. It is expected that the participation of members of FPC should be not only through offering labour for forestry and developmental works but also through directly taking part in planning, decision making, monitoring and evaluation of all the programmes to be executed in the forest. In general, the works implemented in the FPCs under study had been :

- (a) Harvesting and depot works.
- (b) Creation of plantations.
- (c) RDF and thinning in the crop.
- (d) Construction of earthen dam for irrigation and pisciculture.
- (e) Digging well for drinking water.
- (f) Soil and water conservation works.

The members in general got some works, though not regularly or on sustained basis. The villagers are more or less satisfied with the quality of works and they did not face any problem in executing the same. The future expectations of the members as expressed during the PRA exercise, from the Forest Department, are mainly the following facilities vis-a-vis employment generation opportunities :

- (1) Digging wells (4 cases).
- (2) Construction of earthen dams and ponds

for fishing (5 cases).

- (3) Creation/enrichment/infilling in plantations (3 cases).
- (4) Creation of community forests (2 cases).
- (5) Harvesting matured plantations above 20 years (2 cases).
- (6) Repair of village link roads/paths with highways (2 cases).
- (7) Soil conservation works (1 case).

Strangely enough in Tulsiboni the members requested for construction of a stone memorial as a mark of tribal upsurge *against the alien rulers*.

They had hardly any clear idea about the maintenance of the assets created. In general, they suggested that through vigilance, assets could be protected by the members. They failed to provide any idea about the mechanism of bailing out the wells, repair of roads, maintenance of soil conservation structures, earthen dams etc. Neither they could elaborate their participation except for offering human labour on wage payment. In fact, they had no clear idea about the management of forests neither they were conversant with the practices of planning, implementation and evaluation of different forestry works. They seemed to be mainly concerned with the harvesting of the forests and plantation and to some extent with the sequence of felling. Some had been concerned about the increase of rotation age or delay in harvesting. They suspected that trees may lose coppicing power if the rotation period is further extended (case of Metal-Sitarampur). Some FPCs suggested that usufruct may be given in kind not in cash. But most FPCs opined that Sal forests should be retained and plantations should only be crated in blank and derelict areas having no Sal rootstock.

In short, FPCs are not concerned much about the scientific management of forests or about the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation aspects. They have hardly any idea about the maintenance of the assets created. They are mostly concerned about the protection and harvesting of the forests or plantation for getting usufruct on one hand and earning wage from forestry and other developmental works on the other.

Attitude towards change

Some of the major reasons for degradation of forests in the past were uncontrolled removal of fuelwood and grazing in the forests, not only by the villagers surrounding the forests but also by the outsiders both for personal consumption and also for trade.

Though grazing is still continuing in the forests, in the opinion of the people, the damage to the pole crop or young coppice shoots had been reduced considerably due to attitudinal changes amongst the members in favour of JFM.

With changing attitude towards forest management the fuelwood needs has been mostly met from collection of dry sticks as well as dry leaves and use of shrubby growth, such as *Combretum*, *Clietanthus*, *Gardenia* and *Holarrhena* etc. Further imposition of restriction to outsiders to collect the same except the dry leaves has led to adequate supply of fuelwood to the members.

So even after the formation of FPCs the members do not face much problems regarding collection of fuelwood and grazing.

The villagers has realised the direct benefit they could receive by protecting and

managing the forest. The major sources of rise in income are from :

- (1) Wage earning in developmental and harvesting works.
- (2) Receiving 25% usufruct.
- (3) From NTFPs; and
- (4) Getting agricultural implements, almost free of cost, which were not available earlier due to degradation of forests prior to formation of FPCs.

The attitude of members toward involvement of women in protection and planning of forestry works as joint members has not changed much but they have forwarded some suggestions on the role that women can play. These are :

- (1) Since women are the major collectors of firewood they should be motivated not to cause any damage to the major produces during collection of fuelwood and remain satisfied with the collection of dry sticks for the genuine consumption.
- (2) They should be made aware of economising the fuelwood consumption during cooking by using fuel-efficient chullas.
- (3) While collecting fuelwood, NTFPs and dry leaves, they should keep an watch on the resource and inform the FPC on the activities of the offenders or about the incidence of forest offence including occurrence of forest fire.
- (4) They should assist in apprehending women offenders from outside.

The members of most of the FPCs believe that their committees are functioning well (except Kodupura and

Vatmara). The members are unanimous on the issue that they get support from the Forest Department in managing their forests. *Opinions are however diverse regarding the support given by the Panchayats to the committees.*

Conflicts and Conflict Resolution

The conflicts in the institution may be classified as intra-FPC, inter-FPC and FPC-other organisation conflicts. The intra-FPC conflicts may relate to structure, function, responsibilities or share of benefits. On the other hand, the inter-FPC conflicts may arise from boundary dispute, inflicting damage to other FPCs, intrusion for extraction of NTFP etc. Similarly there may be conflict with other organisations like Forest Department, Panchayat, cooperative etc. on general policy issues related to pricing and marketing of commodities, partially on management of inputs, administering the system of management etc.

In most of the FPCs there existed little internal conflict, except in Kodupura and Vatmara. In Kodupura the conflicts have been on the issue of membership and distribution of duties. The extent of conflict was so much that a good plantation was mass looted even after formation of FPC. In fact the FPC was not effective in protecting the forests. The reason of conflict has mainly been the political one. At the time of formation of FPC the inter party rift had guided the membership issue and that remained as the root cause of malfunctioning of the institution.

In Vatmara the conflict erupted mainly from ethnic reasons. The tribals who are the majority inhabitants of Vatmara did not want to share the usufruct with other

FPC members belonging to Tili and Mohali communities of Gopalsole village. The former claimed that the protection duty was mainly done by the tribal and so they dispute about the entitlement or enjoyment of usufruct by the villagers living at distant place.

In both the cases the conflicts could not yet be resolved. In former it was very difficult to solve in near future but in the latter case, the Pradhan of Gram Panchayat, who was present during the interaction, assured that they would convene a meeting soon to discuss the issue threadbare and if necessary split the FPC to resolve the conflict.

It was ascertained that with progress of formation of FPCs in the adjoining villages, over a continuous stretch of forested area the conflicts with neighbouring FPCs were reduced considerably. Only the Vatmara FPC claimed that the usufruct of adjoining Kuilipal FPC should also be given to them, as the latter had more area and the harvest was due. Ajodhyagarh FPC reported that the adjoining FPC tried to illicitly remove the produce from their area and this leading to an inter-FPC conflict.

As the adjoining villagers are now aware that any attempt to infringe into the area of other FPC will be resisted, this type of conflicts had reduced much. They only collect dry sticks and dry leaves as fuelwood which are not resisted so far by the producing FPCs (i.e. Ajodhyagarh). However some villagers still cause damage to the forests managed by the FPCs, claiming that in government forests everybody has equal right (no special right for FPC members) and so they still pilfer the forest produce (i.e. Vatmara).

In most of the cases LAMPS are non

existent and where exists it is non-functioning and so there is no scope of any conflict with them. But members feel that LAMPs should be activated for marketing of NTFPs (in Garbeta few members only supply kendu leaves to LAMPS). Collection of Sal seeds had stopped as there is no marketing channel.

Though Panchayats have little supportive activities to FPCs, there is no conflict with them. Similarly there is no conflict between Panchayats and the forest staff. It may be concluded that serious conflicts are rare in most of the FPCs. Conflict arising out of political factors are difficult to resolve. Inter-organisation or inter-institution conflicts are minimum and often resolved with the help of panchayat and Forest Department.

Conclusion

It appears that all is not well as expected

in the institutional aspect of participatory management and there are still gaps in the JFM programme. So concerted efforts should be taken by all the actors involved in this activities to keep in touch with the FPC members to resist any process of demotivation. As the stake is mainly of the Forest Department, the officials should frequently interact and convene meetings to discuss various matters with open mind. Training and extension should continue. Efforts should be made to strengthen the weaker FPCs and bringing women in the mainstream of the management activities. Other agencies like NGOs, Panchayats should whole heartedly support the cause. At the same time efforts should be taken to enhance the income of the members, so that the institution became sustainable itself. To investigate the level of economic sustainability of the FPCs, it is necessary to assess the livelihood condition derived from the forest and forest-based activities, both by primary and secondary surveys.

SUMMARY

This article is based on field survey to assess the performance of the Forest Protection Committees through participatory monitoring in four Forest Divisions of Midnapore District with their success and drawbacks.

संस्थान के प्रबन्धगत पक्षों का अन्तर्दर्शन - जिला० मिदनापुर, पश्चिम बंगाल के वन मण्डलों में चुनी हुई वन रक्षण समितियों का विशिष्ट अध्ययन

एस०के० सरकार व आर०एन० चट्टोपाध्याय

सारांश

यह अभिपत्र मिदनापुर जिले के चार मण्डलों में भागीदारी द्वारा देख पड़ताल करने को बनी वन रक्षण समितियों की सक्रियता जांचने के लिए किए गए क्षेत्र सर्वेक्षण पर आधारित है जिसमें उनकी सफलताओं और न्यूनताओं को भी बताया गया है।

Reference

Roy Choudhury, P.K. (1995). *Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation. Forest Study Series, F004 Enabling Environment for JFM*. Ed. S.B. Roy. Intra India Publications. pp. 187-203.