

SOCIAL INDICATIONS TOWARDS INSTITUTIONALISATION OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME : A CASE STUDY FROM JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

The success of Joint Forest Management programme from West Bengal and other parts of India has opened avenues to researchers from social sciences and management domain to learn the process of change, its enabling environment and the factors responsible for the new programme (Roy, 1993). Thousands of village level organisations which are either self-initiated or formed through external stimuli, have been functioning in different parts of India. One can see not only the substantial growth in forest cover in this area, but change in attitude of the people and foresters towards forest management and faith in the capacity of the villagers' effort in the programme. The systematic study of both the institutions, the forest community and forest bureaucrats would reveal the facts related to the law of social phenomena, which brings social change.

Systematic implementation of new programme, like Joint Forest Management (JFM), may bring both quantitative and qualitative desired change in village level and government bureaucratic organisation. It is easier to monitor the quantitative change but qualitative change, which is very significant, is difficult to measure. Qualitative information is generally thought

to be subjective, verbal and descriptive in contrast to the quantitative information which is objective, numerical and amenable to mathematical analysis.

However, such study becomes very important concerned of ongoing activities to foresee the desired change for further improvement. Study is made based on some indications which would help developing social indicators.

The qualitative information collected here for understanding the indications for social and foresters' organisational change, involves observation of some activities or observed traits such as how villagers enter forest now (after JFM) and earlier (before JFM), how do they talk to the foresters, how do they feel now when they collect their allotted share of fuelwood in contrast to their way of collection of fuelwood (perceived offender) before JFM. How do the foresters sit with villagers on the same level to conduct micro-planning exercise or they are invited by the villagers to mediate for some village conflict even if it is not related to forestry activities. How do villagers patrol/ watch the forest etc. The initial observations may be converted into approximate numeric values for comparison.

The method of collection of qualitative

information focuses more carefully on how questions are framed. The measurements are introduced into the information collection and field observation with structured questioning, mostly in form of 'close probe'.

Research revealed that it was the community members who, when given responsibility and empowered as partners in the programme, provided a solution to their problems. It became evident that it was not money alone that could solve the problem, and provide the incentive to involve people for forest protection and management. What motivated the village community was a sense of belonging, empowerment and institutionalisation.

The harmonious working and greater co-operation between the Forest Department and forest communities had a positive impact, making Joint Forest Management possible. For this to happen, two distinct institutions - the village communities and the forest bureaucrats - had to remould their norms, behaviour and procedures to create new institutions, the Forest Protection Committees (FPCs), appreciating each other's problems, strengths and weaknesses. This has been termed by the author as "bilateral matching institution" (Roy, 1992).

The author has experience in involving people in forest protection and management in various parts of India, especially in five reserve forests in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, two sites in Himachal Pradesh, six sites in Orissa, one site in Bihar. It has been possible to learn the institutional process of changing people and further use of this learning in involving people at other sites.

Although there have been changes in

the organisational behaviour of both the Forest Communities (FC) and Forest Department (FD), how can one examine and predict changes in the institutions: What are the parameters? Have there been any method of examining the parameters and testing the indications of change?

Social indications of change

(1) **Identity** : After a lengthy period dominated by economic considerations and the reduction of development to quantitative growth, the human factor has resumed its central place, both as the driving force and the ultimate goal of development (Huynh Cao Tri, *et al.*, 1986). Human beings develop their own identity based on socialisation, and further through education and employment. Any programme such as Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) should relate to the identity of the villagers in order to be successful. If villagers do not take pride in their FPC membership, and identify it with their survival and satisfaction, the programme will not go a long way. People should identify with the programme, and the development must be generated from within (Roy, 1993).

The villagers may differ based on their caste, class, age, occupation and sex etc. but they must have a common goal of Forest Protection and for this purpose they must unite in one forum that is FPC. It was found in six villages in Dharampur near Augul in Orissa that villagers have different caste and political affiliation, economic status, and educational level yet they have strong village Forest Protection Committees working for last 15 years and have protected their forest.

At a meeting with members of the Forest Protection Committee at Sijua Village in Midnapore District, West Bengal, the

author asked Durgababu, the founder of the FPC, how the FPC was formed.

Durgababu stated with pride that the FPC at Sijua was formed before Government policy began supporting the formation of FPCs. A former village Pradhan belonging to the upper castes, Durgababu shared a common platform with the other villagers who came from different castes and backgrounds, and took pride in identifying with them in a common cause.

Other members of the FPC like Nimai Majhi, Paltu Singh and others present in the meeting took pride in the accomplishments of their FPC, and expressed satisfaction and happiness that elephants at first came to their regenerating sal forest ten years ago in search of food and shelter.

Similarly, the success of the FPC also depends upon the forest officers identifying with it, and recognising the benefits of delegating some of their authority and responsibility to the FPC. As K. Debnath, a forester at Sijua noted, "We keep in contact with everyone. We have been here for nine years. If offenders run away after cutting trees, we inform the FPC. They summon the offenders and make them apologise." The foresters recognise the ability of people in protecting the forest.

From Individual effort to Organisational effort

An FPC may be initiated by an individual or a group of individuals but finally it should take the form of an organisation with a structure so that the organisation has got norms, rules and regulations affecting conduct, shared values and sanctions.

Initially, it will be very difficult to impose restrictions on People's behaviour such as felling trees.

Durgababu mentioned how they had imposed restrictions in this case. Initially there was competition among the villagers to gain maximum by felling trees from the forest by using different modes for transporting vehicles. Bullock carts carried Rs. 500/- worth of wood, bicycles carried Rs. 100/- worth of wood, and individuals carried headloads of wood valued at Rs. 30. The first move was to impose restrictions on bullock carts and bicycles from carrying wood, and get the assistance of headload carriers to enforce this ban. The next step was to ensure that roots (stumps) were not pulled out, and only branches were carried out.

Durgababu then pointed out to the villagers that if outsiders were prevented from encroaching on the nearby forests, the villagers would be able to enjoy it longer. This gave an incentive to the members of the village community to protect their forest from the encroachment of outsiders. Then gradually, after a year, Durgababu suggested that the community form an FPC to manage its forest resources better.

Participation became widespread, with the women of the village participating as well. Radharani present at the meeting, informed the author that she was involved in forest protection work, preventing women from other villages from stealing wood.

Within the Forest Department as well, the initiatives of individual foresters to involve members of the community in the protection of forests and the formation of FPCs has borne splendid fruit as the process has become institutionalised into an ongoing

organised effort backed by the official policy of the Government of India.

(2) **Institutions** : Institutions are more formal than customs and may be defined as "recognized, sanctioned and established forms of procedure governing the relations between individuals or groups to satisfy human needs" (Maciver and Page, 1950).

Institutions have the following characteristics :

(a) *They represent a collective mode of behaviour* - Here the researchers document the behavior of the people in the past and present related to forest protection activities.

(b) *They bind members together into an association and prescribe rules and ways of doing* - Each FPC member has signed an agreement and follows rules of FPC meetings, election of executive committee record minutes of FPC meetings, protection, reward and action, sharing the benefits etc.

(c) *Institutions have rituals and symbols* - Several new rituals and ceremonies are noticed now in the area where the JFM is successful. These rituals include tree-plantation, celebration of world environment day, folk songs on tree plantation and protection.

(d) *Officers in institutions have regulatory power* - The FPC members have designated elected body of Secretary, President, Executive member, General Body members and Treasurer. The beat officer acts as member secretary of all FPCs under his beat in West Bengal.

In society, important institutions are kinship, marriage, law, property, religion and education.

An interesting incident was narrated by the Beat Officer at Bhagawati Chowk Village, Shri Debnath, that reflects the change in the attitudes of the village community from the perspective of a Forest Department Official: In 1979, he was subjected to a 'gherao' by angry villagers, who held him until 3 p.m. in the afternoon without food, demanding work for all those present. He managed to have a message smuggled away on a cigarette paper, calling for aid. Sometime later, a police vehicle arrived and a number of the villagers ran away. Shri Debnath, the Beat Officer, observed that "The villagers used to hate us. Now they don't do so." And today if required the same villagers will protect me against any attack and odds.

Mimai Majhi, the Secretary of the Sijua village FPC, noted that "We invite Forest Department officials to our village weddings. This was not there before."

The attitude of the Forest Department towards the villagers have also undergone a significant change - from that of adversary to that of partner.

These changes in attitude on the part of both the forest community and forest department have made the institution of FPC possible.

(a) *Values and beliefs* : Based on their values and beliefs, people develop certain behaviours and attitudes.

If the villagers do not consider the activities related to Forest Protection and Management as social values it will remain a temporary affair. Such behaviour or activities related to the forest protection and management should be ingrained in their culture, and it should manifest itself

in voluntary involvement.

A social stigma should be attached to any activities which are detrimental to Participatory Forest Management. Rewards and punishments are handed out to reinforce appropriate behaviour.

After witnessing the almost complete destruction of the forests near Sijua village - which the villagers depended upon for their fuel, fodder and even livelihood - Durgababu began urging the villagers to preserve their forest.

The author asked Durgababu, "If I say, 'Save forests', why would they do it?" Durgababu replied, "If accidents happen on the road, some will walk on and others will get involved. I suppose it is instinct."

When the FPC was first formed, Durgababu stated, 15 or 20 service minded volunteers joined. Then the values and beliefs of the community were gradually transformed from 'This is not our forest. It is the government's forest.' to 'Cutting trees is a crime.'

On its part, the Forest Department has demonstrated that it has changed its beliefs and values relating to the guardianship of forest resources. The earlier belief that forest communities will only denude forest if given access to them because they have no knowledge or skills to manage resources - backed by the value that creating secluded forest zones was desirable - has been replaced by the belief that forest communities can responsibly manage forest resources, and the value of shared stewardship.

(b) *Roles and responsibilities* : As a social institution, Forest Protection Committees

have established sanctioned procedures. They have rules, and a registered membership. FPCs are socially approved, and have both status and government recognition. They are registered with Divisional Forest Officers, and members have clear roles and responsibilities.

Each FPC member has the right to elect members of the governing body, and stand for election themselves. The President, Secretary and Treasurer etc., are elected and have the authority to fine offenders.

It emerged during the meeting that Nimai Majhi, the first Secretary of the FPC, was earlier not a member of the Panchayat. The author inquired whether Nimai babu's participation in the FPC led to his election to the Panchayat, and he replied yes. This shows the upgradation of social status of individual and importance of FPC in providing new role to its member.

Just as the Forest Community (FC) has institutions and an organisation that addresses the needs of forest protection and management, similarly the Forest Department (FD) does too.

The institutional structures of the FC and FD need to function in harmony for the effective protection and management of forests.

(c) *Status* : Status refers to the role performance of an individual, his or her location within the group, and place in the social network. Status involves reciprocal obligations.

The right to apprehend offenders has raised the status of FPC members. The elected office-bearers of the FPC have even greater authority and status in that they

can determine fines to be imposed on offenders and can take part with the foresters in microplanning.

Earlier, the Forest Department had the sole authority to apprehend offenders and impose fines. This power and responsibility is now shared with FPC members.

(d) *Social mores* : The mores of the group define the criterion of right and wrong. Mores are agents of conservation and do not justify right and wrong. Mores are compelling and forbidding.

Taboos are mores expressed in negative forms. Mores tend to maintain the solidarity of the group, and remain unquestioned.

When asked what were the rules that people followed, regarding forest protection, Mr. Nunaram Mardi, a pioneer of forest protection committees in Kudada, East Singhbhum, Bihar, said that in the year 1978, one central committee was formed at Kudada with 13 sub-committees. Before the central committee of 1978, there was no written rule about the Village Forest Protection Committee, although they followed a few rules orally. They are:

1. Cutting trees is an offence. If anybody is considered to be an offender, all villagers of the particular village would break all social ties with the family of the offender. No fine system was practised.

2. Birds and other wild animals should be protected. This rule the villagers practised in their villages. On a few occasions they hunted in other places, but not within their own village.

3. Local meeting took place frequently in a

month, not exactly twice or thrice in a week but they arranged big meetings with other villages twice in a month. From the beginning of the formation of the Forest Protection Committee, they never called the Forest Department staff in their meeting. But now-a-days they are calling some of the FD staff.

4. No one should co-relate the Forest Protection Committee with any political colour. This committee is taken as a general village committee. Everybody should join it for the improvement of the forest. (Singh *et al.*, 1995).

In another meeting at Murakata village, Durgababu stated that on the first offence, an offender is given a warning. If he or she commits an offence a second time, an apology has to be tendered in writing, and is recorded. This reflects a change in mores after the formation of FPC. Durgababu mentioned, however, that seldom do offenders go to the second level.

The author asked for cases of offenders who had been punished by the FPC in the recent past, without disclosing names. In the interests of group cohesion, the FPC members present declined to give names. Although there was an instance of an offender being taken to the Beat Officer, only a fine was levied, but no case was registered.

Regarding the social mores within the Forest Department, senior foresters now recognise the ability of the younger foresters to involve people in forest management. Sharing authority with FPCs to impose fines also reflects the changing mores within the Forest Department.

(e) *Symbols and rituals* : These include holding meetings, group discussions, and singing songs based on forestry. They facilitate interaction and awareness among members.

At Sijua village, a Van Mahautsav - or planting ceremony - was recently held. Foresters and other dignitaries were invited to attend. The villagers vowed to protect trees. Such rituals help to strengthen FPC status.

Under the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) when a forester enters the village, he acts as a student and sits with the villagers on the same physical level preferably on the ground, or under a tree, and introduces himself with his true identity and submits that he has come to learn from them about village resource management. He then recognises the good things in the village or villagers and appreciates their ability to manage whatever they have even during times of crisis. At his stage villagers' morale is boosted and they sometimes express their views with humble politeness or might be very vocal to tell their problems or criticize the government, or they may also criticize the foresters' failure in protecting the forest. The forester at this stage listens carefully and attentively, without being defensive. He becomes a part of the village, shares ideas and opportunities and finally together with community prepares Community Action Plan.

(3) **Socialisation**: Socialisation is a process of interaction through which the growing individual learns the habits, attitudes, values and beliefs of the social group.

Socialisation includes the internalisation of social norms, social rules and regulation in such a way that the

individual feels an urge to conform.

Socialisation has three stages :

(a) *In the family* - Of strategic importance to socialisation when the family members discuss with children about the benefits of forests protection.

(b) *In school, and among the peer group* - The children take part in tree plantation and organise programmes for children.

(c) *Adult socialisation* - In the roles of an employee, bread earner, husband, or social member.

At home, when the mother and father discuss the utility of plants, about the FPCs their children learn about the importance of forest and FPC.

This process of socialisation ensures that values are transmitted from one generation to another, and institutions retain their vitality.

Within the Forest Department, training at the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy in Dehra Dun and the State Forest Service College, Coimbatore provides socialisation for new foresters. Regular training capsules on people's participation are also offered at these institutions.

Similarly, the Department of Forests, Government of India, has introduced compulsory training for Indian Forest Service Officers on Joint Forest Management, Participatory Rural Appraisal and Gender Issues. Refresher courses are also offered, with participants from the rank of Divisional Forest Officers to Chief Conservators of Forests attending.

Acknowledgements

The author expresses sincere gratitude to a number of State Forest Departments, especially West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh for extending all possible support to complete this study. FRLHT, Bangalore deserves appreciation for providing me an opportunity of learning while working on the project on medicinal plants conservation in the field. This experiment would not have been successful without support from villagers who have extended their generous help and encouragement while conducting this study. I am also thankful to Ganesh Yadav, Raktima Mukherjee and Tapan Mahapatra for their active cooperation in preparation of manuscript. My sincere thanks goes to Imon Ghosh for taking sincere effort in taking notes and organising the manuscript. Lastly, I thank Indranil Bhattacharya for painstakingly typing the manuscript. I shall be ever grateful to IBRAD for all the assistance during my work at the PFM project sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

SUMMARY

The quantitative information collected for the success of Joint Forest Management have been described in detail.

विकास कार्यक्रमों के संस्थानीकरण के सामाजिक संकेत - संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध
का एक विशेष अध्ययन

एस०बी० राय

सारांश

संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध की सफलता से मिली मात्रात्मक जानकारी को विस्तार से बताया गया है।

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