

Forest Management and Community Involvement: Some Issues

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Abstract

This paper deals with community involvement in the forest area for its management. Forest has been extremely important in every society because of its green cover and plenty of forest resources, it provides livelihood to the people. Forest have a great significance in our ecosystem as they are natural resources of many raw materials like gums, paper, bamboos, timber, fuel, medicinal drugs etc. which are important for the life of people and wildlife animals and birds. Large scale of deforestation is the main cause of global warming and climate change. In addition to that large population needs large scale infrastructure, road and transport and other development activities required felling of trees which is weakening the forest. Forest can decrease climate change; forest can remove significant volumes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Community involvement helps local people and the forest department with the sustainable development of forest based ecosystem. In light of this paper would analyze community involvement in the forest management of forest resources, ways to involve the communities in the management of the forests and community based conservation mainly from secondary sources.

Keywords: Deforestation, Global Warming, Climate Change, Conservation, Sustainable Development

Introduction:

Forest are an essential part of our ecosystem and it has great importance in our society. India is one of the world's top 17 mega-biodiversity nations. India contains 45,500 plant species and 91,000 animal species, which make up around 2.4 per cent of the world's total geographic area and roughly 7 per cent and 6.5 percent per cent of the world's flora and fauna, respectively. (Ministry of Environment and Forest, 2009). India has a very broad range of forest wealth due of the country's vast topographic diversity. They play an important role in the Indian economy by offering a variety of social, economic, and ecological services. The forestry industry is crucial in supporting sustainable development by safeguarding the environment and promoting inclusive and fair growth. Tribal people, who are among the most disadvantaged sections in Indian society, can benefit from forests

by improving their quality of life. Indian forests provide at least a portion of the livelihoods and subsistence for about 275 million poor rural and tribal people (27 per cent of the country's total population). More than 80 per cent of the energy provided by forests, which provide close to 40 per cent of the nation's energy demands, is used in rural regions.

Furthermore, 27.8 per cent of the country's total recorded forest area is allocated to wildlife habitat protection and is maintained through the protected area network (Forest Survey of India, 2011). Additionally, forests serve as carbon sinks, preserve soil fertility, safeguard watersheds, and lessen the likelihood of natural disasters like landslides and floods. However, forests are one of the most poorly managed resources in the nation, despite their significant economic and ecological worth. They are subject to extreme pressure from a variety of human and biophysical sources, as well as significant biotic pressure, which is causing them to deteriorate more quickly. India has 17 per cent of the global population and 18 per cent of the world's livestock despite having only 2.4 per cent of the global land area. Over the past several decades, an estimated 41 per cent of India's forest cover has seen some level of degradation (Ministry of Environment and Forest, 2006). Additionally, India's forest productivity is quite low compared to the global average. India's forests produce only 1.34 cubic metres per hectare per year, compared to the global average of 2.1 cubic metres per hectare per year. (The Eleventh Five Year Plan, 2007-12). According to the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2011, there are 69.20 million ha of forests in India, or 21.05 per cent of the total land area. This, however, falls short of the national target of 33 per cent of land area being covered by forests set forth in the National Forest Policy of 1988. In addition, only 12.3 per cent of the 21.05 per cent total forest cover, or open forests, have high ecological value, while the remaining 8.75 per cent are predominantly degraded open forests. (Forest Survey of India, 2011)

Forests perform environmental and ecological functions on one side while play an important role in providing socio-economic justice to the people living in and around forests. Thus, forests are very useful in providing intangible benefits such as maintenance of ecological balance and attainment of environmental stability and also in providing tangible benefits such as timber, firewood, non-timber forest produce, bamboo etc. to the society. The functioning of the earth's life support system depends on ecological systems and the environmental resources that support them. They make both direct and indirect contributions to human welfare, making up a portion of the planet's overall economic

worth. Based on previously published studies and a few original calculations, researchers have calculated the present economic value of 17 ecosystem services for 16 biomes. The value of the entire biosphere is thought to be between US\$ 16 and US\$ 54 trillion, with the majority of that value existing outside of the market. Because they make up the majority of an ecosystem, forests perform the functions listed in annexure 1.1 and offer products and services (Contanza,1997).

The community suffers most whenever degradation of environment takes place, apart from loss of the national wealth. As experts have time and again opined, many agro-climatic zones are facing severe shortage of water leading to low agricultural output, unemployment and migration that in turn increase stress on the forest resources for fuel, fodder and livelihoods (Rishi, 2002). The forest is a crucial natural resource that serves human society both directly and indirectly. The scientific and policymaking communities at both the national and international levels are paying greater attention to the environmental services provided by forests for the achievement of atmospheric stability and ecological balance. Particular focus is being placed on how forests fit into the biodiversity and climate change conventions that are being negotiated in conjunction with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) process.

The agreement passed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 mentions that all types of forests represent complex and distinctive ecological processes that form the basis for their present and potential capacity to offer resources to meet both human needs and environmental values. As a result, sound management and protection of these forests are of importance to the governments of the nations to which they belong. In order to meet the social, economic, ecological, cultural, and spiritual demands of present and future generations, it is important to manage forest resources and forestlands sustainably. These demands include those for wood and wood products, fuel, fodder, food, employment, shelter, water, and enjoyment, as well as those for wild animal habitats, a diverse range of landscapes, carbon sinks and reservoirs, and other goods. It is important to acknowledge the crucial role that all types of forests play in preserving ecological processes and balance on a local, national, regional, and global scale. Among other things, they safeguard sensitive ecosystems, watersheds, and freshwater resources, are rich repositories of biodiversity and biological resources, and

are sources of genetic material for biotechnology products as well as photosynthesis (Rishi, 2002).

Concept of community

The term 'community' has received recurrent and persistent attention in social science literature. Hence, a longer-term perspective is required to understand how community has acquired prominence or lost it at different points of time. In the context of teleological theories of social change or theories of modernization, the community is thought to have a finite capacity for transformation. On the other hand, when change is regarded ambivalently or negatively, community is perceived to have positive notions (Agrawal, 1999). While discussing the useful contributions of community in environmental conservation, the present-day scholars highlighted the positive: to create community as a 'warmly persuasive word' (Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Guha, 1989).

The term 'community' depicts a small, locally situated, harmonious social formation in the contemporary writings. For instance, a study on community and forestry reveals that community develops from shared qualities and exists among people who share common interests and identifies Messerschmitt (1993). Similarly, based on a review of common forest management, observes that 'the sense of wholeness or jointers is at the root of the meaning of community', implying that community solves the problems of collective action. Ostrom's critique of the policies based on the "tragedy of the commons," "prisoner's dilemma game," and "the logic of collective action" models highlights the dangers of such simplicity of the complex idea of community (Ostrom, 1990).

Agrawal (1999) distinguishes between two different meanings of community. The first meaning of community concerns with community-as- shared-understandings where the community members are presumed to possess common interests and share beliefs about how to achieve their interests. The second meaning of community concerns with community-as-social- organization, implying shared territory, regular and frequent interactions over a range of livelihood issues, local tenurial or institutional arrangements, and stability in membership. The external agencies including the state, NGOs, aid agencies, and policy makers can do very little about the first aspect, but can influence the second aspect. Most recent programmes to involve communities in resource management included attempts to alter local institutional arrangements, establish new structures of

decision-making or decentralize power, with a hope to encourage a greater feeling of community-as-shared- understandings.

Concept of Community Involvement

In the context of community-based conservation of forests, community involvement implies assigning specific roles and responsibilities to the community in conserving the allotted portion of forest by granting certain rights to it over the use of the resource along with a few other incentives like the provision of wage labour, building of locally useful infrastructure, etc., to take part in the process. In this sense, community involvement means the participation of the members of community in both protecting and managing the forest area allotted to them, enabling them to derive some benefits at present and in future. Thus, community involvement is synonymous with community or people's participation. Seven types of participation could be distinguished as noted in table 1.1, and all community-based conservation initiatives, including those for the management and protection of forests, must explicitly define what participation means. Nothing less than active participation will do if the goal of conservation is to manage the resource sustainably and effectively. (Pimbert and Pretty, 1998).

Thus, community involvement in the conservation of forests means functional participation of the people in protecting and managing the forest resources. The functional participation of communities calls for the use of participatory methodologies such as PRA by the staff of government agencies. Besides, the functional participation of communities could be ensured only when the local management systems are built on the basis of local priorities, indigenous knowledge systems, local institutions, local resources, economic incentives for the participating communities and institution arrangements for equitable sharing of benefits.

Community involvement/participation is being increasingly viewed as the process of empowering the local people with the focus on transfer of power to communities by incorporating changes in the power structure. Participation must become a process of empowering the people so they have more control over their own resources and lives. This requires interactive involvement as well as participation through self-mobilization (Oakley et al, 1991). In brief, the goals of community involvement as an active process are empowerment, boosting beneficiary capacity and self-reliance, improving project effectiveness, increasing project efficiency, and increasing project cost sharing. In fact, he

development of local human resources in the form of the target group is aided by participation in decision-making, implementation, and monitoring, which promotes sustainability. The community participation is intended to contribute towards both beneficiaries' empowerment and project efficiency(Oakley et al, 1991).

Community based Conservation

The scholarly writings concerning conservation of natural resources perceived communities as a threat to protection of such resources (Hardin, 1968; Eckholm, 1976). It was perceived that conservation of natural resources implied their protection from human interference, whereas members of local communities depend upon them for their livelihood and therefore exploit them without any restraint (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). Further, Hardin's (1968) seminal work, 'the tragedy of commons', theoretically proved that human interference in natural resources, meaning collective and unregulated use of the resources, would ultimately result in their overuse and complete degradation. To prevent such degradation, Hardin and many other scholars (Demsetz, 1967; Smith 1981; Ophuls, 1973; Hardin 1978) put forth the solution as either to nationalize or privatize the natural resources. In either case, the community could not find a place for itself in conservation activities of natural resources. It appears that while designing such solutions the scholars had in mind only the physical sustainability of the resource, undermining the needs and requirements of the local population, who depended upon such resources for their livelihood. However, one-sided approach to the problem of natural resources could not succeed in conserving them. Even though the problem of deforestation has been controlled to some extent, the real problem has been the degradation of the quality of forests (Kumar et al, 1999). Experience has shown that it is hard to find effective alternatives to community-based conservation (Wells and Brandon, 1992; Gibson & Marks, 1995).

The growing presence of human population in and around forests and the antagonism of the indigenous people, especially the tribals, towards the top- down and centre-driven conservation strategies paved the way for community- based conservation with the active involvement of local communities. Localcommunities in this context mean those which lived in and around the forests 12for generations. The advancement of democratic decentralization trends also strengthened participatory approaches to conservation of forests and environment. Besides, a large number of empirical studies have

demonstrated that communities can own, manage, defend, sustain, and enhance resources such as drinking water, irrigation systems, forests, pastures, fisheries and wildlife (Berkes and Farvar, 1989; Bromley, 1992; Me Cay and Acheson, 1987; National Research Council, 1986; Ostrom, 1990; Peter,s 1994; Pinkerton, 1989; Singh, 1994). Many other scholars also advocated community involvement for effective management of resources (Bailey 1986; Douglass 1992; Nepal and Weber 1993; Poffenberger 1995). Such advocacy revolves round two important factors: 1) national governments have limited capacity to manage resources on their own or where state has failed to effectively control and manage specific resources; and 2) there are significant externalities associated with private use and management of resources. On the contrary, communities are seen to be equipped with better information about their resources, have greater capacity to enforce rules locally than a distant government machinery and can overcome some of the problems of externalities (Agrawal, 1999).

As a consequence, a number of governments in Asia, Africa, and Latin America initiated efforts to involve local communities in conservation of natural resources, particularly forests. These initiatives are in different stages of progress. And it is also important to remember that they are still in their infancy with the results being uncertain and unknowable for some more time. The shift to involvement of the communities in conservation of resources represents the coming together of three major objectives of policy around the world - development, democracy and conservation (de Fonseca et al. 1994; Robinson 1995).

Undoubtedly forest has great importance in our society, so it is our responsibility to preserve and protect forest resources for our future generation. For that, community involvement in the management of forest resource is essential in forest conservation and forest management. There is need of making people understanding about forest issues and aware about sort of activities related to forest. Community's participation in forest management activities would enable them to get income and improve their living condition. Furthermore, management practices should also have applied compulsory to protect the forest and schemes like sustainable forest management and joint forest management must be followed for the improvement of forest.

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