

FORESTRY
Community Forest Management
ORISSA

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A Crisis of Commitment

When I was young there were fewer people. There was a lot of want. Most of us went to work as mazdoors [agricultural laborers]. After working the day as a mazdoor, we could afford to light our chulas [stoves] to cook a meal. Before sunrise you had to go [to work], if it was daylight when you reached the farmer's house, he wouldn't speak to you.... The forests were depleted. We could no longer depend on them. And what was left was no longer ours, the land was taken from us, it was gone. How were we free? (Harihar Singh. Naik Community Elder, Arabari, in Chatterji, 1996:p.64).

In India, development remains unattainable for 350 million of its poorest citizens. Gandhi's vision of development has been undermined through large-scale industrialization, urbanization and modernization (Saxena, 2000a:p.6). Since 1951, five year economic plans have been adopted to propel India's development in industry and agriculture, and to remedy the political dissension, debt, and infrastructural disarray that plagued the newly independent country (Indian Social Institute, 1988). Development actions have succeeded in exponentially increasing India's industrial, military and agricultural production, its national income and middle class. Yet, in 2001, almost fifty-four years after independence, development has failed to alleviate poverty and related socioeconomic oppressions within the most disenfranchised caste, class and tribal (adivasi) communities. The scale and implications of this poverty and the magnitude of the bondage it reinforces is experienced by most nations of the Global South, forcing its citizens to live within a constant state of war. These conditions are languaged as impoverishment, in circumstances where people's most basic human rights are violated.

International bodies, such as the World Bank, national development ministries and departments in Southern countries, corporations and oligarchies, have institutionalized development ideologies into action plans that promote the globalization of cultural, political and economic systems. Their performance has devastated the Earth's ecology and resources, enhancing social dislocation and alienation, and furthering

the dominance of technological rationality. Such rationality involves the quantification of life based predominantly on market productivity rather than social capability. The international community has at best been concerned with adequate representation, not self-determination, of marginalised communities within development. Neither have the European and North American nations taken accountability for the political and economic crimes they have committed through colonization and neocolonisation. Such considerations do not factor into organizing reparations to the disenfranchised in the once colonized countries of the Global South.

Rather development institutions continue to assert processes that systematically delegitimize traditional livelihoods by impoverishing the natural resource base upon which the lives of subsistence communities depend (Escobar, 1995). Aggressive deforestation continues to haunt rural communities globally. In Sri Lanka 23 percent of its land remains forested, in India 8%, in Pakistan 4.5%, and in Bangladesh 6 percent (IUCN, 2000).

The failure of dominant development and its promised freedoms bear testimony to a deep unconcern for social and ecological justice. In response to such neglect communities across India are operationalising frameworks for sustainability that link economic and ecological well being. Informed by local concerns, along with those of equity and diversity, these frameworks generate an impassioned quest for a new praxis of freedom. Such practice endows sustainability as central to the assessment of the health of society, where well being must be calculated in relation to the empowerment of the most marginalised, respect for diversity, and political integrity.

Political processes are underway throughout India that link ecological restoration with social equity. These processes are rooted in social movements that have impacted all levels of Indian society, from marginalised communities in rural areas to policy makers in national government. The precarious, problematic and enduring alliances across vast cultural strata make India an exciting example of social change in a hierarchical and multicultural society. While the need for sustainable development is crucial in urban environments because of their intensive resource consumption, one of the primary sectors forging sustainable change has been rural communities who live in contiguity to forest areas. This is evidenced in movements for public forest lands reform (Chatterji, 1998).

Toward Public Lands Reform

Two hundred years ago the forests were completely dense up to the Panthasala, Kaimati, with saluya, bamboo, mango, piya sal, asanno,

kongora, shisul and gombhari. In the Rajas (King, Landlord) time he gave his 'prajas' timber and fuelwood, but he owned the land and the people. We had some land from the Raja, even though it was all his. But us general caste people had some land. Not the untouchables. When the Sarkar [Government] came about 40 years ago they announced land reforms. After the census, 'ceiling' land was given to adivasis, scheduled caste, landless general caste people. The forest department rule came after independence. Earlier the forest department did research, inventory and planting work, but the forest land was owned by the Raja. After the Sarkar came, between 1950-65, local people were given felling contracts particularly from Dhenkanal and Bidharpur. Some of the trees in the [a] patch were marked off - mohul, mango, etc., and left. Others like sal, piya sal, shisul and kongra were felled. The contractors put in the labor hired from local areas and sold the trees to the Sarkar [forest department]. Then what? The trees were all cut. Then 8 years ago, in 1988, the Sarkar passed a resolution for forming protection committees. The in between 25 years people struggled for a living. Whatever regenerated or got left behind was felled by us. No one protected. No one could protect. We stole from the forests to survive. We were thieves on the land we lived from. Today most of the big trees are gone, the fruit trees too (Debraj Potty, Village Elder, Dhenkanal, Orissa, in Chatterji, 2000b:p.90).

There were sal forests before. The sal did not prove as economically beneficial so they [foresters] thought, 'let's cut them and plant others which will be more useful.' They felled the sal and planted cashews. This [planting of cashews] was not known to us. It was useless. To them it was valuable. Then came eucalyptus. This grows fast in five years. It fetches a lot more money. With the old sal, the herbs and creepers that grew at the bottom of them also went. Other food trees also went.... The oal tree, only the oal tree gives flowers. This is a lot gone (Bishu Baski, Santal Adivasi Community Elder, Arabari. Chatterji, 1996:p.119).

Forest lands in India are nationalized and under the legal and managerial jurisdiction of state agencies, such as the forest or revenue departments. The primary stakeholders of forest lands are the communities that depend on the forests for subsistence, state agencies, development organizations and the industrial sector. Since the eighteenth century, India's forests have been savagely degraded through commercial exploitation during colonization and post independence felling for supportive infrastructure for national growth (Poffenberger and McGean, 1995:p.127). The colonial and postcolonial state's custodianship and policing of forests has vitiated human-nature interactions. In 1950, 48 percent of the total land area was under healthy forest cover. Subsequently, in the late twentieth century only 19.4 percent of the country's total land area was under some forest cover, and 8 percent of it was healthy (Poffenberger, 1995:p.2; and Mukhopadhyay, 1994:p.35). By the 1950's, increasing numbers of people

became dependent on the few remaining forests. These communities no longer had any rights over forest lands, only 'privileges'. Unilaterally, with a few honorable exceptions, women were the most adversely affected by forest degradation (Sarin, 1999). Poor rural women in India, constitute the lowest sociocultural and economic 'caste'. Rural women perform housework, agricultural work, and non formal forest-based and other industrial work (Chatterji, 2000a:p.22). Their work days are invariably 1.5 times longer than men's workdays (Tinker, 1994:p.98).

Fuelwood Collection has always been a right, even during the Raja's time (Kalpana Pradhan, Deori Adivasi Woman Forest Protection Committee Member, Sorsiapada Village. Chatterji, 2000b:p.203).

In protecting the forests, we have more work we have to do, without any planned development (Sushmita Patnaik, Woman Forest Protection Committee Member, Sorsiapada Village. Chatterji, 2000b:p.194).

In response to the crisis, various strategies for ecological restoration emerged in independent India, some exclusively among community groups, others that involved community groups and state agencies in collaboration. Community, Participatory and Joint Forest Management systems emerged out of the failure of colonial and social forestry and the Indian government's forest policies in general. The term (CFM) refers to local community initiatives and organization toward regenerating, protecting and managing public and other forest lands. The state forest departments are generally unsupportive of such initiatives and would like to extend a state-community co-management framework instead. Participatory Forest Management (PFM) is widely used when describing forest management systems that are collaborative in nature, involving local community groups and state forest departments and other agencies. Joint Forest Management (JFM) is the preferred forest department option of formalized agreements between local community and the state relating to protecting and managing public forest lands (Chatterji, 1998).

These forest management systems were meant to include and empower community. In post-independent India, initiatives for a transition to PFM and JFM systems emerged during the 1970's-90's, preceded by thousands of communities forming CFM groups since the 1940's to protect their degrading forests, primarily in eastern India's tribal forest tracts (See Poffenberger, 1995).

In 1988 and 1989 respectively, the Governments of Orissa and West Bengal passed a number of resolutions clarifying the terms of inclusion of local community groups in forest management, recognizing the village as the formal unit of management. The National Forest Policy of 1988

legitimated the prior claims of forest dependent communities to these public resources. The Government of India passed a resolution in 1990 encouraging community-state collaboration in forest management. In response to the 1990 circular, 24 states have issued formal JFM directives in the last decade. It is estimated that 44,000 villages are currently engaged in organized forest protection. The Government of India revised the guidelines in February 2000, more attentive to the complex conditions under which JFM operates (Saigal, 1999 and 2001; and Government of India, 2000).(2)

Yes, ours is a JFM venture. The forest department has to assist us in protecting the forest, they have the power. Without them, we would have no real authority. If only the forest department tries to protect, then they will have legal authority, no people behind them. That won't work. If only the people try to protect, they will have only labor, that won't work. We need both the forest department and the people to protect the forests together. There are however a lot of inter-village problems which the forest department does not have manpower to deal with. We have learned courage from this JFM experience, have learned not to cower in front of you enemies (Bibhuti Das, Forester and Community Member, Sorsiapada Village. Chatterji, 2000b:p.190).

Stabilizing India's natural forests and watersheds is seen as a significant step in sustaining a rural environment that can support a still expanding population. The fundamental premise of JFM and CFM is sustainable forest management through peoples participation and a reinstatement of their subsistence rights over forests. Operationalising such rights would engender the empowerment of the millions of people that live under survival conditions. Their empowerment would in turn make possible a devolution of authority over forest lands from state agencies to community groups. The state would begin to play a supportive role in management. Community groups would take responsibility for sustainable use and conservation using decentralized mechanisms for local self-governance.

Political and operational constraints have slowed the transfer of rights to user communities. Community protection and natural regeneration have been remarkably effective in halting further degradation and restoring productivity to these environments, now estimated to cover around 35 million hectares (Government of India, 2000). While financial support from government and development agencies for JFM increased exponentially during the 1990's, numerous issues remain unaddressed. Such issues include critical JFM policy weaknesses, and the need for procedural, tenurial and legal changes. There is a felt absence of effective mechanisms to operationalise field learning and forums for dialogue between primary government planners, state forest departments, and the

diversity of development agencies entering the arena at the state and national level.

At present, the National Ministry of Environment and Forests has limited capacity to guide the transition in public forest management systems. To shift the enduring injustices that characterize development interventions and civil society, forest reform processes and programs require major political and legal reframe from the state custodial and industrial management models operational for almost a hundred and fifty years. There is a sense among participants and supporters of JFM in India that new initiatives are required to maintain the larger national effort to reform public forest lands management (Poffenberger and Chatterji, 2000). Rather than endorse the formal inequitable agreements between the state and community groups, JFM's and CFM's non-governmental stakeholders are stressing the need for the transfer of authority over forest lands to local community groups. They are opposing agreements related to benefit sharing that allocate a greater percentage of profits and resources to the state forest department. They are also organizing against the unsustainable management practices, such as annual felling, employed by the forest department. Community groups are concerned about the lack of infrastructural investment into watershed and microcredit development, and availability of processing and marketing facilities for non timber forest products. The growing mandate for a complete reform of the jurisdictional and managerial policies related to public forest lands is an extremely significant development.

Local resistance to historical oppressions that continue to function in the present shapes movements for public lands reform. The convictions behind such reform prescribe a more revolutionary stance. Shifting the very fabric of agreements between the state and community for forest management, ongoing social and political processes seek to alter allocations and entitlements related to all nationalized forests. They advocate abrogation of state control over public forest lands, tenurial and custodian rights for marginal communities, and the initiation of community management frameworks. In a postcolonial state where public lands represent resources critical to the survival of marginalised peoples, these reforms foreground issues of livelihood in the context of ecological sustainability for 300 million people living in close relationship to the forests.(3)

Social Movements: Contexts and Explanations

Land reforms, only public lands reforms, can deliver equality in Orissa (Raji Behera. Village Elder, Ghumsur, Orissa. Chatterji, 2000b:p.206).

In Orissa, public lands reform movements are premised on unequal relations of power, productive of impassioned social activism and critique. These movements raise questions

related to the role and responsibility of the postcolonial state to marginalised rural communities, and of community access to public resources. For the 8,000 community groups working toward public lands reform, their resistance affords hope, sustains lives and manufactures conflict (Chatterji, 1998:p.14). Speaking to social and ecological restitution that reallocates authority over resources, public lands reform propagates safeguarding rights to livelihood and to land. Defending these rights asserts the role of self-determination in local economies that confront the invasion of global capitalism.

These postcolonial movements explicitly resist inequities endorsed through history. Local community members, non-governmental organizations, institutions and allies have initiated certain mechanisms of reform. These challenge public lands reform in Orissa and foreground recommendations for policy and social action.

Within the Global South the array of social responses and organizations emerged as instruments of social action, influenced by neo-Marxist, feminist and human rights activism. Social action was scripted as a practice, as a process of empowerment where participants acting on collective agency sought to reorganize the structural and social relations responsible for their continued marginalisation in society.

It is important to mention that some of the major critiques of such actions emerge from the spaces in which they are practiced. Participation in movements is often solicited without reflection or capacity building. Transition to collaborative practice within social movements is sporadic, and when attempted, unequal social relations engineered through class/caste/religious privilege, differences in education, language, gender socialization, and comprehension of capability disrupt it. Collective action demands questions related to the process of intervention. How are political and social shifts reorganizing such intervention?

The voices and silences we encounter within the scope of such social mobilization resound with histories of domination. Endemic to the very process of intervention is the danger of reproducing the interests of those dominant, or misrepresenting the interests of those marginal. Postcolonial action seeks to shift power relations by inclusion of multiple constituencies in the process of social change. The inevitability of privileging certain voices and reproducing existing social hierarchies demands continual attention to the power dynamics that shape such action. How do we challenge the very ground that defines our social being as we strive to dismantle the conditions that produce us as voiced and others as voiceless?

Contexts and Contradictions

The politics and integrity of public lands reform in Orissa is mediated by scope of relationships that make various stakeholders accountable to each other. Commitment to a shared process that is diverse in its priorities is at once difficult and necessary. Conflict and contestation leads to clarification of different priorities. It is perhaps the engagement of differences that permits these relationships to endure.

In 1995, citizens' bodies challenged the Orissa Forest Department -- the state agency with jurisdiction over forests -- to reformulate its policies related to public forests to prioritize community custodianship. They requested that the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) instate a review of the Orissa Forest Department's policies before continuing further funding to the Orissa Government. The review was advised by citizens' bodies in Orissa through sustained consultation with community groups at district and state level workshops. SIDA, the Swedish Government's international development assistance program, was a primary donor facilitating the forest department's commitment to democratic forest management. SIDA agreed to this petition in 1996, and at the behest of local activists, invited the Asia Forest Network, particularly my colleague Mark Poffenberger and I, to be a part of this review. In 1997-98, I was involved in conducting a state-wide assessment of forest management systems in Orissa within the SIDA project. A primary objective was to understand what is working and what is not within existing systems, and to use this knowledge to frame the structure of decentralized environmental management (Chatterji, 1998).

There is considerable strategy necessary in sustaining movements. My colleagues from non-governmental organizations were reluctant to participate in the review as it would deflect energy from their alliance with local people. Being an outsider and an ally, one is best positioned at times to arbitrate confrontation between the state and the people. They required that I organize platforms where oppositional stakeholders, the forest department and community groups, could participate. This research utilized existing dialogical platforms at the village and district levels that allowed various stakeholders to engage in this process. The research supported community stakeholders in understanding and clarifying their involvement within forest management processes. The primary task was to enable and monitor the equity of representation in the process.

The SIDA review used participatory methods of inquiry. Those involved in the review and connected to academic practice drew on traditions of postcolonial anthropology, cultural studies, geography, development, environmental management and historiography. Others drew on indigenous knowledges, human-nature relationships and life histories. The review engaged oral and literary traditions, and it was conducted in

Oriya, in languages spoken by Deori, Juango, Molhar, Sabar and Santal tribal communities and in English. About 1200 villages participated directly and through representation, in Dhenkanal, Karanja, Ghumsur South, Rayagada and Bolangir -- five of the twenty-eight forest divisions in Orissa. These divisions were identified together with Orissa Forest Department officials, community groups and non-governmental organizations, based on their ecological and social importance (See Chatterji, 1998). The review focused on the following areas: 1. Programmatic and operational constraints. 2. Benefit distribution from forest management. 3. Transition to collaborative forest management. This study used various participatory and action approaches to research, analysis and planning. Research activities included community profiling and resource mapping, narrative assessments, quantitative profiling, ecological audit, assessments of village level JFM-CFM and district level citizens groups.

Through diagnostic and impact analysis and qualitative micromanagement analysis, the SIDA project sought to understand existing resource forest use patterns and conflicts along with the different protection and management units in the area, and the social groups that collaborate or dominate in this management. The inquiry addressed the context within which the social composition and control of these protection units manifest, their objectives and present legal and functional status, management boundaries and microplans. The inquiry mapped the formation histories, shifts in leadership, management and people's participation, resource distributive mechanisms and gender, class and other equity issues.

The research processes were wide-ranging and varied, mediated by certain ethical practices related to methodology. Supporting research agendas that are contingent to the needs of local communities, made necessary that the review emphasize the inclusion of local knowledge and involve communities in the inventorying, monitoring and planning of local forest management. Yet, in assessing the enormity of this project, participation of the 50 million people that this research sought to represent was very limited.

Primarily, qualitative participatory action research approaches, and anthropological tools were used which facilitated collection and analysis of information by and for stakeholders within CFM and JFM projects. Participatory action research approaches allowed for greater dialogue between the forest department staff, and facilitated learning and sharing of information among the different levels of the forest department, bending the rigidity of bureaucratic boundaries. The review attempted to generate a systemic picture of community resource use by prompting the community to speak for itself. This was critical in understanding

community needs and forging alliances between the forest department and community. Methods, such as manual geographical information systems, were used to help create forums for communities to pursue discussions among themselves concerning their own goals and objectives for the protection and management of their forests.

Certain thematic considerations that underpinned all activities within these research processes were: 1. The critical need to involve field level forest department staff in the studies and activities. 2. To ensure the participation of all the various stake-holders within CFM/JFM programs. 3. To address equity issues related to gender, class and social identities (such as caste/tribal identity) by enabling the participation of marginalised sections in the process and reflecting their concerns in the project document. 4. To create research collaborations that deemphasize hierarchies and help to identify resource needs and sustainable use systems; and to encourage partnerships within the forest department, between the forest department-community, and among community groups. 5. To make accessible the process and products generated by the specific activities to local communities and department field staff through translations of reports and other documents. 6. To instate in-built process mechanisms for sharing research findings and receiving feedback from CFM/JFM communities, non-governmental organizations and local forest departments.

Assessments

Perhaps what is not working is that our voices are not unified, not strong enough so they can be heard by the State. Perhaps what is working is that our voices contradict each other, our differences emerge and highlight a road to more a democratic social process (Samarendu Satpaty. PIPAR. Chatterji, 2000b:p. 255).

Postcolonial social movements resides within a complex diagnostics of power/knowledge relations, fostering a relentless, genealogical critique of society. The SIDA review produced openings for limited participation of citizens in decision making within consultative governmental forums on public forest lands management. In 1998, India conducted nuclear experiments; and, in 1999-2000 SIDA retracted its support, citing its differences over India's nuclear politics as a primary reason for its withdrawal. Revoking aid severely impacted the most marginalised sections of Orissa, who, ironically are not involved in decision making on nuclear policy. The lack of donor commitment to the Orissa initiatives is symptomatic of development practices where donors (or governments) responsible for disbursing substantial financial contributions fail to ensure continued support for social change (Taken from Chatterji, 2001).

In working within such politicized human rights' struggles, assessments of failure and success are complicated. While the SIDA review failed to induce radical policy changes, it powered certain meaningful processes. An informal citizens forum of non-governmental organizations, institutions and individuals was functional in the state capital in Bhubaneswar. This body had been responsible for voicing the concerns of its constituents. It had grown over a period of time and was the most extensive state-wide forum to represent stakeholder concerns related to CFM and JFM. The leadership was provided mostly by larger non-governmental organizations existent at the state level. In 1998, in order to resist governmental oversight on human rights and to contribute formally to policy processes, this state level group sought to formalize into an elected Citizens/Non-Governmental Organization Advisory Group on forest management in Orissa.

Cognizant of the proficiency of the Advisory Group, the SIDA review recommended that the group be responsible for electing non-governmental organizational representation to the Orissa JFM Steering Committee, and other state forums. It was endorsed that consistent entry points be established for implementing feedback from this forum to planning and policy bodies within the state. The Orissa Forest Department formally invited the Advisory Group to participate in the JFM Steering Committee in August 1999. This group has been critical to the development of political will and infrastructure that enables complex negotiations in JFM and CFM policy. It has effectively represented multiple positions of alliance and opposition to the state. The Advisory Group articulates its specific political and social mandate to represent community interests and strongly advocates public land reform. There is concern that this, or any such body that elects to represent the JFM and CFM community at the state level must be equipped with certain functions that make it a representative and ethical entity with adequate checks and balances. Some organizations have recommended that the Advisory Group periodically undertake a social audit and hold regular meetings to negotiate the divergent positions among them (Chatterji, 1998).

The SIDA assisted process identified the need for closer collaboration between the various stakeholders at the local divisional level. Intensive discussions were held with local forest officers, community groups, and other organizations regarding the creation of a platform that would allow for such collaboration. There was much support for forming divisional level working groups. These working groups, convened by the forest department, were to promote greater dialogue concerning varied goals and objectives. The forest department in 1998 initiated three divisional working groups (Chatterji, 1998). While this was an important endowment, its utility is undetermined. State-wide political shifts

increasingly endorse greater democratization through communitarian governance in the form of panchayat rule (Saxena, 2000b).(7) The political will in this process is committed to enabling community control at the micro level that foregrounds local self-governance. Such shifts will revolutionize the allocation of power over land. To support these shifts, forums like the divisional working groups need to be dissolved. Community participation in forest department controlled forums must be replaced by the department's participation in community convened platforms.

Such departure would necessitate that forest management objectives must be made compatible with the 1988 Forest Policy and 1996 legislation for extending the Panchayati Raj system to adivasi areas. The role and function of the forest department needs to be reassessed and its revenue generation practices relocated. Currently, the state determines and defines the structure of institutional arrangements between itself and community groups as they operate on public forest lands, and it does so through mechanisms of decision making that are neither participatory nor equitable.

Questions of Social Movements

No matter how terrifying a given system may be, there always remain the possibilities of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings (Foucault, 1993:p.162).

Postcolonial justice is fictive in so many ways. Land reforms have not endowed the landless in Orissa. The present balks at its own reflection as countless women, adivasis and children live lives of severe economic deprivation. The lives of the most disenfranchised have incrementally improved in the last century, as an afterthought of development. Postcoloniality struggles with the death of memory where its promises to the poor are least honored. Their actions for survival and agency for self-determination are policed to benefit the advantaged. In such a context, when I broach the subject of human rights to those suffering from its most severe violation, I am faced with silence. Their survival struggles render abstract the discourse of human rights. Human rights has failed to language itself in ways that resonate with the concerns of the marginalised.

A conversation I had with Kali Babu, a community elder in Arabari, West Bengal, leads me to reflect on the role of resistance. Non-violent civil disobedience has been an integral practice in public lands reform. The practice of resistance seeks a radical shift from inherited conditions where the structural predicament of inequity endures. A key element of resistance has been the emphasis that alleviation of poverty must be distinct from the dissolution of culture. External structural interventions

that attempt to mitigate poverty encourage a decomposition of local cultures. The rationality of progress and the infrastructure of monopoly capitalism require the quantification of culture into its productive and profit capability. Such quantification undermines local efforts. Diversity and sustainability are detrimental to such homogenization. Community leaders and non-governmental organizations in Orissa are aware that misrepresentations of their cultures and lifestyles are assembled to augment irresponsible development. Dominant development is neither sustainable nor organic. It rewrites the premise of development from local enfranchisement to cultural, economic and ecological mutations that sustain inequity.

Local action agendas are attentive to such disregard. These agendas focus on addressing poverty and sustainability. Identifying what is working and what is not allows for a prioritization of necessary interventions. It also detects aspects of local social conditions that must change to support self-determination. Internalized colonization, caste and gender relations are yet to be explicitly engaged. Such engagement is critical to renovating the infrastructure toward equitable self-governance.

It has been a privilege for me to be a part of this process. I have learned accountability in labor. I have witnessed anger and resistance as magnificent and humble, fraught with tension and contradiction. The ethics that define these ongoing associations have produced work and relationships that nurture places of profound meaning. Such collaboration finds courage to acknowledge the impossibility and absolute necessity of this labor. It lives in a complex relationship to irredeemable differences, and its own power. Democratization of social movements demands a subordination of the privileged to processes of social change. In the broader context of utility, one must ask how social movements might foreground pertinent engagement that sustains and advocates the labor of justice?

Glossary

CFM:

JFM: Joint Forest Management

PIPAR: Peoples Institute for Participatory Action Research

PFM: Participatory Forest Management

SIDA: Swedish International Development Agency

Endnotes

(1) Sushil Saigal. Personal Communication. 1999 and 2001. Also see Government of India. 2000. Guidelines for Strengthening of Joint Forest Management Program. Ministry of Environment and Forests. No 22-8/2000-JFM (FPD). February 21, 2000. New Delhi: Government of India.

(2) Postcolonialism — The diverse field of thinking, resistance, and action, within the North and the South, defined through a critical relationship to colonized history. It does not refer to the 'end' of colonization. It delineates the relations of power defined within the context of the North and the South, South and the South, and the East and the West, since colonialism began. Postcolonialism is a contested space that operates within specific histories and contexts (See Payne, 1997; Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1994).

(3) For Orissa research, see publications authored by Agradwamee, Peoples Institute for Participatory Action Research, Singh, Regional Council for Development Cooperation, Sarin, Saxena, Sundar, Chatterji, Kumar, Poffenberger.

(4) Orissa Administrative Boundaries — Orissa has thirteen districts and twenty-eight forest divisions. The districts are administrative boundaries and the district administration oversees legal, jurisdictional, land and rural development matters. The forest divisions are forest boundaries; the forest departments, at the divisional levels, oversee forest jurisdiction and administrative, legal, and financial matters related to the specific forest division. The forest division usually falls within the administrative boundaries of the district it is located in.

(5) In independent India, the panchayat system of government, or Panchayati Raj (rule), refers to the three tier structure of local governing bodies from village to district level; gram (village), samati (block — a collective administrative unit constituted of a group of villages), and zilla (district — an administrative unit constituting of a group of blocks). The passage of the 72 and 73 Constitutional Amendments in 1992 enabled Panchayati rule, enforcing a national mandate for greater democratization and decentralization (See World Bank, 2000).

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FORESTRY

**The Parvati and the Tragopan:
Conservation and Development in the Great Himalayan National Park**
HIMACHAL PRADESH

Vasant K. Saberwal

“...there is a bird, tutru, which toils in the forest to build a nest for its young. But when the time comes, another bird, juraun, forces tutru out and takes over the nest that tutru has built with such effort and skill. The sarkar is doing the same to us. We have raised these forests. We have nurtured the birds and animals. Now the sarkar comes and throws us out of our forests.”

Jai Ram, local medicine-man, village Majgraon, Raila

“... is it not our duty, as a civilization, that we leave some area, just a small part, for nature, for future generations, for our own sanity?”

Vinay Tandon, Chief Conservator of Forests, Himachal Pradesh

Introduction

The conflict between conservation and livelihoods and between larger and local interests has become an integral part of conservation experiences in most parts of the world. In one of its most recent enactments, Indian conservationists have pitted the globally endangered Western Tragopan, a brilliantly colored pheasant endemic to the Western Himalaya, against the grazing and plant collection activities of local populations in the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), in the state of Himachal Pradesh. The preservation of the Western Tragopan, by exclusion of human pressure on its habitat, runs counter to local livelihoods that are almost entirely dependent on using the same resources.

The story of the Western Tragopan is complicated by another factor. The water of one of the valleys of the Park is proposed to be harnessed for generating hydel power for the state. This parallel act of larger interest requires the construction of diversion weirs and underground tunnels in precisely the area that is preferred by the Western Tragopan. Through a peculiar sequence of events in 1999, a part of the Park was carved out to make way for the Parvati Hydro-electric Project. The larger interest of 'development' appears in this case to have edged out the larger interest of 'conservation'. This is the story of the Parvati and the Tragopan -- emblematic representations of development and conservation -- as it has played out in the GHNP over the last two decades. In this brief essay we will explore the contours and drivers of these emerging

conflicts over resources within the GHNP. We will first provide a very brief account of developments in the GHNP, and then examine key elements of this story within a larger discussion on the politics of conservation and development.

The Importance of Being GHNP

The Great Himalayan National Park lies in a relatively isolated part of the Kullu Valley, in Himachal Pradesh. It was established in 1984, following a survey conducted by an international team of scientists who judged that based on the relatively low human pressures in the area and the exceptional condition of the forests, this would probably be an ideal location for a national park being planned for the state. It is noted for having one of only two protected populations of the Western Tragopan (thought to number 1600 animals in the wild), amongst four other pheasant species, sizeable, contiguous populations of Himalayan Tahr and Blue Sheep, and an endangered population of musk deer.

At the same time, the GHNP is used by local communities for a variety of resources. Approximately 11,000 people live in a five-km wide belt, on the western side of the GHNP border. All families cultivate land, for the most part small parcels of land that provide subsistence for some portion of the year. The bulk of the population depends on a variety of additional resources to meet their annual income requirements, including the commercial grazing of sheep and goats, the extraction of medicinal herbs to be sold to a burgeoning pharmaceutical and cosmetics industry, and the collection of morel mushrooms, considered a delicacy in many parts of western Europe.

There is a temporal and spatial seasonality to this use of resources within the GHNP. The sheep and goats owned by individual families are entrusted to the care of 2-3 professional herders from each village in April. These herders will care for these animals for the next six months, gradually moving them up to the alpine meadows at high altitude, where they spend 3 months, before retracing their steps and bringing the animals down to lower altitudes, where the owners care for the animals during the winter. The animals from each village are grazed in specific, clearly defined grazing runs, based on customary rights that have been worked out over the course of many decades. The wool of the animals tends to be used to meet the family requirements, while the occasional animal is sold as meat on the hoof, eventually ending up in the meat shops up and down the Kullu Valley.

Equally seasonal is the collection of morel mushrooms, which grow at the lower reaches of the GHNP forests and in the forests outside the park. The mushrooms are collected during April or early May, depending on the amount of snow that falls in the winter as well as the timing of the snowmelt. Because of the ease of accessibility of the mushrooms, all members of a family may go on collection trips. The mushroom is dried in the village, and eventually sold

to local traders in the small towns of the region or to traders in the bigger towns in the Kullu Valley - Aut, Bhuntar and Kullu. In the past, guchhi, as it is commonly known, has sold for as much as Rs. 4,000 (\$85.00) a kg, a lot of money considering the meager income generating activities in the region.

The collection of medicinal herbs is also highly lucrative. For the most part, these herbs are extracted from the high altitudes, in the alpine meadows above 12,000 feet and higher. It is hard work, and tends to be undertaken by the young men of the village, who might end up spending a week or more collecting herbs before descending to their villages. The collection appears to take place at various points during the summer, but it is generally accepted that collecting plants after August the 15th is probably best, seeing as the plants have set seed by this time, thereby diminishing the possibility of over-harvesting these plants. The combination of guchhi and medicinal herb sales contributes an average income over Rs. 10,000 per family in villages around the park (Tandon 1997). It is likely that the reduced access to park resources is particularly important for the poorest sections of the populace, a point that is emphasized by Baviskar (in press), although there is little data to suggest caste, class or gender differentiated use of park resources.

Biologists and officials of the Forest Department have for long considered these activities to pose a serious threat to the biological diversity of the region. The presence of herders with their sheep is considered responsible for overgrazing the meadows, and at its worst is assumed to be responsible for large scale soil erosion. Their movement through the forests, while on the spring migration up to the alpine meadows, is considered to be responsible for disturbing the Western Tragopan when it is nesting. Guchhi collection also takes place at a time that the Tragopan is nesting, and the "hordes" of people who comb the forest floor looking for guchhi are responsible, once more, for disturbing the nesting birds. The dogs that accompany guchhi collectors are thought to chase the Western Tragopans, and the dogs with the herders are seen as hunting wild animals such as musk deer. Both herders and medicinal herb collectors are seen as laying huge numbers of snares in the hope of catching musk deers, largely owing to the presence of the musk pod, at one point considered to be worth more than its weight in gold. And the medicinal herb extraction is seen as having escalated over the past few years, to a point where some of the species are, ostensibly, on the decline, far less visible, and smaller in size than just a few years ago (DeCoursey 1997; Sharma 1997; Vinod and Satyakumar 1999; Singh and Rawat 1999; Ramesh, Sathyakumar and Rawat 2000).

The scientific evidence in support of these arguments is tenuous at best. Over the past five years, a series of "long-term" studies have been conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India (the work referred to in the previous paragraph). Their conclusions, outlined above, are however, generally unwarranted, failing to establish a decline in the first place, but also owing to poorly designed frameworks, lacking any real capability for examining the relationship between

human activities and biological resources in the park. At its worst, the report mis-interprets its own data in arguing that human activities have a negative impact on wildlife resources within the park.

To illustrate this last, most damning claim, we present the following data from Vinod and Sathyakumar (1999), a study that was primarily documenting ungulate distribution and density patterns for the park, but also undertook an exploration of differences in density and use as a function of human disturbance. In order to do this, they picked four transect lines, two each in “disturbed” and “undisturbed” parts of the park. Along these transects they recorded animal sightings as well as pellet (dropping) groups, the latter an indirect indication of use of the area by animals.

A key argument presented by the authors is that goral and other ungulates are present in fewer numbers in the more disturbed areas. Yet the data does not support such a position. While the Kharoncha-Rolla (KHRO) transect had far lower sightings of goral, than the other three transects - Rolla-Shilt (ROSH), Chalocha-Nada (CLNA) and Rolla-Basu (ROBA) - there is little to choose from amongst these latter three in terms of either numbers of animals sighted or pellet groups counted. And, yet as far as the study design is concerned, both the KHRO and the ROSH transects are listed as disturbed, the other two as not disturbed. Given that one of the “disturbed” transects had numbers identical to the “undisturbed” the suggested relationship between disturbance and goral densities is unwarranted.

On the other hand, one of the most carefully conducted studies of the WII (Mathur and Mehra 1999, see also Mehra and Mathur, this issue), suggests that at the level of the landscape, there is in fact little evidence to suggest a negative impact by grazing on the park’s vegetation.

While some villagers do agree with biologists that certain species of medicinal herbs may in fact be on the decline, such a position is hotly contested. Certainly on the question of grazing impacts on forests and meadows, there is little sympathy with the position taken by the forest department. With regard to the medicinal herbs, the argument is that some of the most intensively used herbs are root-propagating, and it is almost impossible to actually eliminate the root stock. Other species are seed propagating, and where herb collection takes place after August 15, following seed set, over-harvesting of these species is biologically impossible. There are mixed responses to the allegations that guchhi collection is responsible for disturbing the Western Tragopan at a crucial juncture of its breeding biology or to the fact that shepherds and herb collectors lay snares to catch musk deer.

The point for most villagers is that the value that is today placed on the national park cannot be disassociated from the history of use of the area. Many claim that the villagers need to be credited with having taken good care of the park, which is why it is in the good condition it is in today. They would

argue that it is not despite their presence in the park, it is because of their seasonal presence that the animal, bird and plant populations have flourished. To support such a claim, they argue that certain medicinal plants need to be harvested on a regular basis to prevent them from rotting. As is pointed out above, it is now accepted within parts of the scientific community that moderate levels of grazing are necessary to sustain high levels of diversity within grasslands the world over. And villagers argue that because of their presence in the park, they provide the ears and eyes that guard against the intrusion of outsiders interested in hunting. It is because of their alertness that forest fires have been put out in the past. They argue that were their access to the park to be curtailed, there would be a deterioration in the condition of resources in the park.

In 1999, fifteen years after the park was first formally demarcated, the Himachal government issued the final notification for the park. The trigger for this sudden move appears, at least on the surface, to be the directive passed by the Supreme Court in 1996, requiring all state governments to complete, within the year, all legal requirements to bring protected areas in compliance with the requirements of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act. The act prohibits all human activities within a National Park, and only those activities within a wildlife sanctuary which, in the opinion of the Chief Wildlife Warden, are in the interests of the region's wildlife. Recognizing that many protected areas in India are used by people, who have demonstrable statutory and customary rights to biological resources, the Act requires the state government to "settle" or "acquire" these rights prior to finally notifying the park. This happens either through the payment of monetary compensation, or through the provision of alternative areas within which such rights can be exercised.

The settlement of rights in the GHNP took place on the basis of the Anderson settlement, written in the late nineteenth century (Anderson 1894). Based on names of families listed in that settlement, a total of 314 families were granted monetary compensation. Claims of long-standing customary usage of grazing meadows by the remainder of the population were dealt with by claiming that alternative areas were being provided to people to graze their goat and sheep. Since the collection of Gucchi was not listed in Anderson's settlement (presumably owing to the fact that demand from European palates had yet to materialize), no compensation was provided for this loss of revenue. Nor were the vast majority compensated or provided alternative extraction areas for their loss of access to herb producing alpine meadows in the park.

There is considerable resentment within the affected population. While there is wide variation in the predicted income generated from families in the area, it is clear that some portion of the community is heavily dependent upon medicinal herbs, gucchi and sheep and goat grazing to meet their annual income requirements. Going by a study by Vinay Tandon, Chief Conservator of Forests, on average in 1997 a family made close to 10,000 rupees annually from gucchi and

medicinal herb collection (Tandon 1997), with sheep and goat rearing bringing in some more in terms of both money and wool. 80 % of the population, according to Tandon, spent time looking for herbs and guchhi. A study with Virender Sharma suggests a lower proportion of families (20%) looking for these plants, but similarly high level of returns (Sharma 1997). And in talks with villagers, most indicated that given the lack of any kind of industry in the region, with neither apples nor tourism having the sort of presence they have in the main Kullu Valley, a denial of access to park resources could represent a serious blow to the bulk of the population.

That quite considerable amounts of guchhi and medicinal herbs are being extracted from the region is borne out in discussions with traders who handle these products. They point out that certain items such as mehendi and dhoop are removed from the area by the truckloads. Others leave in the hundreds of kilos. While such numbers are in themselves worrying owing to the magnitude of the trade that is above ground (there is reportedly a large and growing underground trade as well), it is also indicative of the large amount of money that is made from these resources. The attempt to deny people the opportunity to make this money has not gone down well with villagers, and they have used various means to circumvent the law.

Much before the final settlement took place, there had been an earlier, more circuitous attempt to reduce human pressures on the park. Faced by mounting criticism of an exclusionary policy that forced people from their homes, conservation organizations the world over had come up with a number of variants on the same theme - local communities needed to be provided a stake in the conservation process if it were to have any chance of success. In India this took the form of eco-development. The logic of eco-development was that through a variety of development initiatives, local communities would be provided alternative means of livelihood, thereby reducing their dependence on resources within protected areas. This was to be tried out in seven national parks in the country, with support from the Global Environment Fund (GEF). But before that, the World Bank provided funds for two pilot studies - one in GHNP the other in the Kalakaad Mundantarai Tiger Reserve (KMTR).

Eco-development came to GHNP in 1994. Over the course of the next five years, approximately 7 Crore rupees (a Crore = 10 million) was spent as part of eco-development, research and management in GHNP - all part of a loan from the World Bank. Since eco-development was to take place for the people, and required their cooperation, eco-development committees were formed in a number of panchayats. Expenditures on development were to be coordinated through these committees.

Confronted with the need to form eco-development committees, most forest guards simply went along with membership they were presented with. Invariably, it was the more powerful people in the village who became members

of this committee. In numerous cases, there was overlap in the membership to the eco-development committees and that of the Devta (or deity) committees. Eventually, upper caste men comprised the bulk of those present on these committees (Baviskar in press).

Most villagers are unhappy with the way funds have been spent in the villages. Temples have been repaired in many villages, testimony to the presence of devta committee members on the eco-development committee. Funds were also spent on the building of bridal paths, some water holding tanks, and rain-shelters. Close to 70% of the total eco-development funds were eventually spent on civil works of this kind. Needless to say, such construction has had little impact on the income generating capabilities within any village, and pressures on park resources have in no way diminished, the key objective of the eco-development project in the first place.

There are reports of rampant corruption in the civil works that were commissioned by the Forest Department - undertaken both for eco-development and for improved park management. In the case of the latter one comes across watch towers, rest houses, and guard huts - some built just over a year ago. The quality of the construction material used has been so bad that many of these structures, including a large rest house in Kharoncha, have cracks that are six inches across. They haven't been used to date, and nothing indicates they will be used in the future.

But corruption is not new to the bureaucracy, and this could surely have been anticipated. Perhaps of greater interest is the attempt to bring "development" to the doorsteps of the park, with the explicit intent to reduce human pressures on the park. As Baviskar (in press) points out, the Forest Department is not trained to do development work, and it should come as no surprise that little came of its efforts.

But there are at least two additional dimensions to the GHNP story. The first is the building of a hydel-power project in a portion of what was formerly part of the park. To enable the Parvati Hydel Power Project to come up in the Jeeva Nallah, a project that had been pending with the government for a number of years, the requisite portion of the Jeeva Nallah was deleted from the original demarcation of the park boundaries. The final settlement that was conducted in 1999 appears to have been timed to enable this deletion - justified by the Chief Wildlife Warden on the grounds that the area was ecologically insignificant. An argument was also made that this deletion of the park would ensure that the residents of the villages of Kundher and Majhan would not be forced to move (since human habitation within the park was prohibited following the final notification). And yet, surveys by wildlife biologists had indicated that the area between Gatipath and Kundher village, part of the area that was denotified, had some of the finest bamboo forest and was ideal habitat for the Western Tragopan. And in any case, all but one family from these two

villages had long since moved lower down the Jeeva Nallah, in response to persistent attempts by the Forest Department to move them out of the park, over two decades ago. All that remains of these two villages are abandoned houses, many with trees growing out of them.

An area of 10 square km was deleted from the original demarcation of the GHNP - not a huge area in itself. And because this is a run of the river project, there will not, in fact, be a great deal of destruction or displacement resulting from the damming of the Jeeva Nallah. The area was deleted, primarily to allow the building of a wide road which will go to the site where a relatively small dam will be built, high up on the Jeeva Nallah. But for the building of this road, and eventually the building of the dam itself, a labor force of 5-6,000 people, three times that of the current population, will (and has) settled in Sainj Town. As was demonstrated with the Pandoh dam lower down the Kullu Valley, the influx of so many people is likely to lead to rapid deforestation of adjoining slopes, entirely a function of meeting the fuel needs of this huge labor force.

As a result of the building of the road and the dam, the forests around the town of Sainj will almost certainly be destroyed. The building of the road on numerous steep sections of the Jeeva Nallah will almost certainly destabilize the mountainside. And, from the biological diversity perspective, the Western Tragopan and Chir populations that used the area between Gaatipaath and Kunder will need to move elsewhere. What comes through most vividly in the settlement order passed by the Kullu district commissioner is the double standard of a developmentalist state. While local livelihoods can be sacrificed for the sake of biological diversity, biological diversity must make way for national development.

A final component of the story remains untold. When in June of 1999, the District Commissioner announced the ban on villager entry into the national park, there was incredulity and some feeble protests. Then the opposition Congress party got into the act, and began to have rallies in the villages around the park, commenting on the anti-people attitudes of the party in power, the BJP. With national elections two months away, the Congress used the situation to extract maximum electoral mileage. Forced on the defensive, the Member of Parliament from the Kullu constituency, Thakur Maheshwar Singh called up the District Commissioner and instructed him to allow people back into the park. This was done through an entirely illegal order issued by the DC, in the name of the park director, and circulated within all affected villages. Maheshwar Singh had saved his political life, and people were back in the park as usual.

The following year, panchayat elections were to be held in December. With the park director taking a tough stance, and asserting he would not allow people into the park (herbs collected by a group of villagers were confiscated, along

with pots and pans they had used while in the park), Maheshwar Singh had no choice but to intervene once more. This time he sent his brother on a tour of the villages, the park director in tow. Sanjeeva Pandey was forced to tell people they would be allowed to enter the park, but that he hoped they would not go in until the middle of August - the date by which seed set normally takes place.

Politics, Conservation and Development

The basic centrality of politics to the outcomes of conservation initiatives comes through repeatedly in studies of conflicts over natural resources (Guha 1989, Peluso, 1993, Neumann 1992). Many of these studies however, document a harsh state, bent on the exploitation of nature and labor. And yet, the notion of the omnipotent state, capable of exerting its will over disparate, fragmented communities, has come under serious attack (Yang 1992, Saberwal 1999, Sivaramakrishnan 2000, see also Chhatre this volume). An emerging literature is increasingly keen on providing more nuanced descriptions of community and the means by which access to resources is negotiated or contested within and beyond the community (Agrawal 1999, Jeffery and Sundar 1999, Sivaramakrishnan 2000).

The problem we pose in this preliminary and highly speculative argument is that in this move towards the local, toward obtaining a better understanding of how power plays out within communities, there has been an unfortunate reduction in focus on the larger politics of state formation, in particular the question of electoral politics that keeps a post-colonial government in power, and development politics, that today keeps the state financially solvent. Development has

often been left out of the conservation picture in the expectation that exploitative development and exclusionary conservation are related phenomenon, with similar roots, but that these are ultimately separate issues. Joint Forest Management, thus, gets discussed within the context of questions of livelihoods and more equitable access to forests, rather than within the larger context of development policy and how that relates to conservation. Thus, for example, we focus on issues of gender within Orissa's JFM experience, but rarely locate JFM within a larger discussion on Orissa's development orientation.

We now take an analytical look at the GHNP material that we have outlined above. We have located this analysis within the potentially contradictory impulses of conservation and development, set within the framework of a politically powerful electorate.

Two seemingly unrelated events lie at the heart of the GHNP story. Both are associated with the final settlement of the national park. Yet the two events have led to dramatically different outcomes. The first event involved the Himachal Pradesh government issuing the final notification for the GHNP, via a

settlement that would deny people access to park resources. Importantly, this notification came fifteen years after the intent to notify the park was first announced. As with almost every other protected area in the country, the GHNP was a National Park only on paper, meeting none of the legal requirements that all human consumptive use of resources within the park be eliminated before the park could be notified. With over 500 protected areas in the country at the time, only a handful had been finally notified, testimony to the fact that state governments were willing to go along with a conservationist agenda, but only up to a point. No state government was willing to incur the political costs of eliminating human access to these areas. That the Himachal government should chose to finally extinguish all rights within the national park flies in the face of all electoral logic.

But the second event provides a clue as to the nature of the calculus of the government in finally notifying the national park. In 1999, at the time of this settlement, a portion of the Jeeva Nallah was deleted from the original boundaries of the park, ostensibly on grounds of allowing the villagers of Kundar and Majhan villages to remain within the park, rather than be forced to move out following the settlement. It was a specious logic given that in other instances, in which villagers refused to move out of the park, such as Shakti and Maror, the relevant area had been carved out of the National Park and downgraded to the status of a Wildlife Sanctuary. The decision to entirely delete the area from the national park, instead of merely reducing the level of protection, appears to have been necessitated by the need to accommodate the building activity associated with the second phase of the Parvati Project.

Despite the seemingly contradictory nature of these two events - the protection of wildlife on the one hand, the enabling of environmentally destructive development on the other -- they are closely connected. We argue here that environmental politics are crucially entwined with a certain kind of development discourse. It is a discourse that enables a state/central government to appeal to a larger Himachali identity - in this case, centered around the creation of a new Himachal, the power-house of the country. Hydel projects have been conceptualized and implemented for many decades, but the current government has given a huge impetus to establishing Himachal Pradesh as a major source of hydel-power in the coming decades. Over 300 projects are proposed in the state, and are up for grabs for the private sector - a dam on every stream. Big development may get part of its legitimacy through the process of identity creation - i.e. through a process by which Himachali's themselves associated their state with hydel power. But such projects are also of importance because of the possibilities of diverting funds towards building financial and political empires. The haste with which the settlement process was carried out, including the machinations around the deletion of a part of the Jeeva Nallah, appears directly linked to this developmentalist rather than conservationist agenda of the state government.

This brings us to a second sphere of conservation politics. As a result of the final notification of the park, people were no longer allowed to access park resources. And yet, now for two years running, people have used the park pretty much as they please. They've grazed their animals in the park, they've continued to harvest medicinal herbs and they've continued to take their deities into the park. They can do this because the praxis of conservation is a long way from the rhetoric. Local politicians call up the DC or the park director and direct them to permit villagers access to park resources (Baviskar in press). This, the MLA and MP constituency, constitutes the crucial arena within which the politics of conservation are played out. It is at this level that the actual implementation of conservation policy takes place, and where the flexible arm of the law comes into its own. And it is the knowledge of this flexibility that provides the necessary re-assurance to the government that a final notification need not in fact force the government to incur significant electoral losses.

It is the interaction of these two spheres of politics that ultimately shapes both the direction of development, as well as the practice of conservation in the Kullu Valley. As can be seen in the GHNP case, the state may espouse a conservation ideology, while pursuing a developmentalist agenda that has potential for great environmental damage. Significantly, the articulation of a conservationist agenda provides legitimacy with international funding agencies as well as with an urban middle class with an interest in conserving wildlife. Interventions at the level of the political constituency ultimately work to minimize any electoral costs the government may have to bear through an enforcement of unpopular policies. And it is only because the director of the GHNP, Sanjeeva Pandey, has caused a fuss, insisting that he will enforce all restrictions that much notice has been taken of the settlement at all. Eventually, when push has come to shove, Pandey himself has had to back down, or risk being replaced with someone more pliable.

With the growing availability of big funding for conservation projects, there is a newfound reason for state governments to adopt a language that is more in line with international expectations. Thus, eco-development has emerged in recent years as a panacea for dealing with continuing conflicts between people and protected areas - the rationale being that through the development of alternative sources of income, local dependencies on park resources will be drastically lowered. Human development is seen as going hand in hand with the effective conservation of biological diversity.

But development is a complex process, and the GHNP experience with eco-development serves to reinforce that idea. As with any government project involving large-scale expenditure of money, corruption during the first five years of the process was rampant. More importantly, however, the department appeared to have little conception of just how to go about bringing development to the people. While a certain expenditure of money took place in the construction of civil works, and items such as handlooms, television sets and

pressure cookers handed out to the villagers, none of this was linked in any way to an impending curtailment of villager access to park resources. Ultimately, close to 70 % of the money budgeted for eco-development was spent on civil works of a general nature, with few inputs into activities or initiatives that would enhance a villager's capacity to reduce his or her dependence upon herb collections as a form of livelihood. People took what came their way via eco-development, but without relinquishing in thought or in deed, any right to grazing, fuelwood or herb collection in the park (Baviskar in press).

Politics once more is omnipresent. Even as the government attempted to gain the trust of the community, through the use of Entry Point Activities, they chose to deal with the most powerful people in the community - members of the *devta* committee. By definition, these committees are comprised of high caste men, and hence are clearly not representative of the varied interests within a village (Baviskar in press). For the most part, these committees seemed to function as rubber-stamps, enabling the departmental activities that took place during the eco-development exercise. Temple repairs were commonly sanctioned by the forest department, clearly in response to the demands of the *devta* committees. But the department did all that was demanded of it by the World Bank - working with a local NGO - SAVE, appearing to work with village level institutions - *Devta* committees and Village Eco-Development Committees -- and spending money according to microplans that had been developed on the basis of villager participation.

For a government to function it needs legitimacy for its actions from a wide range of constituencies. Large scale development projects provide a legitimacy that is linked both to the creation of jobs and by appealing to a larger Himachali identity, centered around defining the state in terms of the future power-house of the country. Projects such as eco-development, when de-linked from curtailed access to the Park, potentially provide legitimacy with a village elite, while enabling the smooth flow of funds from the World Bank to the state coffers. And the elasticity of the law, which enables people to enter the Park despite existing restrictions, works to minimize any potentially negative electoral fall-out of the final settlement of rights within the area.

There is a final political sphere that bears examining. The scientific discourse on human impacts on the environment is part of an over-arching context within which conservation debates take place. It is political in so far as an identifiable constituency has attempted to push through the idea that all human activities are inimical to the conservation of biodiversity. Such a relationship is clearly not axiomatic. And yet, even in the face of evidence pointing to the contrary, there is little attempt on part of the mainstream conservation lobby to engage with alternative models regarding the impacts of humans on the landscape. This conservation lobby uses its scientific expertise to press for the closure of areas to human presence. The eco-development project that has a stated interest in reducing human dependence on the Park,

is clearly influenced by the dominant conservation rhetoric generated both within India and within the international conservation community. The rhetoric, and the scientific community, serves as an additional pressure point, one that may be used to push for a permanent closure of the park to all human activities.

This pressure comes into its own most forcefully when there is a committed forest officer in charge of a national park such as the GHNP. Sanjeeva Pandey is a conservationist in body, spirit and in mind. It is likely that outside of the village communities in the area, Pandey is the best-informed person about the park. He knows his terrain. And he has a dream that one day, human pressures will be absent from his park. He works hard to fulfill this dream, instructing his subordinates to prevent anyone from entering the Park, confiscating equipment and goods, touring villages in the hope of convincing people that they should stay out of the Park, and attempting to provide them with alternative forms of employment that will reduce their ultimate dependence on Park resources. And Sanjeeva Pandey uses the science at his disposal - that of the WII - to buttress his arguments against the continued use of the Park.

When local residents use their electoral clout with MP Maheshwar Singh to force Sanjeeva Pandey to back down, this is merely another intersection of two spheres of politics - local politics on the one hand, science as politics on the other.

Given thus, the centrality of politics to Indian conservation, there are many amongst those concerned about Indian biodiversity who call for a more insistent engagement with the political process, an engagement that needs to occur at each of these intersecting levels - local, state and national. Debates amongst many urban conservationists active in various parts of the country take place on a regular basis. A fora that has managed to sustain dialogue between groups belonging to different conservation camps is the annual consultations that have been organized by the conservation NGO Kalpavriksh over the past five years. It is a fora attended by bureaucrats, social activists and exclusionary conservationists, in an atmosphere that is for the most part conducive to a real exchange of ideas. Such exchanges are useful in prodding the centre towards adopting legislation and policies that are more inclusive.

There is simultaneously the call for greater dialogue with people directly affected by conservation policies - and an argument that has been put forward by many for the need to build bridges with local communities. Such bridges are seen as being necessary both to secure the support of these people for conservation initiatives, as well as to provide the electoral and political bulwark against destructive activities such as mining and the building of dams. While greater local involvement may indeed have relevance in the context of a given conservation initiative - such as, for example, better management of the GHNP

situation, it is unlikely to be of great relevance in the context of the larger development agenda that is being set by the state, if only because of an imbalance with regard to electoral pressure in a single political constituency on the one hand and the over-arching developmentalist agenda of the state on the other.

For political pressure to work in the interests of the environment, particularly when confronting big development, there is a need for mobilization over a much larger scale - in this case, across the state (in the geographic sense of the term). Within Himachal Pradesh there are the beginnings of such mobilization. A Palampur based NGO, Navrachna, is working towards the establishment of a state-wide network of individuals and organizations involved with a variety of issues related to conservation and development. The initiative is entirely political in its orientation, with an explicit interest in exploring the links between environment and development, rather than dealing individually with either or both issues. The work of Ekta-Parishad in Madhya Pradesh and recently in Bihar is similarly broad-based in its approach, focusing on land reform, access to forest resources and a greater say in setting development priorities, rather than merely focusing on more restricted issues associated with conservation.

And so finally, we return to the issue of what happens with GHNP. It should perhaps be recognized that within the Himachal Forest Department, there is an extremely small lobby of officers with an interest in wildlife conservation. That two of these officers are men of great integrity and are pursuing the closure of GHNP in the context of a commitment to conserving biodiversity can hardly be questioned. But the relative isolation of GHNP, politically speaking can also not be glossed over. Within Himachal Pradesh, practically the only other people with an interest in the Park are the people who are currently being denied access to its resources. If they cannot be directly and politically involved in the management of the park, there is little chance that the department will ultimately succeed in keeping people out. And in the absence of recognizable authority of either the forest department or of local institutions, GHNP will remain an area of open access, vulnerable to intrusion by developmental activities such as dam building as also to grazing and medicinal herb collection, quite in contrast to the park director's oft repeated argument that the park has now moved from open to closed access.

In counterpoint, there is a positive argument from a conservation perspective that can be made for allowing residents of adjoining villages into the park. The continuation of grazing practices is likely to be necessary to maintain high levels of herb diversity within the alpine meadows. The presence of people with a real stake in the biological resources of the park can also lead to far greater levels of support for effective management of the park, including better monitoring of who goes into the park, for what, and at what times of the year. Poaching could be more effectively controlled, as could the excessive extraction

of medicinal herbs. And were people to have a stake in the park, it is possible that electoral pressure will be used to counter real threats to the park, in the form of big dams and other industrial development. Already there is talk of establishing hydro-projects on the Sainj and Tirthan rivers. Without the support of resident villagers, there is little chance that any significant opposition will be mounted against such developments.

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FORESTRY
Makku Van Panchayats – Balancing the Old & the New
UTTARANCHAL

Seema Bhatt

The Background

Rural communities in India have for centuries depended on the natural resources around them for their basic survival needs. As a result of this have arisen innumerable community resource management institutions, some which have withstood the ravages of time and bureaucracy and others which have gradually eroded away. The Garhwal and Kumaon regions of the recently formed state of Uttaranchal have the unique distinction of having village institutions specifically for managing their forests. These institutions called *Van Panchayats* (Forest Management Councils) were established by the British in 1931 and even today effectively manage the forest area within their management regime.

In India (with the exception of north-east India) however, management of forests is a state subject and is carried out by the Forest Department. Changing perspectives in conservation in the last two decades have focussed on the need to involve local communities in natural resource management. Several efforts have been made to incorporate this aspect both at the policy and management level. Perhaps the most successful government initiative that has focussed on people's participation in forest management, has been the Joint Forest Management (JFM) programme. JFM seeks to develop partnerships between local community institutions and state forest departments for the sustainable management of degraded public forest lands, on the basis of sharing forest management responsibilities and benefits of forest produce. JFM was officially recognised by the National Forest Policy of 1988. The policy reversed the trend of earlier policies where priorities for managing forests were to meet industrial and commercial demand for forest produce and maximising revenue. Local needs were completely ignored. The 1988 forest policy focussed on environmental protection and conservation and "meeting the requirements of fuelwood, fodder, minor forest produce and small timber of the rural and tribal populations" and creating a massive people's movement, with the involvement of women, for achieving these objectives" (GOI 1988). In June 1990, the Government of India passed a significant national resolution providing more specific guidelines regarding the formation, functioning, rights and responsibilities of community forest management groups. It specifies sharing arrangements in which village forest committees that,' successfully

protect the forests may be given a portion of the proceeds from the sale of trees when they mature', as well as non-timber forest products for subsistence use. The Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, since 1997, has been promoting Village Forest Joint Management (VFJM) with autonomous VPs funded by a World Bank Forestry project. This innovation of JFM unfortunately attempts to bring within the purview of the Forest Department, the only existing example of legally recognised community forest management institutions, the Van Panchayats. The UP Village Forests Joint Management Rules of 1997 enables the Forest Department to become a dominant partner in the management of VP and civil forest lands. As a result of these rules, the Makku Van Panchayat in the Akash Kamini Valley of Garhwal was selected as one of the two in the districts where JFM would be implemented. This idea was however rejected by the villagers.

This case study looks at why a programme that has been successful in other parts of the country was rejected in Akash Kamini Valley. On a broader level it raises the issue of how best to work with existing community natural resource institutions.

Methodology

A specific study on the Makku Van Panchayat was carried out during September 1999 as part of a larger project funded by the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). The author spent one week in the field talking to community members of the Makku Van Panchayat and Kail Mahila Mangal Dal. Extended discussions were carried out with the ex-Sarpanch of the Makku Van Panchayat. Discussions were also held with related Forest Department officials. However, much of the understanding of the region and secondary information is a result of the author's association with the region over three years (1995-1998) as the South Asia Coordinator of the Biodiversity Conservation Network (BCN), a project which promoted an enterprise-based approach to conservation. The project in Uttaranchal was based in Ukhimath and worked closely with the Makku and other Van Panchayats in the region.

The Area

The Akash Kamini Valley is situated in the northern hill region of Uttaranchal along the Western Himalaya in India. Administratively and historically the area is called Garhwal which is divided into six administrative districts: Pauri, Tehri, Dehradun, Chamoli, Uttarkashi and Rudraprayag. The Garhwal region contains the upper watershed of two of India's major rivers, the Ganga and the Yamuna. The region also has great religious significance as it houses the ancient Hindu temples at Badrinath and Kedarnath and the Sikh Gurudwara at Hemkund.

The Akash Kamini catchment lies in the Ukhimath block of Rudraprayag district. The Akash Kamini valley has approximately 12,000 people living in 18

villages. The Akash Kamini catchment drains into a perennial rivulet Akash Kamini which is supplemented by a smaller perennial rivulet, Rakshi. Akash Kamini eventually joins the Mandakini, a tributary of the river Alaknanda. The Akash Kamini catchment roughly covers an area of 73 sq.km. with altitudes varying from 920 to 3,680 meters. 75% of the land area in the valley is forested covering approximately 55sq. km. of the area.

Land use of the catchment indicates that about 75% of the area is under forests, 1.2% under alpine pastures and 3.4% is wasteland (ATI 1997).

Legislation and Policy

Legislation and policy are determined by land tenure. Table 1.0 shows the forest types and ownership in the valley:

Table 1.0

Forest Type	Percentage of Forest Area	Ownership	Management Control
Reserve	30%	Government	Government
<i>Van Panchayat</i>	30%	Government	<i>Van Panchayat</i>
<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	10%	Government & <i>Gram Panchayat</i>	<i>Gram Panchayat</i>
Civil / Soyam	15%	Government	Gram Panchayat
Private	15%	Private	Owners

[Source: ATI 1997] *Note: All local terms are italicised and are defined in a list at the end of text.*

The Forest Department has full control on the reserved forests and the powers are derived from the Indian Forest Act. People are free to graze their animals and collect fallen wood except from the areas that are closed for regeneration. The Forest Department ensures ecologically sustainable exploitation through a Working Plan.

The Civil Forest is under the direct control of the District Magistrate who regulates it through the *Patwari* and the *Village Pradhan*. In some villages of the valley the management of these forests is done directly by the *Gram Panchayat*. The village Usada has both *Van Panchayat* and Civil / Soyam Forest (called *Gramya Van*). The *Van Panchayat* forest is managed by the *Van Panchayat* according to its rules. The Civil / Soyam forest is managed by the *Gram Panchayat* and is used by the villages primarily for grass. The regulatory power in this kind of forest land rests with the *Gram Panchayat / Sabha*.

The management of *Van Panchayat* forests is by the people under the regularly control of the District Magistrate. The Forest Department may also play a significant role, depending on the jurisdiction of the land that the *Van*

Panchayat Forest occupies as also the activities that the *Van Panchayat* carries out in the forest.

Social and Economic Context

Social Structure

There are 18 villages consisting approximately 716 families in the Akash Kamini valley. 88% of these are of the upper caste. The remaining 11% are from the lower caste and live in 6 of the villages. The average income levels and average land holdings of the scheduled castes are lower than those of the upper castes. Social discrimination towards the lower castes continues. The lower castes live in hamlets away from the main village. In most villages they are not able to enter the households of upper castes and eat and drink separately. However, the younger generation of both caste groups does not believe strongly in the prevalent system. The lower castes are also becoming more vocal about their rights. A baseline survey carried out in 1997 (EDA 1997) suggests that the lower caste families have developed an excessive dependence on government supported programmes.

Family Structure

The family structure in the region has undergone a change in the last twenty years. Traditionally, there existed a joint family system with twenty-five to thirty members of the extended family living together. The household size is now reduced to between five to ten members. In many upper caste families at least one man (often the elder son) is involved in seasonal migration or migrates permanently from the area. In these cases the man's wife and children may live separately as a nuclear family. Permanent migration is often for army employment and is more prevalent in upper caste families.

Education

The access to schools has increased over the years in the valley and this has led to a higher percentage of children, irrespective of caste and gender getting educated. In the past, greater importance was given to education of men. Men were potentially more mobile and had greater access to income earning opportunities. Another reason for this is also the pattern of work where women are involved largely with household chores, agriculture and live stock, leaving them very little time for school. This is changing to some extent and more girls are being sent to school. This has however created another problem as there are now several educated youth (at least in the towns) and very few job opportunities.

The Economy

The economy of the Akash Kamini Valley is primarily a subsistence-based agricultural economy, although agriculture is not a source of cash for most

families. Majority of the families depend on other sources of income to meet their cash needs. However, with limited infrastructure development and employment opportunities, there is considerable migration of people from the valley, in search of work. This economy is often described as a 'money order economy' where number of families depend on money being sent through the post (money orders) by relatives working outside the area. Sample households surveyed (EDA 1997), revealed that the main source of income for 40% families was from men in migratory employment outside the valley – 33% in permanent employment (most often the army), 7% in seasonal employment (usually linked to business on the main tourist routes to Kedarnath during the pilgrimage seasons). For about 60% families the main source of income was from men employed in the valley – 25% in regular employment (service, teaching, business) 35% in casual labour.

Every family in the valley (irrespective of caste) has land, although average land holdings are small (*13 nalis; 1 acre = 20 nalis*). Agriculture is rainfed with no irrigation and traditional methods are still used for cultivation. Majority of the families are not entirely self-sufficient and cannot meet all household needs from their own land.

All households in the valley own livestock in the form of bullocks, cows and buffaloes. Some households own sheep and goats and few own horses and mules. Fodder requirements are met from agricultural residues and from forest leaves and grasses.

Gender Attitudes

Women in the region are responsible for all subsistence household needs (agriculture, livestock, food and water collection and household chores). Men are generally left to seek cash earning employment opportunities. Men assist women in the fields only during the time that ploughing is required and also sometimes help in harvesting. Despite the fact that women do most of the household and agricultural work, men usually take the decisions in the community and within the family. This applies to both the caste groups. Men are responsible for all financial matters, which includes managing and keeping the money and deciding how to spend it.

Village Institutions

Five kinds of village institutions are prevalent in the region but may not necessarily all be functional. In some cases a cluster of villages may have a common village institution. Table 2.0 gives a summary description of these institutions:

Table 2.0**Village institutions - a summary description**

Institution	Focus	Main activities
<i>Van Panchayat</i>	Forest management for local needs	restrictions on extraction of forest resources a rotation system for harvesting forest resources hiring forest guards imposing penalties
<i>Mahila Mangal Dal</i>	Women's groups	⇒ village cleanliness ⇒ use of forest resources ⇒ maintenance of community buildings
<i>Yuvak Mangal Dal</i>	Youth	⇒ organizing village <i>melas</i> ⇒ village cleanliness ⇒ organizing village sport's activities
<i>Gram Sabha</i>	- overall village administration - forest management (sometimes)	⇒ village rules ⇒ overall village administration ⇒ forest management
<i>Dekh Rekh Samiti</i>	village maintenance and upkeep forest management (sometimes in the absence of a Van Panchayat)	⇒ maintain village infrastructure ⇒ village cleanliness appointment of <i>chowkidaar</i> for the agricultural fields discussions on topics of interest to the village ⇒ forest management (sometimes)

[Source : EDA 1997]

Members of the *Van Panchayat*, *Gram Sabhas* and the *Dekh Rekh Samiti* are elected and in majority of the cases are men. One male youth member from every household can be represented in the *Yuvak Mangal Dal*. Similarly one woman per household can be represented in the *Mahila Mangal Dal*. The lower castes are represented in all village institutions, although they may not be very vocal. This varies from village to village. In the *Makku Van Panchayat*, there is a large representation of the lower caste and they are extremely vociferous.

Stakeholder Organizations and Natural Resource Management

In the Akash Kamini Valley, natural resource management, primarily forest management, involves four stakeholders, three of which are village institutions. Management of forests by these institutions depends primarily on the ownership or tenure pattern. Table 3.0 illustrates this.

Table 3.0

Forest Type	Institution	Ownership	Management Control /	Benefit Sharing
RF	FD	FD	FD	Some with community through rights
VP	VP	FD / RD	VP / RD / FD	Community

				/ FD / RD
Civil / Soyam	MMD	RD / FD / GP	MMD / RD / GP	Community women
Civil / Soyam	DRS	RD / FD / GP	DRS / RD / GP	Community

Note : RF - Reserved Forests
 VP - Van Panchayat
 FD - Forest Department
 MMD - Mahila Mangal Dal
 DRS - Dekh Rekh Samiti
 GP - Gram Panchayat

Besides VPs, which are officially registered and recognized forest management committees, MMDs and DRSs, also play a very significant role in forest management in the valley. DRSs have been responsible for managing forests in villages where *Van Panchayats* do not exist. The forest land in these villages is Civil / Soyam and belongs to the Gram Sabha. MMDs in some villages have now got access to forestland for management. Table 4.0 is a village wise listing of institutions involved in forest management in the valley. In this table the 'Mahila Ban's are civil / soyam forests that are now being managed by MMD's.

Table 4.0

Village-Wise Listing Of Institutions Involved In Forest Management In Akash Kamini Valley

S.No.	Gram Sabha / Gram Panchayat	Village	Mahila Mangal Dal	Van Panchayat	Dekh Rekh Samiti	Mahila Ban
1.	Karokhi	KAROKHI Durganagar	✓	✓	✓	
2.	Sari	SARI Dilmi	✓	✓		
3.	Usara	USARA	✓	✓		✓
4.	Huddu	HUDDU Brangali Kandhar Somar	✓ ✓	✓	✓ ✓ ✓	✓
5.	Daida	DAIDA Kanda	✓ ✓		✓	
6.	Makku	MAKKU Kail Paab Jagpura Gwad Dilna Jaibanj Dharuda	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓		✓ ✓ ✓ ✓

[Source: AT-India project staff]

This study looks closely at two types of institutions that are directly involved in natural resource management of the area. These are the Van Panchayats and the Mahila Mangal Dals.

The Van Panchayats

Origin

Till about 1865 people living in and around forests enjoyed rights to the use of forest resources, that were virtually unlimited and unrestricted by outside agencies. In the pre-British era, the native governments subjected forest products to a small cess when products were exported, but forest products consumed by people were allowed without any tax. In 1865, there came about for the first time, a formal institutional control of forests and the Indian Forest Act, 1865 was effected. A modified version of the Act was framed and enacted in 1878. This Act enabled the Government to demarcate some tracts of forest land and restrict utilization. However, people were still entitled to their rights to graze their cattle and remove forest products. In 1872, in another land settlement, all cultivated lands owned by villagers were classified as *naap* (measured land owned by the villagers) and *benaap* (civil forests, not measured) lands. By 1897, all *benaap* lands were declared as protected forests. Between 1911-1917 as a result of yet another land settlement, all protected forests were brought under the reserved categories, imposing new rules and regulations on the people. As a result of these restrictions villagers were now deprived of their basic rights of fuelwood and fodder. This led to several agitations by the people. (Ballabh and Singh 1988).

In 1916 an organization (Kumaon Association) consisting of some elite Indians was set up to deal with the forest problems, particularly of Kumaon. Following this in 1921 a Forest Grievances Committee for Kumaon was set up under chairmanship of Mr. P. Wyndham, the then Commissioner of Kumaon division. The Government reclassified forests as Class I and Class II as a result of the Committee's recommendations. Class I forests, had little commercial value but were recognized for their water retention capabilities as also for supply of fuel and fodder to local people. Class II forests had comparatively more valuable tree species and would remain under the direct control of the Forest Department. Class I forests were to remain under the control of the Revenue Department. It was decided that to manage these forests, *Van Panchayats* would be formed. This involved a Committee of 5 to 9 representative community members who would manage the forests. Institutionalization of this took place with the framing of *Van Panchayat Rules* in 1931. These rules were amended in 1972 and 1976 under the Indian Forest Act.

[Ballabh and Singh 1988; TERI 1995]

Objectives

The stated objective of *Van Panchayat* is to protect and develop the forests and to distribute its produce among the right holders in an equitable manner [TERI 1995].

Given this objective, the VPs are required to develop mechanisms to :

1. exclude people who do not have any right in the forest,
2. prevent encroachment.
3. devise rules and regulations for use of forest resources by the right holders, who have proprietary right and which is not determined at the time of formation of *Van Panchayats*.

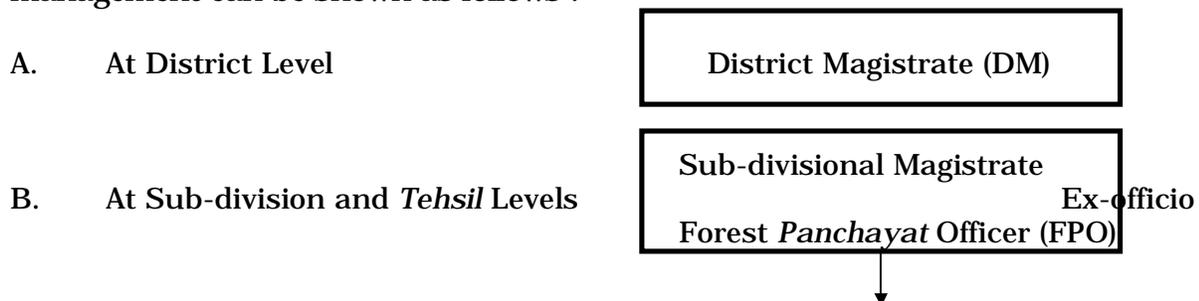
Procedure of Organizing Van Panchayat

A village desiring to form a VP, must through its *Gram Sabha* pass a resolution with one third majority and apply to the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) for registration. On receipt of the application, the SDM will also then inquire from the villagers and from neighboring villages if they have any objections. This is to ensure that most villagers are willing to form a VP and the rights of the villagers and neighboring villagers are recorded. The SDM forwards the application with his recommendations to the District Magistrate (DM). The DM, then directs the Forest Panchayat Inspector (FPI) through SDM, to hold elections for constituting a *Van Panchayat* Committee. Anyone, who has the right to vote, possesses a sound mind, and does not hold a post of beneficiary of any Government is eligible to become a member of the VP Committee. Once a VP Committee has been formed the area of the Forest *Panchayat* is surveyed by an *Amin* (surveyor). A map and a *Khasra* (a document showing right of possession and ownership) are prepared. Elected members of the Committee, simultaneously frame by-laws under the direction of the Forest Protection Inspector (FPI). All the documents are finally sent to the Forest *Panchayat* Officer (FPO) who, having approved will send them to the DM who in turn will send them to the Commissioner for approval and sanction. The villagers are expected to bear all expenses for the survey, preparation of map and *Khasra* etc.

[Ballabh and Singh 1988] .

Organizational Structure

The *Van Panchayat* Committee headed by the *Sarpanch* is the sole arbitrator for management of the VP forests at the village level. The village people elect members of the VP every five years. Elections to the VP committee are generally supervised by a nominated officer of the DM (usually FPI or *Patwari*). Most often, each caste in the village is represented in the committee in proportion to their household number. Women representation on the committee is rare. The organizational structure of VP management can be shown as follows :





[Ballabh & Singh 1988]

Linkage with Forest Department

The FD is supposed to assist the VP in two ways i) provide technical help regarding marking and auctioning of trees, tapping of resin etc. ii) prepare development plans for forests under VP and help execute them in the initial years. For those services, the FD is to receive a portion of the sale proceeds of VP forests. In practice the FD has never prepared comprehensive working plans for the VPs as done for reserved forests. The FD does provide technical assistance for extraction

Resource Utilization

The local people derive grazing space, fodder, dried and fallen leaves for litter used for composting, grasses, fuelwood, poles and timber for house construction, from the forest. The availability of these products depends upon the size and type of forest. Each VP makes its rules and regulation according to the demand for and supply of forest products. Methods of utilization differ from one *Van Panchayat* to another.

Rules and Regulations

VPs use three methods for protection of their forests : a) keeping paid forest guards, b) villagers are expected to report to the VP committee if they come across an offender in the forest, c) the *Sarpanch* and committee members go to the forest occasionally to ensure that adequate protection is taking place. The VP committee meets periodically to discuss offenses and impose fines. VPs are empowered to compound an offense upto Rs. 50/-.

Panchayat Funds

The main source of *Panchayat* funds are utilization fees, fines and royalty received by the VP by selling dead and fallen trees etc. Each VP makes its own rules regarding the use of forest products such as fodder, dried and fallen leaves, grasses, fuelwood etc. Out of the total revenue earned, 20 percent is

allotted to the Zilla Parishad area development, 40 percent is kept with the DM in the *Van Panchayat* account and the 40 percent goes to the FD for preparing and executing development programmes for the *Van Panchayat* forest. Most VPs have an account in the post office where revenue earned by the VP is deposited. Another source of income is the sale of timber and resin which the Forest Department controls. Not all VPs have these resources.

Makku Van Panchayat

The Makku Van Panchayat was registered in 1956 and subsequently recognized in 1958. A Panchayat called the 'Lath Panchayat' existed in the area since 1930. This was an informal community forest management system that existed even before the formal Van Panchayat came into being. Makku is one of the two *Van Panchayats* in the Ukhimath block that are called 'Forest *Van Panchayats*'. These VPs have been established on Reserve Forest land which was delineated such since 1952. The control of the Forest Department in the management of these VPs is greater than in other VPs of the region. The Forest Department is called upon for the evaluation of offences and has the right to make a decision in these cases. The Makku VP covers an area of 2237.5 ha and eight villages that come under the Makku Gram Sabha are entitled to the use of these forests. However, there are 77 other villages who have varying rights over these forests. The Makku VP administers the rights of these 85 villages in its forests and has diverse rules for protection and management. The eight villages under the Makku Gram Sabha, have limited rights over the use of the forests for bamboo (ringal), grazing and fodder collection. The VP decides how and when these rights should be exerted. Extraction of bamboo is restricted to six months, and the other 77 village members are permitted to extract only after eight right holders have done so. Grazing requires a permit. A tax of Rs. 30/- is charged for grazing one buffalo in the forest. There is no rule for the lopping of oak leaves. In terms of the use of timber for trees, the villagers from the three villages of Makkumath, Kail and Jagpuda are charged Rs. 50/- per tree. These three villages form part of the core management team for this VP. The remaining 5 villages from the Makku Gram Sabha are charged Rs. 150/- per tree and the 77 villages Rs.1000/- per tree.

The eight villages that form part of the *Makku Gram Sabha* also adhere to other rules for the use of the VP forests. There is no control on the harvesting of oak leaves. Control on grazing is limited. Part of the forest is closed for grazing between May and November. Grazing in the summer months takes places in the higher reaches and moves to lower areas during the winter. If wood is required for making agricultural implements then a group of people have to make an application to the VP. Use of wood for agricultural implements is non-taxable, but the application has to be made by a group of people - an individual cannot make it. If wood is required for building / construction purposes, an application has to be made to the VP, with an assurance that the wood will not be used for any other purpose. If the VP finds that the wood was

used for any other purpose, all user's rights to use the forests can be taken away.

The Makku *Van Panchayat* has 9 members. Elections for a new Sarpanch are held every five years. During Sarpanch elections held in Makku in August 1999, the Sarpanch who had been holding this post for the last 10 years was replaced by another. On an average four VP meetings are held every year. Sometimes they are held once every month and sometimes once every three months. The annual budget for the Makku VP is Rs. 25,000/-. Utilization of funds have to be sanctioned by the SDM. Funds are derived through: i) Auction of forest products ii) Permits for grazing iii) Royalty iv) Tax on collection of fuelwood by outsiders v) Fines. These funds have been utilized so far for plantation activities and repairing of the boundary wall. The VP had also attempted to develop a medicinal plant nursery which failed. The land is now being used for cultivating fodder species. Protection is provided by two paid guards. The villagers contribute towards the guard's salaries. The guard's salary can be slashed if an offence is committed in the VP Forests.

Conversation with the *ex-sarpanch* revealed that despite all the policing, illegal harvesting of timber does take place from the forest. He mentioned the presence of a timber mafia, which operates in connivance some of the villagers. However, he did not care to elaborate. The *Panchs and Sarpanchs* visit the VP forests every two months. Officials from the Forest Department also tour the area every month and report to the SDM. Records are maintained by the VP which are supposed to be examined by the Forest Panchayat Inspector every year.

VPs and Quality of Forests

Although visibly the Makku VP forests look extremely dense, there is very little biological data to suggest this. The BCN project has carried out regular monitoring activities in the context of the project mainly to determine the sustainable harvest rate of oak leaves that are required for the silk enterprise. The biological team's research revealed that there is very little secondary growth of forests taking place because of high sapling mortality. The team also found that trees suffered more harm because the method of extracting leaves for fodder was harmful. Several village meetings were organised to discuss this and it was concluded that sapling mortality was mainly due to trampling by cattle. Focussed discussions were held with women who are usually the ones to take their cattle grazing. The women however, said that they just did not have the time to ensure that cattle do not trample on saplings. The project has since also put tree guards around a lot of saplings in the area. The team also organises regular village meetings to illustrate a less harmful method of extracting leaves. The project has used a lot of cultural methods such as songs to convey the message about protecting saplings in this area.

Constraints of Van Panchayats

The survival of VPs over such a long time is in itself a testimony of the validity of people's institutions. However, a question that remains to be explored is to what extent are they really 'people' institutions' in terms of devolution of power? VPs have their own constraints which need urgent attention to ensure long term sustainability of this institution. Some of these constraints are mentioned below:

1. **The real empowerment:** The ultimate power still lies in hands of the SDM. People feel that the VPs are only the caretakers of these forests while all the power still lies with the SDM. If the SDM is dynamic and makes it a point to devote some of his time to VPs, then VPs could benefit. However, most often VPs feature very low on the SDM's list of priorities and are neglected. The present SDM of the Ukhimath block who we met, has been posted about 10 months ago. He displayed a total lack of interest in VPs and confessed to not even have read the VP Rules.
2. **Management of VP funds:** Most people who we spoke to were resentful of the fact that the SDM's permission is required to operationalize VP funds. The *Sarpanch* and some other village elders from the Usada VP were quite vocal about it. They said that considering that all aspects of managing these forests were looked at by the villagers, they should atleast have the right to operate the bank account without the SDM's permission. The village elders suggested a separate account which the VP could operate independently. The Makku VP *Sarpanch* pointed out the danger of having the SDM as the final authority. He related an incident when a particular DM in the past had wanted the VP money to be transferred in another Bank Account to be used for another purpose. This however was not done since the VP refused.
3. **Equitable distribution of funds:** There was a lot of displeasure over the distribution of funds derived from the VP. The *Sarpanch* and elders of the Usada VP felt that the 40% of the revenue claimed by the FD is not justified, since FD makes very little contribution towards the management of these forests. They also felt that the FD should rightfully divert at least part of the revenue back into these forests (which it does not do). There should be some accountability of those funds TO THE VILLAGERS? Yes. The villagers feel very strongly about this ISSUE because even the money towards the salary of the VP guards comes from village funds. The Makku VP *Sarpanch* echoed the same view.
4. **Pressure on surrounding government forests:** It is acknowledged by most people in the region that the quality of VP forests is much better than THE ONES under the reserved forests. The ranger we met seemed to think that this quality is maintained at the cost of the reserved forests. People protect their own forests and ravage the FD managed forests. The people on the other hand feel that the reserved forests are just poorly managed. They cannot accept the fact the FD despite having a lot more paid manpower can still not do a better job of managing their forests.

VPs in this region are unique institutions and have done a commendable job in managing their forests. However, given the pressures, it remains to be seen if they will continue to function in the same fashion. The secretary to the SDM seemed to think that most VPs exist only on paper. Only 2 out of 103 VPs in the block had substantial funding. He felt that unless the funding mechanism changed not too many would remain functional. The Forest Panchayat Inspector who is supposed to be the link between the VP, RD and FD rarely visits. He is responsible for VPs in six Tehsils. The present system of financial incentives, in terms of salaries being paid and remuneration for travel etc., does not encourage the FPIs to spend time in the field.

It is certainly a challenge to ensure that these institutions perpetuate and flourish. One idea that was welcomed by most people was that of a Federation of VPs. This suggestion was brought up several times by the people in the course of discussion. This could provide the appropriate platform for VPs to air their grievances and find solutions to their individual and combined problems.

Makku Van Panchayat and Non-acceptance of JFM

In 1998, as a result of the UP JFM order, the Makku VP was selected as one of the two in the district where JFM would be implemented. Officials from the Forest Department held a meeting with the Van Panchayat members in mid 1998. The idea of JFM in the Makku VP was however rejected by the villagers. This study tried to find out exactly why this happened by discussions with several stakeholders. The Makku VP is a very active and the second largest in the block. Villagers who are part of this VP are primarily from the higher caste and are also comparatively better educated. Interestingly even the lower castes in this VP are fairly vocal. Every decision taken by this VP is subjected to considerable debate and discussion where almost everyone participates. Some of the important reasons for the VP having refused entering into a JFM agreement with the villagers are listed below:

1. Politics within the VP: According to the, Project Manager of an NGO working in the region for the last four years, the *Van Panchayat* itself was going through a period of turmoil. There was a crisis regarding the leadership. He feels that it was an inappropriate time to have introduced a new concept to the people. Unfortunately, neither the Revenue Department nor the Forest Department had studied this situation nor did they show any sensitivity to the issue (please explain what it means??). I think this has been explained in the text.
2. Haste in launching the scheme: The local forest ranger felt rather strongly that the Forest Department was a little too hasty in attempting to introduce JFM in Makku. In his own words, ' It was a case of RRA (Rapid Rural Appraisal) instead of PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal). The Forest Department was in a big hurry to launch the scheme'. He felt that not enough time was spent by the FD in explaining to the people what the implications of JFM were. He also accepted that people turned extremely

cynical at the initial meeting because representatives of the Forest Department could not answer most of the questions that people put to them.

3. Lack of trust and faith in the Forest Department: The NGO project manager felt that since JFM was being introduced by the Forest Department, it was viewed with greater cynicism. The Forest Department is neither liked nor trusted by the local people. The ranger, when asked, accepted that they as foresters were only taught to wield the stick and follow rules but not interact with people. I would not say this. Also, at this stage, based on the experience of one VP, I would hesitate in doing this box. Given a choice between the FD and the RD, people still prefer to deal with the RD. The SDM still has a lot more contact with people on the ground as opposed to the DFO. The SDM is more accessible, geographically also, since he is stationed at Ukhimath while the DFO is in Gopeshwar which is several hours by road. The FD is viewed as a 'policing' body, which has not even attempted to establish contact with the people.
4. Distrust compounded by other activities of the FD: Both the ex and the present *sarpanchs* of the VP mentioned the general fear that the FD will eventually take over the VP land. One reason for this is also the presence of the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary in the vicinity. In the response to a petition filed by WWF India, the Supreme Court in 1997 directed all state governments to complete the process of rights and acquisition as required under the Wildlife (Protection Act) 1972, within a period of one year. As a result of this ruling the FD has been carrying out a process of settlements of rights of the people living in and around legally protected areas (PAs). Unfortunately there is a total lack of communication, transparency and understanding of issues in this process. It is not clear to the villages which of them fall within the sanctuary boundaries. This has led to confusion and misunderstanding. The villagers of Makku are convinced that part of the Gram Sabha falls under the sanctuary and access to the forest for people living there will be curtailed. A visit to the Range Forest Officer's office revealed that Makku does not fall in the Sanctuary at all. However, neither the FD or the RD have bothered to clarify this or to explain to the people what the process of resettlement of rights involves. In the meanwhile, distrust towards the FD in Makku is increasing.
5. Negative experiences with other agencies: The present VP *Sarpanch* also shared his distrust about other agencies because of their past experience. Makku VP owns a lot of non forest land. The VP had leased three *nalis* of this land to the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam (a semi-autonomous body) for a guest house in Chopta (a popular tourist spot). The GMVN encroached on another 150 *nalis* of the VP land. A case was filed in the High Court who gave the ruling to close down the guest house. Unfortunately, this resulted in several Makku inhabitants being deprived of jobs and ultimately nobody seems to have benefited from this decision. The land in question lies disused. Land has also been leased to the Garhwal University in Tungnath and some to establish a sheep farm in the area. Not much is being done on

either piece of land. The VP is now sceptical about the status of their land once the JFM scheme is implemented, fearing a similar experience as they have had with the above mentioned agencies.

6. Villagers feel no need for another institution: The *ex-sarpanch* as well as the present *sarpanch* of the VP did not feel the need for introducing a new scheme for forest management. They felt that the VPs were doing a perfectly good job of managing their forests. They also felt that JFM would impose new institutional structures on them, which they were not ready to accept. The decision not to accept JFM was not a hasty one. The VP debated this issue over a period of six months. The attendance in these meetings was quite substantial.

Mahila Mangal Dals (Mmds)/ Kail Mahila Mangal Dal

MMDs are one of the five village institutions that are traditionally part of the village system and are exclusively for women. A baseline survey carried out by an NGO, EDA Rural Systems in 1997, found that although ranked highly by both men and women of the lower caste groups, not more than half the MMDs appeared effective. Some MMDs have been functional for the last 10-15 years, others were initiated at that time, but later became defunct. The Makku MMD was established in 1987.

One woman member from every household is entitled to be a member of the MMD. The representative is usually the senior woman member in the household i.e mother/mother-in-law. There are four office bearers (all women), the chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and treasurer. The vice-chairperson can officiate in the absence of the chairperson. The secretary takes minutes and maintains all financial matters relating to the MMDs. Elections for office bearers are held once every five years. After the elections, the MMD has to register itself with the Block. Members of the MMD meet every month. MMD activities include i) village maintenance and cleanliness ii) Prohibition of alcohol iii) Use of forest resources iv) Employment for underprivileged woman.

Each woman of the village individually saves Rs.2/- to Rs/ 5/- every month and contributes this amount to the MMD fund. MMDs that have such a fund, also have a Bank Account where the amount is deposited. Registered MMDs are eligible for funding from the Block.

For example, under a Women and Child Development Scheme, underprivileged women are trained and given employment by the Block. These women are also entitled to Rs. 25,000/- as a recurring fund. Utilisation of funds is need based. Most funds are spent on village social functions.

Mahila Bans

In the mid-1980s the women of Kail village (which is part of the Makku Van Panchayat) expressed their frustration over the use of resources from the VP forests. Women in the region have the greatest stake in their forests since they are responsible for the collection of firewood, fodder and grazing cattle. Although, women had access to the VP forest, they still found it a long distance to commute especially if they were leaving young children at home. Also, despite the fact that women were part of the VP, they were never able to express their views in meetings. The men decide how the VP forests should be managed. At this point the rather progressive *Sarpanch* of the VP, encouraged the women of Kail to start protecting the degraded forest land which was adjacent to their agricultural fields. This was degraded Civil / Soyam land which belonged to the *Gram Sabha*. The *Sarpanch* simply asked the women to set up a system of patrolling this land. Initially, this plan was met with a lot of opposition specifically from the men who had to put in some additional work at home while the women patrolled this land. They even accused the *Sarpanch* of inciting the women.

Gradually, the patrolling yielded results and women could get enough fuelwood and fodder to meet their needs from this land. In 1987 the women formally registered their MMD and have since been managing this land as their forest or 'Mahila Ban'. The degraded land, with protection has now flourished and barren land has been replaced by forests. Two women continue to patrol the forests on a rotational basis every day. The women can now meet all their fuelwood and fodder requirements from these forests, and rarely use the VP forests. This gives women more time and energy to do other work. The VP forests is however still used as and when timber is required for house construction. Women of each MMD makes its own rules. If any villager is caught felling illegally then he/she is fined by the MMD. There was an incident where a boy was caught illegally felling a rhododendron plant in the Kail forest. Members of the MMD decided to fine the parents since they felt that the parents should have oriented their child in the right direction. No grazing is permitted in these forest patches. Since the establishment of the Kail Mahila Ban, three more have come up in the Makku Gram Sabha.

Effectiveness of MMDs

The emergence of MMDs to manage forest lands is a rather exciting development in the region. The women certainly have the greatest stake in forests and this in itself is an incentive for them to protect and manage the forest. Moreover, since their attendance in Van Panchayat meetings is of no significance, MMDs provide a forum for them to express their opinion. Management of Mahila Bans by MMDs may prove to be more efficient since the land in question is degraded Civil/Soyam belonging to the Gram Sabha. MMDs are hence not answerable to the SDM in any way and can operate more efficiently. Women also have a greater incentive to manage forests in their vicinity since this drastically reduces their drudgery. This is also quite apparent by the fact that women patrol their forest on a purely voluntary basis. There are no paid guards in these forest patches. The biggest shortcoming in

the institutionalization of these MMDs is the fact that women still remain burdened with work. They find practically little or no time to indulge in other activities. What MMDs have been able to achieve has been on a voluntary basis and on their own time. If MMDs are formalised, will it add to the burden of the women? This remains to be seen.

Gram Panchayat Land

Some villages also have forest land which belongs to the *Gram Panchayat* and is managed by the same. The Usada *Gram Sabha* for example has such land. This forest land is managed by the *Gram Sabha* and is used by the villagers mainly for fodder collection and grazing purposes. The villagers are still dependent on the VP forests to meet their timber needs. In terms of managing this category of forests, like the Mahila Bans these are owned and controlled by the village body and may prove to be more effective.

Towards Collaborative Management

This case study has brought up several interesting points that perhaps are important pointers for new ventures in collaborative management.

Flexibility and Adaptability

If the ultimate goal is to involve the local communities in natural resource management, it is important to first see if a system of management already exists. Conflict is bound to arise if a system of management is imposed on a community where there is a pre-existing system. The challenge is how to best work with the existing system, be flexible and adapt. Communities are different and so are their systems of management. The beauty lies in the fact that each system is unique and different. A uniform system will not always work. The Van Panchayats have been in existence for 70 years and have been fairly successful in conserving forests. A programme like the JFM then needs to recognise this and adapt itself such that it can plug the gaps in the existing system and overcome the constraints faced in the existing system to arrive at a more socially sensitive and ecologically sound management of resources.

Sensitivity

This case study reveals that communities need to be approached with an adequate background of the ground realities and with sensitivity. A fair bit of homework is required before introducing a new programme or concept into an area. This was obviously not done in this case. The programme/concept being introduced has to be acceptable to the local people and their opinion must be respected .

Transparency

A lot of mistrust and ill feeling was generated in this area because of the lack or inadequate information. Rumours were rampant and no effort was made to put these rumours to rest. Communities need to have adequate information

about the actual situation and the options available before making a final decision.

Gender Sensitivity

It is quite evident that women are important stakeholders in protecting the forests of this region. Gender sensitivity when designing any forest conservation programme is absolutely necessary. As in the case of JFM, ensuring that a percentage of women are members of Committee is not enough. Women of the region feel very strongly that JFM committees remain male dominated and the women have a mere token presence there. In some cases where a woman has been elected the *Sarpanch* of a certain VP, it is her husband who runs the VP through remote control. It then becomes necessary to recognise women's groups as separate entities and give them the due recognition with respect to forest conservation

Legal Endorsement

Despite the fact that community initiatives for conservation do work, in the present day scenario where commercial forces dominate, it may become necessary to give community initiatives adequate legal backing. This kind of endorsement may help in dealing with pressures both internal and external. A legal entity demands some accountability which may perhaps help in dealing with commercial pressures. However, it must be kept in mind that legal measures must be well thought out and sensitive. VPs are legally recognised bodies while JFM is only a time-bound scheme. What then would be the legal validity of these areas once the JFM programme is over?

Conclusion

Recognising the fact that natural resource management is not possible without the involvement of the people who depend upon these resources, it is equally important to first acknowledge and accept locally existing natural resource management systems. *Van Panchayats* are unique forest management systems that have been in existence for a long time. VPs also enjoy a legal status granted to them by the British. JFM has proved to be successful in many parts of the country. However the question this particular case study raises is why it is necessary to impose a system of management when a successful model already exists in the region? It is more productive to use the existing model and perhaps modify it if necessary for better implementation. There is no validity in forming new committees when several village level institutions exist and are functioning successfully. It would be more desirable to work with existing institutions and strengthen them if necessary. The VP model is not the ideal one. The communities themselves have pointed out many flaws in the system and have also suggested changes. It would be more productive if these changes could be considered through the JFM model and appropriate modifications made. A management system which proves to be counter-productive to conservation is certainly not desirable. This region also clearly reveals the stake women have in the protection of forests. Women of this region have repeatedly

demonstrated that they are a powerful body if given the appropriate support. The women have for example been extremely active in getting a ban on the production of local liquor in the region. It is more important then that this strength is adequately harnessed. Again this should not be done by the token presence of women in JFM committees but by working with the existing *Mahila Mangal Dals*. A programme like the JFM can then only succeed in this region if it is flexible, adaptable, transparent and sensitive.

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FORESTRY
**Community-Centred Natural Resource Conservation:
The Case Of Mendha Village**
MAHARASHTRA

Neema Pathak

Background and Relevance to Eco-development

In late 1970s, the Madhya Pradesh state government proposed an ambitious hydroelectric project in Bastar District. For the economically poor tribals in the region the project not only meant displacement from their traditional homes and a possible social disruption but also destruction of large stretches of forests on which their livelihood and culture heavily depended. The project thus elicited a strong tribal opposition under the name of “Manav Bachao Jungle Bachao Andolan” (Save Forests Save Humans Movement), which spread to surrounding tribal dominated districts, including Gadchiroli District in Maharashtra. Faced with this opposition, which was supported by many local and external NGOs, and local politicians, the project was finally shelved by the government.

This large gathering of tribals provided an opportunity to those involved with the movement, to reinforce the importance of forests for the existence and survival of tribals. Serious debates were generated and it was realised that the local surroundings were a matter of immediate concern for the villagers whose livelihoods depended upon them and they should have rights to take decisions about their management and fate. This started a movement towards self-rule in the region giving rise to the slogan “Dilli Bombai Hamari Sarkar Hamare Gaon Mein Ham Hi Sarkar” ('Our representatives rule in Delhi and Bombay but we rule in our village').

Mendha was one such village where some local individuals with the help of outside NGOs, started a movement towards self-rule. The process was started in 1984-85 with extensive discussions about self-rule, concluding that “self-rule” meant having the capacity to manage oneself and one's own society, which can be best built by being well informed and democratic. The village subsequently struggled towards its empowerment by freeing itself of alcoholism and ensuring equality for women among other things. Traditional village institution, the *Gram Sabha* was strengthened and new ones like the Village Forest Protection Committee or *Van Suraksha Samittee* (VSS), *Abhyas Gats*

(Study Circles), *Mahila Mandals* (Women's Organisations), *Bachat Gats* (Saving Schemes) and others were established.

The village is not one of the villages under any official ecodevelopment plan, neither is it in the vicinity of any Protected Area (PA). However, the initiative taken by the villagers towards self-rule is very important to understand the concept of ecodevelopment. Many lessons can be learnt from this for any natural resource conservation related planning in the country. One of the major follies of the official ecodevelopment policy in the country so far has been that it has been seen as a medicine for a "social disease" affecting ecosystems. It has been perceived in isolation of both the ecosystem and the concerned society. A strong indication of that is a fact that there have been no efforts so far to change the predominant definition of "development" itself, even while defining eco-development.

The current definition seems to assume that the larger society continues to be "develop" in the conventional way. However, communities residing around areas of rich biodiversity should (may be as a punishment for not having "developed" enough to have destroyed their natural surroundings so far, like the rest of the society) be denied this "development" because it's destructive! What is happening in Mendha is not called "eco-development", it is simply an evolution of a process, which has led to improvement in lifestyles while conserving and protecting the surrounding ecosystems. It has arisen from people's own vision and realisation and indicates that if development can be redefined it does not have to be "denied" to be ecologically sensitive.

The paper is in three parts. Section I, introduces the village and its initiative, including the constraints faced by them. Section II deals with some unique achievements of the village and Section III deals with some lessons that can be learnt for the conservation planning and efforts like eco-development from this case study

Section I : People's Initiative In Mendha

Mendha is a small Gond village falling in Dhanora tahsil of Gadchiroli District. The total human population is 370. The total area of the village (including the surrounding forests) as in the records of the *Patwari* (local revenue official) is about 1900 ha. The forests were traditionally used by the villagers for their Nistar (usufructory rights for biomass requirement). The livelihood of the inhabitants is heavily dependent on subsistence farming and the resources from the surrounding forests. Major source of income include Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) collection and daily wage works as labourers with government and private agencies.

History and Legal Status of the Forests

The forests of Mendha are predominantly dry deciduous forests, with some common species such as Teak (*Tectona grandis*), *ain* (*Terminalia alata*), (*Anogeissus latifolia*), *tendu* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*), *char* (*Buchanana lanzan*), bamboo (*Dendrocalamus strictus*), (*Cleistanthus collinus*), and others. Common animal species include, Tiger, Leopard, Wild dog, Wild boar, Sambar, Chausingha, Giant squirrels, many birds, amphibian and reptile species among others.

Prior to 1950s the forests in this area were under the overall charge of the local tribal landlords as they were too remote to be directly administered by the British government. After Independence, in 1960s the process of nationalisation of these forests was initiated. Sudden restrictions on access and rights led to a strong local opposition. Subsequently a detailed survey was done on the customary rights of the people in these forests and a *Nistar Patrak* was developed. These forests were assigned the category of *Nistar Forests* (A category under the Land Revenue Code of Maharashtra, legally allowing the local people to meet their basic requirements after the payment of a nominal fee).

The forests, prior to their nationalisation, were largely used for local requirements. According, to the local forest officers the tribals in these areas do not harbour a commercial or exploitative outlook towards the forests. After nationalisation these forests became more a source of revenue for the government. Resource use by the surrounding villagers therefore came to be viewed as a major threat. Some parts of these forests were contracted out by the government to extract wood for charcoal making, some parts were leased out for stone quarrying and some good bamboo patches were leased out to the paper industry. In the remaining area, Forest Department carried out timber and bamboo extraction (selective felling). In 1991, 1800 ha. was declared Reserved Forests (stricter category under the Indian Forest Act with more restrictions on resource use). This however was done without the knowledge of the local villagers.

Restrictions on the local villagers for resource extraction were already getting stricter. Resource use on paying of bribes to the local forest staff was now fairly common. The resentment against being called "thieves" of natural resources was rapidly increasing. The villagers began to see a dichotomy in the FD's management strategy towards the forests. While the villagers were increasing being treated as thieves for meeting their *bona fide* personal requirement, huge quantities of teak, bamboo and other forest produce were being supplied all over the country and abroad from the same forests. Villagers had already seen, over-extraction by timber contractors (often in connivance with the forest staff), encouragement to the commercially valuable species by the department, destruction by the charcoal contractors, and destructive extraction of bamboo by the paper mill. All this and some other reasons led to a feeling of injustice and a greater need to take control of the situation.

In a *gram sabha* (village council) meeting in late 1980s two important decisions were taken;

All domestic requirements of the village would be met with from the surrounding forests without paying any fee to the government (as was the case) or bribes to the local staff. This however, was accompanied by a set of rules for sustainable extraction, including strictly forbidding any commercial use of timber. No outsider, government or private would be allowed to carry out any forest use activities without the permission of the *Gram Sabha*.

Taking a greater control and assuming responsibility also meant establishment of new or revival of traditional village level institutions.

Village Institutional Structure

Like most tribal villages this village also has a traditional *Gram Sabha* (the Village Assembly). The *Gram Sabha* is the main decision making body in the village and includes as its members, a male and a female representative from each family in the village. Decisions are implemented through oral but still strong social rules. Social ties and sanctions are so strong that the decisions taken by the *Gram Sabha* prevail over any other official or unofficial orders. All the outsiders (government officials, researchers, NGOs, and others), if they intend to carry out any activities in the village or the adjoining forests have to present their plan to the *Gram Sabha* and seek its permission. The *Gram Sabha* meets once in a month for discussions and decision making, except in the case of any emergency when instant meetings are held. The village now commands such respect that officials as highly placed as the collector also send messages to the *Gram Sabha* and come to the meeting to discuss any plans to be implemented. Villagers also send official letters to the concerned officials to participate in the *Gram Sabha* meetings if need be. In order to incorporate the concerns all economical and gender classes in the village, the decisions of the *gram Sabha* are based on unanimity. Issues are discussed till all the doubts have been settled, no decisions are ever taken on the basis of majority.

The village also has a Van Suraksha Samiti (VSS) or Forest Protection Committee, composition of which is same as the *Gram Sabha*. The VSS mainly deals with the forest related decisions. The local forester is the member-secretary and a President is elected by the villagers during the VSS meeting for that particular meeting.

There is an equal representation of women in the decision making process. Apart from being members of village institutions, the women also have a separate *Mahila Mandal* (the women's organisation). They mainly deal with issues of savings and loans to the villagers. *Mahila Mandal* also takes regular forest patrolling and confronts the offenders. The *Mahila Mandal*, especially ensures non-alcoholism in the village and take action against those found guilty of drinking or wife torturing. Men largely support their actions and encourage them to come out with their opinions during the meetings.

In addition, with the help of outside agencies/individuals/experts, the village has established, local study circles in the village which act as forums for frank and in-depth discussions on various issues ranging from immediate village problems and their solution, to wildlife conservation. There is no fixed system, rules or membership for these study circles, and they are informal groups, which gather as and when the need is felt or anytime when people are sitting together having a casual or serious discussion. The study circle discussions, however, are an important source of information and a platform for interaction with the outsiders. This interaction and exchange of information helps the *Gram Sabha* and the VSS make informed decisions.

Through these institutional structures the village has been able to achieve a better village organisation, has been successful in establishing good relations with some sensitive government officials and non-governmental agencies, and has also succeeded in facilitating the inter-departmental co-operation among various government agencies functional in the area for their village.

Impacts on the Village

This effort has led to various direct and indirect benefits to the inhabitants of the village:

Empowerment : The entire process has led to confidence among the villagers in their own capacity to take responsibility over matters directly affecting their lives. Through the study circles the villagers are now better informed about the processes outside, including various government schemes and better equipped to handle the official matters and paper works (which earlier intimidated them). There are various registers in the village (including a visitors book) to keep record of various happenings. The village has also had a Adult Education Programme, under which many villagers learnt basic reading and writing. *Gram Sabha* ensures that all members (of economic and gender classes) get equally represented and benefited from it's activities.

The *Gram Sabha* has it's own bank account and manages it confidently. For all commercial activities allowed in the village land and forests by the government, after seeking *Gram Sabha* permission the village charges a fee, which goes to the village accounts for various developmental activities.

The license fee paid to the government by any leaseholders is also collected by the village, instead of a government officer, and handed over to the concerned department. All outside labourers employed for any such works have to be given a license by the village, before being appointed.

Forest related offences both by the local villagers and outsiders are settled at the *Gram Sabha*. The Forest officials are now confident about the capacity of the village to handle these cases and often even on the face of influence or clout advice the offending party to deal with the VSS directly.

Forest Use: The self empowerment has to a great extent helped the village solve the issues of basic livelihood requirements. The villagers have now decided upon the amount to be extracted from the forests by each family, based on the actual domestic requirement of the people. For extracting this amount, a permission is required from the *Gram Sabha* and a nominal fee is paid which is later paid to the government as *Nistar* fee.

Impacts on Forests

One of the important results of this process has been the revitalisation of importance of forests in the lives of the tribals and the need to protect and conserve it themselves.

In the last seven years the villagers have taken up a number of soil and water conservation programmes (building 1000 check dams over various forest streams), built an earthen dam to retain the water for a longer while, especially in summers, when water is a scarce commodity (under the official Joint Forest Management Scheme).

Forest fires which are an annual phenomenon have been controlled to a certain extent, not completely as yet, as the villagers claim that they are not fully convince that controlling fires is good for the health of the forest. Discussions on forest fires have been going on for a few years for now but no conclusion has been reached so far. A Ph.D. student is currently working on the forest fires in these forests.

Instead of illegal and therefore often uncontrolled resource extraction activities, the villagers now have fixed rules about resource extraction. There also exist penalties for those who do not abide by these rules.

The village has a system of forest protection, under which two people are assigned every day for protection rounds in the forest. These watchers bring back the offenders to the village where they have to pay appropriate penalties.

Parts of the forests were leased out to a paper mill by the government in early 1990s for extraction of bamboo. Villagers had earlier worked in the paper mill extractions found their methods very destructive. They opposed and officially succeeded in stopping the industry from extracting bamboo from their forests. The Industry offered heavy license fees and donations to the village, yet the permission was denied. Respecting peoples' desire not to let their forests destructively exploited by the Industry, the FD in the latest micro plan for the area (1994), have kept the forest compartment numbers, falling within the village boundaries, as not to be lease to any industry.

The village has also managed to get into a Joint Forest Management (JFM) arrangement with the FD. This is probably an exceptional case as the JFM as

per the rules is applicable only for degraded forests and is based on the principle of plantations and harvest. The forests in this village, however are natural forests and villagers support sharing of benefits arising from NTFP collection and sustainable bamboo extraction rather than timber felling. The local staff has expressed concerns that the villagers have not allowed them to either carry out selective felling or clearing natural growth (under "scientific forestry") to improve the timber quality. The villagers have unanimously decided that a diverse forest is healthier and is more beneficial for them than monocultures.

Encroachment by the villagers in the surrounding forest area was a common feature till late 1980s. Detailed discussions were carried out on this issue in the study circles, often initiated by outsiders. After many years of discussions it was realised that the demand for land is never ending, the solution is to find best land-use practices for the existing available land rather than keep encroaching in the hope of better crop productivity. The *Gram Sabha* banned any further encroachments without its permission. Under very special circumstances it is felt by the entire village that allocation of land to a certain family is absolutely essential then the *Gram Sabha* may allow for the same. In this village where annual expansion of agricultural areas was a common feature no encroachments have taken place for last five years.

Constraints or Failures?

Like any process or project this process also has many constraints some of these are listed here many may come up in later years:

Though the forests appear to be in good condition there is no formal studies (based on local or outside expertise) for assessing the quality of the forests or the impact of current forest use on these forests, or to suggest whether the process has helped ecologically.

These efforts are quite formal at the village level where regular records are maintained, there is an appreciation in all government and non-governmental spheres, yet till recently there did not exist any law flexible enough to accommodate these into the formal system of governance. Thus the sustainability of the initiative very heavily depend upon the various informal support structures, such as, outside individuals, sympathetic officers, and dedicated village members who have a voluntary spirit. Major changes in any of these could affect the character of the initiative. However, the recent 73rd amendment in the Constitution and its extension to the Scheduled Areas is a major positive step towards encouraging such initiatives. (see section III).

Considering that a large amount of the concerned villagers' time must go into earning livelihood, it is sometimes difficult to sustain the fervour for the forest protection activities, especially if there are no immediate threats they are

facing. A positive support in this regard from the Forest Department can take the process a long way.

While this initiative appears to have been successful in regenerating and protecting natural resources, and in bringing the voice of ordinary villagers to decision-making fora, much remains to be understood is how precisely they have worked. What factors inhibit or support the initiative? Are state policies and legal structures supportive? Finally is there a possibility of extending these efforts to the rest of the country or the region? Are there lessons to be learnt from this initiative to some kinds of Protected Areas in the country? All these questions need a much detailed and in-depth exploration. The following analysis provides answers to some of these questions.

Apart from the ones mentioned above many more constraints may appear at a later stage. What I would like to stress, however, is that this effort should be viewed as a positive social process, which is very much a part of the village dynamics. *This is not an externally driven project with limited objectives, viewed in isolation of the social dynamics and other village issues as well as constrained by limitation of time. Therefore any obstacles faced by a process like this should not be viewed as failures but as constraints which can be solved within the concerned social system.*

Section II : Some Important Achievements

Ecodevelopment programmes initiated in villages in and around PAs envisage improving the economic status of the human communities living in these villages. The aim is to divert human pressure from these areas by reducing the dependence on them. This assumption, however, needs verification. Experience of Mendha suggests that it is dependence on the forests, which creates a stake. This stake can be strong enough for people to fight for empowerment, which will help them protect the ecosystem better. Empowerment gives them a feeling of belonging. Such a strong sense of belonging may lead to people assuming responsibilities normally considered beyond their capacity. Indeed, being in the position of a decision-maker can lead to developing capabilities to accomplish the responsibilities.

There are many examples in the village, which illustrate the above statement, but, I am mentioning below only some which are unique and need to be taken notice of.

Achieving livelihood security : To overcome the problem of unemployment, the villagers have made an informal rule that Mendha villagers will have a first right to all the labour works created in different government agencies in their village and surrounding forests. All outside labourers coming to the village have to seek permission from the village *Gram Sabha*, and will be allowed to work here only if there are vacancies available. The economic status of Mendha villagers is higher than the neighbouring villages and there is little difference in

economic status within the village now as equal and regular opportunities of employment are available. In addition, for all the jobs received through the *Gram Sabha*, local villagers have to pay 10% of the salary received to the village fund. This fund also has many other sources such as the lodging and boarding fees paid by the visitors to the village, fines paid by the offenders, money from the license fee from the stone quarry and other such activities allowed by the government in the village area and others. The *Gram Sabha* is now in a position to give loans to the needy in the village with minimum interest. This has almost eliminated the moneylender in the village.

Through Indo-German watershed programme, each villager has constructed an irrigation tank. The villagers have also constructed a collective *Van Talav* under the JFM scheme where fish fingerlings are introduced and each family earns significant amount each year. In addition, sale of NTFP is a major source of revenue.

Participatory Research: A requisite for any conservation planning process including ecodevelopment, is comprehensive socio-economic and ecological research. To be able to include the local perspective, which is often extremely precise and detailed, it is important for such a research to be participatory. Participatory here does not merely mean using local people as field guides. It means a process in which both the local and the outside experts get similar respect and acknowledgement, and jointly plan and implement research programmes.

The "study group" concept in Mendha is one such unique example. This concept is based on the fact that any social group is a conglomeration of some thinkers, some talkers, some doers, some do gooders and some subversives. The need is to identify these subgroups within a society. There are always some people who like to discuss. The topic of discussion is often not important, in the village *chaupal* one often finds many such debaters and thinkers". The phrase "study group" is just a name for such informal discussions. The only difference being that in Mendha some people in the village have made an effort to invite outsiders (government officials, non-government people) to the village and have similar discussions with them. This interaction has helped the villagers develop their own conversation skills, awareness of the world outside and often provided them important inputs which helped them take informed decisions later at the *Gram Sabha* meetings.

This forum has also been used by outside people to influence the decision-making at the village level. The village has been able to overcome the problem of encroachments largely because of discussions initiated by the outsiders at the level of the "study groups". Discussions have also been going on about the negative impacts of fire and hunting on the ecosystem. No final decisions have been made in this regard as there have been no concrete studies to prove anything to them.

Apart from the ongoing study based on which this paper has been written, there are many interesting examples of participatory research and monitoring in the village.

Pakshi Mitra Mandal (Friends of the Birds), a group of NGOs working on birds in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, has initiated a study on the number of bird species and their habitat, with the help of villagers interested in birds (some of whom used to or still hunt birds). The villagers have been given Salim Ali's *Book of Indian Birds* (translated into Marathi). The village members of the *Pakshi Abhyas Gat* (Bird Study Circle) carry a notebook with them and note down the name of the bird and when and where it was found (they need not specially go for this, they do it while doing any other work).. They have also helped make a bird inventory with Marathi and Gondi names.

Vrikshmitra, another Chandrapur based NGO (coordinated by Mohan Hirabai Hiralal) has been carrying out a research and monitoring exercise with the villagers since 1994. This study is conducted by *Jungle Abhyas Mandal* (Forest Study Circle) on the impact of NTFP collection on the productivity of the concerned species. The species under study are *Mahua* (*Madhuca indica*), *Charoli* (*Buchania lanzan*), *Tendu* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) and *Amla* (*Embilica officinalis*). The data is generated while people are at work. This is a part of a formal project, therefore the villagers are paid in kind (as requested by them), mostly blankets, etc. at the end of the year.

One important activity for the villagers has been honey collection. Through the study circle the villagers were introduced to some outside experts who have worked on extracting honey without destroying the honeycomb. A *Madhumakhi Abhyas Gat* (Honey Bee Study Circle) was established and members were given special gear to wear at the time of extraction. Members first did some basic behavioural studies on the bees and studied the structure of the comb. It was decided that extraction would be done only in the dark when the bees are least active, and only the part of the comb containing honey was to be extracted. Villagers noticed that bees were quick to recollect the honey and since the entire comb was not destroyed the comb numbers were found to have significantly increased in the area. With the help of a group from Wardha in Maharashtra, they have been able to market this honey as *ahimsak* (non-violent) honey, and thus generate substantial economic benefit. The villagers are now trying to spread this effort to other interested villages around them.

Vrikshamitra is also proposing another participatory study, called the Nistar study. This study will assess the actual biomass requirements of the people from the village forests and the carrying capacity of the forests. The proposal is still awaiting funds.

Inter-agency coordination: It is interesting that people's empowerment can lead to solutions to problems, which are more complex than usually perceived. An example of this is the inter-agency coordination that the village has been able

to achieve. All over India, one common lament is that different government departments do not coordinate their plans and programmes with each other; the Forest Department is frequently anguished about the activities of agencies like the Irrigation or Hydro-electricity Departments, which are detrimental to the forest. In Mendha, the rule that all government/non-government schemes to be implemented in the village must be discussed by the concerned department in the *Gram Sabha* meetings, has contributed to a much greater co-ordination among these agencies. Just before the end of the financial year of 1996-97, different line agencies (Zilla Parishad, Panchayat office, Forest Department) approached the villagers with proposals for constructing a few *gobar* gas plants, bathrooms and toilets under different schemes (e.g. Employment Guarantee Scheme, Joint Forest Management, etc.). Under each agency there were funds for only a few families for one or the other of the above mentioned facilities. After a few quick discussions between villagers and some outside friends, invitations were sent for the concerned officers from the each department to attend a joint meeting in the village. A *Gram Sabha* was held for the purpose and during the meeting the villagers requested the government representatives to put down in writing (on a blackboard) exactly how much money was available under each department for these activities in the village. All the line agencies were very cooperative and encouraged by this initiative by the village.. A total count was made and it was realised that there was enough money to provide all these three facilities to each family in the village in different phases. Each department subsequently made their contribution to the *gram Sabha*, which decided not to use the government contractor and engineers (because plants made by them in the past in the neighbouring villages had failed). With the help of some masons from Wardha the work on the *Gobar Gas* is now in progress

Section III : Lessons For Forest Management, Including Protected Areas

Presenting the Mendha experience here is not meant to signify that all local communities have always lived in complete harmony with nature or that they continue to do so even in the current changing socio-economic and cultural scenario. Neither does it intend to argue that it provides all the answers to all the problems of wildlife management in the country or the process in the village has no failures. However, Mendha is not an example in isolation, similar initiatives are now common in both inside and outside of the PAs across the country. In Gadchiroli district itself there are many villages which are taking such steps. There are many villagers, which come to Mendha and request guidance from the villagers. Through history such efforts have existed cutting across the administrative and cultural boundaries. These examples, if holistically studied and understood in-depth, provide enough grounds and base for finding answers to current dilemmas of forest and other natural resource conservation in the country. These may even lead us to a larger model of ecologically sensitive development as an alternative to the present model, which is often destructive if adopted and regressive if not.

The following lessons thus emerge for effective forest and PA management in the country:

Site-specific, decentralised management: One major difference between the community initiatives and the official efforts so far has been that, the former are decentralised, site specific and varied in their objectives and approaches. The government efforts on the other hand have largely been centralised, top-down and often working under uniform policy framework and guidelines, without taking into account site specifications.

Conservation, Whose Priority? One important lesson that emerges from Mendha is that of taking into account the local conservation priorities. Forests in Mendha may not be one of the areas under national priority for conservation, but for the people of Mendha they are the highest in priority for livelihood, spiritually, culturally, and in many other ways. The national conservation prioritisation strategy thus has to be modified to include such priorities (rather than focusing on ecological factors only of concern to the world outside).

Stakeholder analysis and creation of stakes: Mendha and other initiatives indicate that, if adequately taken into account, the local communities often have greater stakes and reasons for natural forest conservation than the rest of the society. This leads to the question of who should be the stakeholder in the management of protected areas. It can be argued here that the stakeholders themselves can be divided into primary stakeholders and secondary stakeholders based on certain criteria. Some important criteria could be:

- Cost paid for conservation;
- Extent and nature of dependence on the resources;
- Length of time of this dependence;
- Responsibility towards conservation in terms of resources and efforts; and
- Proximity to resource sought to be conserved.

A primary stakeholder will have to fulfil most (though not necessarily all) of these criteria. A secondary stakeholder will fulfil only some of these. A primary stakeholder in that case becomes an obvious primary manager and beneficiary. For example in case of Mendha the villagers fit in the category of primary stakeholders. The industries, the state, other villages, all become secondary stakeholders. Mendha has been able to overcome the problems of encroachments, indiscriminate exploitation by the outsiders, over-exploitation, etc. mainly because of a sense of belonging and a realisation of the stakes involved in the conservation of these forests.

There has been considerable work on the possible stakes that could be generated from PAs and other forest areas: access to bio-mass resources, employment, shares in income from tourism or other activities, appropriate developmental inputs, social rewards, and political empowerment. These possibilities, and the legal/policy implications of these, are reviewed in a number of recent

publications (see, for the Indian and Asian contexts, Pathak and Kothari, 1998; and Kothari et. al. 1998). Mendha and other examples strongly indicate that the stakes for conservation are not always monetary incentives (in fact, in some cases monetary incentives have proved to undermine conservation), but more in terms of livelihood security, empowerment, and such others.

Inter-agency coordination and regional planning: People in Mendha have been able to get over the problem of the lack of inter-agency coordination in the area, by acting as mediators between various government agencies active in the village. In many PAs of India, wildlife authorities can easily get over the problem of inadequate resources, especially for the provision of ecologically-sensitive livelihood inputs to local communities, by pooling together of resources by all the other line departments in the area. It should also be kept in mind that a PA does not exist in isolation of various social and political forces and land-use practices in the areas surrounding. Allowance of resource intensive activities in the surrounding area could put more pressure on the PA resources or act in contradiction to the objectives of the PA. Thus PA planning should be integrated with that of the regional planning.. In order to facilitate, a similar inter-agency co-ordination as in Mendha, the first requirement is an open attitude on the part of all the local level line agencies. This could be further encouraged by a government order in this regard, insisting on coordination of this kind. Of course, this should be borne in mind that the best results will only be achieved by the local population taking their part of the responsibility.

Adequacy of conservation personnel: When the entire village takes on the responsibility of protection, “inadequate staff” does not remain a cause for ineffective management. In Mendha, the official forest department staff does not need to look after the protection and conservation aspect any more. Poaching, timber smuggling, etc. can thus be controlled with the involvement of the local people.

Lack of information: From the section II above it is clear that people have been able to provide answers to some very important questions, that conventional PA management is still struggling with in other areas. To a large extent this has been possible because of the open and transparent discussions at the study circles. It strongly indicates that constant interaction with outsiders and discussions within the village make people more conscious and aware, which in turn helps in taking informed decisions. Thus an important role that emerges for the wildlife authorities is that of extension, through constant interaction with the villagers on equal terms. Officials and other outside experts could bring in the larger perspectives not so easily perceived by the villagers given their limited horizons and access to outside information. In turn they could learn from the detailed site-specific information that the local people have.

Need for joint management and controls: Mendha villagers have demanded to be included in the formal Joint Forest Management scheme of the government, a demand that has also come from other such community efforts in the country. This indicates that communities often do realise the difficulty of managing natural resources on their own, especially given the internal and external social dynamics and political and commercial forces. An active role of the state as a partner in the management of resources is often envisaged by these communities, but on equal terms and in the capacity of a supporter and guide rather than a ruler or policeman. This, however will need a drastic change in the attitude of the officials. The colonial attitude of distrust and disrespect will have to be given up.

Commercial Pressures: Destructive commercial forces, in the face of which wildlife authorities have often felt helpless, can be resisted with the help of a mass support, as has been proved by the paper mill incident in Mendha. This is again not an isolated example; villagers in Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan were able to stop limestone mining after the PA management failed to do so; more recently tribal groups fought and won a legal case against a luxury hotel in the Nagarahole National Park in Karnataka; many villagers in the Himalayan forests have successfully thwarted destructive developmental or commercial forces; a nation-wide agitation against trawling by traditional fisherfolk has forced the Government of India to stop issuing licences to trawlers; similar agitation convinced the Supreme Court of India to stop all further expansion of industrial aquaculture along India's coasts; and so on.

Combining biodiversity and livelihoods: The contention that communities are not interested in protecting biodiversity is shown to be false in experiences both in Mendha and in several other villages of the country. Conventionally, official Joint Forest Management (JFM) has favoured the harvesting of timber and the sharing of sale proceeds; however, several communities have argued that the more important benefit of JFM is a continuous supply of non-timber forest products (Poffenberger and McGean 1996). This argument translates into the conservation of biologically diverse forests rather than mere plantations of single tree species. Local community arguments against industrial aquaculture, or commercial fisheries, have similar grounds and implications. PA planners and managers could well build in such concerns to enable a marriage of livelihood requirements and biodiversity conservation.

Need for continuous and participatory monitoring : All of the above, however, needs to be along with a continuous monitoring and evaluation. This itself will be most effective if it is participatory and transparent. Results of such monitoring will be used by the local managers in evolution of management strategies. An example of that is the NTFP monitoring being carried out by the *Jungle Abhyas Mandal* in Mendha, in which both villagers and outside members are involved.

Legal and Policy Measures : For the long-term protection of these forests from internal and external commercial forces, the villagers could consider it being declared a protected area (i.e. national park or sanctuary, under the Wild Life (Protection) Act 1972. There however does not exist as yet any provision in this Act, where the control of the PA could remain with the conserving communities and where they are able to meet their subsistence requirements while protecting the area. One way of building in greater flexibility into the PA system would be to expand the number of categories of protected or conservation areas, to include a range of different ecological and socio-economic situations. The site specific planning strategy for these areas (specially the ones where human settlements exist) could be then done through a participatory research like that of the study circles in Mendha. To this end some workers have suggested addition of at least 4 new categories, including Community Reserves, based on different objectives and management regimes (Bhatt and Kothari 1997). Such a system would be able to accommodate (without co-opting) local community institutions and knowledge as a base for conservation. Two of these proposed categories, Community Reserves (managed entirely by local communities), and Resource Reserves (for sustainable harvesting of certain resources), have been included in the revised Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act currently under consideration.

A major positive change has been the 73rd amendment in the Constitution and its extension to Scheduled (tribal) Areas in 1996. This amendment has given the *Gram Sabhas* the right to take decisions on any scheme envisaged for the village, and conferred ownership on all non-timber forest produce within their area. In Maharashtra at least the officially Protected Areas have been kept out of this amendment. However, encouragement of processes and institutions like Mendha, could help extend this provision even to these areas and result into better management of many of these areas.

The local forest officials in Mendha had shown great flexibility by including Mendha in the JFM scheme, which was only meant for degraded forests. Such flexibility and initiative by the forest department could greatly help people's initiatives like Mendha. Similar flexibility was also shown by other government departments by supporting the village in the *gobar gas* case. The villagers are also supported by the officials in taking actions against the offenders. All these are very positive signs but yet dependent largely on the respective officials and the strength of the community. There is still great resistance in Mendha for example in involving the people in the actual micro planning and management of the forests (even though the management plan prepared by the forest department takes into account people's concerns). People's participation will be more sustainable if there exist sufficient policy and legal measures rather than being dependent of supportive individuals. For more details on possible policy changes in this regard see Pathak and Kothari 1998.

Conclusion

Perhaps not all but many problems faced by the PAs in the country today are a result of management practices, which are alien to local resident populations, and to centralised and authoritative regimes. With little effort at understanding the historical, social, economic, cultural, and spiritual context of the area, and building up from existing indigenous practices rather than imposing completely new management regimes, more site specific and effective management practices can be evolved. By reviving or encouraging people's sense of responsibility and belonging, wildlife conservation could become a national effort rather than the responsibility of a single, resource-deficient, relatively powerless government department. Conservationists, both within and outside the government, would do well to heed the lessons from Mendha and dozens of other such examples from various parts of India.

Urgent policy, legal, and institutional changes are needed if an environment conducive to community involvement in conservation has to be built up. There is also a need for capacity building measures across the various sectors of society, to understand ecological and social processes better, and to make use of the opportunities for participatory conservation.

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The Regional Setting

Location: Lying between latitudes 30° 25' and 29° 45' North, and longitudes 80°07' and 80°22' East, is the Gori River Valley, in Pithoragarh District of Kumaon. This valley lies in the Greater Himalaya and its upper reaches extend into the Trans Himalaya and the Tibetan plateau. The 120 kilometer long Gori river originates from Milam glacier. Waters from as many as 22 other glacial rivers and a multitude of rain fed, snow melt streams, feed into the Gori river right till the point where it joins the Kali, which is the biggest trunk river of Kumaon. The Gori Valley spans parts of three tehsils, Munsiri, Dharchula and Didihaat, of Pithoragarh District in the State of Uttaranchal. A major part of the valley lies in Munsiri Tehsil while some of the lower parts fall into Didihaat on the Gori Right bank^a and Dharchula on the Gori Left Bank. There are around 140 villages spread across the valley with an approximate population of 50,000. Some of these villages are located in the higher altitudes, towards the north of the valley and are seasonally inhabited in the summers.

Climate and Weather: Variations in the altitude range of the Gori valley, from below 1000 meters above mean sea level (amsl) to over 7000 meters (amsl), along with slope aspects give rise to considerable variations of microclimates and weather patterns. Though deep inside the Himalaya the broad climate and weather patterns that influence much of northern India prevail here also. The SW monsoons contributes to as much as 80 % of the rainfall of the valley. The North West monsoons, originating from over Central Asia and traveling the length of the Himalaya brings the winter snows and rains.. Temperatures, influenced by altitude, aspect and season range from extremes, touching 40° C in the lower parts of the valley to many degrees below zero in the higher reaches.

Geology: The Himalaya are the youngest mountain range in the world. They are still evolving and fault lines are found across its length and breadth. One such runs along the Gori River with a thrust called the Munsiri thrust.

¹ The spear head team has been working in the Gori valley of Munsiri for the last nine years. They work on issues of forest conservation through village level institutions called van panchayats. They promote the regeneration of local species of plants and the use of fuel saving devices. They have constructed traditional water mills, which is made almost completely of locally available material, and have helped the communities strengthen their traditional water harvesting structures.

^a True Left bank, True Right Bank: The side of the (river) bank, as it appears when we look down stream, in the direction that the river flows.

Unstable mountains, loose rocks & soils, steep slopes and high rainfall combine together to cause many landslides, a predominant feature of the Valley.

Natural Vegetation: The Gori valley spans two physiographic regions – the Greater Himalaya and the Trans Himalaya. It also lies in the overlapping transition zone of the flora of eastern and western Himalaya. These factors and ranges of the other contributing elements (altitude, aspect^b) have contributed to the diversity in the flora of the valley.

Broadly the forest types could be classified as:

- Sub Tropical Forests
- Lower Temperate Forests
- The Upper Temperate Forest Type
- The Sub Alpine Forest Type
- The Alpine Zone

Between these dominant tree species, are found a very rich and diverse range of grasses, bamboos, sedges, herbs, shrubs and climbers. In the alpine region, till its uppermost limits, are found many rare and valuable seasonal alpine plants. This diversity in flora caters to a wide variety of needs of the communities in the valley.

The People: The Gori valley is on one of the traditional trade routes to Tibet. It is believed that the upper part of the valley, Kirats, a group of Mongoloid tribes, who came from Tibet. Gradually they moved down to inhabit the densely forested temperate zones of the valley. Over time, around the 10th Century they came to be recognized as Bhotiyas, which means people from the land of Bhot or Tibet. Gradually a trade route established itself from Kumaon to Tibet, through the valley. The Bhotiyas undertook the perilous journey across forbidding steep mountains and glacial terrain to trade food grain, cloth, cotton, hardware, jaggery and tobacco for fine wool, pashmina goat, salt, butter, horses, fur and hides and gold dust, in the Tibetan markets. This was a remunerative form of trade, which economically gave them advantage in the class and caste system. It is also believed that during the rule of the Chand dynasty there was a large influx of non Bhotiya Hindus who were either Rajputs or the Shilpkars who made up the service and artisan class. The Rajputs were brought in to till their land under a system called Sirtani^c, while the Shilpkars were brought in basically to serve the Bhotiyas in their lower settlements, build homes, work as domestic servants and provide service support.

Today the profile is the same but with difference in the essential nature of these communities. The Bhotiyas, a Scheduled Tribe, have had to give up trading with Tibet, and have become local traders, farmers or have moved away to a more urban economy. The Rajputs^d over time settled down and

^b Aspect: The direction in which a slope faces, particularly with reference to possible amounts of sunshine it receives.

^c Sirtani: A feudal system of lords and serfs where the land was owned by the Bhotiya's and it was tilled by the Thakurs. The Thakurs had a share in the produce but were dependent on the Bhotiya's for providing most of their other needs. The situation changed after the Bandobast, where much of the land belonging to the Bhotiya's was given to the tillers – the Thakurs. This land is even now called Sirtani Bhoomi

^d The Rajputs are divided into many sub castes, and are called by different terms in different places. In the upper Gori valley they are usually called Jimdars, lower down they are called Thakurs. However, all are under the General Caste category.

tilled the land and now form the main body of farmers in the valley. There are no distinct groupings and are all categorized as General Caste. The *Shilpkars* even today form the bulk of the artisan class and come under the category of Schedule Caste.

Women in the Hills: Women's reality in the village communities in the mountains is determined, as in our society at large, by male domination and their control over power and wealth. As also the case in most rural societies, women play a major role in ensuring the survival and in meeting the livelihood needs of the family. Scarcities of fuel-wood and fodder directly affect women and their workload. Further, out-migration of men increases this burden many times. This situation also puts women in a position where they may need to make decisions related to the family, children and other aspects of daily life, especially in women headed households. However at a deeper level, this trend of out-migration, which increases the stress on women, does not really provide freedom from patriarchal authority of the larger community. Intense physical labor, domestic violence, polygamy, and lack of control over productive resources are harsh realities in the life of women in the hills.

History of Conservation in The Valley

The heavy dependence on forests in order to maintain a subsistence economy and the ever-increasing pressures on the limited natural resources has motivated communities to adopt various strategies to protect and conserve their natural resource base. The tradition of protecting forest areas by individual villages is not recent and predates even India's independence. The local institutions formed to protect and use forests, which have legal sanction, are called Van Panchayats¹ (VP). Van Panchayats, are community owned and managed Village Forests, and have been in existence in Kumaon since 1930 and in the Gori valley since 1947. The oldest Van Panchayat in the valley is Walthi Rapti, formed in April 1947..

Forest User rights too have an old history predating British rule. It first finds mention in the *Assi Sala* (land resettlement around the 1880's by the British), which documented the forest user rights of local communities (*Maurusi hak*). During the Land Resettlement of the 1960's (*Bandobast*) the revenue boundaries of many villages were redrawn and with it came a new set of rules guiding Forest User Rights in which communities were restricted to the forests that lay within their village boundaries. In the Case of Van Panchayats, formed before the Land Resettlement of the 1960's, their boundaries were now deemed to lie within the redrawn Revenue boundaries. In some cases, Van Panchayats were formed on Forest Land and such land does not appear in the village revenue maps but continues to be part of their Van Panchayat.

This redrawn legal status, which often does not reflect the actual use regimes, has affected the traditional access of communities to different forests, which they used or utilized for different purposes. Even to the present day there are various arrangements based on tradition, which cut across revenue boundaries enabling communities to access forests as they did in the past. However, with increasing pressure more and more VP's are restricting access, even to traditional users who may not necessarily be owners under the present land revenue system.

There are now cases of conflict that cannot find resolution within the existing revenue system nor can they be resolved using traditional rights without upsetting the larger and established framework of land redistribution, both public and private, which is in place.

This situation of heavy dependence on forests for basic survival and restriction in traditional access to forests lands exists today in many small and marginal villages, who in response have had to adopt varied long term survival strategies. Waiga is one such village.

Waiga - The Background

Ecological Profile: Nestled within the folds of the steep mountain slopes on the right bank of the Madkanya river (a big tributary of the Gori river with its origins in the glaciers of the high Panchachuli ranges) is a small village Waiga. The village is split in two hamlets, Chaunali, at an altitude of 1410 and Waiga^e at nearly 1600 meters. The village has an altitude range from 1350 meters near the river to 2100 meters at its highest point. The mountain slopes face East and South with micro-aspects facing southeast and southwest. It lies at 80°18'46" E latitude. 30°04'25" N longitude approximately mid-way in the Gori Valley.

Waiga is 4 kilometers from the nearest road head, at Madkot, which also happens to be the junction, where the Gori and Madkanya river meet. Waiga is spread over an area of nearly 78^f hectares of which nearly 13 hectares is privately owned land and the remaining is under various categories of Commons^g or Government owned land. Waiga is boxed in by human habitation on all sides, except towards the south where the Madkanya River is a natural boundary. In no direction does Waiga have the privilege of direct access to or boundaries with natural expanses of forests or alpine mountain region. Chulkot a village of 55 households, higher up, form the northern boundary. Ringu and Sana, with 100 and 30 households respectively form the northeastern boundary, and finally to the west there is Dobri-Narki, with 14 households.

Most of the land is steeply sloping, with large parts being either stony barren cliffs or precipitous grass slopes. The agriculture land, which has been tended to, has over the years taken on the distinctive form of terrace fields. Farmers with their caring and nurturing efforts have transformed the not so steep parts of the land into valuable and fairly productive agriculture fields with relatively deeper soils than the surrounding areas.

The low to mid altitude range of the village places it in the warm temperate zone while the dry south facing aspect^h, steep slopes and not very deep soils make it an ideal habitat for temperate grass slopes.

^e For the purpose of this Case Study Waiga refers to the whole village unless specifically mentioned otherwise.

^f The area in Hectares are approximate values rounded off to the closest unit.

^g Common Property resources or Commons could be defined as resources with restricted access where joint ownership and management unit exists and access is open only within the bounds of this unit. As against open access resources or properties where there is no exclusion or possibility of the same. Further, common properties are subtractable in consumption and can thus be depleted or exhausted if left under an open access regime.

^h South facing aspects generally have a drier moisture regime than the north face and are not conducive for the growth of Evergreen forests.

The existing forest cover in the village consists of a few patches of *Utis* (Alder) mostly on private lands which dot the mountainside. The main natural tree vegetation includes, fig and toon, but grasses dominate most of the landscape. There are five species of grasses, all of them being utilized for fodder, one for thatching and one for cattle bedding and composting. On homesteads, citrus fruit trees, figs and banana trees are commonly seen. Forests and Grasslands that are usable by the people of Waiga would cover approximately an area of 32 Hectares; this includes 30 hectares of Commons and 2 hectares of private forests. Around 33 Hectares of land in the village is steep cliffs and rocks, inaccessible to humans.

The small area of the village and the grassy vegetation cover do not provide much habitat for mammals, but the cliff and grassy sections are an ideal habitat for some birds. Water, a prerequisite for human habitation is scarce. The agriculture crops are totally rain-fed, while the requirements of water for human consumption and livestock must be met out of the few natural sources of water that exist within the village. The waters of the Madkanya are too far away to be utilized for agriculture.

The three perennial springs that have been tapped for water are:

1. *Semal Dhara*
2. *Chaunali Dhara*
3. *Khul Dunga Dhara*

There is also a seasonal spring above *Chaunali* that provides water for 6 – 8 months of the year. All these natural sources of water are located within a short distance of 100 to 400 meters from the village habitation.

Administration: Under land administration Waiga is categorized as a revenue village, in the Madkot Patti under the Jurisdiction of Munsiri Tehsil. For development and the Panchayat system it is part of the Madkot Gram Sabha in the Munsiri Development Block.

Infrastructure and Mainstream Development Work: Waiga is a small and marginal hamlet in the larger Madkot Gram Sabha. It often gets neglected by planners and local administrators. The Circular Ring road, an all weather mule track connecting the village, starts from Madkot lower down and goes up to Ringu village, through Waiga. There is no electricity and no plans to provide it in the immediate future Apart from the few natural sources, drinking water is provided for by two government installed pipelines, one from a source within the village and the other from Murkuli, a source 5 km. outside the village. There is a primary school (till 5th class) with an official posting of two resident teachers and one Para teacher. But for almost every other facility or service the people must trek to Madkot or beyond.

Traditionally, the people of Waiga used to grind their grain in water turned flourmills in nearby Sana and seasonally across the Madkanya River in Rapti. However, with the advent of fast diesel mills in Madkot, people have moved away from the traditional and comparatively slow watermills², which are facing a crisis across the valley. Oil expelling, which is harder than grinding flour, was usually a

painstaking process, done by hand. The nearest mechanical device was easily a full days walk away in Golfa village and entailed crossing over to a neighboring valley. However, the arrival of a diesel expeller in Madkot has reduced this burden considerably.

History and the People:¹ Settlers from the nearby villages of Chulkot and Dobri-Narki settled in Waiga around the 1900's. The few patches of broad, relatively flat and seemingly fertile land must have drawn these first settlers. The village is a mixed caste village comprising Thakurs and Bhotiyas with a population of 84 spread in 14 households.

The land ownership pattern is fairly different now from the period prior to the Land Resettlement of the 1960's (*Bandobast*). Before the *Bandobast*, the majority of the land belonged to the *Bhotiyas*. With the resettlement, the *Sirtani* system was abolished and the Thakurs and other farmers got ownership rights over the land they tilled. This in turn influenced the economic status of the Thakurs to bring them on par to their once nearly "feudal masters".

Agriculture: Subsistence agriculture is the main occupation. Around 10 hectares of the land is cropped. The cropping pattern follows a two-year cycle. (*Annexure 4*) All the crops are totally rain-fed. Some households cultivate vegetable crops for sale in the local market at Madkot, which because of its road head related urbanization has a demand for food and dairy products. A few households have also grown fruit trees mainly for home consumption and in the fruit season, surpluses are sold in the local market. .

Traditional methods of farming incorporate some techniques to improve the fertility of the fields. Some of the more common techniques used are:

- a. High Input of compost manure
- b. Growing of legume or nitrogen fixing crops
- c. Leaving the fields fallow for a season
- d. Changing the crops grown

The farmers also do multiple cropping as a safe guard against the failure of the main crop.

In recent times there has been a slight reduction in the area being cultivated. Some of the reasons are an increase on economic security, conversion of agricultural area into fuel wood plantations and grass plots and crop infestation by termites.

Dependency of Forests: The dependence on forests is not restricted only to leaf litter but extends to almost every aspect of mountain life. Forests provide the following to mountain communities:

- i. Fodder for Livestock
- ii. Fuel Wood

¹ A household survey was done in Waiga Village. Details of the survey are available in *Annexure 3*.

² The agriculture seasons are divided into Kharif – Sown in spring and harvested in Autumn, and Rabi sown in Autumn and harvested in summer.

- iii. Leaf Litter
- iv. Construction Timber
- v. Agriculture Implement and equipment
- vi. Bamboo for household and agriculture related work
- vii. Thatch grass for Roofing
- viii. Wild edible plants
- ix. Medicinal plants
- x. Other uses

The nature of variation in vegetation across altitudes and aspects makes it quite rare that single villages, especially small ones, would have sufficient areas under different forest types. But at the same time different needs are met from different forests. Thatch grass and fodder grass (hay grass) is found on southern slopes, leaf litter in ever green forest, construction wood in evergreen forests, Ringaal bamboo of 4 different species are to be found at four different altitudes and each have distinctive and unique uses with no local alternative. Medicinal plants, also have distinctive habitats. This all leads up to the fact that mountain communities draw material from different types of forests, often irrespective of the ownership and control systems of the forests or through mutual agreements. This has led to a complex system of use regimes that transcend the legal or administrative boundaries and some such systems have been in place for much longer than can be remembered.

Even if a village were to grow their own forests to try and meet all their needs they would be constrained by the various factors that influence natural floral growth and composition.

Given this scenario, Waiga, like many other villages in this region, is not forest resource rich, has dependencies on other village lands and also suffers from a poor forestland to agriculture land ratio. A study in eastern Nepal, and independent investigations in Kumaon on the ratios of agricultural land to forestland in the mountains required for subsistence levels of production agree on a range from 1:4 to 1:6. Waiga has tried to adjust to changes in access to forests around them by adapting to the changes and adopting different survival strategies, as we will discuss later.

Livestock: Cattle form a big part of the village's subsistence system. They are bred as draughts animal, for their dairying potential and more importantly for the dung they produce, which combined with leaf litter (or grass) is the most needed input to sustain their farming. The dairy produce – milk and Ghee (clarified butter) find a ready market in nearby Madkot, which have many restaurants and non-dairying or farming families. This supplements the cash income of some of the families.

The first buffalo came to the village in the 1950's. The Animal Husbandry Department actively encouraged the rearing of Buffaloes as a means to increase Milk production in the late 1970's under the Antyodaya^k programme.

Two factors have made families in the mountains keep big populations of Cows:

^k Antyodaya was a grants and loan programme for the poor initiated by the Government in the late 1970's.

1. The mountain cows, given their poor nutrition and normally harsh conditions have genetically adapted to be small, low milk producers and for shorter periods of time when compared to better fed cows that live in more hospitable conditions. So most families, having a requirement for milk and other dairy produce have kept reared more cows in order to be able to maintain a continuous cycle of milk production.
2. In order to maintain the fertility of their agriculture fields, they must be adequate cow dung. Since the mountain breed of cattle is small they produce less cow dung per animal. Also the cattle free graze, in the day, so the dung produced then is not collected. So the farmers have had to rear a larger number.

Other Opportunities: Opportunities from non-agricultural activities are scarce. Such activities could be divided into those that are available within the village and those outside. Very few income generating activities available within the village are

- a. Wool work – by women
- b. Bamboo Crafts work

A wider variety of opportunities present themselves outside the village, some of them longer term (service type) and many of them casual and temporary. Such non-resident or non-local income contributes much to meeting the cash requirement of the village and is an important part of the village economy.

Waiga - Conservation and Resource Upgradation

The Process

Waiga has 10 Hectares under agricultural regimes and 32 Hectares under forest and grass cover. A ratio of 1: 3.2 that, by the estimates of studies quoted earlier is on the marginal side. However, this ratio is an improvement in the situation, as it existed earlier, when all the current village Commons were open access, and forest produce had to be got from the forests of nearby villages. Also the intensity of agriculture was a little more.

The history of forest resource upgradation began nearly 20 years back, when an army soldier retired and returned to his village Waiga, to a typical mountain life full of uncertainties and hard labor. He initiated the planting of Utis trees on his families private lands, in order to be able to meet their fuel wood needs without having to trudge to the closest forests, which are at least 5 kilometers away. The initial skepticism of their neighbors and others in the village gave way to a more involved private initiative where nearly every family was planting and protecting their own private forests. But this was after a gap of a few years, when the growth of the Utis became visible on Havaladar Gopal Singh's land.

The main reason they chose Utis was because saplings were easily available in the dense Forest in the Walthi Rapti Van Panchayat, across the river. The other important reason was that Utis is a very fast growing species and can do well on even poor soils.

Today nearly 2 Hectares of land are under private Utis forests and the people are adding more species like Bamboo to these forests.

However, apart from these valuable and private initiatives a more solid and unified approach to the other village land resources was lacking.

The entire revenue wasteland land within the village, which was not encroached was actually under an open access regime, with no control on grazing, grass cutting or tree cutting (of any trees they might have had). Since it was an open access regime there were opportunistic users from all the surrounding villages especially Chulkot. Fires⁴ in the winters ensured the destruction of any natural regeneration that might have escaped the notice and palate of grazing animals.

Around this time, 1990-93, the impact of restricted access to traditional forest areas, rock fall from the highly degraded and steep slopes, the formation of small gullies with a consequent violent run off of rain water, jolted the small community to think of some protective measures. But they did not have the social strength or legal wherewithal to change the open access regime to a restricted common. This was partly because the opportunistic users from Chulkot and other nearby villages had more political influence, were bigger and could easily ride rough shod over any unsupported initiative and partly because there was no firm consensus even within the members of the village.

Some members of the village had heard of a Tree Grower's Cooperative Society (TGCS)⁵ Project being initiated in the valley. The National Tree Growers Cooperative Federation (NTGCF) was implementing the project, started in the valley, in 1992. It was the first non-governmental initiative in the valley and was still in its formative years..

It was during one of the preliminary survey visits and meetings of the NTGCF project team to Waiga and nearby villages, in 1994, that the idea of being able to take the upslope land on lease from the Government, protect it and then use the benefits seemed to become a real possibility for the people of Waiga.

Though the TGCS project was still in its beginning stages the people of Waiga felt that it was an opportunity to try to make their life support systems stronger. While there was a broad consensus on the requirement to protect and up grade the natural resource base, there was not much agreement on the process to be followed. There was also a lot of initial doubt and resistance to a new institutional strategy and a unified process.

Under the existing "open access or free for all system " which extended to their neighbors territory and vice versa, Individuals had there own stakes and privatized niche use regimes and strategies. Many could foresee problems for themselves or their cattle under a Commons approach.

There were a lot of apprehensions in the village regarding the mechanisms of protection, the source of funds for the work and dealing with bureaucratic processes of getting land leased from the Government.

The NTGCF project team had experience on these matters, drawn from similar work by the same organization in other states, so the process was easy to outline.

Its implementation would depend on the village coming together and pushing with commitment and involvement from their side.

There were a few meetings between the project team and the people of Waiga. NTGCF felt the need for total participation of all adult members of the village, men and women both.¹

In September 1994 the village decided to commit themselves to forming a TGCS and apply for land lease. They resolved to form a TGCS and applied for registration of The Waiga Tree Grower's Cooperative Society. NTGCF, working as it was under the specific mandate of helping form TGCS' and subsequently support them had a MOU with the Government of Uttar Pradesh to this effect. The application for the TGCS was forwarded through NTGCF to the registrar and Waiga TGCS was registered on the 20th of March 1995.

24 people attended the first meeting of the TGCS of which 12 were women. Every family was represented. A management committee (MC) was made. Kedar Singh Chulkotia was nominated the Chairperson, while Havaldar Gopal Singh, who was still skeptical as to the real agenda of NTGCF, was appointed one of the MC members. There was an informal consensus that the management would be done through the general body, since the village was small and the best system would be to include every adult in the decision making process. The chairperson and a member of the MC, Keshar Singh, would also operate an independent Joint Bank account with the NTGCF through which funds for work would be transferred.

Membership to the TGCS⁶ was initially open to two adults from each household, one woman and one man, who resided in the village the whole year and had permanent homes too. Such members were also supposed to contribute towards the management of the TGCS and work on the land after it was leased. In July 2000, membership was opened to all adult members^m of the village, with the other criteria remaining the same.

There was a move away from the traditional one *chullah*, one member system. It was probably for the first time in the village, apart from the political system, that women were allowed to participate in the management of a resource(s) and institution as individual members rather than just a member of a family. Though the management committee was a formality, four women were nominated as management committee members.

In order to establish membership, people had to buy a token share of Rs.10. In the first meeting 27 people (14 women + 13 men) became members. One of the main agendas of this first formation meeting was to establish the area that the village would like to lease and work on. Formally there was a project requirement of up to 15 hectares, in order to make the work ecologically and economically

¹ The drudgery of the mountain women today, seen in the great distances and the intense physical labor involved in fetching fuel wood, fodder and water just for sustenance, is probably unparalleled. NTGCF felt that for the project to be relevant it would have to involve the women of these communities right from the planning stage.

^m Other TGCS' and Van Panchayats had opened membership to all adults from 1996 onwards, but Waiga did not feel the need then and made such a resolution only in July 2000.

viable. The area the village decided on was the Revenue land available behind the village, which as described earlier was very degraded. Tree cover was almost none, gullies were being formed, it was open to grazing for 24 hours to anybody and fires affected it every year. The actual area of this patch of land is 27 hectares. The village decided to apply for lease up to the maximum permitted limit of 15 hectares but decided informally to work on only around 8 hectares. The lower portion of the land was to be left open for grazing, while the topmost section was to be left open to the people of Chulkot. This step was a compromise and an appeasement strategy for their more powerful neighbors, who they felt might not be pleased with the prospect of an open access area used by them coming under a protective system.

The project Team did not insist on pushing work on the entire proposed or available 15 hectares. Time would help the village decide.

During this whole process, which concentrated around the hamlet of Waiga and the plot of land immediately upslope to Waiga, the needs and possibilities of Chaunali hamlet were left out. Though a part of the same village and social system, and participating fully in the ongoing institutional process, there was a slight difference in the forest dependent strategies of Chaunali. The three families there had access to a less open revenue wasteland plot, which meant a slightly more productive wasteland. They met their annual fuel wood needs from driftwood that was brought in fairly abundant quantities by the Madkanya River in the monsoons. Like the rest of the village they too met most of their forest needs from *Sana* and *Khata*. Since the work on the plot above Waiga did not directly affect them, the residents of Chaunali were quite happy to allow the residents of Waiga hamlet to take the initial risks.

During the period when the registration procedure was underway a few village meetings took place. This was in order to keep the momentum of the institutional process underway as well as work out firmer strategies. The lengthier process of preparing the land records and maps for land lease was also begun. The map records were verified on site. This helped the village clearly identify the area they wanted to get on lease and protect and it also helped them plan the work they would do.

The process of physical site visits also threw up the various problems that would be faced. The biggest fear was the constant threat of intrusion by outsiders and the villages presumed inability to tackle the powerful outsiders. Cattle from Chulkot were a big part of the free grazing community on the proposed land. These cattle would make their way down from the plot and invade the agriculture fields and destroy valuable crops. There was no way to control these free grazing cattle, which had been left to fend for themselves.

The submission of the Registration Certificate and the subsequent submission of land lease papers was a big morale booster for the people of the village. Especially Havaldar Gopal Singh, who seemed to have now visualized the positive aspects of the process under way. He was itching to start work, land lease or not. Under his motivation more people in the village wanted to begin the process of regeneration.

It now became apparent that the sooner the land was protected the earlier it would become more productive.

Around this time, February 1995, NTGCF took a group of farmers from 8 villages (TGCS') in Munsiri, including 3 from Waiga, for a Farmer Interaction Programme to another NTGCF project area in Gujarat, which has been working for nearly 6 years. There were a number of TGCS' in Gujarat that had achieved very good results in regenerating land which, at the time of lease to the respective TGCS', had been very degraded tracts.

After the return of these farmers, and in the subsequent formal and informal discussions, the impact of the success of the concept and working of TGCS' began to further motivate the people to want to start work.

Soon, in an informal meeting the village members, in a bold step, decided to initiate physical work of reforesting and protecting the land that was pending lease to their TGCS. They were willing to take the consequences, if any, of developing the land that as yet did not officially belong to them or their TGCS.

Since the land was not yet legally leased to the TGCS, NTGCF could not release funds to them nor could it assure them of financial support in case the land lease application was rejected. But they were willing to undertake work even with the possibility of not getting external support. However, they had confidence and faith that they would surely get their land lease.

Not wanting to lose a seasonⁿ the members of Waiga decided to go ahead with their own plantation and protection activities, in-spite of the legal hitch of no land lease. They initiated the following:

1. Putting a stop to open grazing of their cattle on the proposed plot. As mentioned earlier, they had decided to begin with protection work on only 8 hectares, but the physical continuum of the two parts of the plot made it difficult for them to leave one section open to their cattle and prevent them from entering the restricted area. So after 6 months of failing to make this combination work they decided to protect the whole of the leased land and subsequently stopped the practice of free grazing on the entire 15 hectares. This too was a big step, as it meant that they had to find alternative places to graze their livestock or use a different approach to cattle rearing.
2. Planting of around 1500 plants of *Utis* in the spring of 1995. They used their experience of planting *Utis* on their private lands to good effect.
3. Preventing the livestock of Chulkot from free grazing on their proposed forest plot, this would also then protect their agriculture fields. Since no physical activity of walling or fencing was feasible at that time, they decided to patrol the forest plot in turns or to go to the plot whenever they saw livestock in it.

ⁿ The mountain regions are fortunate to have two planting seasons. The monsoons are ideal for evergreen trees and the winters for the winter deciduous trees. Apart from this direct sowing of seed of tree and other plant species is also a very successful method of regeneration. Hence, a season missed is literally a year lost.

4. Protecting their plot from annual fires that were set by people. This they did by not putting their plots to fire themselves. And whenever they saw their plot being set on fire a group rushed up to the site and put it off.

During the month after the registration of the TGCS, work on sending the papers for land lease was hurried up. The papers were prepared and put up for land lease through NTGCF on the 21st of April 1995. In August 1995 the village received the land lease order and the necessary papers.

This was five months from the time of registration of the TGCS and four months after submission of land lease papers. A legal demarcation of the land was to follow. This was done by the Patwari in the presence of representatives of the neighboring revenue villages, with common boundaries. In this case Chulkot, Ringu, Sana and Dobri-Narki.

In the intervening months, the people of Waiga had made their intention of protecting their land and restricting access to it clear to all the neighbors and free riders. This threatened the existing free-for-all situation, which was to the benefit of many of the neighbors who then attempted to obstruct the process

1. By filing a boundary dispute case with the Sub-Divisional Magistrate regarding the demarcated boundary of the TGCS plot. The boundary dispute was judged in favor of Waiga and their TGCS.
2. By driving their animals into the TGCS plot in order to ensure that the plot did not get a chance to be properly protected.

However, these few initial problems got resolved without much heartburn. The TGCS now had before them the opportunity to implement whatever they had been planning for the previous year.

With the financial and technical support now assured from NTGCF they began the process of regenerating the leased land and also simultaneously improving their private support areas.

Regular planning meetings were held. Since it was a small village it was easy for the people to get together to discuss the management of the land. The TGCS plot was fortunately located in full visual sight of Waiga hamlet, hence its care-taking was easy. The approved lease papers, for 15.043 Hectares of land in the name of Waiga TGCS were received in August 1995. From the time of formation of the Village Institution till December 2000, the main activities that have been done by the village:

No.	Activity	Quantity	Details
1	Common Land Plantation	13000 saplings	12 species over 4 Hectares
2	Hedgerow and Firebreaks	500 meters	<i>Utis and Bambhalu</i> trees planted
3	Common Land Seeding	328 kilos of seed	5 species over 4 Hectares
4	Common Land Grass Plantation	176 loads	1 species (<i>Salam</i>) over .5 Hectares
5	Private Land Grass Plantation	145 loads	1 Species (<i>Salam</i>)
4	Private Land Plantation	1645 saplings	11 species along field boundaries
5	Stone Fencing	114 meters	On the only place suitable for stone walls
6	Fire Lining	5 times	1996, 97, 98 , 99 & 2000
7	Water Harvesting Structures	1 Dhara	At Semal Dhara
8	Soil Conservation	135person days	Gully Plugging
9	Bee Keeping Training	In the village	With Bee Keepers from Jumla Nepal
10	Farmer Interaction Programme	To Gujarat 3 members	
11	Visit to Community initiatives in Nepal	1 member	As Part of a larger group from Munsiri

Benefits of the Conservation Initiative to the People

1. **Fodder:** Waiga was dependent on their neighbors for some green fodder. Hay fodder for the winter was got from grass plots called *Mangs*^o, or in rare cases from the neighboring Van Panchayats. The production of hay from the Revenue Civil Land before protection was minimal and inadequate and also a lot of it was harvested by whoever happened to get there first. These were usually people from Chulkot who were slightly closer to the top edge of the plot. However, at the end of the first year of protection, in the winter of 1995-96, the results of their legally unsupported protection initiative began to pay off. The residents of Waiga were now able to harvest one *lota*^p for each of the 14 households. It may not have been much in real terms, but it was an instant benefit and the potential for an increase in production was clearly visible.

^o Mangs are grass plots usually on common land or privatized revenue lands, which, are maintained by families for the production of hay fodder specifically for the winter.

^p A lota is a stack of hay that could contain from 100 to 150 pulas. Each pula weighs approximately 4 kilos.

- Over the next few years there was a progressive increase in fodder production, both green and dry. Today every family has more than adequate dry fodder, as many as seven lootas per family. They also manage to sell Mang's - seasonally to people of the neighboring villages. Over and above this, there is still standing grass left over at the end of the season. Further, they are able to harvest green grass through the year, even during the peak winter months, when it is rarely available.
- Green Fodder: In the growing season women would make a quick trip, to the plot and get back a load or two of green grass. Not only was green fodder readily available, it was close by and for all practical purposes theirs!
- The money generated from the sale of Mang's is deposited in a bank account in order to save for the future needs of the institution.

2. **Regeneration:** Subsequent to the protection from over grazing, fires and indiscriminate cutting of grass and other vegetation the plot has seen a tremendous increase in natural regeneration of a variety of plants. Many of them are valuable fodder trees, like wild figs, of which previously only a few were surviving, that too on private land.

- Tree cover is visibly increasing. In 1994 there was just one big Toon tree left on the plot. Today the entire plot is dotted with a variety of plants and trees. Some of these have taken on the unmistakable and distinct tree form. Rows of trees and other plants, specially planted as firebreaks and hedgerows, can be seen from a distance.
- Since there is a wide variety of needs that are catered to by forests, the members of Waiga planned and planted a wide variety of local plant species to meet their diverse needs.
- Thatch Grass plantation: The requirement for thatch grass used to be met from Mang's of other villages. Under the plantation programme, some plots of thatch grass were made both on common and private land. This has made the village self sufficient in terms of thatch grass, with some left over. Grass plots that are not harvested for thatching are used as valuable and highly nutritious fodder in the growing season.
- There has been a change in the natural mix of grass species. When the land was degraded the grass species had become quite unpalatable and in local knowledge, not nutritious. With protection, prevention of fires and closure to open grazing, the grass production increased. More importantly, plots of grass were left to seed naturally^q. This has allowed for natural genetic mixing. Finally, the number of grass species has increased from one, before the protection regime, to a productive and nutritious five now.

3. **Cattle:** Adequate availability of fodder in the village and the closure of grazing lands in the neighboring Dobri-Narki, who emulated Waiga and formed their own Van Panchayat^r, to protect and regenerate their land have lead to an

^q Regular harvesting of Mangs followed by fires leaves no scope for grasses to reach the seeding stage and to then regenerate from seed, which is important for a healthy genetic stock.

^r With the assistance of NTGCF.

increase in the number of stall fed animals which in turn has lead to an increase in the output of cow dung.

- Unproductive cattle, previously left to fend for themselves must now be either stall fed or sent to forests that are still open. Since such cattle are becoming a problem, the people are now reducing their cattle holding to a manageable number.
- Though Buffaloes produce more milk, in consistent quantities and lactate longer, they also consume more fodder and have to be stall-fed and are therefore hard to maintain. With the increase in fodder availability after protection and the practice of stall-feeding becoming a necessity the rearing of Buffaloes has become a viable proposition. An added benefit is that they also produce more dung than the local cows.

4. **Leaf Litter and Alternatives:** As mentioned earlier the inadequacy of good quality leaf litter has been a problem for the village. With the increase in grass production, they have been using *Ganni* grass as a good alternative. This has reduced their dependence on other forests and also saved valuable time and effort that would have gone into leaf litter collection from the far away forests.

- The farmers of Waiga are planting other tree species, the leaves of which could also be used as leaf litter.

5. **Soil Run Off and Gully Plugging:** The increase in vegetative cover has brought about a visible decrease in soil run off. Waters that flowed down violently and destructively seem to have reduced considerably.

- The gullies that had been formed will take some more time to get filled up and / or disappear. There is still a need for some stone structures to plug some of the gullies in order to prevent torrents from forming and beginning a new gully.

6. **Private Land Plantation:** Private land plantations have a history older than the TGCS, however through the TGCS members of village were able to access a wider variety of plants and also got financial support to implement some more difficult options.

Some of the plantations on private land are:

A. Thatch Grass: 145 loads of Salam Grass covering an approximate area of .36 hectares.

B. Fruit Trees: 303 Citrus (Malta, Lemon) and Nut (Walnut and Almond) Fruit trees.

C. Fodder Trees: 238 evergreen fodder trees (*Bhimal* and *Chiura*)

D. Fuel Wood Trees: 504 trees of *Utis*

E. Multi Purpose Trees (Leaf Litter, Timber, Fuel wood and others): 600 trees of Horse Chestnut, Wild Walnut, *Reetha*)

Other Effects of the Village Institution

1. Sheep and Goats^s: Sheep and Goat are best raised when they are free ranging. They also have a wider dietary range, can go onto steep cliffs and require smaller amounts of fodder per animal, than the bigger cattle.^t However, in the case of Waiga their free ranging habits have caused them to be unwelcome in the village, at the same time the support area available for the flocks has reduced drastically. A few people who owned Sheep and goats have now reduced the size of the flocks, with just a tinge of reluctance.
2. Transfer of Knowledge: During the process of regeneration and protection there was a lot of information flow, especially about techniques related to plantations, seeding and nursery. The people now feel confident to undertake any such activity without need for technical and in many cases financial support.
3. The story of Waiga may not be well know across the valley, but the visible results have stood out especially for their immediate neighbors and for people who have seen the changes happening. Some have been motivated enough to want to replicate the success of Waiga, other have not been able to try because of other problems affecting them.

Institutional Processes:

Planning and Decision Making: The TGCS was a new institution to the village, and there was a conscious effort by the project to not reinforce existing inequalities of society in this institution and it has been helping in trying to incorporate processes that would make the TGCS a truly democratic institution, with the understanding that this would determine its long term survival as well as the sustainability of the resources it controls.

Planning of work or the functioning of the institution has formally been done in the regular meetings. However, such decisions have sometimes, already run their course in the more real and informal setting of their daily routine, before figuring in formal discussions or appearing in the records. Technical specifications were often based on the larger learning's of the project in the valley, which was based on a flow of information from similar work by other villages and were adapted to the specific requirements of the village.

Participation: Though a small village, there is the normal lot of rifts and human dynamics that exist in any group of humans. Apart from human nature, caste and class history does contribute its bit to the problems that crop up now and then, but it does not affect participation. In an unsaid way, and even in the face of larger problems, the members of Waiga work as a cohesive group when it comes to their TGCS plot. There is a general agreement on the rules-in- use and

^s Sheep and Goats: A big part of the traditional economy has been the rearing of sheep and goat for wool and meat. The flocks migrate seasonally to the alpine pastures in summer and the Himalayan foothills in winter. During the migration some of these flocks spend some time in the forests of their owners. And in case of small flocks they are kept permanently in the local village forests.

^t Because of these reasons sheep and goat have often been called the poor person's cows

all work is distributed and done equally. They attempt to coordinate work timings so that it is possible for all families to participate.

However one family, of Inder Singh, have kept away from the TGCS. Though efforts have been made to involve them, the family stays away from the institution's activities. It would have been a cause for worry for the institution if one family was keeping away as a form of protest, but this isolation is self imposed and extends to their other Social interactions, like marriages, festivals and other social functions as well. They meet their fuel need from their private forests and the fodder needs from the still open portions of revenue land.

Benefit Sharing: By virtue of being a small and normally cohesive village they have managed to come up with a simple formula: equal benefits for everybody. All the benefits that accrue from the protected land are distributed equally to every family. In cases where there is some left over from distribution it is either left unharvested or sold to outsiders and the amount is put into a bank account as savings for future uses.

Contribution, Savings and Corpus: Much of the physical and watch and ward work done, in order to protect and regenerate the TGCS plot, was financially supported by NTGCF. However, the village is aware that such support is time bound and if they are to continue to be able to invest in the land, even small sums, they would have to establish some mechanism for savings for the long term.

Some of the methods already in place are:

- a. They have made contributions from the payments received by them for work done through the TGCS.
- b. They are placing all receipts from fines (if any) and the sale of produce from the TGCS plot.
- c. The amount they initially put in for membership has also been made part of the corpus.
- d. Interest accumulating on the institution's savings in the bank.
- e. A system of annual fees by all the members.

At present they have around Rs. 4000 in a Savings account. Though less, they feel it is a fall back for when the work required to be done, cannot be done by the members themselves.

Leadership: Individuals, especially Havaldar Gopal Singh have been in the forefront of ensuring the process of conservation before the TGCS was formed and subsequently the protection and regeneration of the leased lands. However, more than any single individual it has been a collective effort to keep the process in motion. At different times in the history of the institution and its activities different people have come forward to initiate a course of action. Many of which are contributing to the proper management of the institution as well as the land.

Though the institutions are different the members are the same. In effect there has been no change in the functioning of the village institution. NTGCF has been continuing support to the village and will continue to do so even after a total change over.

The Role Of Women in the Institution: The role of women right from the initiation of the TGCS and till date has been very high and involved. As said earlier the onus of ensuring adequate collection of material from the forests is on the women of the family. The adequate and close availability of green fodder, hay, leaf litter or grass for compost has considerably reduced the time and effort spent by the women of Waiga on their collection from previously far away forests. Fuel wood is got from their private *Utis* forests. This has given them a lot of security with regards to the source of forest produce.

Women have attended nearly every formal meeting and probably all informal ones. The percentage of attendance of women, in TGCS meetings, has been very high, as compared to their involvement in the Gram Sabha or any other forum of the village. This is the case even with the physical regeneration works that the TGCS undertook.

Women Forest Watchers: The steep sloping configuration of the plot did not make it suitable for the construction of a stone wall or any other fence to protect from free grazing animals. For nearly two years the forests were patrolled whenever required by whoever saw the need or whoever was free. At the same time abundant and good quality grass that was beginning to be available, this attracted people from neighboring villages who were coming quietly and harvesting grass without permission or payment of fees for cutting rights.

In the beginning of 1997 two women, Sita Devi and Padima Devi became joint watchers of the plot. It was now their responsibility to protect the plot and report the status to the village whenever required. The two women could split the day's work of watching as well as continue their normal work.

Given the strong patriarchal society around and the general stereotyping of Gender roles this was a move away from normal societal norms, and also a small confidence building break-through, not only for the women of the village but also for the women of the valley.

Since then there has been a change of forest watchers, but they have always been women.

Other Women Forum's: many villages in the valley have Mahila Mangal Dals^u. However Waiga does not have any such group. The women of Waiga decided to form a separate women's self help group under the aegis of the TGCS and with the support of NTGCF, however after the initial few meetings this group has not been really able to translate into a functional Women's group.

Form of the Village Institution - Security of Tenure

One of the reasons why Waiga chose to work through a Tree Growers' Cooperative Society is because of the support given to the village by the National Tree Growers Cooperative Federation. During the initial years of the NTGCF project in Munsiri legally it could not work with or provide support to any form

^u Mahila Mangal Dals are registered women self help groups promoted by the government.

of village institution other than a TGCS. However, Van Panchayats were and are a strong institutional form, and in many aspects better than TGCS.

- VPs have a longer history of existence. They were born out of a people's struggle for forest rights under the British. They are widely accepted by communities
- TGCS' have a fifteen-year lease on the land, but VP's have a secure tenure on the land and forests.
- The management of Van Panchayats is almost totally in the hands of the community. A Van Panchayat Niyamawali or a model set of rules applicable to all Van Panchayats guides them. Within this framework they may make their individual rules and byelaws. Being totally local they are usually in tune with local requirements and can help in planning and management of the resource accordingly.
- Some VP's have managed their forests very well and some of the best forest areas in the upper parts of the valley are to be found in VPs.

Considering this NTGCF managed to get the permission to work with Van Panchayats. Around the same time the Government of Uttar Pradesh also re-initiated the process of creating new Van Panchayats and actively encouraged the transfer of Revenue Civil Land to newly created Van Panchayats. NTGCF also decided to support this process and work at creating more Van Panchayats and supporting them apart from the existing TGCS. It was proposed that these TGCS' would be helped to change over to VPs if required. NTGCF has been helping villages in preparing the papers, maps, holding meetings, and with the submissions and follow up.

Waiga TGCS and the members were presented the possibility of creating a Van Panchayat and converting their leased land into a Van Panchayat and with it getting a more secure hold on the land.

They did not have any problems with the TGCS form of institution. But their familiarity with the working of Van Panchayats in some neighboring villages as well as in many other in Munsiri combined with the security of land tenure were powerful motivating factors for them to want to change over.

In a meeting of the TGCS in March 1998 the village decided to go ahead with the process of creating a Van Panchayat and of transferring the land to the Van Panchayat. The process was similar to the formation of a TGCS but it involved a few more government functionaries at the field level.

Waiga having seen the benefits of protection and upgradation decided to put in as much area as was available^v to them, which was most of the civil land near the Waiga hamlet. Even the civil land available near Chaunali was proposed to be placed in the Van Panchayat.

^v Under the present system villages are allowed to put in as much Revenue Land (cultivable and uncultivable) as may be there within the revenue boundaries of the village.

The formation meeting of the Van Panchayat was held in January 1999 in which the Van Panchayat inspector was also present^w. However,, during the discussions, and signing of the various documents related to the formation not much attention was paid to the land that the village proposed to bring under the Van Panchayat. A rough map of the proposed area was made and the official formation of the VP finalized. In the hurry and confusion the plot of land near Chaunali had been missed out.

The VP papers, map records, land records and other related documents were prepared and put up to the Government through NTGCF in February 1999. After being processed by the Government and some rectifications in the papers, the final VP formation papers, land records and maps were received in September 2000.

The process of demarcation of land, and handing over and taking over between the TGCS and VP, is under way. The village has decided to immediately follow up the process with a request for expansion of their new VP to include the area left out the first time.

The Future of the Village and the Institution

Forest land to agriculture land Ratio:

Currently the agriculture land to forest land ratio is at 1:3.2. As mentioned earlier, this is an improvement to what existed before the creation of the TGCS. The people of Waiga are still dependent on the forests of neighboring VPs for some forest produce that is not yet available on their lands, likehousing timber, wood for agriculture implements, some medicinal plants and Ringaal bamboo.

Even if they were to bring the entire available revenue land under a protection and regeneration regime the ratio will still remain under 1:4. What effect a negative ratio will have on the long-term sustainability of the agriculture fields is not well known. However, the village has been working at reducing their consumption of biomass without loss in productivity of their fields. Their strategies to optimize the available resources have been:

1. Closing the land from open grazing and allowing maximum possible natural production to take place.
2. Reducing the number of cattle and keeping those that apart from being better milk producers also produce larger quantities of dung per animal.
3. Reduction in sheep and goat population.
4. Bringing some private land under forest and grass cover.
5. Allowing natural regeneration, especially of grasses, which has increased production.
6. Reduction in area coming under agriculture. This has been a two way process - reduced support area lead to less agriculture. Less agriculture in turn increased the per unit forest support area.

These measures may not be adequate, the village might have to continue to make their livelihood systems more efficient and depend on some external resources.

^w A Van Panchayat Inspector is a government employee who handles the administrative work for the Government in the field. They are responsible for ensuring the smooth running of a VP as well as to organize new VPs.

But the situation of independence and security as well as control over productive natural resources has made living a lot easier. The village may not be able to define the balance they are trying to achieve, but it is something that other villages in the valley to can possibly learn from.

Participation: The lack of participation of the one household in the village has been affecting the village as a whole. However the formation of the VP may influence the situation a bit. The family has been sustaining itself from resources drawn from their private forests, VPs of other villages and some civil land that was not under a protection regime of the TGCS. This plot of civil land has now been included in the newly formed VP area. The main body of the village feels the need to include it and make it more productive than it is currently, through protection and regeneration. However this has not been fully discussed either by the members themselves or with Inder Singh and his family. The views of Inder Singh and his family are not known.

Membership: Till now the membership of the TGCS or VP was restricted to permanent residents of the revenue village of Waiga. The abundant quantities of fodder available and the perceived long-term benefits are well known in the nearby regions of Waiga. This has attracted the attention of a lot of people. Some of them are those who own land in Waiga. They either moved out from Waiga many years ago or have inherited land in Waiga. Some of them, from the close by Dobri-Narki village even cultivate some crops on their fields Waiga. Others have left their fields' fallow or have a sharing arrangement with some of the farmers in Waiga who cultivate on their behalf. These people do not live in the village nor have they contributed to the protection and regeneration of the land, as it now exists.

The current members of Waiga are not sure what must be done. Many of those who have applied for membership are blood relatives of those who are now members. Some of them share the same ancestry. Before *Bandobast*, all the land in Waiga belonged to the people of Chulkot. Some of them have also asked for membership.

Allowing any one non-resident person to become an outsider will open a floodgate of new members, which will upset the delicate ecological balance that Waiga is trying to achieve and the social balance that it already has. The VP plans to actively regenerate the land that was previously not under protective regimes. NTGCF would continue support to them in this respect.

Much of the future of the institution depends on the decisions taken by its members. In 1994 the motivating factor was the resource crunch they faced. Today they may not have achieved a perfect homeostatis but they have tried with dedication and faith and are willing to continue trying to improve their situation. Some factors are beyond their control: limited availability of land, increasing pressure on the lands around and within, financial support, inputs in terms of efficient systems, government policies and a host of others will influence their survival and the survival of their eco-system.

Endnotes:

¹ During the British Rule there was a period when all forests in Kumaon and Garhwal were taken over as the property of the Queen of England and a new set of rules regarding its use were imposed. Village Communities, at the stroke of a pen, were dispossessed of their Forests. The heavy dependence on forests and the loss of rights was a big blow to their very existence. There followed a period of intense struggle and negotiation. However, the British were relentless. As a result, the local communities began to destroy the valuable forests by setting them on fire on a very large scale. It was then that the British agreed to return a part of the forest areas to village communities as Village Forests. Van Panchayats have evolved from this.

² Watermills: Village owned watermills are the only means for people in remote villages, which do not have electricity to convert the grain into flour. These mills are maintained as a common property, and often when the flow of the stream is insufficient, as it sometimes is in winter and summer, especially in villages with progressive deforestation, people are forced to carry their grain over difficult terrain to neighboring villages for milling, where often they have to wait long because of insufficient capacity. Traditional water mills are fairly simple to construct, maintain and operate. They are made totally out of local material.

³ The practice of using compost manure as fertilizers is widely prevalent in the valley or for that matter in most of the Himalaya. This manure is a mix of leaf litter and cattle dung, which is composted for some period of time. The availability of leaf litter is crucial to the compost. Villages that cannot access leaf litter must make do with agriculture residue or grass. For the agriculture field to remain productive over a long period of time some bio-strategies have been adopted like planting of soil improving crops or leaving the fields fallow. However the most important input is of dung compost., Some studies estimate the average input of manure that would be required per hectare, to keep agriculture production sustainable, is in the range of 6 – 8 tonnes per season.

Thus, even for subsistence agriculture, the farmers must not only rear cattle for dung production but also have an adequate support area for the cattle as well as for leaf litter inputs.

⁴ The Gori valley has been and is a haven for people who, for different reasons, set fire to the valley's forests. The main types of human caused forest fires are:

- a. Poacher Fires: Commercial Hunters, in the winter months, set fire to high altitude forests in order to drive the animals in a preset direction so that it is easy to kill them.
- b. Fodder Grass Pasture Fires: Shepherds, Village Communities and individuals set fire to their grass plots from which they cut their winter stock of grass. They do this in the mistaken belief that such treatment by fire causes grass to grow earlier in the season. This belief is mistaken because what actually happens is that the grass is stressed out to throw up new shoots in order to compensate the damage caused by fire to the plant.
- c. Thatch Grass Pasture Fires: Thatch Grass (*Salam - Chrysopogon gryllus*) is the main roof thatching grass in this valley. A large part of the forest area is reserved

for this grass, which forms an important part of this region's living system. Village Communities cut grass inefficiently and on new plots every year, which results in large stocks remaining on individual grass plants. This leads to a situation where it would not be easy to cut grass on these plots in the coming years. So in order to avoid this situation they set fire to these grass plots.

d. Mischief Fires: These fires have no reason other than an intent to cause destruction.

⁵ The principal idea of village level Tree Grower's Cooperative Society was to enable village communities to access revenue wasteland or revenue civil land, on lease from the Government, which could then be developed to meet the fuel wood and fodder needs of the village. The objective of NTGCF was to provide support to villages that felt such a requirement. Support was provided for the initial mobilization of the community, forming and registering of a village TGCS, which would then, under an MOU with the State Government, be in a legal position to request for land lease. NTGCF has signed an MoU with the Government of UP to provide technical, institutional and financial support to such TGCS' as may be formed under the project.

⁶ Membership to TGCS' is governed by the rules of the Act under which a TGCS is registered. Different State Cooperative Acts have different rules and can also be interpreted differently.