



SHODH

# POLICY BRIEF

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IFRI- Collaborative  
Research Center

## Neglecting Institution Building in JFM Leading to Forest Deterioration

### Evidence from revisit study

Active participation of communities in the management of natural resources is gaining ground all over the developing world. Government policies and programs are increasingly becoming participatory in India as well. The Indian government took a major step by adopting a policy of participatory forest management in 1988 and to operationalize 'inclusion', Joint Forest Management (JFM) was implemented in a number of states. With several liberal modifications, and introduction of a two-tier system through Forest Development Agency, participation has become integral part of the government's forest policy. But is the implementing agency doing enough to make the pro-people programs real? Is the changed approach getting reflected in improvement of resource condition? A recent 'revisit' study by Rucha Ghate tried to address these questions in three villages located in the forest rich district of Gadchiroli in Maharashtra state. The study concludes that JFM is being implemented without much conviction in the participatory approach. Apart from the fact that some FD staff itself is unaware of the basic purpose and provisions of the program, there are problems like dearth of staff, irregular flow of funds, and lack of training to staff in preparing micro plans and dealing with people. Many communities are accepting JFM mainly for the financial incentives, as their participation has not got reflected in any improvement in the condition of the resource.

The major lesson of the study is that there is increasing need for continuous investment in strengthening of institutions.

### METHODOLOGY

The study is based on three case studies from the forest rich district of Gadchiroli in the State of Maharashtra. Using the scientific method developed by International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI), the villages were first visited in the year 2002 and then in 2007. IFRI has developed a set of ten research instruments to facilitate collection of information about demographic, economic and cultural characteristics of communities dependent on forests. It uses rigorous forestry techniques to measure impact of institutions regulating the use of forest products. Biophysical data determining forest condition in the three respective institutional structures was collected from 30 temporary forest plots in each of the three forests. Distribution of plots was carefully determined keeping in mind the major objective of the study, which was to assess variation in forest condition.

### FUNDING

While South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE) funded the first visit in the year 2002, funds for revisits in the year 2007 were extended by IFRI, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

[www.umich.edu/~ifri](http://www.umich.edu/~ifri)

Community forestry in India is characterized broadly by the presence of three different types of institutional structures aimed at promoting common property regimes – self-initiated efforts, NGO-promoted efforts, and the government's Joint Forest Management. While the first study done in 2001-03 clearly reveals that there is no single 'best' governance system that can ensure sustainable forest management, self-initiated, and NGO-promoted efforts reflect an improved understanding of institutional rules, their acceptance and compliance. However, issues of inter-community socio-economic divisions, choice of scientific techniques, and financial help are better tackled with State support.

There are several studies on JFM that have criticized it on various grounds like - in most places protection committees do not last long, they become dysfunctional either after initial enthusiasm dies down or after the incentive money is exhausted; the committees end up being unequal partners and timber revenues are never actually shared; in some cases village level JFM committees remain only on paper; many committees are ineffective in protecting the resource etc. Yet, the fact remains that in twenty-eight states that have adopted JFM, 8.4 million families in 84,632 JFM committees are managing around 17.33 million hectares of forestland in India according to the annual report of Ministry of Environment and Forest 2004-05. The growing popularity of JFM is not only an opportunity but also a responsibility. For JFM to be the new institutional arrangement for forest protection as well as for rural development, and to ensure its effectiveness it needs to become a 'peoples' program in true sense. Robust people's institutions would be a necessity, which would require more than just financial investments.

### **STUDY UNDERTAKEN IN 2001-03**

The first study analyzed alternative outcomes in the three institutional structures represented by a case study for each structure: self-initiated (village Deulgaon), NGO-promoted (village Ranwahi), and government-sponsored JFM program (village Markegaon) in Maharashtra State.

The study tried to understand if the collective action, started with differing set of incentives, gives different results. The study had shown that the self-initiated approach was better in not only monitoring the forest better, but also was most 'participatory'. The forest regeneration in this case was also the best amongst the three. But its only problem was lack of cooperation from the Forest Department, which was hampering its efforts in dealing with poachers from outside the community.

The NGO-promoted community experienced best cooperation from the Forest Department and was able to formulate better rules with the help of the NGO.

The JFM sponsored community, with no inputs apart from financial help from the Forest Department, was found to be lacking in effort towards forest management, including that of protection.

### **LESSONS FROM THE FIRST STUDY:**

1. Although secure land tenure is not absolutely necessary for successful participation of local people in forest conservation in the short run, in the long run communities would require some assurance of tenure security. Improving forest condition requires investments and forest protection requires monitoring, and both in turn require investment of money, time, and labor.
2. JFM can potentially offer an excellent opportunity to bring in a new institutional arrangement that is effective in curtailing deforestation and is acceptable to communities living in forest areas due to the legal sanctity given to usufruct use. This has worked as a major incentive for even self-initiated communities to adopt JFM arrangement. This is despite the fact that JFM is a quasi-legal arrangement, with limited transfer of resource ownership.
3. The new institutional arrangement, however, will have to be carefully designed, which will not take away autonomy of the communities to develop their own rules. The 'participatory approach' that the government wishes to promote should lead to 'collective action', which is indigenous, flexible, and provides developmental opportunities.
4. Institution building by integrating the three levels—constitutional, collective, and operational, by consulting the communities right from the beginning of the program, is necessary for sustainable collective action.
5. Initially communities neither pay special attention nor adopt purposive strategy for ensuring equity in benefit sharing. But in the long run, with improved awareness and improved forest condition resulting in commercial revenues, conflicts and disruption of collective action are likely.

Therefore equity-related issues need due attention for long-term sustainability of JFM.

## MAJOR CHANGES RECORDED DURING THE REVISITS

### POLICY CHANGES BETWEEN THE TWO VISITS

Encouraged by the success and ever increasing demand from communities to enter into the JFM agreement, Government of India set up a nodal agency called the Forest Development Agency (FDA), with the intention of federating JFM committees in each forest division. The decision to establish FDA and implement the *Samanvit Gram Vanikaran Samirddhi Yojana* (SGVSY) in Maharashtra State was taken on 20/01/2001. The concept of FDA is construed on the fact that Forest Department has access even to those villages where staff of other rural development departments cannot reach. Being in constant contact and thereby observing the forest dependence of villagers, forest officials know better than anybody else that it is the lack of alternative developmental activities that the villagers are compelled to poach, encroach, and use their forest unsustainably. Thus, using the network of JFM registered communities FDA is so designed that all rural development activities are to be routed through FDA in the member villages, which are mainly located in and around forest areas.

#### Case study 1: Self-initiated village Deulgaon

- No major change in infrastructure
- Population increased from 173 to 182
- Plantation of bamboo in 2005
- Cattle heads increased from 80 to 100 and goats from 10 to 60
- Reduced availability of forest products reported
- Monitoring got lax, rules not followed
- No infractions reported, no penalties imposed, no fines collected
- Severe termite infestation in forest.

#### Case study 2: NGO-promoted village Ranwahi

- Marked improvement in infrastructure
- Population increased from 393 to 424
- Cattle heads have increased from 23 to 236, resulting in increased pressure of grazing on forest.
- No new rules formed by JFMC since 2002
- Substantial increase in the fund flowing from Forest Department
- Poor monitoring resulting in non reporting of infractions

### INDICATIONS OF FAILURE OF INSTITUTIONS

INDICATORS	DEULGAON		MARKEGAON		RANWAHI	
	2002	2007	2002	2007	2002	2007
Findings from 30 plots in each village						
SOIL EROSION	1	23	4	30	5	24
GRAZING	6	29	20	26	22	30
FIRE DAMAGE	1	0	0	27	8	0
INSECT DAMAGE	13	30	21	29	25	26
TREE CUTTING	14	25	5	26	20	24
ENCROACHMENT	0	1	0	9	2	0
CHARCOAL BURNING	0	0	2	1	1	0

All the three communities that were studied in 2002 were covered under FDA by the year 2007.

- No penalties imposed in past five years
- Earlier restrictions on harvesting of fuel

wood for sale and grazing in plantation areas are no more in force.

### Case study 3: JFM village Markegaon

- No major changes in infrastructure in this traditional village
- Population increased from 161 to 172
- Halfhearted and unreliable protection activity continues as before
- Marked increase in encroachments on forest land
- Commercial exploitation by poachers curtailed to some extent
- Sale of timber by community members has increased marginally
- Restrictions on use of fuel wood introduced, but no infractions reported.

Despite funding received by all the three

communities under FDA, there is no evidence of strengthening of the JFM as an institution. In fact, instances of damage by fire, encroachments on forestland, grazing, etc. have increased. The study clearly shows that monetary incentives do not automatically encourage a community in taking up forest protection. Similarly, constituting JFM committee alone does not ensure its effective functioning. Especially in case of communities that do not have prior experience of collective action, Forest Department needs to put in extra efforts, provide inputs of technical know-how, stay in regular communication, and invest in capacities of the community members. Without investing in institution building any institutional structure – traditional, self-initiated, externally-supported, would be prone to erosion. And in the absence of strong institutions, forests are likely to be the first casualty.



Indication of deteriorating forest institution - Deulgaon

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*This policy brief is an outcome of a revisit study by 'SHODH: The Institute for Research and Development, Nagpur' entitled "Institutional Structures and Changing Collective Action: A Revisit to Three Communities".*

*The study report (No. 01-07) is available at SHODH at Parvati Apartments, 50, Puranik Layout, Bharat Nagar, Nagpur - 440033, M.S., India  
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