



SHODH

POLICY BRIEF

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Social Capital and its Role in Forest Conservation

Policy Implications from a research study

Since the introduction of participatory programs like JFM in India, community-level action has acquired importance. Collective-action at community-level depends on various factors. Social capital has been recognized as one of them. Social capital is defined as a resource that belongs to a group of people in the form of values (trust, reciprocity, common understanding), rules, norms, and various mechanisms that help a group of people to act collectively and get flow of benefits. Accumulation of this capital over a period of time leads to building of its 'stock', which when utilized provides 'flow' of benefits. But what are the factors that help build social capital to enable resource conservation and what factors help sustain and maintain this capital over a period of time? In this study, Deepshikha Mehra explored the changes in performance of social capital in forest conservation over a period of time in communities with varying levels of stock of social capital - from stock accumulated over generations (traditional/historical) to stock recently built (non-traditional).

The study brings out the fact that not just traditional communities, who are known to have a historical stock of social capital in the form of traditional

institutions and knowledge, can revive social capital but non-traditional and heterogeneous communities can build it too. However, over a period of time there is higher probability of consistent growth of social capital in communities with a pre-existent historical/cultural stock of the capital than communities that have built the capital recently. Social capital in local communities is affected by presence or absence of internal and external factors like effective leadership, culture of collective action, role of NGOs, role of forest department, effective institutional rules and mechanisms. These factors determine how social capital would get built and behave over a period of time, and also explain the differences in levels of social capital in different communities. The study recommends that in the current JFM set-up it is important to understand and treat these differences and tailor the interventions in communities accordingly. Constant and coordinated efforts of internal and external agencies is essential to achieve this. Additionally, development of organizational capacities of local communities as well as members of implementing agencies like the forest department is essential in this joint effort in order to build and maintain this capital in local communities.

STUDY METHOD

Study was conducted at two points of time - years 2000 and 2005 - in five forest-dependent communities from two forest rich districts of Vidarbha region in central India. These villages are Saigata, Lakhapur, and Maral Mendha from Chandrapur district and villages Mendha and Lekha from Gadchiroli district. Six indicators of social capital were used and their values were captured through three methods of primary data collection, namely, research instruments by International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI), household survey, and researcher's observations. A comparison was done using multi-criteria analysis.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND FOREST CONSERVATION

A large part of the population of the developing world still lives around forests and depends on them for various goods and services. This makes role of people in forest protection very important. Constant interaction with nature equips them to develop common understanding and ability to cooperate, which can stall deterioration of forests. This ability of cooperation and common understanding can be achieved through values like solidarity, reciprocity, and trust, as well as rules and norms. A culmination of these values, rules, mechanism, and social norms constitutes social capital. It has been recognized as a community trait that helps a group of people to plan, coordinate, effectively implement ideas, manage resources, resolve conflicts, fight poverty, and use opportunities better. Social capital, like other forms of capital has a stock in the form of norms, institutions etc, built over a period of time. This stock can be used to provide 'flow' of benefits in the form of goods and services. Lack of investment and use, as well as misuse of this capital can lead to its

erosion. Communities in India were known to possess this capital before the advent of European rulers. However, it faded in the background due to loss of rights and access to forests during the colonial rule. Even after independence government of India continued with the colonial forest management policies of exclusive control. With no stakes in the resource and limited access, some communities restored to indiscriminate use. However, there were always a few who practiced prudent use. With alarming decline in forest cover role of communities in forest management came to be accepted with the decentralized policy in 1988 and Joint Forest Management (JFM) program in 1990. Since its inception, JFM has grown in leaps and bounds. But, even after 15 years of existence its varied performance is raising questions about factors that are required to ensure its wider success at the local level. With growing role of communities in this participatory program through various amendments, it is important to concentrate on community traits like social capital that facilitate collective action and find out how it is built over a period of time, what changes it goes through, factors that contribute to

PROCESS OF BUILDING OF SOCIAL CAPITAL					
Case Studies Process	Mendha (Homogeneous - Traditional tribal community)	Saigata (Heterogeneous - non-traditional community)	Lakhapur (Heterogeneous, non- traditional community)	Lekha (Heterogeneous, non-traditional community)	Maral Mendha (Heterogeneous, non-traditional community)
Status in the beginning	Traditional stock of social capital in dormant form	Caste divisions and conflicts over economic exploitation of forests. No stock of social capital.	Social and economic divisions. No stock of social capital.	Divisions between the elite and the poor. Uncontrolled commercial exploitation of forest. No stock of social capital.	Divisions between the elite and the poor. Commercial exploitation of forests and mass encroachments. No stock of social capital.
Initiation of social capital	Perceived scarcity of forest products, revival of traditional stock by local leaders, guiding role of local NGO. Self-initiation of forest protection in 1989, joined JFM program in 1996.	Scarcity of forest products, effective internal leadership that built social capital for forest protection. Self-initiated forest protection in 1979, joined JFM program in 1996.	Initial impetus by scarcity of forest products, internal leadership, and common stand against forest department. Ideological unity created by external religious leadership, but failure of external leader to develop strong social capital. Self-initiated forest protection in 1970. The village never joined JFM program.	Scarcity of forest products, awareness building by neighbouring community and local forest department officials. Forest protection initiated in 2001 with JFM.	Failed effort due to divisions in perception about forest protection and domination of one group engaged in forestland encroachment.

such changes, and the aspects of social capital that can be enhanced to facilitate better forest management. These dynamics of social capital were explored through this temporal study.

KEY LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Differing levels of social capital as well as temporal difference in performance of social capital was found between traditional and non-traditional communities. In the traditional community where social capital was converted from a traditional ‘stock’ to current ‘flow’, collective effort has moved beyond forest conservation to management of other resources. In non-traditional communities, where social capital was built afresh by factors like local leadership, the growth of social capital was found to be inconsistent. It was also found that existence of

stock of social capital, recently built or historically gained, is important to get flow of goods and services. Constant and coordinated efforts of internal and external agencies are essential to invest in the existing stock to create flow of benefits. In general, building process of social capital and its behaviour over time is affected by the presence or absence of internal and external factors like effective leadership, culture of collective action, role of NGOs, role of forest department, effective institutional rules and mechanisms especially conflict resolving mechanism. The variations in these factors explain the differences in levels of social capital in different communities. It is important to understand and recognize the differences in level of social capital in each community in the current JFM set-up and mould the interventions required in these communities. Communities with an existent stock

CHANGE IN SOCIAL CAPITAL OVER REVISIT PERIOD					
Case Studies Process	Mendha	Saigata	Lakhapur	Lekha	Maral Mendha
Change	Improved	Decreased	Deteriorated	Initiation of structural social capital (set-up of JFM institution), deterioration in cognitive social capital in general.	No social capital in forest conservation, deterioration in other aspects of village life
Factors contributed to change	Leadership - both internal and external, common culture, traditional collective activities, importance to consensus and unanimity in decisions, fairness and transparency in dealings with community issues and assets, well-developed traditional system of conflict resolution and social sanctions.	Increased levels of conflicts, less effective conflict - resolving mechanism, corrupt practices of forest association, it's weakened functioning, less active role of the leader.	Social capital built on religious taboos and dictates and not voluntary participation, weakened role of external leader, no internal leadership, increased conflicts and divisions in the village, no effective conflict resolving mechanism, dominance of one group in all activities of the village.	Setting up of forest protection association, rules, voluntary forest patrolling; conflicts over corrupt practices, shoddy implementation of JFM rules by forest department staff, and inequalities in benefit-cost sharing from forest; no leadership, ineffective conflict resolving mechanism.	Economic benefits from increasing land under cultivation at the cost of forest cover, conflicting interests, ineffective conflict resolving mechanism, no leadership.
Indications in forest condition	Improvement in frequency, density, and abundance of saplings and trees.	Fractional deterioration in forest condition - decline in saplings.	Deterioration in saplings, increased dominance of a fast growing specie, low potential of NTFP and high value timber species.	Decline in saplings, and deterioration in NTFP species.	No forest cover. Plantation also encroached.

will require lower intervention than those with low or negligent stock. For traditional communities like Mendha identification and revival of traditional stock of social capital and its incorporation in the JFM set-up will facilitate its higher acceptance at the community level. Non-traditional communities like Saigata and Lakhapur that have recently developed stock of the capital but are struggling to maintain it, will require positive supplementary intervention from external agencies. However, the bigger challenges are communities like Lekha and Maral Mendha who are dependent on the resource but have negligent or low social capital to manage it. External agencies can help build awareness in such

communities, facilitate equal participation, increase level of equality in decision-making, bring transparency in dealings of the local institutions, and develop internal leadership. This is especially helpful during the formative years of any forest protection institution. However, it is equally important to develop leadership and JFM program-related capacities of the ground level staff of the forest department for ensuring proper implementation and sustenance of the program. Able leadership provided by them can facilitate building of social capital in communities that lack it internally.



This policy brief is an outcome of a revisit study by 'SHODH: The Institute for Research and Development, Nagpur' entitled "Role of Social Capital in Forest Management A Revisit to Five Communities".

*The study report (No. 04-06) is available at SHODH at Parvati Apartments, 50, Puranik Layout, Bharat Nagar, Nagpur - 440033, M.S., India
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SHODH undertakes research projects for exploring socio-economic aspects of rural and tribal population; anthropogenic impacts on ecosystems; and various aspects of environmental degradation and restoration of ecological balance. It also undertakes awareness building and human resource development programmes in rural and tribal areas; conducts training programmes for teachers and students from rural and tribal areas; and aims to undertake activities for emancipation of women and child development

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