

Role of Community Based Organization in Forest Management in the Tribal Areas: A Case Study of Koraput District

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Abstract

Forest is the life line of human civilization. Global warming is now working as a challenge to humanity. Development in the sense leads to destruction. Tribal people are really the caretaker of forest resources. Tribals and forest are closely linked with other. They can't be separated with each other. Forest provides livelihood to the tribals and in exchange of it tribals protected forests. This is a common phenomena, generally in Indian context and particularly in the context of Odisha state. Koraput Forest Division of Odisha is thickly populated with the tribal people. These people mostly depend on forest for their livelihood. Forest provides them food, fodder, fuel, timber, shelter, medicinal drugs, agricultural implements. Here in Koraput tribal economy, custom, social fabric and folklore are also neatly interwoven with forest. The focus of this article will include the role of community based organization in forest management in the tribal areas of Koraput district of Odisha.

Keywords: Self Help Groups, Farmers Associations, Forest Protection Committee, Youth Club, Panchyats

INTRODUCTION

Involvement of community based organisation in the management of natural resources as well as protecting the environment has been considered as one of the most significant initiatives in the field of sustainable development in the last three decades. It provides protection to natural resources worldwide. It plays an important role in the eradication of man-made forest fire, livelihood diversification and involvement of women especially in the protection of natural resources in the developing and under-developed nations. It has contributed positively to the natural resources management by forming social capital, creating new opportunities and diversifying livelihoods of the resource dependent rural people. Natural resource management, in general, and forest resources management in particular, are currently undergoing a major paradigm shift. In recent years, the notion of government as the only decision-making authority has been replaced by involving a large number of stakeholders in different

institutional settings contribute to overall management of resources. Community-Based Organizations are grassroots institutions that involve rural communities in co-management.

Several factors influence the functioning and sustainability of these Community Based Organizations (CBOs) which contribute to the management of common-pool resources in Koraput. Natural resource management, in general, and National Tribal Forest

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Programme (NTFP) management in particular, are currently undergoing a major paradigm shift. Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) has been adopted as one of many possible forms of co-management for better management and protection of forest resources in Koraput. CBFM is a suitable forest management option, which offers the prospect of relief from some of the more negative aspects of a centralized management system. By developing, testing, and assessing arrangements of user-based (community and group based) forest management across the diversity of forest in Koraput, the CBFM-project has been developed to improve the livelihoods of poor people dependent on forest resources.

Community-Based Resource Management (CBRM) has also become a common strategy for improving management of natural or common pool resources and empowering local communities. Community-based management by its nature is participatory. The participation of the local people and incorporation of their views, opinions, and goals must be taken into account when managing resources under a community-based program. The main arguments of community-based management are that communities recognize that they have a long-term need for the resources they use and will manage them for long-term benefits; if communities are involved in conservation and management then the benefits they receive create incentives for them to use and manage resources more sustainably; and that communities have a closer association with the resources they use and therefore possess a great deal of practical knowledge about the resources and the ecosystems associated with them.

Community-Based Organizations and their Challenges:

Due to poor awareness among the tribal people, frequent manmade forest fires have been causing harm to the forest of this region. With that, denudation is taking place in such a rate that the hills which were with bounty of natural resources are now either covered with low shrubs or disfigured with bald patches due to the trend of shifting cultivation of some tribal people.

The shrinking forest is indicating the impending danger towards the livelihood of the local tribal community, who solely depend on forest for their livelihood. The trend of shifting cultivation of the tribal people and frequent forest fires has caused great damage to the forest of this region during the last four decades.

The local Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) are grass root organizations with broad socioeconomic objectives and are managed by the members on behalf of the members. But lack of scope for the CBO members to get involved in different Government programmes in this direction make them apathetic towards these programmes.

Policy and Implementation:

The Forest Department in order to prevent forest fire started involving the local tribal people of tribal villages adjacent to the forests. The department has been instilling the spirit of ownership among the tribal people by creating awareness on how to check frequent fire accidents occurring in forests. Forest Department has been implementing lot of schemes and programmes to regenerate and enrich the degraded forest with the help of the Community Based Organizations. Forest department has started mobilizing the ignorant and unaware tribal youths regarding the different problems related to environment degradation. Simultaneously Forest Department in collaboration with different NGOs working at the grass root level is mobilizing the youths of the community for the preservation of forest and making them aware on the ill impacts of forest fire.

CBOs and Joint Forest Management:

Forest is an extremely important natural resource for any nation. Its productions have great commercial value. More important is its impact on the climate of the region as well as in the soil. Depletion of forest cover disturbs atmospheric, environmental, and ecological balance and adversely affects all forms of life - human, animal and plant. The preservation and conservation of forests is thus imperative. In India, there is an added dimension to their importance since tribal communities and those communities which live on the fringes of the forests rely on forest to meet their needs - fuel wood, fodder and small timber. They also depend on forests for their livelihood. These communities enjoy certain customary rights and concessions with regard to use of forests and forest produce (Vardarajan:2002).

The British interest in forests started conservation of forests a major concern for the colonial state. The British invited a German Expert, Dietrich Brandis, for advice, and made him the first Inspector General of Forests in India, who set up the Indian Forest Service in 1864, and a Forest Department. Dietrich Brandis helped to formulate the Indian Forest Act of 1865, which was followed by the Indian forest Act of 1878. The very

first Forest Policy was formulated in 1894. For about a century Indian forest policy had emphasised nationalisation and commercial utilisation of country's forests. The rights and responsibilities of the communities which depended on forests for their various daily needs had been eroding. By 1980s, concern over the degradation and depletion of natural resources and deteriorating environment had grown to such an extent that appropriate policy measures were initiated. A separate Ministry for Environment and Forests was established. The Forest Conservation Act was passed which placed considerable limitations on logging. The National Forest Policy of 1988 was introduced which redefined the objectives of forest management but did not envisage a direct role for the people in its day-to-day management. The main objectives of this policy were: maintaining of environmental stability through preservation; restoration of ecological balance; protecting generic resources; meeting the basic needs (fuel wood, fodder and small timber) of the tribal people and those rural communities living in and around forests; protection of their customary rights and responsibilities, etc (Shanti & Lakshmi 2002).

This change imperilled two groups of tribal peasants, the hunter gatherers and those who depended on JHUM (Slash and burn cultivation). To implement the policy objectives successfully, it was necessary to change the attitude of the state forest department and their personnel. It was also necessary to motivate the communities for their active involvement in the development, conservation and management of forests. This led to a path-breaking policy-decision in June 1990. The policy set out to involve forest community in the management of degraded forests thus initiating joint forest management (JFM). JFM policy specifies the rights for protecting communities for the first time. An agreement is made between the state through forest department and the village forest management committee (known variously as FMC or VFC or VFMC) for releasing the forest areas for joint forest committee JFM. A village Forest Committee or Forest Management Committee (FMC) is basically a community based organisation (CBO). Forest Management Committee (FMC) has to manage a well-defined, designated forest area, a function performed earlier by the state forest department. Each state lays down detailed procedures and norms for constituting and running FMC, such as defining the management unit and participants, constitution of the executive committee, powers of the executive committee and norms for sharing timber and Non-Timber Forest

Produce (NTFP). The participants may be the entire village or groups of village households, hamlets, and user groups. Most FMCs are registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. The executive committee (EC) has three constituents: Forest Department (FD) representatives, people's representatives, and others. The latter two may be elected, selected, or appointed ex-officio. The EC has the power to frame rules, accept and cancel memberships, apprehend offenders and punish them. The committee also decides how non-timber forest produce (NTFP) and timber should be shared. Very often there is a provision of allocating part of the proceeds to the village development fund (Dashora & Sharma:2002).

Post Policy Implementation Problem:

Koraput is a part of the tribal belt in southern Odisha. As the term 'tribal' often denotes a negative connotation, the indigenous people here prefer to be known as Adivasis, i.e. "original inhabitants". Many different Adivasi communities live in this district. The traditional culture (including languages), knowledge and subsistence of the Adivasis are closely connected with local ecosystems.

As shifting cultivation (Podu Chasa) is the time bound practice of earning livelihood for some of the tribal people in whole Koraput forest Division, it has been felt that tribal people must be provided some definite alternative land for cultivation as well as they must be trained on modern and stable farming process..

Alternative livelihood options have not successfully been provided to tribal people by the forest department. Other government controlled financing agencies must be involved for providing tribal NTFP collectors loan in lean season and other necessary helps to improve their standard of living. Banking sectors must be introduced for provide loans to those people who have the skills on making 'Pots', or Handicrafts, blacksmith works, Artisans, on Small Business or Trade of Minor Forest Produces etc. so that their dependency on forest could be reduced.

Fire control squads formed by the VSS members to control fire accidents need to be given proper training and orientation on the causes of fire and on fire protection measures. They have not been equipped with some Fire Fighting Equipments like Racker, Shovel, Ruler Key, etc. Community hunting practices for religious purposes is a major impediment to be overcome.

Women need to be included in processes relating to CBNRM and benefit sharing, as their strong involvement in decision making processes and committees can support equitable benefit sharing outcomes.

SUGGESTIONS

Koraput district is one of the poorest regions of the country characterized by extremely skewed land distribution, entitlement failure, and marginalization of socially vulnerable groups such as women, scheduled caste and tribes, and therefore it resulted to very low human development index. Government of Odisha aims to organize poorest, empower them so that they can be able to plan and then implement participatory livelihoods focused development effectively. With the given scenario, it is one of the greatest challenges for Forest Department to restore confidence levels of the poorest by demonstrating some tangible actions, which would effectively address social inequalities and human rights. Perhaps, the efforts of forest protection committee has been able to internalize this reality mainly because (i) of the shift from forest protection to livelihoods; (ii) human resources (Capacity Building of local villagers at the ground level who have remarkable experiences of working as change agents in complex, diverse and risk prone ecosystems. Interactions with staff of Forest Department fielded at the Forest Division levels it is quite apparent that the limitations of the interventions to initiate processes of social change have been understood by them adequately. Team of forest department have been able to instrumentalize the effectiveness of decentralizing innovations at grassroots levels such as right-based development approaches has been encouraged. This is an area Forest Department should explore more in-depth. While working for JFM, Village Forest Committees (VFCs) have found that they face some common problem such as delay in registration of a forest produce cooperative and in receiving authorisation letter from the state forest department (SFD). To sort out various problems related with forest village forest management committees (VFMCs) are established.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that CBOs are an essential part of project implementation; investigated the major purposes,

objectives and triggers of CBO formation by local people. The CBFM project has a profound impact on fire management activities, establishing several local rules and norms. The role of NGOs in CBO formation, stakeholder mobilization, organization, and capacity-building has a positive aspect in this direction. The success of the CBOs activity is directly related to how close it cooperates with the village council since it has the potential to facilitate the efforts of the CBO. Community funds foster local sense of responsibility along with long-term and sustainable vision. CBOs that didn't obtain significant "start-up" funding have clearer mission and vision and are more likely not to deal with moral hazard problems. Availability of funding may give CBO members incentives to register CBOs to implement forest management project.

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Conflict of Interest:

There are no conflicts of interest.

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