

14. Institutions for Self-Governance of Community Forestry Resources: Experiences from Three Indian States

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Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the role of state and civil society in promoting Community Forestry Management (CFM) in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Orissa with a view to understanding the policy and theoretical implications. The interrelated objectives of the study are to examine:

1. Whether the government policies, institutions, and finances enable people and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to promote CFM; and whether the state leadership (both political and administrative) has the vision and commitment towards CFM policies.
2. Whether the CSO's ideology, commitment and initiatives promote people's confidence in CFM activities. In what way can CSOs collaborate / contest the efforts of GOs to strengthen the CFM activities?
3. Whether the Community Forestry Institutions (CFI's) at the village level are autonomous, representative and accountable to ensure efficient equitable and sustainable use of community forestry resources.
4. The factors responsible for strengthening the synergy between state and civil society in the CFM. In other words, to what extent is social capital (developmental state and leadership, transparent laws, norms and rules, responsive bureaucracy, vibrant civil society, powerful opposition party, and vigilant media) responsible for bringing synergy among government, civil society and community organisations.
5. Whether social capital can be created with state and civil society intervention within a short time. What are the advantages and disadvantages of such capital on collective actions?

Analytical Framework

The framework developed by Peter Evans on state-society synergy has been adopted with some modifications. State-society synergy can be a catalyst in development. Norms of cooperation or networks of civic engagement among ordinary citizens can be promoted by public agencies and used for developmental ends. Synergy is to promote coordination and cooperation among various actors on the basis of trust, norms, networks and rules to achieve the desired goals. Synergy between government and civil society or markets would help to generate social capital and achieve the outcome, which they would not be able to achieve individually. Synergies between government and civil society or markets can be broadly classified into two categories, complementary and contesting synergies, on the basis of nature and context of interaction.

In a situation of complementary synergy, the state contributes social capital by facilitating environment or support to civil society or markets. Examples include predictable policies and supporting laws to facilitate private capital to invest in infrastructure and other public good activities. Similarly, effectively ruled/governed environment strengthens the voices of the poor. On the other hand, contesting synergy refers to the strength of civil society in questioning the State's actions. This framework, as developed by Putnam (1993), posits that societies where citizens trust one another and are more inclined to cooperate, give rise to more accountable and efficient governments, which in turn are able to deliver better quality of public goods and create conditions for society to develop faster. The synergy between state and society depends upon the endowment of social capital prevailing in society, type of government organisation that shapes state and society relations, politics and political interests of the country (open political competition or contained by repression).

Methodology

The study focused mainly at three levels (state, project, and village) to capture the processes and the outcomes. It was carried out in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Orissa, which represent different patterns of state-society synergies and performance. Five cases were selected to represent three patterns of management systems at the range/cluster level, which are interacting with the village communities. They are Joint Forest Management (JFM), Village Forest Panchayat (VFP) and Community Forest Management (CFM). The government influence in these management systems keeps on declining, as we go from JFM to CFM and vice versa in the case of civil society. Three villages on the basis of performance from each cluster/range were selected to assess the impact of social capital provided by the external agencies on the one hand and the existing natural social capital in the villages (homogeneity, leadership, political factions and traditional community institutions) on the other.

Focused interview method was adopted to collect information from the respondents. Information regarding socio-economic profile, membership, perceptions and involvement were ascertained from 10 to 15 respondents from each village through an interview schedule. Intensive discussions were held with the government official's representatives of NGOs and members of the community forestry institutions. Secondary data were collected from the government departments and NGOs. Minutes of various committee meetings were extensively consulted, and some of these meetings were attended and plantation sites visited to observe the condition of the forest.

Findings

Synergy between GO and CSOs at State Level:

Andhra Pradesh

The performance of Andhra Pradesh is better in terms of the number of Village Forest Committees (VFCs) and area developed under JFM, while it was moderate in Karnataka and Orissa. On the other hand, the coverage of VFCs under CFM was very high in Orissa.

In Andhra Pradesh, the synergy among Government Organisations (GOs), CSOs and funding agencies appeared to be very high in management of community forestry resources. First, there was effective coordination among government departments, which facilitated the pooling of resources for JFM. Second, the good rapport between state government and funding agency (World Bank) facilitated the availability of the funds for the second phase of JFM unlike in Karnataka and Orissa. Third, the synergy between the government and NGOs was very cordial and NGOs' representatives were present in the policy and review committees of the government at the state and sub-state levels. NGOs were also actively collaborating with the JFM at the field level. Nearly one-third of the total VFCs were formed with the assistance of NGOs. They were even paid honorarium to motivate people to form VFCs under World Bank (WB) funded projects. The main factors responsible for effective synergy were vision and commitment of the political leadership, vibrant civil society, vigilant opposition party and responsive administration. Second, the introduction of wide-ranging reforms and incentives made administrators more responsive and accountable to the people. Third, the state facilitated the participation of CSOs in JFM by creating incentives. Fourth, the state was also compelled to be more responsive to the people in the light of the strong opposition from political parties and civil society organisations. Organisations like People's War Group (Naxalite), Raitha Coolly Sangha, intellectuals and trade unions are critical of the ongoing economic reforms, including CFM, with WB assistance. Mobilisation of people against these policies by the civil society made the state to protect the interests of the vulnerable sections of the society.

Karnataka

Both complementing and contesting synergies among the GOs and CSOs in Karnataka did not appear to be very strong. First, JFM was not effectively integrated with other programmes and departments. Second, the interaction between GOs and CSOs had been declining over the years. Even the existing interaction mechanisms like the state-level steering committee had become ineffective. FD evinced very little interest in resolving various conflicts with NGOs regarding conceptual issues and flaws in the design. The non-renewal of the second-phase Western Ghat Programme can be partly attributed to poor interaction between CSOs and GOs.

The absence of synergy among the GOs and CSOs in Karnataka can be attributed to the absence of political will, conservative bureaucracy and weak civil society. Although Karnataka has adopted the Andhra Pradesh model of development, forestry has not

received the attentions of the state leadership. Second, the conservative bureaucratic culture, absence of dynamic NGO leadership, and weak NGO network were also a major hurdle to the expansion of the programme. Added to this, there were no strong CS movements against the state since people's dependency (particularly tribals) on forest was very low unlike that in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. On the other hand, there was no strong pressure from the opposition party and civil society against the state as it prevailed in Andhra Pradesh.

Orissa

In Orissa, contesting rather than complementary synergy appears to be dominant in relation to community forestry movement, although it was not the case with other spheres of life. The Forest Department was not very strong in its presence and effectiveness, although it played a significant role in social forestry in the late 80s. First, there was no coordination among the different wings of the forest department. Second, FD was not able to respond to the needs of the people creatively. However, NGOs close to the FD were nominated in state and district-level committees. Added to this, the non-extension of the SIDA second phase regarding community forestry further weakened the finances of the FD. The absence of budgetary support prevented the state from taking up many programmes. On the other hand, the formation of CFMs at the initiative of civil society was on the increase over the years. Even the number of CFM federations had been increased over the years. Most of the CFMs were better protected and cost effective. Biomass needs of the people were met. Infrastructural facilities were better provided. Bio-diversity had been maintained. The presence of civil society is mainly due to dependency on forests for their livelihood. A large proportion of biomass needs of the people are met from the forests. Communities are also protecting forests to undertake such activities as construction of schools, temples and organisation of festivals.

Comparison of Joint Forest Management (JFM), Community Forest Management (CFM) and Village Forest Panchayat (VFP)

VFCs in CFM and VFP villages are more autonomous, participative, transparent and accountable when compared with JFM. The initiative for starting forest protection in CFM came from the people, while in JFM villages it came from the top, particularly from the government. VFCs were formed within 3 to 6 months without building necessary base for formation of social capital (habits of cooperation). Individual and community incentives were adopted to motivate the people to protect the forests. This de-motivated the people after the stopping of government funds.

Women and poor were well represented in governing bodies of JFM when compared to CFM and VFP. However, their participation was not effective due to illiteracy, social stigma and lack of awareness. Elite domination was very common, and the voices of the poor and the women were not articulated effectively.

Accountability was better ensured in CFM and VFP when compared to JFM villages. Honest and accountable leaders got elected through regular polls in CFM and VFP villages. However in JFM villages, leaders continued for more than 3 to 6 years,

although elections are to be conducted every two years. Regular consultations in rule formulation enhanced the rule compliance in VFP. Such consultations helped not only to own the forest but also facilitated people's participation in forest patrolling and development. Absence of such consultation in JFM villages in recent years resulted in loss of people's trust and confidence in VFCs. Information about access rules and sources of income and expenditure are easily accessible to people in CFM villages. VFPs and CFMs were having complete autonomy in management and use of resources although it was limited in JFM.

Access, Use and Sustenance of Resources

In CFM villages, communities had used a variety of innovative approaches for protection and access. Penalties were imposed depending upon the type of offence. However in JFM, forest was protected through trenches, fencing and watchmen, although people's patrolling prevailed.

Factors Responsible for Accumulation of Social Capital

Credible and transparent laws, participatory democracy (regular free and fair election, representation and transparency in governance) committed leadership (political administrative and NGO) and vibrant civil society are mainly responsible for the creation of social capital.

In conclusion, the study suggests policy prescription in the form of pathways for accumulating social capital within a short time both by the state and civil society for prompting national resource management.