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Incorporating Stakeholder Perceptions in Participatory Forest Management in India:

Perceptions of Panchayati Raj Institutions on Joint Forest Management in Harda

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*Names of villages and respondents appearing in this report
have been changed to protect their identity.*

For more information

TERI
Darbari Seth Block
IHC Complex, Lodhi Road
New Delhi – 110 003
India

Tel. 2468 2100 or 2468 2111
E-mail anirban@teri.res.in
Fax 2468 2144 or 2468 2145
Web www.teriin.org
India +91 • Delhi (o) 11

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Anirban Ganguly

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Glossary of terms

<i>Adhiniyam</i>	Act
<i>Adhyaksha</i>	President
<i>Gram kosh</i>	Village account
<i>Gram Panchayat</i>	The lowest tier of the Panchayat Raj institution, which is formed on the basis of the population and may consist of one or more villages.
<i>Gram Sabha</i>	A body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level.
<i>Gram swaraj</i>	Village self rule
<i>Jagir</i>	Landowner
<i>Janpad Panchayat</i>	The second tier of the Panchayati Raj institutions, i.e., at the intermediate level between the village and the district levels.
<i>Koshadhyaksh</i>	Treasurer
<i>Malguzar</i>	Contractor
<i>Panch</i>	The elected representative of a <i>Gram Panchayat</i>
<i>Panchayat</i>	An institution (by whatever named called) of self-government constituted under Article 243B of the Constitution, for rural areas.
<i>Panchayati Raj</i>	Institution of local rural self governance
<i>Patta</i>	Land title deed
<i>Patwari</i>	The lowest official of the Revenue Department posted at the village level
<i>Samiti</i>	Committee
<i>Sarpanch</i>	The head of a <i>Gram Panchayat</i>
<i>Sarpanchpati</i>	Husband of the woman sarpanch (de facto sarpanch)
<i>Sarvjanik Sampada Samiti</i>	Common resources committee
<i>Van Panchayat</i>	Traditional local institution that owns and manages forest land
<i>Zilla Panchayat</i>	The highest tier of the Panchayati Raj institution, formed at the district level
<i>Zilla Sarkar</i>	District government

Executive Summary

Participatory natural resource management, which involves joint management and devolution of management to the local level, has, in the recent years, emerged as an increasingly essential strategy for the management of common pool resources. It aims at providing a space within which multiple stakeholders can identify and address their policy problems, in contexts where resources are subject to contestation among multiple users and there is a conflict between multiple uses.

Harda has been celebrated as an exemplar of the effectiveness of participatory forest management, having been in the forefront of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) process since the early 1990s. Madhya Pradesh was also the first state to legislate *Panchayati Raj* after the 73rd Amendment and has subsequently taken significant steps to improve its legislation, in order to effectively implement decentralization and to ensure synergies between Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). However, while the Forest Department views the participatory forestry approach followed in Harda as a success, many other stakeholders, notably a section of Non-government Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) working in the area, have criticized the Harda model for not having addressed the objectives of the local communities.

The project on incorporating stakeholder perceptions in participatory forest management in India thus aims at elucidating the perceptions of diverse stakeholders in the forestry sector in Harda district. By understanding the causes of conflict, the project hopes to increase learning about stakeholder differences over participatory forest management, and generate policy-relevant findings that can be used to formulate an inclusive policy for participatory forest management.

The objectives of this paper are, first, to examine and discuss the theory behind participatory forestry management the policies that have been formulated to implement it, and the changes that it has facilitated; and second, to elucidate the perceptions of the representatives of the PRIs (one of the many stakeholders in the forestry sector) in order to understand the process by which policy problems are formulated by this stakeholder group.

Perceptions of PRIs have been analysed in relation to JFM and the extent to which it has provided the space for local

stakeholders to participate in the management of forest resources in order to achieve ecological stability and social justice.

Based on these perceptions, the paper attempts to analyse the 'policy problem' as constructed by the respondents of the PRIs and the extent to which the knowledge of theory, policy, and change influence these constructs.

In this context, the key findings of the study are:

Perceptions related to the decision-making process.

In the context of the decision-making process the extent to which marginalized communities and the village community participate in the decision-making process vis-a-vis the elite community and the Forest Department has been assessed.

The study findings indicate that respondents at all three levels perceive neither the marginalized community vis-à-vis the dominant community nor the village community vis-à-vis the Forest Department, as participating dynamically in the decision-making process.

At the district level, it was assessed that the perceptions of the respondents were influenced by the entrenched elite domination and the perceived superior capability of the FD to undertake forest management. At the block level, perceptions related to the ineffective impact of JFM in empowering local communities in the decision-making process were influenced by an identified 'mindset' that does not question existing power structures and the existing nature of ownership rights that favours the dominance of the FD in the decision-making process.

At the village level, perceptions were assessed to be based on a lack of change due to existing local-level power structures that enhanced elite domination instead of the empowerment of marginalized communities. The factors influencing the dominance of the FD in the decision-making process were assessed to be based on the lack of change, as the FD was perceived as the best-suited institution to undertake management and protection. This indicates that the JFM process has not fostered a local sense of ownership, or a participatory means of incorporating local knowledge in the management of forest resources.

Perceptions related to the rights and ownership patterns

The respondents stated that the advent of JFM had not brought about any change in the pattern of rights and ownership of forest

resources, an important indicator of effective local participation.

At the district level perceptions related to the lack of change in the nature of rights and ownership patterns were based on the perceived lack of capacity within the local community to exercise such rights.

At the block and village level perceptions related to the ineffective transfer of rights and ownership of forest resources to the local community, were influenced by the perceived ineffectiveness of participatory policies and theories being translated into practice, due to which the FD was viewed as being unwilling to devolve power.

In the context of the benefit-sharing mechanism respondents at the district level perceived the benefit-sharing mechanism as equitable. However, the actual transfer of these benefits is undermined due to the lack of awareness among the community and unaccountability on the part of the Forest Department. At the block and village levels, the PRI respondents perceived the current benefit-sharing mechanism to be skewed towards the Forest Department, which was perceived to be reaping the benefits of forest protection provided by the community.

Perceptions related to forest conservation

Perceptions at all three levels of PRIs conform to the view that JFM has facilitated forest conservation as the status of the forest has improved and the level of protection provided has increased. Though all levels perceive JFM to have facilitated conservation, respondents at the block and village levels perceive a marked improvement only in the initial years of JFM during which there was substantial funding, key leadership, and a perceived incentive to conserve forest resources. The causes attributed to undermining the sustainability of protection activities included a lack of interest and livelihood opportunities, and an ineffective local dispute resolution system.

The policy problem

Thus the broad policy problems, identified by the PRI respondents, relate to the lack of participation, insecure rights and ownership of forest resources, and declining conservation initiatives within the participatory forest management strategy of JFM. The findings also indicate that the perception formation process on which these problems are constructed vary between the district, block and village levels, i.e., at the village level

perceptions are influenced by the ineffective implementation of participatory theory and knowledge into practice, due to which there is no change in the level of participation, rights and ownership patterns and a decline in the conservation initiatives. At the district level, perceptions are often influenced by the knowledge of theory and the belief in its ultimate implementation.

Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions

At all three levels, there is a broad consensus that the role of the PRIs in participatory forestry management should be limited to that of monitoring.

PRIs are not perceived as the appropriate institution to resolve the identified policy problems and facilitate participatory forestry management due to the following reasons:

- Lack of capacity to facilitate forest management – PRIs are not perceived to have the technical knowledge or the resources (financial and human) to manage forest resources.
- Current ineffectiveness in providing social justice – PRIs are not considered as effective in facilitating social justice due to politicization of issues, elite domination, and corruption.
- No perceived overlap of institutions – the PRI respondents did not identify any overlap or conflict between JFMCs (Joint Forest Management Committees) and PRIs.

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

Participatory forest management, in the context of this paper, has been used as an umbrella term that broadly aims at involving multiple stakeholders in the management process through Joint Forest Management (JFM) or decentralized natural resource management, in order to foster conservation and development.

In this sense, the district of Harda in Madhya Pradesh has been celebrated as an exemplar of participatory forest management in India. It was the first state in India to legislate Panchayati Raj after the 73rd Amendment and has subsequently taken significant steps to improve its legislation (ODI *et al* 2002). The district of Harda is also considered the forerunner of the JFM process in Madhya Pradesh.

The effectiveness of participatory forest management, however, is determined by the extent to which such theories/policies/institutions address multi-stakeholder perceptions related to the many objectives and policy problems that forestry encompasses. Examples of the divergent objectives that forestry encompasses include: commercial, rural development (poverty alleviation, employment creation, empowerment of marginalized groups), tourism and amenity, and conservation. Due to these diverse objectives conflicts often arise between the objectives and the priorities assigned to each in a given area.

Apart from the diverse objectives, the management of common property resources encounters many problems such as environmental degradation, a lack of appropriate institutions for management, or conflicting claims over resources. A point of contention in this context thus relates to the definition of policy ‘problems’ amongst key stakeholders.

Forestry management thus requires a multi-stakeholder approach that can effectively provide the appropriate ‘space’¹ for stakeholders to overcome conflicts by prioritizing and defining

¹ Edmunds & Wollenberg (2003)) have defined ‘Space for local forest management’ in terms of the extent to which the devolution policies can become a means of promoting rural people’s self-determination and economic advancement in forest management, i.e., the extent to which local people, especially disadvantaged groups, exercise control over:

- Changes in the extent and quality of forest.
- Their economic assets and livelihood strategies.
- Decision-making process related to forest management.

objectives and problems related to forestry management. It is in the context of not having addressed the objectives of the local communities and at times making their situation worse that the 'Harda model' of participatory forest management has been criticized by a section of activist Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) working in the area.

Like the NGOs and CBOs, which are important pressure groups that have brought the conflict of interests between local-level stakeholders and the bureaucracy to the forefront, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are also considered important stakeholders in the management of common pool resources. They constitutionally represent the interests of the local communities and have been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring economic and social development, under which forestry is a component. PRIs are thus an important medium of participatory natural resource management, i.e., they provide a 'space' through which local objectives attached to forestry may be implemented.

These objectives, related to securing livelihood needs or empowerment, may often contradict the objectives of conservation or maximum timber harvest yields or centralized management policies that are constructed by the Forest Department, thus leading to a difference in the construction of a 'policy problem' and to a conflict. It is also assumed that the management role entrusted to PRIs often overlaps that of JFMCs, which would thus lead to a conflict.

At an outset, the objectives attached to the forestry sector, by the mandates of JFM and PRIs may vary to a degree. PRIs aim at increasing participative and representative governance through the representation of weaker sections like Scheduled Tribes/Scheduled Castes (ST/SC) and women and are entrusted with the responsibility to implement development schemes and prepare plans for economic development and social justice, under which social and farm forestry, minor forest produce, fuel and fodder and maintenance of community assets are components (Constitution of India). JFM on the other hand has a restricted scope as compared to the broader development mandate of the PRIs. Thus, even though the objective of the JFM programme is to provide a space for forest-dependent communities to be involved in participative forest resource management, it envisages participatory management as a means to translate the twin objectives (ecological stability and social justice) of the 1988

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Forest Policy into practice. JFM thus focuses specifically on forestry management and aims at addressing development needs and ensuring joint governance as a means to fulfil the objectives of sustainable forestry management.

It is important to keep in mind these objectives and priorities before elucidating the perceptions of the PRIs on JFM as they provide a context in which the effectiveness of either institution may be measured.

Having established that different stakeholders address the management of common pool resources with different objectives and policy problems, this paper, in order to facilitate an inclusive policy dialogue, aims at elucidating the perceptions of one of the many stakeholders (PRIs) on the current process of forestry management in Harda.

The analysis is based on how the representatives of the PRIs define policy problems in the context of the current functioning of the JFM programme. The process of defining policy problems is based on the 'analytical framework for dialogue on common pool resource management' (Adams *et al* 2002), which seeks to provide a basis to understand the knowledge of theory, policy, and change that determine the current knowledge on which perceptions are based. The paper concludes with suggestions, provided by PRI representatives, to facilitate effective forestry management.

Chapter 2 of the paper will provide the contextual basis for participatory forest management, i.e., it will outline the theoretical traditions behind Participatory Forest Management (PFM), the policies that have emerged to put the theories in place, and finally the extent of change that PFM has brought about. The last section dealing with 'change' will also highlight the areas where the expected level of change has not taken place and the causes for such shortfalls.

Chapter 3 of the paper, dealing with 'perceptions', provides an analysis, from the perspective of PRIs, of how the JFM programme has provided 'space' to forest-dependent communities in the context of achieving the twin objectives of ecological stability (forest conservation) and social justice (space in the decision-making process and extent of rights exercised over forest resources) and on how current problems can be addressed.

1.1 Study approach

Participatory forest management in the context of this paper has been defined as a means to create a space in local forest management that allows local stakeholders to participate in forestry management in order to facilitate social justice and forest sustainability.

JFM as an institution aims at creating this space through administrative devolution. In order to assess its impact on creating a space for local stakeholders within the management process the following indicators have been taken into account:

1.1.1 Space in the decision-making process

Creating a space in the decision-making process is an important element of PFM. It indicates the extent of local stakeholder participation in decisions related to forest resource management and allocation.

Participation is an important dimension in the decision-making process and plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of a decentralized institution. At its narrowest, participation in a group is defined in terms of nominal membership, and at its broadest in terms of a dynamic interactive process in which the marginalized have an active voice and influence decision-making (Agarwal 2001).

As many studies have highlighted, participation in the local forest management process is often nominal as it is often dominated by the local elite² or by the Forest Department.

Thus for the purpose of this study, the impact of JFM on creating a space for local participation in the decision-making process has been assessed according to:

- (a) The extent of participation of the marginalized communities vis-à-vis the local elite in the decision-making process.
- (b) The extent of participation of the village community vis-à-vis the Forest Department in the decision-making process.

1.1.2 Rights and ownership patterns.

The extent to which local stakeholders exercise rights and ownership over forest resources has been defined as an important dimension of the effectiveness of participatory forest management. It provides an incentive for participation and a

²The term 'elite' has been used in reference to groups that were of a higher caste, or that had a greater level of economic wealth or knowledge.

sense of local ownership of the resource and managing institution. In this context the study assess the extent to which JFM has impacted:

- (a) The extent to which local stakeholders exercise rights and ownership over forest resources.
- (b) The extent to which the benefit-sharing mechanism has impacted the rights of local stakeholders to receive a stake in the benefits of sustainable forest harvest.

1.1.3 Conservation of forest resources.

As sustainable use/regeneration/protection of forest resources is an essential component of any forestry management regime, the study assesses the impact of JFM in ensuring the conservation of forest resources. The indicators used to assess this dimension include:

- (a) The status of the forest.
- (b) The level of protection provided.

1.2 Study sites and methodology

This study was undertaken in 12 villages in Harda district³ (Annexure 1). Insights from the full sample of 24 villages were used wherever appropriate. The villages were chosen on the basis of the following criteria:

- Presence of JFMC at any point in time in the past ten years
- In the same proportion as the forest and revenue villages in the district having JFMC (1:3)
- In the same proportion as MTO influenced villages in the district having JFMC (1:2)
- In the same proportion of the villages having JFMC in a range
- In the same proportion of the villages having JFMC in a block

The primary research is based qualitative research methods, especially key-person interviews. The research group involved representatives at all three levels of the PRIs (Annexure II). Secondary literature review; official data; field team data; and, project team reports have also been used in the study.

³ These villages form a sub-sample of the 24 sample villages chosen for the overall study.

CHAPTER 2 Participatory Natural Resource Management: Theory, Policy and Change

As participatory forest management is the starting point of this paper, i.e., as a concept that has been implemented into a policy acknowledging the role and legitimacy of multiple stakeholders in forestry management, and, secondly as both Panchayati Raj and JFM aim at creating a space for participatory management, it is important to trace the ‘theory’ behind this concept, the ‘policies’ that have been formulated to implement it, and the ‘changes’ that it has facilitated.

2.1 Theory

The rationale behind the paradigm shift, from command-and-control or exclusionary conservation to participatory conservation and management; from centralized to decentralized forms of governance; and from revenue generation to addressing forest-dependent livelihoods, has a theoretical basis in assertions, like the role of decentralized governance; pro-people approaches that prioritize livelihood concerns and poverty alleviation; and a shift in ecological concepts.

Though these factors have a specific base in the fields of governance, pro-poor development, and ecology, the theoretical basis often overlaps.

2.1.1 Decentralized Governance

The theoretical basis for decentralized governance (see Box 1 for meaning and manifestations of decentralization) stems from the notion that devolution of power to the local level or within a closely interactive local community will create institutions that are more accountable to local citizens and more appropriate to locally diverse needs and preferences (Johnson, 2003). Such devolution is also believed to lead to the empowerment of marginalized groups.

This theoretical basis for a shift from centralized management is based on assertions that view centralized state policies that have been responsible for devising elaborate development schemes and governance mechanisms, to be in isolation from the masses for whom and on whose behalf they plan and govern. Such state-

designed policies have resulted in primarily benefiting elite groups that include middlemen, contractors, officials, politicians and favoured special interest groups, and in treating people as recipient objects of the development process. They have thus met with little success. Secondly, the process of centralization taking the form of commercialization and nationalization has led to the erosion of the local commons and the appropriation of the traditional historical rights of local communities over these resources. This in turn has led to the disenfranchisement of the poor and to management by a distant bureaucracy, which is believed to have resulted in insufficient utilization of local information and initiative causing overexploitation and degradation of the commons by influential interest groups and by formerly responsible, now dispossessed, local users (Bardhan 2003).

A third view argues that unchecked authority and inadequate incentives encourage 'rent seeking behaviour' among government officials. In theory, decentralization would undermine these opportunities by creating institutional arrangements that formalize the relationship between citizens and public servants, giving the former the authority to impose sanctions on the latter (Johnson 2003).

In the context of natural resource management, decentralization of powers and responsibilities to the local level is viewed as contributing significantly to a more efficient, equitable and sustainable use of resources thus improving local livelihoods and facilitating effective management of natural resources. It also places decision-making in the hands of those who have information and an incentive advantage to ensure sustainable resource use, a characteristic that outsiders lack. Decentralization is also seen as a tool for resolving collective management problems of common property resources, like forestry and grazing, which supports the daily livelihood of the poor, particularly in rural areas.

Thus, transferring forest management authority from poorly funded, top heavy bureaucracies to forest users with interests in maintaining a healthy and productive forest will save money, improve forest quality, provide greater benefits to those who deserve them, and make decision-making more democratic (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2003).

Box 1: Decentralization: meaning and manifestations



Specific to India, the theoretical basis for decentralized natural resource management may be traced to the colonial era during which time centralized management over natural resources failed and worsened poverty-environment linkages (Baumann and Farrington 2003). Evolving from this failure, the formation of *Van Panchayats* in Uttaranchal may be cited as one of the first examples of community participation in natural resource management. In the broader context the theoretical basis behind the current day *Panchayats* may be traced back to a long history that the country has had with local democracy. Historically, the institution of the *Panchayat* has been an integral part of rural Indian polity and society and has played a key role in organizing and maintaining social order in Indian villages since ancient times (Behar and Kumar 2002). The system of *Panchayat* government and the village community first began to be eroded under the Mughal rule, which introduced the *jagir* system and the collection of revenue through *malguzars* or contractors. Following this under the British period, executive and judicial powers were further centralised in the hands of government

officials and the village community was deprived of all control over the land and its produce, which became the private property of the newly created landowner. This led to the breakdown of the joint life and the corporative character of the community. However, the colonial period also introduced, the system of decentralized governance that we currently have in place, i.e., local government through a top down approach. The Charter Act of 1793 first set up municipal administrations in Madras, Bombay and Calcutta on a statutory basis. In the context of local governance at the village level, Lord Mayo's Resolution of 1870 marks the process of administrative devolution and political education. This was followed by Ripon's Resolution of 1882 and by the report of the Royal Commission on Decentralization, 1909, which pointed out that *'the scant success of the efforts made to introduce a system of rural self government lay in the fact that they have not been built upon from the bottom.'* The British Parliament passed the Government of India Act, 1919, which made local self-government a provincial subject and led to the establishment of village *Panchayats*. Post-independence the concept of decentralized governance through village institutions became a crucial point of discussion. It was, however, not adopted and found mention in Article 40 of the Directive Principles (Majumdar and Singh 1997). Following this, proposals for institutionalizing and strengthening *Panchayats* found mention in various committees and 5 year plans, including the 1957 Balwantrai Mehta Committee, the 1977 Ashok Mehta Committee, the 1985 Rao Committee and the 1987 Singhvi Committee and the 1st, 2nd and 7th five-year plans. Apart from this planning process, the theory behind decentralized governance was also influenced by international and national contexts, which included the collapse of the Soviet Union leading to a debate on various development paradigms and by the rise of social movements and civil society initiatives, which were trying to claim their legitimate space from the state (Behar and Kumar 2002).

2.1.2 Ecological decentralization

In terms of ecological theories, participatory Natural Resource Management (NRM), based on the idea that conservation and development is compatible, has been controversial as livelihood objectives have not been seen as consistent with conservation objectives. This led to the implementation of conservation concerns through 'exclusionary' and 'fortress' type management strategies.

However, failures in exclusionary conservation in a world where social and economic factors play an increasingly vital role in conservation success: the development of interdisciplinary conservation science: conceptual shifts that view ecosystems not as simple linear cause-effect thinking, requiring command-and-control resource management to one which views ecosystems as complex adaptive systems, having attributes of non-linearity, uncertainty and scale: have questioned the effectiveness of centralized planning on an ecological basis.

The issue of scale, for example, has implications for the match between institutions and ecosystems and for perspectives that may be held by different agents. Thus multiple scales in complex systems recognize that a number of agents or actors may hold different but equally valid perspectives on a conservation problem and that problems may vary at different scales. In this context, a one-size-fits-all kind of management ignores issues of scale. Such mismatches of scale may be one of the key reasons for the failure of environmental management regimes (Folke et al 2002) and have paved the way for bottom-up local solutions to cross-scale conservation. Another example of facilitating participative management is the theoretical shift in the management from the command-and-control style to that of adaptive management. Adaptive management recognizes the uncertainty in information and the complexity of risks related to natural resource management. The use of imperfect information for management necessitates a close cooperation and risk sharing between the management agency and local people. Such a process requires collaboration, transparency, and accountability so that a learning environment can be created and practice can be built on experience. This approach thus brings the community actively into the management process.

Thus, these conceptual shifts in ecology towards a systems view, towards the inclusion of humans in the ecosystem, and towards participatory approaches to ecosystem management are interrelated. They all pertain to an understanding of ecosystems as complex adaptive systems of which humans are an integral part (Berkes 2004).

2.2 Policy

The theoretical framework outlined above and the context in which it is based, has led to the formation of specific policies aimed at facilitating PFM.

The two most important policies that have been implemented to facilitate PFM in India include the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution, 1993, and the JFM Circular of 1990. Both policies focus principally on facilitating administrative and political institutional frameworks conferring rights, responsibilities, and roles in decentralized natural resource management. While the JFM Circular promotes formal natural resource management partnerships between the public administration and local user groups, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment transfers the responsibility of management and development of natural resources to PRIs at the district, block and village levels. This reform provides a legal sanction for establishing *Panchayats* as the third tier of self-government, thus strengthening local government (ODI *et al* 2002).

In the context of administrative decentralization based on the partnership model of JFM, the state of Madhya Pradesh issued a resolution (Community participation in preventing illicit felling and rehabilitation of the forests) in December 1991 to involve the local communities in the management and development of forest resources in the state. This order associated communities not only in regeneration of degraded forests as directed by the Government of India but made provision for participatory forestry in well stocked and sensitive forest areas. In order to coincide with the World Bank-funded forestry project this order was revised in January 1995 to prescribe in detail the procedure of constitution, duties, and benefits to village level Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) and Village Forest Committees (VFCs). The order attempted to link the development of village resources with that of forests under community protection through the preparation of micro plan and working plan prescriptions. In February 2000 the government resolution was again amended to take into account recommendations and suggestions. The new resolution provided a basis for community participation in forestry keeping in view the distinctive features of different kinds of forest areas. It thus made a provision for Ecodevelopment Committees (EDCs) in and around protected areas. It also made changes in the structure, functioning and benefit sharing mechanism of all the JFM committees. For instance, membership was extended to all voters of the village from that of one male and one female from each household. The participation of women was strengthened by raising the percentage of women members in the executive committee and by ensuring reservation in the post of chairperson or vice

chairperson. The resolution also grants JFMC members the protection available to public servants, while they perform their duties. It also financially empowers the JFMC by granting 50% of the compensation/fine recovered from offenders. In terms of usufruct rights over timber, 10% share goes to the FPC and 30% to the VFC at the time of final felling. Royalty free nistar, which was earlier available only to FPCs, was also extended to all three committees (Word Bank Review). The latest October 2001 order has further increased the villager's entitlements, but has not changed the distribution of power between the villagers and the Forest Department (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2003).

Table 2.1 outlines the development of these policies.

Table 2.1 JFM Policy review in Madhya Pradesh⁴

Major Issues	1995 Resolution(4 th Jan)	2000 Resolution(7 th Feb)	2001 Resolution (22 nd October)
PARTICIPATION 1 Membership. Membership General Body	Based on household represented by one male and female member.	Based on eligible voters	
EC Membership	Constituted under chairmanship of the <i>Panchayat</i> . Minimum of two female and two landless members. Beat guard or forest guard will be the secretary.	Minimum 11 and maximum 21 members. 33% female representation. Strengthening of institutional linkages with other existing committees through common membership. Representation of other user groups related to village resources.	SC/ST member, interested in conservation and having passed 8 th standard, will be made assistant secretary and then elected with forest guard providing only technical advice.
2. Decision-Making Formation of Committee	Unanimous decision between DFO (Divisional Forest Officer) and villagers. DFO presides over initial meeting and election of chair and vice chairman	Formalization of agreement to establish a committee through mandatory registration with the DFO. MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) between federated committees at the division-level and the district-level forest officer. Sarpanch presides over initial meeting. After approval of <i>Gram sabha</i> , committee elects chair and vice chair, one of whom has to be a woman.FD retains the power to dissolve committee if found as not discharging its duties.	New committees to be registered under the Societies Registration Act. Gram sabha approval essential for functioning of committee.
RIGHTS & OWNERSHIP	Committee members to assist FD in forest protection. VFC have full right to MFP (Minor Forest Produce) in allotted area. Fuel-wood, fodder, bamboo etc., allocated as per micro plan. Right to 30% of timber felled and 30% of net sale value.	All committees entitled to <i>nistaar</i> on payment of extraction costs. Right to NTFP (Non-timber Forest Produce) as per State Government decisions based on provisions of PESA (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Area). Committee members to be granted equal rights in terms of legal protection and compensation as those granted to public servants. FPC has right over produce of intermediate thinning and 10% of final harvest. VFC right to income from final felling. To be divided in 5:3:2 ratio as cash for members, for village development and forest development respectively.	

⁴ TARU (2002), as cited in, Panchayati Raj and NRM: Situation Analysis & Literature Review.

In the context of political decentralization, the system of decentralized governance in Madhya Pradesh may be traced back to the traditional *Panchayats*, which followed a pattern of caste *Panchayat* and village *Panchayat*. In terms of policy initiatives, based on the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee, the Madhya Pradesh *Panchayat* Act, 1962 was enacted in the state. It gave provision for a three-tier structure of the *Panchayati Raj* institutions in the state. These levels were: the *Gram Panchayat* at the village level; *Janpad Panchayat* at the block level; and the *Zilla Panchayat* at the district level. However these institutions remained legal bodies without any ground functioning. In order to revitalize the *Panchayati Raj* institutions the Madhya Pradesh *Panchayati Raj* Act, 1990 was enacted in order to transfer 'power to people' to facilitate democratic decentralization. The Act ensured direct elections to the *Panchayati Raj* bodies; involvement of political parties; transfer of resources and machinery to *Panchayats*; and a *Gram Sabha* conterminous with the *patwari* circle.

Following this, in the spirit of the 73rd Amendment, Madhya Pradesh enacted the Madhya Pradesh *Panchayati Raj* Act, 1993, to create and amend existing laws for the establishment of *Panchayat* institutions. This Act has been further amended to ensure the effective functioning of PRIs. For instance, to ensure the participation of women Article 6 of the State Panchayat Act was amended to make it mandatory to have one-third of the *Gram Sabha* quorum as women members (Behar and Kumar 2002). The state has also taken significant steps to address the loopholes caused by bureaucratic domination and *sarpanch* politics. Significant early Amendments include:

1. Those that made it obligatory for the *Gram Panchayat* to implement recommendations made by the *Gram sabha* when the annual statement of accounts, audit, and proposed works for the next year are presented.
2. The introduction of the *Gram Swaraj Amendment* of January 2001 as a means of further strengthening the *Gram sabha* by moving away from representative democracy to direct democracy. The Amendment provides for the strengthening of *Gram sabhas* in every village, with funds flowing automatically from the *Gram Panchayat* to the *Gram sabha* in the village and with the creation of the post of a *koshadhyaksh* (treasurer) who is a co-signatory of the *Panchayats'* accounts at the village level. The *Gram sabha* also comprises eight Standing Committees dealing with different subjects, including the

management of common property resources (*sarvjanik sampada samiti*). The *Gram sabha* is also entrusted with the power of beneficiary selection of government programme and of the members of various groups.

There was also an attempt to free the local units from bureaucratic planning by providing a framework for the *Zilla sarkar*. According to the *Panchayat Raj 2001 Act* District Planning Committees were formed to formulate a district-level plan that would incorporate the plans passed by the various *Panchayats* and the *Gram sabhas* and then be submitted to the state. The system of *Zilla sarkar*, which has now been discontinued, aimed at decentralizing powers from higher administrative blocks.

In the context of decentralizing forest management to the *Panchayats*, the MP *Panchayati Raj Adhiniyam*, 1993 devolved responsibility to the *Gram Panchayat* for the plantation and preservation of *Panchayat* forests subject to the availability of funds with the *Gram Panchayat*. The *Janpad* (intermediate) *Panchayat* was given the responsibility to provide for social forestry, subject to the rules framed by the state government. In the 1997 Amendment the *Zilla* (district) *Panchayat* was given an advisory role to the state government with respect to the protection of the environment and social forestry. In 1999 the *Gram Sabha* was entrusted with the management of natural resources including water, land and forests. This management role was subject to compatibility with the provisions of the constitution and other laws. In 2001 the functions of the *Gram Panchayat* in respect of plantation and preservation of *Panchayat* forests were omitted. The *Gram Sabha* was entrusted with similar responsibilities in village forests (ELDF Project Report 2005).

Based on the overview of both forms of decentralization in Madhya Pradesh, it is clear that there is a significant overlap between the institutions of the JFM and the PRIs. Significant examples of this overlap include the management of common property resources (including forestry management), development priorities, addressed by both institutions, and lastly a common general body.

The state has attempted at ensuring synergy by amending both policies related to JFM and PRIs. Some relevant examples include the 2000 JFM resolution, which envisages a role for the

Panchayats in the JFMCs. A few guidelines would show the relation:

1. The first meeting of the VFC is to be presided over by the sarpanch of the respective *Gram Panchayat*.
2. All the *panches* and the sarpanch of the village will be the ex-officio members of the Executive Committee of the VFC/FPC.
3. A Coordination Committee is to be constituted in each district. The *Janpad Panchayat addhyakshas* and the district-level officers of the concerned departments shall be the members of the committee. This would result in the involvement of the *Janpad Panchayat* even at the district-level.
4. The rights of the committees related to minor forest produce should be in accordance with the *Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Area) Act, 1996*.

A second example is the October 2001 Amendment, which aims to 'seek co-operation of people in protection and development of forests' (government of Madhya Pradesh 2001). To enforce *Gram Swaraj* and to give certain rights to the *Gram Sabha* the resolution says:

1. For the constitution of a FPC, a meeting of the *Gram Sabha* should be held under section 6 of the Madhya Pradesh *Panchayati Raj Gram Swaraj Adhiniyam, 1993*, and according to the procedures laid down in the Madhya Pradesh *Gram Sabha* (procedure of meeting) rules, 2001.
2. The *Gram Sabha* has the power to approve/disapprove the committee and its executives.
3. For the coordination of activities to be executed through the micro plan, in each district, the state government shall constitute a Coordination Committee under the chairmanship of the Forest Standing Committee of the district *Panchayat*. The *Janpad Panchayat* chairperson and the district-level officers of all the concerned departments shall be the members of this committee.

2.3 Change

From the above outline, it is clear that the current theory and policy focuses principally on facilitating PFM by creating administrative and political institutional frameworks conferring rights, responsibilities, and roles to local communities that will enhance livelihood options through sustainable resource use and

empowerment. It also acknowledges the viability of local knowledge in strengthening management practices.

Visible changes, brought about by the development of theory and policy in the field of PFM include the establishment of:

1. JFMCs based on *partnership models* that promote formal natural resource management partnerships between the public administration and local user groups. Currently, Madhya Pradesh, as compared to any other state, has brought the largest forest area under JFM. By 2000, the state had the greatest number of JFMCs, 12 038 in number, covering an area of 5 8000 000.00 hectares (National Forestry Action Programme 2001).
2. The Constitutional empowerment of PRIs that transfers the responsibility of management and development of natural resources to PRIs at the district, block and village levels. As an indicator of bringing about a level of change in democratic participation, Madhya Pradesh has had four rounds of PRI elections.

However, specific to decentralization theories and policies, ground realities have not noted any significant changes in the level of participation; in the level of livelihood opportunities; and, in an increase in resource base.

For instance, the evaluation report of the World Bank highlighted significant loopholes in the entire project (ODI report, 2001). It was found that community participation is still to be fully realized in JFM in Madhya Pradesh and the Forest Department still overrides the committees in a lot of decision-making and planning. Examples include:

1. The 2001 guidelines required the committees to be registered under the Societies Registration Act, which definitely gives them a legal existence. However, the registration is with the Forest Department, which is problematic. The Forest Department might take its own time to register committees as a result of which the benefits accrue to them much later than their actual setup.
2. The Forest Department has all the rights of removal of any member of the Executive Committee without even the approval of the VFCs or FPCs.
3. The selection of forest area also lies with the Forest Department, which has resulted in severing the

traditional linkage of the community with the forest.

4. The office of the secretary of the committee is reserved for a representative of the Forest Department. The office bearer exercises important functions related to record keeping, budget allocation, etc. In most instances it has been found that this reservation makes the implementation of JFM less transparent and ambiguous.⁵
5. The projects of JFM are usually target-oriented where the Forest Department decides how many committees have to be formed in a year and what projects are to be assigned to the villages. This makes the process very arbitrary as the village members are left with no decision-making space. Even the micro plans are prepared with close consultation with the Forest Department and not with village-level institutions. The micro plans have not been incorporated in the working plans and thus management does not suit local conditions.

Explanations given for the same were that the committees have less technical knowledge to select the forest areas or decide on various programmes regarding forests. This makes the powers of the Forest Department more pronounced in the committee decisions.

In the context of PRIs according to Behar and Kumar 2002, significant changes have not been experienced, as *Gram Sabhas* have not evolved fully, rather critics would say that they are not workable in the field and weaken the *Panchayats*. According to Behar and Kumar 2002 the reasons cited for the low level of changes include:

1. Low level of participation and awareness from *Gram Sabha* due to reasons like strong caste, class, and local politics. It was also found that a high majority of people seemed completely ignorant.
2. Elite domination in the decision-making process - it was assessed that the sarpanches and other influential people still dominate the decision-making processes. Also villagers live in a close-knit community, which is based on interpersonal relationships, hence open confrontation is not possible. The voices of the poor, marginalized, and

⁵ The 2001 guidelines aim at addressing this lacuna by providing the space for the election of the secretary from the village SC/ST population and limiting the role of the forest guard to providing technical advice.

- women remain unheard. Secondly, the traditionally influential leaders from upper castes and landowners dominate influential positions. The new *sarpanches*, elected from the non-traditional groups' face stiff resistance to their plans and developmental activities.
3. Lack of transparency and accountability caused due to the fact that most of the time the *Gram Sabha* is not aware of the *Gram Panchayat* functioning and there is a communication gap between these two bodies. Mechanisms and procedures for making the *Gram Panchayat* and other bodies accountable and transparent to the *Gram Sabha* exist within the *Panchayati Raj* system. For instance, the *Panchayat* should get the approval of the *Gram Sabha* for identifying beneficiaries for different government programmes. Similarly the *Gram Panchayat* budget needs to be presented to the *Gram Sabha* for approval. However, due to low awareness and weak participation they are unable to exercise their rights.

The causes behind the low level of change brought about by PFM and at times it having the opposite effect have also been highlighted in numerous other studies.

For instance, in the context of empowerment, participatory institutions have been ridden by the problem of 'elite capture' leading to social and economic inequalities, leaving the poor exposed to the mercies of the local overlords (Bardhan 2003).

Similarly, in administrative decentralization, the criterion for establishing rights in the commons through membership in groups like JFMCs or some other formal system have been cited as a means to formalize systems of inclusion and exclusion, which in many instances favour elite or male domination (Agarwal 2001).

The process of decentralization has also been observed as not facilitating a genuine shift in the power structure often resulting in the extension of state control to where it did not exist before or in an increase of the power of the state at the village level (Hobley 1996; Edmunds and Wollenberg 2003).

Lastly the capacity of local institutions to undertake the technical, institutional, and organizational aspects of devolved forest management requires strengthening to ensure that the benefits of

the decentralization process are appropriately imparted. The lack of this capacity has been attributed to specific historical experiences, which include the loss of local knowledge to manage forests that consist of altered species planted under centralized forestry. Also, centralized forestry has led to the breakdown of traditional management institutions and has caused local knowledge and institutional forms to develop in directions that are not helpful for an expanded set of rights to forest management (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2003).

Apart from the socio-political causes limiting change, secure property rights are considered an important means to ensure the effectiveness of participatory NRM theories and policies. Property rights are considered an incentive to conserve and ensure sustainable resource use. However, even though secure and well-defined property rights are an important element of effective participatory governance and have a theoretical and historical basis to support the claim of local rights, there has been no change in the nature of property rights with the advent of participatory governance. For example, it is interesting to note that the law on forest produce in Madhya Pradesh has still not been amended to grant ownership rights to the *Gram Sabha* especially in scheduled areas (ELDF 2005).

Property rights that traditionally belonged to local communities were converted to state ownership rights. The basis for investing property rights in the state may stem from the notion of the 'Tragedy of the Commons', due to which foresters seem to assume that they have a moral authority to own and regulate control over all the forests. Their role is justified as it claims to represent the larger 'public interest'. Claims to technical knowledge and superiority of scientific management (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2003) and the legitimate power to stop illegal activities are also invoked to justify state-owned property rights.

The conversion of traditional property rights to state rights has also been traced to the emergence of powerful leaders presiding over large territories that transcended traditional 'villages'. Natural resources thus came to be regarded as sources of revenue instead of merely sources of sustenance for the local population.

This break also facilitated the gradual breakdown of internalized social mechanisms for controlling resource demands. This process was further exacerbated by the advent of colonialism, which required the replacement of local institutions with colonial

administrators to facilitate natural resource-based revenue generation (Bromley 2003).

On the other hand, the claim to the moral authority to manage and protect forests is also stated by local communities on the basis of their efforts to protect forests and a long history of forest management along with traditional rights (Edmunds and Wollenberg 2003). The effectiveness of this claim is also supported by literature on common property rights, which highlights that local communities have effective mechanisms and sanctions (traditional) in place to regulate rights and ensure fulfilment of duties and to effectively exclude those not belonging to the group (Bromley 2003).

What is important to note from the lack of change, be it in the context of empowerment or in the nature of property rights, is that it is the construct of the state/powerful groups or its definition and justification of 'problems' or solutions that is enforced. Thus many have questioned whether the introduction of participatory theories and policies on their own can facilitate the promised change. Such arguments highlight the challenge of encouraging participation without addressing the fact that in rural areas a large number of people are dependent on a small number of local, powerful elites and without addressing the rights entitlements that underlie political structures in rural areas (Johnson 2003).

Thus, power structures have an important role to play in the implementation of stakeholder perceptions and may at times limit or influence the perception formation process of the marginalized groups or those seeking to secure power. Thus the failure of 'theory' and 'policy' in facilitating 'change' may have important implications on the process of 'problem' definition. It may result in stakeholders making strategic choices in order to be inline with the more powerful stakeholders, thereby enhancing their power and/or avoiding further marginalization.

CHAPTER 3 Perceptions

As stated above, the perceptions of the PRIs on issues related to the participatory space provided by JFM and its impact on livelihoods was studied in 12 villages in the district of Harda.

In order to provide a specific context for the PRI perceptions, Section 3.1 provides an overview of the villages studied and their level of dependence on the forestry sector. Section 3.2 elucidates PRI perceptions on JFM in Harda. These perceptions are based on an analysis of responses gathered at all three levels of the PRIs and the village community. Perceptions have been analysed in the context of the impact of JFM in addressing the priorities of forestry sustainability and social justice.

3.1 Profile of the study area

The study area falls under the three blocks of Harda, Timarni, and Khirkia.

Timarni block

The Timarni block of the Harda district has the maximum area under forest in the district. The forests under Timarni are categorized mainly as reserved forests. Majority of the forest villages are located in this block. The involvement of the Forest Department is thus much higher in this block as compared to the other two blocks.

The study villages under this block are Malhanwada, Muhalsarkular, Vichpuri Malh, Pathri, Aamkhedi, Ajrudmal, and Kalyakhedi.

The social composition in the block includes *Korkus* and *Gonds* (the prevalent tribes), and other castes like *Gwalis* and *Golans*. The block does not have a significant population of members from the high caste.

The influence of the *Shramik Adivasi Sangathan* (a Betul-based mass tribal organization) is also the highest in this block.

Harda block

In the Harda block the forest area is mainly around the River Narmada. The study villages include Ajrudraiyyat and Bankhedi. After the submergence of the villages due to the Narmada valley

projects many of the villagers have encroached on forestland. The NVDA (Narmada Valley Development Authority) has worked in this block to improve the status of forests and the status of the rehabilitated villages.

The social composition in the block includes members of the higher castes (Rajputs and Bishnois) as well as tribal communities. Thus, intercaste conflict is most visible in the villages of this block.

Khirkiya block

The forest cover in the Khirkiya block is also quite high and is categorized mainly under 'protected forest'. The study villages in this block include Dolaria Khurd, Gurla, and Dhansi.

The social composition in this block comprises a significant tribal population (Korkus and Gonds) and a low level of high-caste communities.

Like Timarni the Shramik Adivasi Sangathan has established a degree of influence in the forest areas of Khirkiya. However, the MTO (Mass Tribal Organization) does not have many active supporters in this block. The block profile is provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Block profile

Particulars	Timarni	Harda	Khirkiya	Total
Total Population (2001 P.)	1, 45,367	1, 90,264	1, 38,543	4, 74,174
Revenue Villages	135	196	195	526
Forest Villages	44	1	--	45
Total Villages	179	197	195	571
Area (Sq. Km.)	822.09	998.41	823.82	2644.32
Total Panchayats	61	59	61	181
Total Agricultural Land (Ha.)	56,101	65,605	53,015	1,74,721
Irrigated Land (Ha.)	41,820	48,275	20,623	1, 10,718

Source: <http://harda.nic.in/> (10.07.04)

Of the 12 study villages studied (see Annexure I), nine are revenue villages and three are forest villages. Gurla, Dolaria Khurd, Ajrudraiyyat, and Bankhedhi have VFCs in place, whereas the other seven villages have established FPCs. The JFMC in Vichpuri Malh has been dissolved.

The villages, which have a heterogeneous social composition, include Ajrudmal, Muhalsarkular, Gurla, Vichpuri Malh,

Ajrudraiyat, Aamkhedi, and Kalyakhedi.

The villages that have a strong elite domination include Vichpuri Malh, Dolaria Khurd, and Ajrudraiyat.

The villages, which have a strong presence of the MTO, include Ajrudmal, Muhalsarkular, and Pathri. The villages of Aamkhedi and Dolaria Khurd also support the MTO but do not have any active members.

Lastly, the contribution of NTFPs in the income stream of the sampled villages is an important indicator to determine the level of importance that local communities attach to forest management. This is based on the assumption that if local communities benefit significantly from forestry resources then they will attach greater priority to manage forests at a local level. It was observed that villages with a higher level of dependence on NTFPs had a greater interest in their management and thus had stronger perceptions related to the impact of current forest management policies.

In this context it was assessed that the overall contribution of NTFPs to the total annual household income is 11.08%. In the forest villages this contribution was assessed to be higher, i.e., 15.06% of the average annual income as compared to a 10.43% contribution in the annual income of revenue villages. A further analysis highlights that the contribution of NTFPs in the income stream of villages, which have a high annual income, was lower as compared to villages that have a low annual income. For example in Vichpuri Malh the annual average household income is Rs 34 000 and the contribution of forest resources is Rs 720 (2.12%), whereas in Aamkhedi the annual average household income is Rs 7300 with forestry resources contributing Rs 1600 (21.92%) to the annual household income.

The contribution of NTFPs in the income stream of the sampled villages is highlighted in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Contribution of NTFP to Local Income

Village	No. of Households	Total Annual Income Per HH (In Rs) ⁶	Annual Per-HH Income From NTFP (In Rs) ⁷	Percentage Dependence
Malhanwada	46	13500	2990	22.15
Ajrudmal	184	11000	2020	18.36
Aamkhedi	157	7300	1600	21.92
Muhalsarkular	48	10000	1000	10.00
Pathri	91	9400	1200	12.77
Kalyakhedi	65	32000	2000	6.25
Vichpuri Malh	58	34000	720	2.12
Dhansi	57	8300	1180	14.22
Dolaria Khurd	62	11500	1750	15.22
Gurla	100	18000	1400	7.78
Ajrudraiyyat	36	15000	2480	16.53
Bankhedi	53	25000	1140	4.56
Overall		14660	1625	11.08

Source: TERI field survey and SANKET field report

3.2 PRI perceptions on JFM

This section highlights the perceptions of the representatives of the three levels of the PRIs [District level (Zilla); Intermediate level (Janpad); Village level (Panchayat)].

The perceptions have been analysed according to the responses under the broader issues of forest sustainability and social justice, which are the two objectives of JFM. The respondents were also asked to provide their perceptions on the appropriate institutional form that can effectively address current problems and thus facilitate sustainable forestry management.

3.2.1 Space in the decision-making process

Perceptions under the JFM objective of facilitating social justice have been evaluated in terms of the extent to which local communities have been provided the space to participate in the decision-making process.

In the context of participation, this paper highlights how the PRIs

⁶ Source: Sanket Field Team Village Report

⁷ TERI field survey, March 2004 to May 2004. Total amount of each NTFP collected, multiplied by the Selling Price of the product.

perceive JFMCs to have empowered marginalized communities vis-à-vis the elite community and the extent to which the village community, as a whole, has been empowered vis-à-vis the FD to participate in the decision-making process related to forest management.

Marginalized community vis-à-vis the dominant community:

In the context of the impact of JFM on the empowerment of the marginalized communities vis-à-vis the dominant community, perceptions varied amongst the three levels of the PRI institutions.

Perceptions at the district level:

At the district level, all three respondents of the *Zilla Panchayat* stated that, on paper, JFM provided the space for the equitable participation of all the community groups. Equitable participation is ensured as the membership in the JFMCs and its Executive Committee is as per the JFM guidelines, which ensures the representation of the marginalized groups, i.e., women and the SC/STs.

In practice, however, the perception of the PRI respondents varied between membership providing a nominal space in the decision-making procedure and membership providing a space for a dynamic and interactive process in which the marginalized groups have an active voice and an influence in the decision-making process.

For instance, the PRI representative from the Timarni block perceived the representation of the marginalized groups in the JFMCs as a case of *angutha chaap*, i.e., nominal representation. He stated that the 'elite', i.e., groups that were of a higher caste, or that had a greater level of economic wealth or knowledge, dominated the decision-making process. Similarly, the representative from the Khirkiya block perceived the marginalized groups as not being represented in the decision-making procedure, as they did not have the '*capacity to take decisions on issues related to forestry management, development, or benefit-sharing*'.

On the other hand, the president of the *Zilla Panchayat* perceived JFM as having provided a space to facilitate participation within the community. He stated that the community was in the process of building its capacity to take decisions and in most of the villages the entire community was

participating in the decision-making process.

One may thus conclude that the degree of variation between the perceptions of the president and the block representatives is based on the belief that capacity-building measures are in the process of facilitating greater participation and on the belief that elite class domination and the incapability of the marginalized communities is a hindrance to providing a space for the equitable participation of the marginalized communities.

Perceptions at the block level:

At the block level, on an average, all the PRI representatives of Timarni block perceive JFM as having provided an adequate space in the decision-making process for the marginalized groups, both on paper and in practice. For example, they perceive JFM to have facilitated '*participatory decision-making with regard to forestry management and the equitable representation of the interests of the entire community*'. In a slight variation of perception, the *Janpad Panchayat* president (from the Timarni block and from the general caste), stated that though the space for equitable participation has been provided through JFM, and is being effectively utilized in some villages, he feels that the role of the marginalized communities is still limited in the decision-making process, even though they have the capability to take decisions, as '*their mindset has not changed and they perceive the government officials and the village elite as their rulers*'. Thus participatory decision-making requires confidence building through awareness raising and education. This perception may be assessed as being based on the prevalent caste and political structures in rural areas that are believed to be the major causes that undermine the on-ground implementation of PFM.

It is important to point out that these perceptions, related to the effective representation and participation, do not take into account the lack of representation and participation of the members of the MTO and the lack of participation of women (both, a constituent part of the village community) in the decision-making process. For instance, representatives stated that, '*only those villagers capable of making decisions should be involved in the decision-making process*'. According to this perception women and the economically marginalized communities fall under the category defined as incapable due to their lack of knowledge and power to influence decision-making.

PRI representatives, from MTO dominated villages, perceived the decision-making process to be effective even though the MTO members were not represented as they were against the Forest Department. The lack of participation of these members has important implications for the 'participatory' nature of JFM and on its long-term sustainability as it must effectively take into account the objectives and policy problems of the different stakeholder groups. Thus the perception, on membership, of the PRI representatives does not reflect a true picture of the level of participation in the decision-making procedure.

Representatives of the other two blocks (Harda and Khirkiya) perceived JFM as not having been able to provide the space for equitable representation of community interests. The respondents perceived the decision-making process as being dominated by the elite groups. For example, representatives stated, *'the decision-making process in every village was dominated by the economically powerful groups that did not take into account the voices of the weaker groups'*. The absence of a good leader was perceived as a significant deterrent to equitable participation.

Perceptions at the village level:

At the village level, a significant degree of variation is not observed among the perceptions of the PRI representatives of the three different blocks. Majority of the representatives perceived JFM as not having been able to provide the space for equitable participation between the marginalized and the dominant communities. For example, representatives of Malhanwada stated that *'on paper the JFMC representation was equitable, however in practice it was dominated by the traditional village heads, in both homogeneous and heterogeneous villages'*.

The perceptions of the PRI respondents were assessed to vary only in Kalyakhedi and Ajrudraiyyat. In Kalyakhedi, a tribal village, the JFM programme has been a success in addressing development needs. The representatives perceived JFMC membership to be an effective mechanism of participatory decision-making. For example, they stated that *'the voices of the entire village are heard in the JFMC and that the decision-making process is based on the issues raised by the general body'*.

In Ajrudraiyyat, a significant level of conflict was observed between the dominant (Bishnoi) caste and the marginalized

(Korku, tribal) caste. The PRI respondents from the Bishnoi caste perceived JFM as having provided sufficient space for participation. However, the elite representatives perceive the rules for reservations for the marginalized groups to be a hindrance in the decision-making process as they consider them to be incapable of making decisions. On the other hand, however, perceptions of the marginalized sections state that the JFM programme has not empowered them in the context of providing a space for equitable dialogue in the decision-making process. For example, a *Korku* member of the *Gram Sabha* in Ajrudraiyyat where the *Bishnoi* community was observed to exercise significant power, stated that *'it is no point for us to be present at the committee meeting as we do not have a voice, we will have to agree with whatever decisions are taken.'*

Table 3.3 Perception of PRI respondents on the 'decision-making process.'

Marginalized community vis-à-vis the dominant community			
PRI Level	Perception	Reason	Knowledge Base
District	Nominal participation	Lack of capacity Elite domination	Lack of change Lack of change
Block	Nominal participation	Existing mindset Elite domination	Lack of change Lack of change
Village	Nominal participation	Elite domination	Lack of change
	Effective participation	Effective functioning of JFMC as per theory and guidelines.	Theory, policy and change.

Village community vis-à-vis the Forest Department:

In the context of the impact of JFM on the participation of the village community vis-à-vis the FD in the decision-making process, perceptions varied amongst the three levels of the PRI institutions.

Perceptions at the district level:

At the district level the PRI respondents perceive the balance of power in the decision-making process to be skewed towards the Forest Department. The respondents stated that the reason for the dominant role of the Forest Department could be attributed to the 'better equipped' capacity of the Forest Department to manage and protect forest resources. The representative of Timarni block also stated that the *'Forest Department did not take into account the traditional knowledge related to resource use and management in the planning process.'* Apart from

dominating the decision-making process, the Forest Department was also perceived as being unaccountable to the village community, which was resulting in excluding the community from exercising equitable control over management and allocation decisions. For instance, representatives pointed out that a member of the Forest Department holds the office of the JFMC secretary and as the JFMC members were not aware of the mechanism of fund allocation, the activity was carried out solely by the Forest Department.

Perceptions at the block level:

At the block level it was perceived that JFM had not empowered the village community vis-à-vis the Forest Department. Perceptions related to the relationship between the village community and the Forest Department varied. For example, representatives of Harda block stated '*JFM had led to further marginalization of the weaker communities as the Forest Department collaborated with the dominant community in the village in order to ensure the functioning of the JFMC.*'

Representatives of Timarni block perceived that the relationship between the Forest Department and the village community to be based on the nature of rights that each stakeholder exercises, which in turn determines the level of power or equity in the decision-making process. In this context they stated that since the Forest Department exercises absolute ownership rights over the forest resources, they have the right to dominate decisions relating to management, or since the '*community was not given complete rights over the forest resources they should not exercise equal power.*'

The representatives of Khirkiya block stated that the '*decision-making procedure is dominated by the Forest Department due to which the needs of the community are not represented.*' Thus at the block level, it is apparent that the perceptions are based on the fact that JFM has not put in place an effective participatory framework, as all the respondents believe that the community has a role to play in management but has not been provided the same by the Forest Department.

Perceptions at the village level:

At the village level, the PRI respondents stated that a majority of the decisions taken by the JFMCs relate to forestry management and protection. In the context of such decisions, the PRI

members perceived the decision-making process to be dominated by the Forest Department, as the community did not possess the technical knowledge to contribute.

This perception is at variance from the one at the block level, i.e., it is not based on the current theory of participatory forest management that acknowledges the role of local knowledge in effective conservation and natural resource management. It is in fact based on the lack of change that the participatory forest management process is supposed to initiate.

PRI representatives of Vichpuri Malh village stated that they had dissolved the JFMC as the decision-making process was 'top-down' and was thus not representing the needs of the villagers.

The PRI respondents also stated that as the decisions did not address development needs, due to a lack of funds to address such priorities, the JFMC members often lost interest in participating in the decision-making process.

On the other hand village level respondents also perceived their relationship with the Forest Department to be at par, as they no longer paid bribes.

Table 3.4 Perception of PRI respondents on the 'decision-making process.'

Village community vis-à-vis the Forest Department			
PRI level	Perception	Reason	Knowledge base
District	Ineffective participation	Better capacity of the FD. Ineffective devolution by FD. Financial un-accountability of the FD	Lack of change
Block	Ineffective participation	Target driven approach has led to further marginalization Existing nature of rights skewed toward FD.	Lack of change
Village	Ineffective participation	Decisions related to technical forestry and protection. Local knowledge/priorities not taken into account.	Lack of change
	Increased participation	Reduction in corruption (bribes).	Change

3.2.2 Rights and ownership pattern

Regarding the issue of rights and ownership, on the whole, the perceptions of the PRI representatives at all three levels highlighted that JFM had given only concessions to the communities and not rights. They stated that the communities had been given only concessions in lieu of their traditional *nistaar* rights over fuel wood, collection of non-timber forest

produce and grazing.

Perceptions at the district level:

At the district level the PRI representatives did not perceive the JFM programme to have changed the pattern of rights and ownership over forestland and resources.

Again, on this issue the *Zilla Panchayat* president stated that JFM had provided resource use rights to the village community, whereas the other members stated that neither the ownership of forestland and resources, nor the right to use forest resources lay with the communities. The PRI members stated that the primary right to resource use should lie with the forest-dependent communities, and the failure of JFM in ensuring such rights would lead to a direct impact on local livelihoods and forest sustainability. With respect to this correlation between resource use rights and sustainability of forestry management, the representatives of Timarni block highlighted that the '*nationalisation of NTFPs had broken the link between the villagers and the forest,*' and they thus took less interest in its sustainable management and protection.

It is interesting to note that none of the perceptions related to the ownership pattern of forestland/resources questioned the lack of ownership rights. It was observed that all the responses were made only in the context of the right to resource use. In fact perceptions related to the ownership of resources were often observed to relate to the opposite end of the spectrum as compared to the demand of providing primary resource use rights to the locals. For instance, the representatives of Khirkiya block stated '*the ownership of forests should not be handed to the villagers as it would lead to complete degradation.*'

Perceptions at the block level:

At the block level, the PRI respondents agreed that the forest dependent communities should exercise primary rights over the use of forest resources. Majority of the representatives at the block level perceive that JFM had not facilitated any such transfer of rights.

Representatives of Harda and Timarni blocks stated that the villagers had traditionally exercised such rights over resource use in the form of *nistaar*. They did not perceive the advent of JFM, which brought about the formalization of such rights, to have resulted in a greater level of empowerment of the local

communities as it had brought about no change.

Perceptions at the village level:

At the village level all the PRI respondents perceive JFM to have provided only concessions and not rights over resource use.

For instance, in Ajrudmal, where the level of dependence on forestry resources is significantly high, i.e., 18.36% of the annual household income is derived from NTFPs and there is a strong presence of the mass tribal organization, the PRI representatives perceive JFM as not only not having provided rights to resource use but also claim that it has converted traditional rights into concessions. For instance, representatives stated that *'we have been given concessions in terms of bringing head loads of fuelwood, these used to be our rights.'*

There is some difference in opinion regarding why concessions and not rights have been given. The *Janpad Panchayat* and the *Zilla Panchayat* officials of the PRI feel that the community is not ready to exercise rights over the forest, as they are not well equipped in terms of education and it will take some time for them to gain the capacity to understand all the issues regarding the management of forests. For instance, representatives of the *Janpad Panchayat* state *'since the community lacks the ability to take decisions keeping all the aspects in mind, the Forest Department has to take the decisions on their behalf. Thus, the Forest Department needs to retain more power to implement the decisions that are taken.'* The village *Panchayat* officials of Pathri and Dolaria Khurd also share a similar view. They feel that along with the ability to take a balanced decision the community also lacks the technical knowledge required to manage the forests sustainably. The officials feel that the Forest Department is best suited for taking decisions regarding the conservation and protection of forests.

The PRI officials at the village level, however, feel that the Forest Department is not ready to devolve decision-making powers to the community and thus complete rights were not given. The stature of the forest guard as *'Maharaj'* would get threatened if more rights were given to the community. According to them, in the villages where the department could not rule over the community, the JFM programme has failed. For instance, the large farmers in Vichpuri Malh were too powerful for the Forest Department and thus the JFMC formed in the village was dissolved. Another example is the village Bankhedi where

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representatives feel that *'the loss of interest on the part of the Forest Department in the JFMC of Bankhedi was because the forest guard could not impose his decisions on the villagers.'*

Table 3.5 Perception of PRI respondents on the 'rights and ownership pattern.'

PRI level	Perception	Reason	Knowledge base
District	No change	Lack of local capacity to exercise rights. Policy and implementation process does not give rights.	Lack of change
Block	No transfer/increase in rights	Lacking local capacity to exercise rights.	Lack of change
Village	JFM to have converted rights into concessions. No increase in rights	Existing restrictions on resource use/collection. FD resistant to share power.	Lack of change

Benefit-Sharing Mechanism

As described above, forestry resources contribute significantly to the income stream of the forest-dependent communities. For example, the overall contribution of the forestry sector to the total annual household income is 11.08%. In the forest villages this contribution was assessed to be higher, i.e., 15.06% of the average annual income as compared to 10.43% contribution to the annual income of revenue villages. Effective benefit-sharing mechanisms in this context are essential for fulfilling the objective of social justice outlined in the objectives of the JFM programme. Secondly, an effective benefit-sharing mechanism also ensures sustainable resource use. It thus also has important implications on the objective of achieving forest sustainability. Perceptions related to the extent to which JFM has addressed the issues of providing equitable sharing of benefits include:

Perceptions at the district level

At the district level, some of the PRI representatives stated that the design of the benefit-sharing mechanism of the JFM programme was equitable, but due to lack of awareness, the community is not able to avail of its benefits. For example, representatives of Timarni block stated that *'as the villagers had exercised traditional rights over resource use for personal consumption, the benefit-sharing mechanism was restricted to the benefits from nationalized products, labour, and the allocation of money for development purposes. The benefit-sharing mechanism under JFM is in place to facilitate the allocation of such benefits. However, the low level of awareness amongst the villagers led to an increasing level of unaccountability on the part of the Forest Department staff due*

to which the mechanism was not being implemented.'

Perceptions at the block level:

Representatives at the block level perceived the JFM as inadequate in securing rights through benefit sharing, as it was not designed for the equal distribution of forest benefits. For example, representatives of Timarni block stated '*the design of the benefit-sharing mechanism under the JFM programme is such that the Forest Department would gain more than the community.*' They stated that the benefits to the community are limited to wage labour and some development activities.

Perceptions at the village level:

Majority of the village-level *Panchayat* officials feel that the benefit sharing from the JFM programme has not been equal and has remained skewed in favour of the Forest Department. For instance, representatives of Ajrudmal stated '*benefit-sharing mechanism under the JFM programme is not in favour of the community, as the Forest Department reaps all the benefits of the protection provided by the community.*' They also stated that '*a major share of the profits from the timber harvest should be given to the community and not to the Forest Department.*'

Another point to note is that at the community level, the respondents stated that benefits were lacking in terms of institutional support. For example, the JFMC members put a significant effort into protection activities and do not get any benefits or compensation when they come to harm or when their crops are raided by wild boars.

3.2.3 Conservation of forest resources

Status of forest

Perceptions at all three levels of the PRIs conform to the view that the status of the forest improved significantly in the initial years of JFM. Wherever there has not been any improvement the officials agree that the rate of degradation has reduced.

Perceptions at the district level:

The PRI officials at the district-level feel that the status of forests has improved to a large extent due to the JFM programme. They are of the opinion that the forests in the district had degraded before the start of the JFM programme and the protection done by the community in collaboration with the FD has led to an overall improvement in the condition of the forests.

The respondents at the district level are all literate and well versed with the theory of participatory natural resource management and the role that JFM envisages to implement it. Their perception that the status of the forest has improved is also based on the importance attached to the level of collaboration between the FD and the community, which according to them has resulted in lesser incidences of forest fires and illegal logging and in controlled grazing.

Perceptions at the block level:

The perceptions of the PRI representatives, on the status of the forests, vary between the blocks, i.e., majority of the respondents of the Timarni block (four out of five) perceive JFM to have improved the status of the forest, respondents of the Harda block perceive either no change or a deterioration in the status of the forest after the initial years.

In Timarni, the causes behind the improved status varied between the respondents. For example, according to the tribal respondents, the status of the forest had improved due to the increased support provided by the community in terms of controlling fires and open grazing. On the other hand, other representatives stated that the reason behind the improved status of the forest could be attributed to the fear factor that the FD officials instilled among the community and not due to an increase in awareness about the importance of sustainable forest resource use and the link between the forest and the locals. Statements related to such perceptions include, *'In areas having a large MTO following, changes in the status of the forest are not visible as there was no fear of the FD'*.

Thus as compared to the other perceptions, this perception is based on the knowledge of change in the status of the forest, however this change has not been attributed to the knowledge of theory, according to which conservation is facilitated with increased awareness and a sense of local ownership.

In the Khirkiya block, the PRI representatives perceive the status of the forest to have improved significantly with the advent of the JFM programme. For example, a PRI representative stated that, *'the tree cover has increased and so has the quality of the teak plants or bamboo clumps in the forest.'*

A variance in the perception was observed in the representatives of the Harda block. The PRI representatives of this block

perceived the JFM programme as having a minimal effect on the status of forests in the region. For instance, representatives stated that, *'forests had improved but it was because of the activities of NVDA and not the JFM programme.'*

On the other hand, some PRI representatives perceive JFM as a complete failure as far as its impact on the improvement of the status of the forest is concerned. This contrasting perception may be attributed to the fact that the villagers of Bankhedi have encroached into the forestland due to the submergence of their original village. With no other space for establishing their homestead these villagers, along with many others in the block, have encroached on forestland resulting in its degradation. Even though JFMCs have been established in these villages there is no available land for plantation and there is also a low level of interest due to the low level of forest dependency, (income from NTFP contributes only 4.56% to the average annual household income).

Other respondents, including one from Timarni, perceived JFM to have improved the status of the forest in the initial years, i.e., at the time when the programme was funded and when it was introduced among the communities with its promises. They stated that the failure in delivering the promised benefits had resulted in loss of interest among the communities due to which forest protection activities undertaken by the communities, including protection provided to the plantations have deteriorated.

Perceptions at the village level:

The PRI officials at the village level perceived the JFM programme to have brought about a significant level of improvement in the status of the forest in the initial years due to the fact that it promised significant benefits to the locals, increased their level of awareness, and under an effective leader the programme had ensured effective partnership resulting in local ownership of the programme and its objectives. However, they stated that in the recent years the status of the forest was once again on a decline. In the villages dominated by MTO, such as Muhalsarkular, Pathri, and Ajrudmal, some of the PRI officials blame the MTO movement for the deterioration of the forest conditions. In Ajrudraiyyat, in the Harda block, the PRI officials feel that the lack of an able leadership is one of the causes of the failure of the JFM programme. Respondents from the villages of Amba, Aamkhedi, Dolaria Khurd, and Dhansi stated that lack of

local varieties in the plantations had caused the locals to lose interest in the programme. For example, respondents from Dolaria Khurd stated, '*Reduction in the rate of forest degradation had not benefited the local communities, as the tree species of their interest were not grown*'. This is an important perception as it corresponds to the fact that JFM has not been effective in implementing the theories and policies behind PFM, which include addressing local needs and which recognize the importance of traditional or local knowledge in management-planning.

In Bankhedi, the officials feel that the JFM programme never had any effect on the overall forest conditions. The forests had improved to some extent under the NVDA. On the other hand, in Kalyakhedi, the community as well as the PRI officials feel that the forests have improved to a large extent due to the JFM programme and the JFMC is still functioning properly for the improvement of the forests as well as the development of the villages. The positive perception of the impact of the JFM programme on the status of the forests in Kalyakhedi may be attributed to the effective functioning of the JFMC. It was observed that of the 12 studied villages the Kalyakhedi JFMC had facilitated development work, it had increased the area under bamboo plantation, which has resulted in providing labour opportunities and in addressing local livelihoods based on bamboo products. The JFMC has thus succeeded in addressing the objective of social justice in the village, which has resulted in a greater degree of interest in forest management and protection.

Table 3.6 Perception of PRI respondents on 'conservation of forest resources.'

Status of Forest			
PRI Level	Perception	Reason	Knowledge Base
District	Improved status	Effective collaboration between the FD and the community.	Theory and policy
Block	Improved status	a. Effective collaboration.	
		b. Fear of FD	
	Decline in status after initial years	Lack of incentive.	
	No improvement	Forest conservation not a priority.	
Village	Decline in status after initial years.	Lack of incentives, leadership, MTO impact, exclusion of local priorities in the management.	

PRI Level	Perception	Reason	Knowledge Base
	Improved status.	Effective functioning of JFMC.	

Level of Protection

Perceptions at the district level:

Respondents of the *Zilla Panchayat* perceive that forest protection under the JFM programme has been of a very high standard. They stated that the incidents of forest fires and of illegal felling had reduced throughout the district. The *Zilla Panchayat* president states that, *'The forest protection activities in the district have been very effective and have improved the standard of living of the forest-dependent communities'*.

Perceptions at the block level:

The PRI representative of the Khirkiya block also stated that the JFMCs had been effective in protecting the forest plantations from open grazing by increasing the level of awareness amongst the communities due to which villagers were now grazing their cattle in identified compartments.

The members of the Timarni *Janpad Panchayat*, however, do not attribute the increase in protection to the effectiveness of the JFM programme. They perceive that protection is carried out due to the fear of the FD. For example, respondents stated, *'All these improvements are not due to the increase in awareness within the community but it is mainly because of the fear of the FD officials. In regions where there is a significant MTO presence these changes are not visible'*. They also feel that the activities of the MTO in the block are one of the reasons for which forest protection has declined. However, the *Janpad Panchayat* member of Kalyakhedi feels that the community is aware of the requirement of forest protection and the whole village is involved in the protection activities.

The *Janpad Panchayat* members of the Harda block feel that forest protection has not been effective. For example, representatives stated that, *'Demarcation of forestland is not taken into account and people are free to collect NTFPs or graze their cattle anywhere in the forests. Illegal felling of trees has also continued freely.'*

Perceptions at the village level:

At the village level the PRI officials perceive JFM to have facilitated effective protection. However, the community lost interest in the protection due to the lack of development of

villages, lack of recognition, unwanted risk of protection as well as the lack of available NTFPs in the forests. For example representatives of Gurla stated that, *'it was not safe for the community to go to the forests as the poachers carry weapon and they do not.'*

In Bankhedi, representatives stated that, *'After the NVDA activities the forests have declined continually and at present nothing is available in it.'*

In Ajrudraiyyat, which has a significant level of elite domination, the cause of the decline in protection activities was attributed to an ineffective local dispute resolution mechanism. The JFMC members (from the Bishnoi community) stated that they were weary of restricting the tribal communities from illegal collection of forest resources as they resorted to the TWD (Tribal Welfare Department) for dispute resolution and not to the JFMC or the village sarpanch (see Box 2). They stated that in such cases the ruling favoured the tribal communities and the Forest Department did not provide any support, thus undermining the local institutions and deterring any further protection to be carried out at the local level. On the other hand, the ineffectiveness may also be attributed to 'elite' domination in the resolution process leading to the marginalization of tribal interests.

Box 2: Ineffective Dispute Resolution Mechanism

Decline in participatory protection due to ineffective local dispute resolution mechanism.

The case mentioned here relates to an incident where the JFM president allegedly stopped tribal women from illegal collection. He was then reported to the TWD for attempted sexual harassment and was not supported by the FD in his attempt to protect forest resources. The PRI/JFM respondent stated that the incidents has proved to be a deterrent to any further attempt to protect the forest from illegal activities.

In the village of Ajrudmal, the cause of the decline in the level of protection was attributed mainly to a lack of livelihood options, and due to the lack of partnership between the villagers. For example, the non-MTO representatives stated that they could not restrict local resource use when people had no other livelihood options. Secondly, they stated that the forests were being degraded (due to cultivation) by the MTO followers who were being instigated by their leaders to undertake illegal activities. On the other hand, representatives who are members of the MTO perceived JFM to have caused internal conflict between the

villagers due to demarcation of forest area. Thus, in this case the divide in the village community was stated as hindering effective partnership essential for forest protection.

The PRI officials of Kalyakhedi have an absolutely opposite view on this issue. They feel that the level of protection has been very good and has remained so over a period of 10 years. They feel that the results are also visible, as the forests, especially the bamboo forests in the region, have improved a lot. They state that, *'Forest fire incidents has markedly declined. Bamboo forests have improved a lot after the flowering that occurred a few years back at Harda'*. As a matter of fact there has not been a single report of a forest fire from the region in the last one year and the volume of bamboo collected in the Rahetgaon depot (the nearest depot of the region) is increasing every year.

Table 3.7 Perception of PRI respondents on 'conservation of forest resources.'

Level of Protection			
PRI Level	Perception	Reason	Knowledge Base
District	High level of protection	Effective collaboration	Theory, policy & change
Block	Effective protection	a. Increase in awareness.	a. Theory & change
	Ineffective protection	b. Fear of FD. No regulation.	b. Lack of change
Village	Decline in protection after initial years.	Lack of incentive and security, ineffective dispute resolution system, lack of livelihood alternatives, lack of intra-village partnership.	
	Effective protection	Effective functioning of JFMC	

3.3 Definition of problems

This section aims at highlighting the problems related to the current process of forest management in the district of Harda.

As stated in the introduction, in order to be effective PFM must provide a 'space' for local stakeholders within which they can prioritize and define objectives and problems related to forestry management. JFM, which attempts at providing such a space through a partnership model, is an example of implementing PFM. It attempts at ensuring local participation in forest management in collaboration with the Forest Department

through implementation of participatory micro planning; decision-making; and through a greater access to and control over forest resources. It also attempts at ensuring the participation of marginalized communities within the village through reservation and membership in the JFMC.

Thus the definition of problems is based on the perceptions of the PRIs on issues related to the extent to which JFM has created a 'space' for local communities to participate in ensuring forest sustainability (conservation) and social justice (participation in the decision-making process and rights and ownership of forest resources).

Based on the discussion above, one may conclude that the PRIs do not perceive the current process of forest management in Harda to have provided a space for local communities to ensure forest sustainability or social justice. The following were defined as the main problems causing a hindrance in the effective implementation of participatory forest management.

3.3.1 Space in the decision-making process

At all three levels, the PRI respondents stated that JFM had been ineffective in creating a space for the active participation of marginalized and village communities in the decision-making process related to forest management.

The policy problem may thus be defined as 'ineffective participation.'

At the district level the causes identified for ineffective participation include:

1. Entrenched elite domination at the local level.
2. Lack of capacity of the marginalized communities caused by illiteracy and unawareness.
3. Superior capability of the Forest Department to undertake forest management.
4. Financial un-accountability of the Forest Department.

At the block level the causes for ineffective participation were attributed to:

1. Lacking capacity of local communities to exercise active participation. Factors influencing the low capacity include – a 'mindset' that does not question existing power structures; and, the existing nature of ownership

rights that favours the dominance of the Forest Department.

2. Entrenched elite domination.
3. Target driven approach leading to the collaboration of the elite and the Forest Department has further reduced the participation of marginalized communities.

At the village level the causes for ineffective participation were attributed to:

1. Entrenched elite domination in the decision-making process.
2. Superior capability of the Forest Department to undertake management and protection. This indicates that the JFM process has not fostered a local sense of ownership, or a participatory means of incorporating local knowledge in the management of forest resources.
3. Exclusion of local priorities in the planning process.
4. Lack of incentives

3.3.2 Rights and ownership pattern

The PRI perceptions highlight that the current forest management process has not impacted the nature of rights over forest resources in any way that will increase the level of power exercised by the local communities. According to the theory behind PFM insecure rights to forestry resources is responsible for ineffective participation of local communities and to the low level of local ownership of management institutions.

Thus the policy problem in this context may be defined as 'insecure rights to forestry resources.'

At the district level the reasons identified for the lack of change in the rights and ownership pattern include:

1. Lack of capacity within the local community to exercise such rights.
2. Policy and implementation framework was not appropriate to facilitate a transfer of rights and ownership to the local communities.

At the block level, the causes identified include:

1. Lack of capacity within the local community to exercise such rights.

Benefit-sharing mechanisms

The PRI respondents highlighted that the current benefit-sharing policy was skewed in favour of the Forest Department and was thus not equitable. The benefit-sharing mechanism related to timber was highlighted as a special example. The PRI respondents stated *‘the JFMC spent maximum funds on the protection of timber; the Forest Department however appropriates the larger chunk of the benefits of its harvest.’*

A second problem highlighted as causing inequity in the benefit-sharing mechanism relates to the fact that the community is not compensated for the support it provides in protection, i.e., in terms of physical security and for the loss of crops to increased wildlife.

3.3.3 Conservation of forest resources

In terms of the impact of JFM in facilitating forest conservation, respondents stated that the status of the forest and protection had improved, especially in the initial years. However, currently, majority of the respondents at the block and village level stated that conservation efforts were in a decline.

Thus the policy problem in this case may be defined as ‘a decline in conservation initiatives.’

The reasons identified for the decline include:

At the block level the reasons were attributed to:

1. Ineffective regulation.
2. Lack of incentive to conserve forest resources due to declining benefits.
3. Forest conservation a low priority.

At the village level the reasons were attributed to:

1. Lack of incentives in terms of benefits and security.
2. The impact of the MTO.
3. Exclusion of local priorities from the management agenda.
4. Ineffective local dispute resolution system.
5. Lack of alternative livelihood opportunities.
6. Lack of intra-village partnership.

3.4 Appropriate institutional forms: PRI or JFMC

In order to address the problems defined above, the PRI respondents recommend that the following factors must be taken into account to ensure effective PFM.

- An able leader is required in the Forest Department, who can take the lead and guide the Forest Department staff as well as the community.
- The committees need to be financially strengthened so much so that they can take up certain activities without waiting for the Forest Department money to arrive.
- The members of the committee have to be given certain powers so that they can punish a criminal if caught red-handed without waiting for the Forest Department staff to step in.
- The forest watchers and also the other members need to be given some security when they move into the forest for protection to guard them from mishaps that may occur. The security can be in terms of weapons being provided or in terms of certain insurances to protect them.

In terms of the institutional structure required to implement effective PFM, none of the PRI officials' feel that the JFMC should be completely replaced by the village *Panchayat* or the *Gram Sabha*, even though they are the people's body. However, about 37.5% of them feel that the PRI should be involved in forest management to ensure proper participation of the community and also the monitoring of the JFMC accounts to ensure transparency. The rest believe that PRIs should not be involved in any form.

At the community level, the perceptions highlighted that the members were vehemently against giving the charge of forest management to the *Gram Sabha* or the village *Panchayat*. They perceived the PRI as being corrupt and dominated by the elite at the village level. They fear that giving PRIs a role in forestry management will stop them from getting whatever benefits they are getting from the forests and it would also lead to the unabated plunder of forest resources.

Thus, PRIs are not perceived as the appropriate institution to resolve the identified policy problems and facilitate participatory forestry management due to the following reasons:

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- Lack of capacity to facilitate forest management – PRIs are not perceived to have the technical knowledge or the resources (financial and human) to manage forest resources. The respondents also stated that the role of the Forest Department was essential in effective forest management as it had the capacity to instil fear in the local communities. The ‘fear factor’ was identified by some as being essential to ensure regulation and avoid anarchy.
- Current ineffectiveness in providing social justice – PRIs are not considered as effective in providing a space for local communities to participate in the decision-making process or for providing secure rights to resources due to politicisation of issues, elite domination, in-capable leadership caused due to reservation, and corruption.
- No perceived overlap of institutions – the PRI respondents did not identify any overlap or conflict between JFMCs (Joint Forest Management Committees) and PRIs.

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