

Concept on Common Property Resources Management through Community Participation

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Forest degradation in the state has reduced the supplies of critical livelihood resources of the locals. These include fuel wood, fodder, edible fruits and vegetables, medicinal and aromatic plants, and other timber and non-timber forest products for direct consumption as well as sale for income. In addition, supplies of local ecological services (e.g. drinking and irrigation water and nutrient supply to the hills farms and shifting cultivation areas) from the forest has reduced considerably, thereby limiting the range of livelihood activities that rural households could pursue. In addition to poverty, forest degradation has accentuated economic inequality and drudgery, especially of the hill women. However, forest regeneration is not impossible; it could be done and has been done if the concern stakeholders could work together towards decentralization of forest management to local communities.

Strategy

This project is in the process of initiating and facilitating the implementation of a forest management model that is sensitive to both the needs of the whole community and the Self Help groups (SHGs) of poor men and women for forest based livelihood enterprises.

The project strategy focuses on:

- a. Facilitation/support policies and legal frameworks that allows access of village communities and Self Help Groups to forest areas and forest products for management and harvesting as per local needs. LAND BANK CONCEPT.
- b. Strengthening a community institution that organically links Self Help Groups to the whole village community. Dovetailing of NREGS flagship programmes to SHG movement.
- c. Taking up forest management in a sustainable through a business mode, thus, imparting the natural resources base and properly returns to the local community organization/SHGs- Setting up of Forest based micro enterprise units.

Constraints

The following are constraints that the Project is looking into more in-depthly

- a. Existence of strong village institutions but women (who are actually the main player in management of forest) are excluded in policy matter relating to decision making
- b. Wide variation of the land tenure system in the state making common management policies difficult to adopt
- c. Lack of resource inventory mapping of clan /community forest land
- d. Lack of technical expertise in Autonomous District Council, who control most of the forest land
- e. Lack of inter departmental collaborative efforts to control shifting cultivation by department of soil & water conservation, forest department and agriculture department

- f. The present arrangement planning of forest so far has been weak as it stresses more on protection than on production
- g. Neglect of the rich indigenous knowledge in forestry, especially on forest inventory and local ecological services in planning process
- h. Poor participation of community/SHGs in the preparation of line department work plan

Micro Plans - An effective tool towards sustainability whose effectiveness could be seen more with the usage of the 3D Model:

Preparation of micro plans on a participatory mode is the main focus of the project in order to yield meaningful and sustainable results. Thus, micro planning involves extensive considerations of local needs, resources available, natural, human, financial, and opportunities (market) against constraints (relating to communication, investment, technology, skills, cultural inhibitions etc). All these are dependent on technical as well as financial viability of the alternative proposals. Thus, with this complexity, the community as well as the facilitation of NGOs should seek the technical advice from concerned line departments. Hence, the micro plan thus prepared would comprise not only of activities to be carried out and the time scale, but also define capacity building inputs for successful implementation, identify responsibilities of different stakeholders, define modalities of linkages between traditional institutions/ local CBOS and SHGs along with other developmental departments / agencies, and evolve agreement on mutual obligations during implementation and post-implementation phases. It is seen by experience that the conduct of Micro Plan through a participatory mode using PRA exercises such as Resource Map, Social Map, Time Line, Mobility Charts, Seasonality Calendar etc. along with the usage of the 3D Modeling can go a long way to increase the understanding of the community to a sustainable way of approaching the planning process.

The participatory 3 Dimensional modeling is a method that integrates spatial knowledge with data on elevation of the land (or depth of the sea) to produce stand alone, scaled and geo-reference relief model. Land-use, land cover, boundaries, needs etc. are depicted on the 3-D model using different colour codes. On completion a scaled and geo-referenced grid is applied to facilitate data extraction or importation. On completion, the model remains with the community and can be used subsequently for capturing land use dynamics, resource use planning and many other application..

Through a participatory process, the P3DM merges conventional spatial information and people's mental maps, making information tangible and meaningful to all and visualizes scaled and geo coded indigenous spatial knowledge. The process basically involves the mobilization of the community for the construction of a 3D Relief map of their immediate environment of which information generated by the community is captured and used for various application. The process has been used for variety of activity and application, ranging from collaborative research, collaborative protective area management, participatory land use planning, ancestral domain mapping to conflict resolution and empowerment.

The advantages of P3DM over conventional resources mapping approaches as several, but the fundamental advantage is that P3DM, is geo-referred and scaled and therefore, much more accurate compared to 2 dimensional, community generated maps. These attributes, thus allows for quantification of land use data and hence can provide a low cost alternative to cadastral surveys, particularly in upland areas that lack cadastral

information. The methods are an efficient community organizing tools as it helps congregate the community members to share information and concerns in a highly interactive and participatory manner. P3DM is especially effective in portraying relatively extensive and remote areas, overcoming logistical and practical constraints and public participation in resource use planning and management (particularly of common property resources). The relief model, with community spatial information filled in, provides stakeholders and local authorities with a powerful medium of using communication and language barriers, creating a common ground for discussion. The most important advantage however, is the fact that the process and the out put together, fuelled self-esteem of the participants (community members) and raise local awareness of the interdependent ecosystem and helps delineate intellectual ownership of the territory map.

Success stories on community based action plan

Community fish reserves

Name of the village: Bansamgre

Location: 20 kms from Williamnagar town, about 3 Kms stretch along the Simsang river, Which originates from Nokrek Biosphere Reserve in West Garo Hills and parts of East Garo Hills and flows through West & East Garo Hills towards South Garo Hills and finally enters Bangladesh where the river is named Soweshwari River and joins Bay of Bengal.

Aquatic biodiversity: Rich in fresh water aquatic species and found gradual changes in varieties aquatic species in comparison to upper ridges and lower ridges. The population more concentrated in deeper side of the river where the breeding takes place.

- Bansamgre village has about 4 such breeding spots inside their village.
- Due to the weak social norms earlier, people use to practice illegal means of fishing, by using bleaching powder, dynamite etc. which created great pressure on aquatic population in the river and have drastically reduced the fish population and some of the species are even found to be endangered. Many of the poor people who depends their livelihood from selling fishes from this river are greatly threatened for survival.
- It was then in the year 2006, MRDS, IFAD project step in and sensitized the people about the concept of conservation and discussed the ways and means to control the illegal means of fishing in participation of the Nokma and the whole village. It was towards the end of the year 2006 the whole village has decided to conserve one such breeding spot as fish sanctuary and formulated their own rules and regulation for management.
- After almost two years the fish population is found to have increased along the shores of the river much to the relieve of the poor people again.

Impact of community action

- Interested local tourist stop every day to have a glimpse
- Fishery department has initiated the project of releasing more fishes
- Business activities like local tea & snack shops, restaurants have come up, SHGs have started vegetable stalls
- DRDA have constructed view points for the tourist spots for peoples comfort

Community managed turtle reserves

Name of village: Aruakgre

Location : 135 kms from Williamnagar in Resuebalpara Block.

Scientific name: Aspiderete gangeticus (not confirm)

Common name : Indian Soft shell turtle

Found: Derik river, 6 Kms from Bajengdoba, East Garo Hills.

Local name: Chijong Mande

Weight: 30 – 35 kg (Fully Grown)

Habitat: Deeper side of the rivers.

Food habit: Snails, crabs, shrimps, fishes.

Breeding: Lays about 80–100 no.s of eggs at a time during Sept./Oct.

Status: Rarely found in Garo Hills, illegal fishing & over exploitation & hence endangered.

Community Action Plan .

- Identified six Natural habitat spots in 4 Kms stretches of the river
- Decided to have strict by laws for protection
- Plan to set up Community based Eco- tourism spot
- Organized exposure visit to Rombagre village, in West Garo Hills where natural fish sanctuary is being conserve by the community to strengthen community action.

Village SHG clustering concept – the Samatan village story

Samatan village is a village situated in Laskein Block with a population of 73 Household and depending their livelihoods on agriculture, horticulture and animal rearing. The Area of concern of this village as expressed by the community is that more than 50 % of the Male population migrate to adjoining and villages during the winter season in search of jobs. The villagers are so poor that they could not afford to provide proper education to their children.

In its intervention the project could initiate the formation of 4 SHGs namely Richanlang-I SRL, Pynkulang SRL Synroplang SRL, Spainlang SRL and IasohktiLang SRL. Interestingly it could be seen that these groups have developed a kind of Bondage between one another during this period of formation. This could be further elaborated with the fact that when the project approach the agriculture department for enhancing the productivity of Turmeric. The agriculture department initially agreed to conduct a demonstration programme on intercropping of turmeric with maize for 1 hectare only. Due to shortage of time and as it was the planting season for paddy (a crop which the farmers considered very important for their existence) it was felt that it may not be possible to organise such a programme. However, in the course of the interaction with the groups they came up with a perfect solution.

The groups agreed to work together by dividing the 1 hectare into 5 plots (interestingly 1 group promoted by the Block Development Office has also joined the mission) wherein each group would work in their own allotted portion. The training programme was conducted on the 9th April 2008 wherein resource persons were invited from the agriculture department and the participants of over 81 numbers from the adjoining villages participated. Seeing the huge turnout of farmers and their enthusiasm, the agriculture department were very much keen in extending their kind Cooperation, Technical and resource support for this cluster. A cluster

approach for these 5 villages of Samatan, Shilliang Myntang, Thanrain , Khlieh Sniriang and Thadialong on intercropping of maize with other crop such as soyabean, turmeric is now in progress for 12 hectare.

The participants from the nearby villages of Thanrain Shilliang Myntang have also initiated the plantation of maize.

The small initiative of the project with active participation of the community has shown that there could be a synergy to work together to improve the lives of our rural farmers through the convergence of efforts of various stake holders having the same vision and mission.

Reference

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