

STAKEHOLDERS' ROLE AND INTERACTIONS IN CONTEXT OF FORESTRY EXTENSION INTERVENTIONS IN THE NORTHWEST PAKISTAN

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Stakeholders play role and interact at multiple levels—from local to global level and their role and interaction determine the effectiveness of a development intervention. Therefore, analysis and exploration of stakeholder interaction, their role in decision making process according to their relative position and power relations is obligatory for the success of any extension project. This piece of research reports the findings of a research project conducted in the forest rich districts viz. Mansehra, Abotabad and Haripur in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. The main objective of the study is to identify the interaction among main stakeholders at the local level—and analyze their extent of participation in decision-making in the context of three forest related extension projects. Beneficiaries (local communities) of three randomly selected forest related project's areas served as the respondents of the study. The quantitative data were collected through a structured interview schedule while qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Poor interaction between forest department and local communities was perceived due to supremacy of forest department in decision-making regarding forest management at local level. It was recommended that implementing agencies should involve local communities simultaneously in decision-making and implementation process, local communities should work with implementing agencies to accelerate project activities and donor agencies should develop consensus among involved stakeholders before project's implementation.

Keywords: Stakeholders' interaction, forestry interventions, sustainable forest management

INTRODUCTION

The North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan is endowed with a wealth of natural resources including forests. However due to multiple reasons (see for example Ali *et al.*, 2007; Shahbaz *et al.*, 2007), the natural forests of NWFP are shrinking at a high rate (FAO, 2007). Indeed depletion of natural forests in these areas is one of the most threatening environmental issues in Pakistan. Nevertheless numerous forest development and extension project had been carried out by international donor agencies and the Government of Pakistan during the last three decades but in spite of all these efforts forest depletion rate in Pakistan is still very high and the situation is worsening every year (FAO, 2005 and 2007). Many researchers have pointed out towards the ineffectiveness and un-sustainability of state forest policies as one of the major causes of forest depletion towards this end some authors have underlined the need for the involvement of stakeholders in the development interventions. There exists a vast range of stakeholders who have a stake in the use of forest resources in NWFP and have different rights and claims in the forest (Suleri *et al.*, 2008).

Stakeholders include all those who affect, and/or are

affected by projects, policies, decisions and actions; they can be individuals, communities, social groups or organizations of any size, aggregation or level in society. A range of stakeholders has been identified in the context of forests in NWFP, by the previous researchers (see Suleri *et al.*, 2008); some of the key stakeholders include people living around forests (the citizen), the state (Forest Department), civil society organizations (NGOs, local community based organizations CBOs), traditional institutions (for example *Jirga*—the informal assembly of village elders), private sector etc.

Grimble *et al.* (1994) pointed out that participation of beneficiaries and target groups only can not guarantee the project's success, but also of whole range of stakeholders is essential for a particular project or policy and useful interaction need to be developed between public objectives and related stakeholders objectives. Sustainable participation in forest management of whole range of stakeholders can only be ensured through strong intra-stakeholder linkages, as different stakeholders affect forest management according to their region of interest. Local resources and environment are strongly influenced by the local people and in turn their actions are strongly influenced by the decisions taken at higher levels (Smith, 2000).

In many natural resource management situations different stakeholders are interlinked by a complex web of interests (Grimble and Quan, 1993), therefore, interaction development among different stakeholders is a pre-requisite for managing forest resources in a sustainable manner (Chandrasekharan, 1996). Therefore, it is necessary to understand under which conditions do both local and higher level stakeholders act, and it is also necessary to develop a balanced environment where lower level actions and higher level decisions can mutually support each other.

Problem statement and research questions

Despite various forests related development projects that had been implemented so far, the rate of forest depletion in NWFP and adjacent northern areas is remains to be one of the most threatening environmental issues of Pakistan. Failure of most of the forest related development and extension projects and policies in meeting their anticipated objectives call for exploration of causes of the ineffectiveness of such interventions particularly stakeholders interactions.

The research conducted in the context of forestry extension interventions identifies and analyzes the level of interaction and perceived roles in decision making of key stakeholders in three randomly selected forest extension projects. More specifically this paper asks following questions;

- i. What is the perception of project beneficiaries (local communities) about the level of interaction among different stakeholders of forests in those areas where forest related projects were/are implementing?
- ii. What is the perception of local communities regarding the role of different stakeholders at local level in decision-making regarding sustainable forest management?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

During the decade 1997-2007 almost eighty forest related development and extension projects were launched in the highland districts of NWFP (Tayyab, 2008). Most of them were completed at the time of study but some projects were still under execution process. These 80 projects served as the universe of the study. Among these projects three projects were selected randomly for this study. A brief profile of these selected projects is given in the next section. One village was selected randomly from each project area and 40 respondents from each village were selected at

random and thus making a total of 120 respondents. Only household heads were interviewed in order to get response. The data were collected through personal interviews with the help of validated interview schedule. Focus group interview and key informant interviews were also conducted for qualitative data collection. The data thus collected were analyzed using a computer software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists)

Profile of the selected projects

People and plants–conservation and training in applied ethnobotany in Pakistan (Project-I)

This project operated in two villages of district Abotabad named Passala and Mallach from 1997–2005. The project was a part of the People and Plants initiative, a project of WWF-UK and UNESCO. The main objectives of this project were; to increase the capacity of communities to conserve biodiversity and provide sustainable quantities of plant resources for livelihood security and reduced poverty and to contribute to greater sustainability of plant resource use at Ayubia National Park. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) UK and Department for International Development (DFID) provided financial support for the project. Its beneficiaries were the local communities and students of Agriculture University, Peshawar.

Community Based Resource Management Project (Project-II)

The Community Based Sustainable Resource Management (CBRM) Project was implemented in 55 villages of district Buner and 60 villages of district Mansehra (NWFP) during 1998-2006. The main objectives of this project were; to contribute towards livelihood improvement of resource poor in highland districts of NWFP through community based (participatory) natural resource management. This project was funded by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by Intercooperation Pakistan. The implementing partners NGOs of this project were Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP) and Sungi Development Foundation. Its beneficiaries were the local communities of Buner and Mansehra district.

Environmental Rehabilitation and Poverty Reduction through Participatory Watershed Management in Terbela Reservoir Catchments Area (Project-3)

This project was being executed in 1500 villages of 6 districts of NWFP viz. Abbotabad, Haripur, Buner, Mansehra, Batgram, Kohistan and Shangla for a time

period of 5 years from 2005–2010. The main objectives of this project were; to upgrade the socio-economic conditions of the target population and bring a sustainable balance between the economic development and natural resource conservation in the project area and to increase useful lifespan of Tebaila and Mangla reservoirs by using participatory approach. This project was sponsored by Ministry of Environment, Government of Pakistan, and was being executed by Government of NWFP, Environment Department Peshawar, through provincial Forest Department and village level organizations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Interactions among Different Stakeholders

The perception of respondents regarding interaction between various (stakeholders) institutions was measured on a 5-point Likert Scale (0 = No interaction, 1 = very low interaction, 2 = Low interaction, 3 = Average interaction, 4 = High interaction, 5 = Very high interaction). The results in this regards are presented in Table 1 which indicates that in the project area of project-I the highest interaction (mean value 3.35) was found among local *Jirga* and forest department. While in the project area of project-II the highest perceived interaction was found among NGOs and local communities. In the project area of project-III the highest interaction was found among *Jirga* and forest department. It is interesting to note that for all of the three projects, lowest interaction was recorded between forest department and local communities.

The role of *Jirga* is that of conflict resolution. In the rural areas of NWFP, the state, NGOs, CBOs, and donor driven initiatives etc. had to get support of *Jirga* to penetrate in the rural society and get wider acceptance of their interventions (Suleri *et al.*, 2008). The support of *Jirga* members for is considered an important step and thus the perceived interaction of forest department and *Jirga* was high. However, perceived interaction between forest department and the local communities was low in all of three projects. In spite of the fact the all of three projects emphasized

participatory approach and development of partnership between the state and local communities but still local people perceived state (Forest Department) as untrustworthy and they had least interaction with them. Lack of trust and friendly relationship, disagreements among state institutions and stakeholders doesn't develop stakeholders' capacity for participatory forest management (Salam *et al.*, 2005). In NWFP lack of trust and misunderstanding exists and it is due to communication gap between the state and local stakeholders especially local communities despite various participatory interventions were made in NWFP (Suleri *et al.*, 2008). When stakeholders have incompatible interests and priorities, different rights and claims over natural resources, it is likely that conflict among them may occur especially when they compete for the same resource (Anderson *et al.*, 2000).

Stakeholders' Role in Decision Making

Most of the decisions 'fail' to achieve their intended objectives because decision makers don't consider the concerns and interests of stakeholders seriously, and due to limited participation of related stakeholders (Nutt, 2002). Perceived role of key stakeholders was measured by using five point Likert scale (0 = No role, 1 = very low role, 2 = Low role, 3 = Average role, 4 = High role, 5 = Very high role). The results are presented in Table 2 that shows that the provincial Forest Department had the highest role in decision making at local level for all of the tree projects. It is because local communities have to go to forest department to get permission and fulfill many unnecessary formalities in order to cut even a single tree for their household consumption. As one respondent said, "Forest officials attentively withholds our approvals even sometime up to one year or more. So, in order to get approval in time, we look for some local influential (in return we've to obey him) or sometimes offer forest officials to make them partner for that tree". Therefore, most of the respondents rated the role of forest department more than high in decision-making at local level. The role of local communities in decision-making at local level was found to be extremely low.

Table 1. Interaction among different stakeholders (Institutions/Departments)

Institutions/Departments	Project I		Project II		Project III	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
Jirga and forest department	3.350	.770	3.025	.619	2.925	.758
CBO's and local communities	3.000	.555	3.225	.479	2.917	.588
Jirga and local communities	2.550	.638	3.200	.687	2.708	.715
CBO's and forest department	2.450	.714	2.675	.572	2.575	.603
NGO's and forest department	2.400	.672	3.225	.576	2.558	.786
NGO's and local communities	2.700	.608	3.625	.540	2.541	1.173
Forest department and local communities	2.000	.640	2.100	.900	2.225	.739

(\bar{x} = mean value; SD = Standard deviation)

Table 2. Role of different institutions in decision making regarding forest management at local level

Role of Stakeholders	Project I		Project II		Project III	
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD
Forest Department	4.600	.496	4.650	.483	4.550	.504
NGO	2.450	.638	3.200	.405	2.100	.560
Local Jirga	3.150	.483	2.275	.554	1.975	.676
Local communities	.525	.679	.175	.446	.150	.362
Respondent's household	.050	.221	.075	.474	.000	.000

Forests in NWFP are managed and controlled by the provincial Forest Department, and in implementing policies and developing strategies for natural resource management state institutions generally tend to discriminate and exclude local communities (Suleri *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, majority of the respondents reported that forest department wants to maintain supremacy in decision-making over forest use and management issues and does not like the involvement of "outsiders".

Regarding the role of NGOs, one respondent commented, *"Big NGO's are influential enough to force even federal government to alter its decision. Therefore, I think that the role of NGO's in decision-making is very high at provincial level"*. The results presented indicate that local communities had very limited role in decision-making at provincial level in case of each project while, respondents' household had no role in decision-making at provincial level. The following qualitative statement explains:

"I never privileged of being involved in decision-making regarding the fate of forests. I even heard occasionally about participation of local peoples in consultative meetings. But, sometimes we have a role in decision-making just only that any NGO invites anyone from local communities, who is not our true representative, and he just attends some workshop or seminar regarding sustainable forest management, takes meal or dinner over there and feels pride in going there. They decide our fate either in big hotels or in their offices while we are not present there" (Farooq Ahmed, April, 2008).

Government and other actors need to develop policies, which are favorable to local initiatives, protect their legal rights and facilitate them to carry their responsibilities. But, unfortunately, so far, national and departmental government agencies have not only done very little in this regard but sometimes also have indirectly undermined local government activities (Kaimowitz *et al.*, 1998).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Perceived interactions of Forest Department with project beneficiaries (local communities), local CBOs was low. Among different stakeholders, Forest Department was perceived as most influential followed by NGOs; while local community was found as least influential in decision making regarding forest management at local level. Following recommendations are suggested in order to make this interaction better:

- It is recommended that Forest Department should take measures to involve local communities in decision-making as well as in implementation process a co-coordinated manner for the success of future forest related projects.
- The donor agencies should develop a consensus all involved stakeholders, and there should be uniformity in the perception of donor, implementing agencies and beneficiaries regarding a particular forest issue or project.
- Local communities should work with the implementing agencies to accelerate the project activities instead of waiting some unseen help. On the other hand, forest department needs to win local communities' trust, and it should be done on mutual benefit sharing basis between forest department and local communities.

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