

# Management of Guzara Forests; Policies and Their Implications in Hazara Division, North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan

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## Abstract

*The management of Guzara forests in the Hazara Division of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan is carried out through a variety of ownership arrangements. Legally the forests are broadly divided between state (reserved) and private (Guzara) forests. The deeply dissected land-tenure system and the ongoing conflicts between the government and forest owners and users have led to the drastic degradation of the resource. Since 1947, the government has enacted a series of forest policies to manage the meagre forest resources of the country, but none of these policies has been effectively implemented on the ground. Moreover most of the policies were aimed at the generation of revenue from the forests and little attention was given to environmental aspects and rural livelihoods. They were prepared through a top-down approach and community participation was not considered essential in policy formulation. Subsequently, these policies failed to achieve their objectives. Though forest legislation limits the rights of local people in the forests, the majority of them still have access to forest resources in the area. They fulfil all their requirements from these forests, but contribute nothing to the protection and development of the resource. It is feared that if nothing is done to check this process, these forests will soon disappear. The study argues for the introduction of a participatory forest management system and identifies options for and approaches to the sustainable development of the resource and improvement of rural livelihoods in the area.*

## Introduction

The Hindu Kush-Himalayas are home to watershed systems and natural resources providing life support not only to mountain communities but also to those in the plains. Forests, the most important of these resources, are a versatile and renewable natural resource and provide a wide range of economic, social, environmental, and cultural benefits and services. Since time immemorial, mountain people have depended on forests for various products to fulfil their basic needs for resources such as fuelwood, fodder, leaf litter, poles, timber, fruit, and medicinal plants and to provide other services that are essential inputs into the farming system. The forests also protect the natural resource base for growing agricultural crops and protect the upland watersheds against erosion, thus regulating water flow in the downstream areas.

Pakistan is a forest-poor country. The total area of Pakistan is 87.98 million ha out of which only 4.72 million ha are under forest cover. Thus the total forest cover (5.3%) is very low when compared to other countries in the region such as Malaysia 65.5%, Sri Lanka 42.4%, India 23.7%, China 17.7 %, and Bangladesh 15.3%. The per capita forest area is a mere 0.033 ha compared to the world average of 1 ha. The primary reason for the meagre forest area is that most of the land area (70-80%) of Pakistan falls in arid or semi-arid zones where precipitation is too low to support tree growth (Shah and Saliheen 2003). Though forest resources are meagre, they play an important

role in Pakistan's economy by protecting the upland watersheds, employing half a million people, and providing 3.5 million cubic feet of wood and one third of the nation's energy needs (Govt. of Pakistan 2002). Most of the country's forests are found in the northern part of the country (40% in the North West Frontier Province and 15.7% in the Northern Areas). The forests of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) are distributed over the Himalayas in Hazara Division and the Hindu-Kush in Malakand Division (Ahmed and Mahmood 1998; Poffenberger 2000; Sulehri 2002).

Hazara division in NWFP is a mosaic of ethnic, socioeconomic, and biotic diversities where forests are held under a variety of ownership arrangements. These are broadly divided between state and private forests. State forests are owned and managed by the Provincial Forest Department and communities have no rights, whereas private forests, called Guzara forests, are owned by the communities but managed by the Provincial Forest Department. Communities have rights to the revenue from these forests. Communal forest is a sub category of the Guzara forests in which the forest is owned by the entire village.

Guzara forests were set apart to meet the domestic, agricultural, and pastoral requirements of village communities at the time of the first regular settlement 1872-73. The Guzara forests cover an area of 1.394 million ha in Hazara Civil Division. These are the property of landowners, but management of these forests rests with the Forest Department. Till 1950, management of Guzara forests was the job of the district administration. In 1950, the Government of NWFP issued Guzara Rules, thereby transferring management of these forests to the Forest Department for the purpose of scientific management.

The Guzara owners however remained disgruntled with the managerial control of the Forest Department. They considered the management style of the Forest Department to be too conservative and that it did not protect the forests from the incursions of migratory grazers and from the mounting demands for forest products by the growing resident human population. They made several petitions and finally the Agricultural Inquiry Committee recommended the transfer of forest management to owners organised into cooperatives. These societies took charge of felling and marketing operations in Guzara forests under their control. These societies were accused of uncontrolled felling and mass scale deforestation. In 1992, a huge flood occurred and caused heavy losses of human and physical assets. This was attributed to the over-cutting of trees in the catchment areas, so subsequently the Prime Minister of Pakistan took a decisive step and all cooperative societies were banned in 1992.

Since 1992, there has been a complete ban on felling of trees in Guzara forests for commercial purposes. However the owners are entitled to get timber for domestic needs with the permission of the Forest Department. Currently this concession is being misused and more trees are cut than prescribed in the permits. In addition, this illicit cutting has reached a peak and both local people and officials from the Forest Department are involved in the practice. This has led to the destruction of forest resources in the area.

Continuing resource degradation in the mountains has led to growing concern and a sense of urgency in the context of seeking strategies that can ensure the sustainable management of forest resources. Nowhere is the concern more marked than in the conservation of upland forests which contribute to the communities' subsistence needs and to the sustainable development of these natural forests.

Participatory forest management has emerged as a common strategy in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas to protect and manage forest resources in the mountains. A key element of this approach is collaboration between government institutions, non-government organisations, and local communities.

The present case study on 'Management of Guzara Forests' attempts to analyse the forest policies and their responses to the ground challenges affecting the sustainable management of forest resources in the area.

## Objectives

This case study has four main objectives, as given below.

- To study the management of Guzara forests in the Hazara division of NWFP
- To examine flaws and deficiencies in the existing system of forest management in the area
- To assess the institutional capacity for decision-making, planning, and policy implementation and its response to field issues
- To identify options and approaches for equitable and sustainable development of the forest resources to ensure better livelihoods for mountain communities

## Methodology

This report analyses the policies and institutional reforms that regulate the management of Guzara forests in the Hazara division of NWFP. Literature was reviewed on the institutional set-up, forest legislation, and forest policies and the baseline information of the study was widely reviewed. Primary data were collected through participatory rural appraisal tools, using a semi structured questionnaire. For this purpose, a survey was carried out in Hilkot watershed located in the Mansehra district of Hazara division.

Before actual data collection, a preliminary survey of the people in the study area of Hilkot watershed was undertaken. During this survey, the questionnaire was tested and, where required, changes were made, and a comprehensive list of the households in every village was prepared. Individual sample household heads were selected by random sampling. There are about 900 households in Hilkot watershed. Out of these, 180 household heads were interviewed including 90 men and 90 women. Thus the sampling intensity was 20%. After collection, the data were entered into a computer and analysed with Microsoft Excel.

## Study findings

### Guzara policy context

The documented forest history of pre-partition India dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century, the time when the British advent in India occurred. Not much is known about the pre-colonial pattern of land ownership, except that it was predominantly communal. It is estimated that at least 80% of the total natural resources of India were under some kind of common property regime. Forests, being no exception, were mostly held as common property by those living close to them (Azhar 1993).

After the colonisation of India, the British introduced a land settlement process. The state extended its control to forest land through the Indian Forest Act of 1878, and as such nationalised one fifth of India's land area. This provoked the local people because it limited their access to forest resources. After the independence of Pakistan in 1947, no significant changes were made and the status quo was by and large maintained. With passage of time conflicts arose and multiplied.

The forest resources of Hazara division are managed and controlled under national forest policies. The Government of Pakistan enacted a series of forest policies in 1955, 1962, 1975, 1991, and 2001. The first two policies were formulated entirely by representatives from the federal and provincial governments. They emphasised the management of public forest and were particularly concerned with the expansion of area under forest. The primary objective of forest management was the generation of revenue and maximisation of yields – environmental and social issues were not considered. Policy encouraged a top-down approach and reinforced the notion that communities had no interest in forest management and no stake in the preservation of public forests.

The forest policy of 1975 was formulated in response to the loss of forest resources after the separation of East Pakistan in 1971. The policy drafting committee included representatives from both government and non-government institutions. This was the first people-friendly policy enacted in the forestry sector. It recognised that management of Guzara forests should be entrusted to the owners themselves with the state taking on only supervisory responsibility. The policy recommended the formation of owners' cooperative societies, but stated that harvesting should be carried out entirely by public sector corporations. The 1975 policy soon fell prey to political expedience. The government that had formulated the policy was removed in a coup d'état in 1977 and the new government, which had no wish to continue with the initiatives of its predecessor, restarted the process of analysing the condition of the forests, rangelands, and other natural resources. From 1977 to 1988, forestry continued to be considered a subsidiary of agriculture, and forest policies were enacted as appendages of agricultural policies.

The 1991 policy represents a turning point, as it was influenced by donor agencies and Pakistani non-government organisations involved in implementing forestry programmes at the grassroot level. The most significant contribution of these grassroot development programmes has been demonstration of the participatory approach to forest management. The 1991 policy specifically mentions the introduction of participatory forest management. This policy also placed greater emphasis on social forestry and biodiversity conservation. However, due to rapid changes in governments and political instability, this policy remained confined to the files and shelves of government offices, and no implementation took place on the ground.

## Forest legislation

### *The Forest Act 1927*

The forest legislation in Pakistan is regulatory and punitive in nature. The Forest Act 1927, which remains the prime forestry legislation in Pakistan, was promulgated to provide strong legal support to the forest service in conserving and protecting public forests from human and animal damage. In fact forest law has been mainly a tool in the hands of the forest service to ensure the rational behaviour of people towards

national forests. Almost exclusive reliance on the force of law has been the strategy for achieving the main policy objective of forest conservation.

#### *The NWFP Hazara Forest Act 1936*

Most of the forests in Hazara civil division come under the legal category of privately-owned (Guzara) forests, although state-owned reserved and protected forests are also part of the area. Due to the heavy rights of the community to the forest, there is a separate Hazara Forest Act 1936 for the management and control of forest resources in this area. The penalties and procedures are the same as those specified in the Pakistan Forest Act of 1927.

#### *Implementation of forest laws*

Implementation of laws has always remained in question in developing countries. It is also the case for the forest laws of Pakistan. Several reasons are quoted for non-implementation of forest legislation. Local people cite corruption of forest officials as the main reason for non-implementation of the forest law. Forest officials argue that the territorial sizes are so large and the forest staff so few that it is impossible for the official responsible to protect this open wealth from theft. Forest crimes are difficult to detect. The law relies on the forest officer and locals to detect crimes. Lack of cooperation and understanding between the Forest Department and local people has made the legislation impracticable.

Khattak (1994) brings out an important point that the legislation says nothing about the obligations of the government and provides no mechanism for remedial action when forest depletion is the result of its own actions. He further emphasises that the punishments provided for forest offences have remained unchanged since the first version of the Indian Forest Act was promulgated in 1865, while the profitability of illicit trade in timber has increased 500 times. Considering difficulties in proving guilt for forest offences and the negligible punishment provisions in forest laws, they no longer act as effective deterrents to the commission of forest offences.

Writing on the enforcement of forestry legislation Ashraf (1992) concludes:

“The effectiveness of forest laws is further undermined by the two factors. First, forest law matters are held in comparatively low esteem by the judiciary and other law enforcing agencies. As a result forest cases are given low priority and kept pending and undecided for long times. Second, some forest personnel invested with authority to book arrest and compound the forest cases misuse these powers. It invites public contempt of the law and instigates them to violate the law in protest, often without punishment”.

So we can conclude that enforcement of forestry legislation has not been effective and as such has not ensured the orderly behaviour of the human population towards these forests.

### **Institutional set-up of the Forest Department**

Forestry in Pakistan is a provincial subject and the provincial forest departments are the principal institutions that deal with forest management. The federal government is generally responsible for international liaison and inter-provincial co-ordination: the office of the Inspector General of Forests in the Ministry of Environment performs these functions.

In addition to managing the forests, the provincial forestry departments are generally also responsible for watershed management, range management in forest areas under their control, and, in some cases, wildlife management.

Provincial forest departments are the prime institutions for management of forests in the country. The Chief Conservator of Forests heads the Provincial Forest Department. There are several circles in the province each headed by a Conservator of Forests. One circle has several forest divisions. A forest division is the basic unit for forest management, and it is headed by a divisional forest officer. Each division is divided into several forest ranges and each forest range is headed by a range forest officer. The lowest tier in the hierarchy is the forest guard deputed to protect forest ranges.

### **The experience of forest cooperative societies: a participation that did not work**

The Guzara forests cover an area of 1.394 million ha in Hazara Civil Division. These are the property of landowners, but management of these forests rests with the Forest Department. Until 1950, the management of Guzara forests was the responsibility of the district administration. In 1950, the Government of NWFP issued 'Guzara Rules', thereby transferring management of these forests to the Forest Department for the purpose of scientific management.

The Guzara owners however remained disgruntled with the managerial control of the Forest Department. They considered the management style of the Forest Department to be too conservative and that it did not protect the forests from the incursions of migratory grazers and from the mounting demands for forest products by the growing resident human population. They made several petitions and finally the Agricultural Inquiry Committee recommended transfer of management of these forests to the owners organised into cooperatives. Accordingly a new experiment in the shape of cooperative management of Guzara forests was launched in 1980 under the Cooperative Act of 1925.

About 33 cooperative societies were formed in Hazara civil division for the management of Guzara forests. They carried out extensive harvesting of the forests for commercial purposes without considering the ecological consequences. There were frequent reports and complaints of mismanagement, massive irregularities in use of funds, and political hijacking of the societies. In 1992 there was a huge flood which was attributed to mass-scale deforestation in the catchment area, and because of this the then Prime Minister of Pakistan took a decisive step and abolished all the cooperative societies in 1992.

### **Recent institutional reforms**

Since 1992 there has been a strong campaign in the country to bring about decisive changes in the forest policy. In this respect three main initiatives have been taken: a Forestry Sector Master Plan (FSMP); a National Conservation Strategy; and a National Environmental Action Plan. The Forestry Sector Master Plan was a national-level initiative focused entirely on increasing the area under forest from 5% to 20% through mass scale afforestation efforts. However this initiative did not succeed as expected and this was due to the fact that in Pakistan land available for growing trees is less than 20% of the total land area and there was little involvement of the forest dependent communities during the implementation. The National Conservation Strategy (1992), taking lessons from these failures, went for alternative solutions that were technically and socially feasible. However, due to the weak implementation mechanisms of the

Strategy and its subsequent decentralisation to the provincial level, the initiative did not have much impact.

Keeping in mind the lessons learned from the implementation of the National Conservation Strategy the Government of Pakistan approved the National Environmental Action Plan in 2001. This Plan now constitutes the national environmental agenda. Its core objectives are to initiate actions that safeguard public health, promote sustainable livelihoods, and enhance the quality of life of the people of Pakistan.

### **Change in forest policies**

With the evolution of new institutional changes and increased pressure of civil society for the devolution of forestry sector, changes were brought about in the policies and new forest policies and legislation were formulated. These are briefly discussed in the following.

*The NWFP Forest Policy 1999* – Policy formulation is mainly the task of the Federal Government; the Government of NWFP also promulgated its own Forest Policy in 1999. NWFP has rich forest resources, a diverse ecosystem, and unique cultural and socioeconomic conditions. The policy was based on the principles of integrated resource management, participation of the people, promotion of the private sector, equity, public awareness, incentives, and cross-sectoral linkages. The policy also calls for forestry legislation to be revised and for institutional transformation of the forestry sector.

*Forest Policy 2001*– The recent debates about governance, poverty, and environmental sustainability have emphasised a ‘rights’-based’ approach in which equitable development is strongly associated with individual and communal rights. The current National Forest Policy (2001) mentions improved livelihoods as its fundamental goal. The policy calls for involvement of local communities in the implementation of projects, management of forests, and implementation of joint forest management.

*The NWFP Forest Act 2002* – In order to provide legal cover to the ongoing reform process in the forestry sector, the Government of NWFP promulgated the Forest Ordinance of 2002. Later on, this ordinance was approved by the Provincial Assembly and became the Forest Act. The new legislation revised the Forest Act of 1927. The staff of the Forest Department became a Forest Force and penalties were increased for various forest offences. Introduction of joint forest management in Guzara forests was also included in the new Act.

### **Impact of forest policies on resources and rural livelihoods in Hilkot watershed**

#### *The Hilkot watershed*

Hilkot watershed is in the Mansehra district of Hazara civil division, NWFP. The total geographical area of this watershed is about 1,600 ha. The area is a part of the catchment of the Siran River, one of the major tributaries of the River Indus draining directly into Tarbela, one of the largest reservoirs in the country, for hydropower generation and irrigation. Climatically the area falls in the humid temperate zone with elevation ranges from 1,342m to 2,672m. The total population of the area is 7,500, with a male-female ratio of 51.3: 48.7%.

Ethnically, the population is divided into three main groups: the Swatis and Syeds who are the owners of forest and agricultural land and hence socioeconomically advanced and the Gujars who are mostly tenants and are economically and socially suppressed.

The Swati and Syed reside in the lower communities of the watershed; namely, Hilkot, Syedabad, and Kandi, whereas the Gujars live in the upper communities of the watershed; namely, Sunbal, Bojri, Sathangali, Guldehri, Nakka Sher, Nakka Bissa, Dehri Numberdaran, Jogran, and Kund. According to the survey carried out in these villages, 60% were Gujars, 33% were Swatis, and 7% were Syeds.

#### *Ownership of forests in Hilkot watershed*

In Hilkot watershed, forests are held under a variety of ownership arrangements. There are two main categories of land tenancy: i.e., owners and tenants.

**Owners** – Owners mostly belong to two ethnic groups: Swati and Syed. They constitute about 40% of the total population of the area. They live in the lower watershed communities, namely, Hilkot, Kandi, Syedabad, and Malkan. They own agricultural and forest land. They inherited their lands from their forefathers, and this is recognised by the law of the land. They are in better socioeconomic condition than others due to the income from agricultural and forest land. They enjoy better facilities than others in education, communication, and health care too.

**Tenants** – Tenants mostly belong to the Gujar ethnic group. They constitute about 60% of the total population of Hilkot watershed. They live in the upper hilly areas. The majority of them live as tenants on the agricultural and forest lands of the owners. They cultivate the owners' lands and take a considerable portion of the agricultural produce from these lands. They also meet their needs for fuelwood, fodder, and timber from the forests, but they have no share in the revenue of the forests. Their main source of income is from rearing livestock and from daily wages for their labour. They have very poor access to education, communication, and health care facilities.

#### *Forest area*

The total forest area of Hilkot watershed is 710 ha (44.4%), out of which Guzara forest accounts for 378 ha (23.6%) and reserved forest 332 ha (20.7%). Blue pine (*Pinus wallichiana*) is the dominant species, mixed with deodar (*Cedrus deodara*) and fir (*Abies pindrow*) on ridges. The total volume of wood in Guzara and reserved forests is 118,645m<sup>3</sup> and 111,953m<sup>3</sup>, respectively (Cheema 2000).

#### *Conflicts*

Due to the complex land-tenure system and ill-defined property rights, there have always been conflicts and disagreements among the various stakeholders in Hilkot. These conflicts are adversely affecting the natural resources of the area.

**Conflicts between the government and local people** – After the declaration of reserved forests, the local people never recognised these forests as the property of the government. Local people still believe that ownership of the resources in the area should be theirs. That is why they provide little assistance towards the protection and development of these forests. As a result there has been considerable illegal annexation of and encroachment on Guzara and reserved forests.

**Conflicts between the government and owners of Guzara forests** – Though Guzara forests are recognised by the government as private property, it is still holding control over them in the name of forest management. This has disgruntled the owners and now they are opposing government control of the forests. They want complete control of their property in terms of management, protection, harvesting, and development.

Conflicts between owners and tenants – There is a complicated land-tenure system in Hazara. Because the landholdings are big, owners are not able to manage their agricultural and forest land, so they keep tenants on their property for management and protection. These tenants have been living there for centuries. Now they consider these lands as their legitimate right, and the state law has also given them some concessions. Owners cannot replace them without following a lengthy legal procedure. The tenants want a substantial share, especially in forest resources which they consider to be common property resources. The owners are not ready to accept their demands. This has led the tenants to violate the forest laws and remove fuelwood, timber, and fodder from the forests in every possible way.

### **Access to forest resources**

Despite a dissected land-tenure system, the conflicts between owners and tenants and the existence of authoritative forest legislation, the majority of the population in the watershed has access to forest resources. About 72% of households have access to Guzara forests and about 56% have access to reserved forests. There is less access to reserved forests because of greater departmental control and greater distances from people's homes.

### **Fulfilment of domestic needs for timber and fuelwood**

The majority of the residents in the area meet their needs for timber, fuelwood, grass, and leaf litter from both Guzara and reserved forests. Legally, owners are only entitled to get timber from the Guzara forest after receiving written permission from the Forest Department. The Department issues permits to owners up to a maximum of four trees for home construction or other genuine reasons, but not for commercial felling. This right is misused often; and more trees are cut than stipulated in the permit, and these are sold through the black market. None of the owners admits that they have taken timber from the reserved forest. This is due to the fact that they have their own forest so they have no need to get timber from the state forest. The majority of owners purchase fuelwood because they do not have time to collect fuelwood from the forest. Secondly, they consider it beneath their social status to collect fuelwood.

Though tenants have no rights to Guzara or reserved forest, interestingly they get timber, fuelwood, litter, medicinal plants, and grass from both Guzara and reserved forests. Timber is collected only when needed, fuelwood is collected throughout the year, and grass is collected in the months of August and September. They pay nothing to the owners or to the Forest Department, but whenever they are caught, they are fined by the Forest Guards who take money from them according to the offence they have committed. Usually this fine ranges from Rs 500 to 1,000 for taking timber from the reserved forest. This is a kind of social proxy because it is taken without following the legal procedures.

### **Degradation of forest resources**

Almost all respondents were of the opinion that the forest had been rapidly declining in the last ten years – the period during which the ban was imposed on commercial harvesting of trees. Illicit cutting of trees, overgrazing, lack of fuelwood alternatives, corruption of forest officials, and exclusion of local people from forest management were pointed out by the majority of respondents to be the main problems in the forestry sector in the watershed. Some people mentioned the population increase and others pointed to the lack of alternative job opportunities as the main reasons for forest degradation.

## Forest management system

Currently there is only nominal forest management in the area. Legally a ban has been imposed on felling trees for commercial purposes. However, owners are entitled to get timber for domestic use provided they have a permit from the Forest Department. Nothing is done in terms of plantation and development of forests. This situation has led to the continuous decline in forest cover. Most local people are dissatisfied with the present system of forest management. They consider the present system a complete failure, due to its failure to protect the forests and fulfil the needs of the locals in an equitable way. The owners particularly are against this system which has excluded them from the management and control of their property. About 90% of the respondents were unaware of the recent developments and changes in forest policy and legislation.

Due to the ongoing promotion of participatory forest management and facilitation of the People and Resource Dynamics' Project (PARDYP) of ICIMOD in the area for dialogue and interaction between the forest department and the local people, joint forest management committees are now being formed in the area. These committees have representation from owners, tenants, women's groups, and local NGOs. The primary task of the committees will be the harvesting of windfalls from Guzara forests. Later they will be involved in other activities related to forest management in the area.

## Impact of resource degradation on rural livelihoods

Because of continuous degradation, local resources are inadequate to support the population pressure. Due to this situation, people have started to leave their home areas and migrate to big cities and abroad where they can find better earning opportunities.

In the study area, this trend is increasing day by day and adult males are migrating to Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, and the Middle East. According to the survey, 45% of the households have male members who have migrated to big cities and abroad in search of jobs. This trend is more conspicuous in Gujar communities where almost every household has one or more male family members in the cities. On average 1.4 persons in the sampled households were working in big cities in the country and abroad.

This trend has gained momentum in the last 20 years. After migration of adult males, about 36% of the household have given up some of their activities such as rearing livestock and cultivation of additional land, whereas 64% of the households have not given up any activity; the work of migrant family members is mostly carried out by the women. This has increased women's workloads in the area, as they have to look after their farms besides their household work.

## Conclusions

After analysing the institutional set-up and ground realities, we have reached the conclusion that the present forest management system has totally failed to safeguard the interests of the locals and to conserve forest resources. The gap between the resource owners and managers has widened since the abolition of cooperative societies. Because of political instability in the country, lack of commitment on the part of the government, and exclusion of local people, forest policies are subject to rapid changes. Policies and management have always been ad hoc. These policies have never been implemented on the ground. It is widely believed that most forest policies have viewed people as the prime threat to the forests and have attempted to exclude

groups other than the government from decision-making. This approach not only affects the sustainability of people's livelihood strategies, but also increases the vulnerability of marginalised sections of the community. It ultimately leads to unsustainable management of natural resources and forest depletion. Thus, in practice, forest resources were made inaccessible to the poor and marginalised, whereas the influential along with members of the timber mafia consumed these resources as they wished. This dichotomy created feelings of lack of ownership among the marginalised adding to their miseries and encouraging them to adopt unfair means to meet their reasonable requirements for forest resources.

Due to the complex land-tenure system and ill-defined property rights, there have always been conflicts and disagreements among the various stakeholders in the area. These conflicts are adversely affecting the natural resources. Though Guzara forests are recognised by the government as private property, it is still holding control of these in the name of forest management. This has disgruntled the owners and now they are opposing the government control of forests. The owners want complete control of their property in terms of management, protection, harvesting, and development. The growing conflicts between the government and owners, as well as between the owners and tenants, have led to heavy destruction of the forests. Tenurial uncertainties and inequalities are a major cause of forest depletion. The owners consider it unbearable that they are being deprived of the rights already given to them by law. Tenants consider it inequitable for landlords to claim major benefits from forests even when they are not residing in the area.

Local people fulfil their demands for timber and fuelwood from these forests without any serious restrictions, albeit illegally. They contribute nothing to the development and protection of the forests in terms of plantation and security. On the other hand, officials from the Forest Department are least concerned about the decline of the forests. According to the local people they only seek to fulfil their vested interests and are fully involved in the illegal cutting of forests. This situation has encouraged illegal trade and black marketing of timber in the area.

Current forest policy and legislation are encouraging the participation of local people in the management of Guzara forests, but there is a need to implement these policies with full spirit and commitment.

## Recommendations

For the sustainable development of forest resources and improvement in the livelihoods of rural people, the following suggestions and recommendations are made.

- The current system of forest management should be immediately replaced with a participatory forest management system in order to improve rural livelihoods and manage resources on a sustainable basis.
- The equitable participation of all stakeholders is essential in the newly established joint forest management committees in Guzara forests. The participation of marginalised groups must be ensured in these committees.
- There should be close collaboration between government institutions, non-government organisations and local communities to identify workable options for and approaches to sustainable management of Guzara forests.
- The management of Guzara forests should be gradually handed over to the owners, while the Forest Department should assume the supervisory and technical role. At

- the same time a share of the revenue should be allocated to the tenants residing in these forests. This can be done through mutual consensus of the stakeholders.
- All the owners and tenants residing in the vicinity of Guzara forests should be allowed to get timber and fuelwood for their domestic needs and also to take part in reforestation and protection of forests. But this should be under a proper system evolved by the stakeholders themselves.
  - In the case of reserved forests, the government should gradually give property rights to those who do not have rights in the Guzara forests temporarily, while retaining some degree of control in the beginning. After the capacity building of stakeholders and stability of the institutions, their rights should be legalised and the Forest Department should assume a supervisory role.
  - In order to reduce pressure on Guzara forests, the government should seek the participation of locals in the protection and afforestation of reserved forests by giving them some incentives in the form of timber and fuelwood for their subsistence needs.

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