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**The Need For Creating Policy Spaces In Joint Forest Management: A
Case Study From The Punjab-Shivaliks, India**

It was December 2003. A group of villagers and the local forest guard had gathered in the village Kharkhan (Punjab, India) to discuss the implementation of a Joint Forest Management Programme (JFM) in this village. The conversation began on a congenial note but in a short while, turned into a heated debate. The voices had become sharp and the tone was nearly threatening. One of the vocal Panchayat¹ members, for example, loudly declared:

*“The forest is ours. If we decide, we can fell all the trees, burn all the grass, and the forest department will be unable to do anything! In fact that is what we should do, and **will** do if you (the forest department) continue to force us.”*

His fellow villagers nodded vigorously to express their agreement. The women gathered their children and quietly left.

The Forest Guard replied in an equally threatening tone:

“No! The forest is controlled by the Government! The forest is yours only in name. We (the forest department) are the actual owners and the workers of the forest. You only derive the benefits....”

A seemingly peaceful meeting to evaluate a proposed programme had suddenly become a battlefield. The reactions were totally new and unexpected.

Later interactions with the community and the forest officials, separately, revealed that the tension was rooted in the forest departments’ unrelenting efforts to implement a participatory forest management policy that was in conflict with the villagers’ traditional resource use practices. The present paper investigates the history of this conflict and examines the need for greater policy spaces to accommodate community culture, and traditional management practices.

¹ The General Assembly, or Gram Sabha, elects its representatives to the Panchayat, which is the local body for self governance.

The Beginning of Forest Management in Kharkhan

The village Kharkhan, located in the *Kandi*² tract in Punjab, is contiguous with the Kharkhan Panchayat. The village has 150 households, comprising *Pandits*, *Jats* and Scheduled Castes, with the *Pandits* being the dominant caste group.

Till the mid-twentieth century, Kharkhan had almost 2500 acres of private forests³. These forests were owned by three Muslim families that also owned vast tracts of agricultural land. A large part of the village was then employed in the landlords' fields and households. All families that were in the landlords' employ were allowed fuel-wood and fodder from their forests. Other villagers too, whether from Kharkhan or nearby villages were allowed to extract of fuel-wood and fodder. Some families were also permitted to extract *bhabber* (*add scientific name*) grass that they used in making rope. Such extraction was without payment, but as a token, a part of the final product was 'gifted' to the landlords.

All these extractions were based on a tradition that itself was ascribed, by the villagers, to an oral agreement entered into by the Muslim landlords' forefathers with the villagers in the 15th century. While the landlords did not charge for any forest produce that was extracted, they expected that the 'users' would protect the forests from fire and illegal felling. Timber extraction was not permitted, and though there was no monitoring to ensure the same, "it was a matter of honour not to do so. We(the villagers) in any case knew that in times of need we could request the landlord for timber and the request would not be denied" (An elderly Kharkhan lady).

² The Kandi area of Punjab is a sub-mountainous zone that stretches in a thin belt along the north-eastern border of the state of Punjab, and comprises the Punjab Shiwaliks and a strip of undulating land below the hills (Sud *et al.*, 2000) in the districts of Hoshiarpur, Ropar and Dasuya. With a length of 161 Km, and a width of 10 Km, the Kandi is one of the most degraded areas of Punjab. The forests of Punjab are largely confined to the Shiwalik region or the Kandi tract.

³Private forests include those owned by individuals, groups of individuals or the Panchayat. In the case of Kharkhan, all private forests are Panchayat owned. Earlier, the Government owned forests, though within the boundary of the Kharkhan Panchayat, were far away from the village and closer to the hamlet called Chak Sadhu. In the 1980s, Chak Sadhu was made part of another Panchayat. The people of Chak Sadhu were therefore only dependent on the Government Forests. Since the government forests were closer to Chak Sadhu, and the Panchayat forests closer to Kharkhan all the Panchayat forests were retained in the reduced Kharkhan Panchayat.

In 1947, however, at the time of the Partition of the country, the Muslim landlords left for Pakistan and the Government acquired all their land. In the absence of the “owners” there was large scale felling of trees, mainly by people who were not residents of Kharkhan. An elderly resident recalled that “all the forests were destroyed. Not a single tree was left. Wherever one looked, only stumps remained.”

In the state of political and social upheaval that followed the Partition, protection of the forests was of least priority – the governance structure was falling apart and the Government was in turmoil trying to maintain peace; the people were more concerned with their own security, preserving their homes, and helping the refugees from Pakistan. As the village head pointed out, “in those days no one cared about the forest. We were just trying to protect ourselves” When, in 1951, about 1900 acres of the original 2500 acres of acquired forest land was given to the Kharkhan Panchayat and was designated as Panchayat forest, these forests were in a state of complete degradation. The pressures on these forests had increased, and the biotic interference in the area did not allow for regeneration. Fires broke out in the summer, and destroyed whatever remained. Gradually, there was no grass, no *bhabber*, and little fuel-wood. All the forest area became weed infested. To meet their requirements of fuel-wood and fodder, the villagers turned to the small patch of Government forests that too had suffered under the constant and increasing biotic pressures.

A larger problem that resulted from this degradation was of soil erosion. The forests were located mainly along the hill slopes. As these forests were destroyed, sand and gravel from the slopes was washed away and deposited in the agricultural fields rendering them unfit for agriculture...

“..a situation arose where we (the village people) were forced to contemplate leaving our ancestral homes. We knew that something had to be done, but what?” (An elderly Kharkhan resident)

Most villagers sold off their cattle. Only goats were retained since their fodder requirement was limited and they could be allowed to forage in the forest.

Discussions on this issue of degraded forests had been taking place in small groups in Kharkhan, but no solution had emerged. Finally a village meeting was called. The problem seemed overwhelming and no easy solution was readily available. What was certain, however, was that the forests had to be rehabilitated if the village was to survive. After a series of meetings, the village community took a decision to fight further degradation and enable the forest to regenerate. For this to happen, it was necessary that the forests be closed for grazing and the extraction of fuel-wood be reduced. Moreover, it was necessary to protect the forests from fire.

“We did not have the money to replant the forest, otherwise we would all have contributed for that also” (a resident of the village).

Eventually, all the forests were closed except for a patch of about 300 acres that was demarcated to meet the immediate requirements of the people for fodder and fuel-wood. Since this patch, in its degraded state, was insufficient for the designated purpose, the village had to rely on the other forests nearby. Yet they consciously ensured that other forests did not fall into the same state of degradation. A system of patrolling was institutionalised, and such patrolling was carried out through the night.

The real challenge lay in protecting the forests from fire. A road passed through the forest, and un-extinguished *bidis*⁴ often resulted in these fires. Some fires also spread from the neighbouring forests. Smoking in the forest was prohibited and in the summer, “check-posts” were installed along the road to enforce this prohibition. In the event of a fire the entire village would get together to fight it, and the forest department was immediately informed.

“If we had waited for the forest department, all the forests would have burnt down. We were closer to the forests and fighting the fire was our responsibility. But we did not have the tankers and other equipment that the forest department had” (an elderly Panchayat member).

Conversion of the Forests into a General Purpose Land Resource

In the 1960s, limited afforestation was undertaken by the forest department, wherein trees of *khair* (*Acacia catechu*), mango (*Mangifera indica*) and aonla (*Emblica officinalis*)

⁴ Indian cigarettes made by rolling *tendu* leaves and filling them with tobacco.

were planted. The village took responsibility to ensure that the plants survived, and made efforts to protect and water them. Gradually, the forests were rehabilitated. In 1971, about 400 acres of Government forest was allotted to the landless and to the ex-servicemen, and about 700 acres was allotted to the fifteen families that had come to the area from Pakistan, and settled in Kharkhan. Almost all the 700 acres was brought under plough. Thus, till the 1980s, there were no landless families in the village, but the area under forests had decreased.

Later, the Kharkhan area was selected for a camp of the Border Security Force. To meet the land requirements for the establishment of such a camp, about 600 acres of forest land was acquired from the Panchayat. Thus, the Panchayat forest of Kharkhan was reduced to 1300 acres. Again, in the 1990s, a part of the Panchayat forest was acquired for the construction of a dam that was to provide irrigation. Thus finally, at the time of the study, the Panchayat was left in possession of only about 1000 acres of forest. Of these 1000 acres of forest that it owned, the Panchayat designated about 300 acres as *charand* or village grazing ground, from which the village was allowed to extract its requirements of fuel-wood and fodder.

Forests and the Kharkhan Community

The forests of Kharkhan play a central role in the lives of the local community. In addition to employment in the forest department, the village people are dependent on the forests for fuel-wood and fodder. On an average, a family with five adult members requires seven kilograms of fuel-wood in the summer, and about fifteen kilograms of fuel-wood in the winter. In the case of landless households, the forest is also the primary source of fodder. Leaves and grass from the forest area are the primary fodder used, supplemented with cattle feed. Even in the case of the land owners, wood is the main source of cooking fuel. Almost all these families have Liquid Petroleum Gas (LPG) but that is used only for heating water and making tea. For regular cooking, the people are still dependent on fuel-wood not only because LPG is expensive but also because they are accustomed to the taste of food cooked on a wood-fire.

The villagers had been protecting the forests because they knew that denudation of the forests would lead to ecological conditions that would deprive them of their basic needs. They had realised the benefits of such protection in terms of increased availability of ground water as well as decreased erosion, both of which were linked to their day to day lives.

From Ecology to Economics

In the 1990s the Panchayat was approached, on behalf of the paper industry, by contractors who were interested in buying grasses for the paper mills. Plentiful grass of the kind demanded was available in the Panchayat forests, and a decision was taken to lease out parts of these forests, in rotation, to the contractors for extraction of the grass⁵. All the revenue from these auctions flowed to the Panchayat, was deposited in the Panchayat account. Such revenue, over the past decade, proved to be more than the grants that the village received from the State.

The revenue from this sale as well as the auction of trees for fruit was substantial (see Exhibit 1) and gave the community the much needed money for village development. A

Exhibit 1: Amount realised from auction of forest produce: sale of grass/ small timber/ dry timber

Year	Amount realised
1993-94	127650
1994-95	150205
1995-96	278150
1996-97	326225
1997-98	164400
1998-99	98100
1999-2000	131100
2000-01	201600
2001-02	131650
2002-03	95100

Source: Kharkhan Panchayat Lease Register

large part of this amount was from the sale of *bhabber* and *sarkanda* grasses. The people admitted that were it not for the forests and the returns from the forest produce, their village could not have developed like it had

“(our) forests have been (our) biggest strength, and therefore even the children know that they must protect the forest from harm! ” (Kharkhan resident).

⁵ Though the entire process requires the permission of the Divisional Forest Officer, the Forest Department plays only a supervisory role – that of ensuring that unsustainable extraction is prevented.

The income from forest produce, from 1993-2001, was used to meet the expenses of the Panchayat, as well as in works for village development. Some of these works were:

- Construction of roads, and drains in the village;
- Construction of a new school building, and repair of the existing building; building of the boundary wall and gate of the school; purchase of furniture for the school offices and classrooms; and construction of a water tank for the school;
- Construction of a room for the milk collection centre;
- Installation of five tube-wells and laying of pipelines for supply of water to the fields;
- Installation of seven taps and purchase of a small tanker for supply of water in summer and for facilitating control of fires in the forest;
- Construction of a community centre and marriage hall;
- Construction of two crematoriums of which one was for the schedule castes; and
- Plantation of poplar and aonla trees.

The revenue from the year 2001-2003 was earmarked for installation of solar powered lights and purchase of books for the school library. In addition to investing in the village's infrastructure and its development, some money was earmarked for their maintenance. In addition, the Panchayat also appointed 'watchers' – whose salaries were to be paid from this revenue – to patrol the forests.

In the year 2000-2001, the forests of Kharkhan were brought under the ten year felling programme⁶ of the State. The Khair trees in these forests were auctioned for more than ten million rupees. Post-auction, the Panchayat earmarked 50 per cent of auction revenue to cleaning-up operations in the forest and for planting new trees in areas where the Government's afforestation programme had not reached. It (the Panchayat) also decided to put the remaining money into a bank term-deposit to meet future needs. The Panchayat had realised that with the closure of the paper mills, the demand for *bhabber* and other grasses would gradually be reduced. The interest earnings from the deposit could then be used to meet the Panchayat expenses as well as the maintenance costs of the assets

⁶ In 1987, the Government of Punjab issued a notification permitting private forest owners to harvest timber from their land, under the *ten-year felling program*⁶. Under this programme, different areas would be opened for felling in different years, the time between two felling cycles being ten years. The Divisional Forest Officer, on the basis of applications received by him, permitted such felling. While all the benefits realised from the sale of timber would be the property of the owner(s), it appears that the onus of replanting and maintenance of forests remained with the Forest Department.

created. However, the contractor was unable to pay the amount due and the matter is pending in the local court.

The Decision-making Culture of The Village

“The forest is ours, it belongs to the entire village. No matter that it is a Panchayat forest – the Panchayat belongs to the village. Without the support of the community where would the Panchayat be? The people in the Panchayat may change every five years, but the village and the forests will always remain.”

The above statement of the *Sarpanch* of the Kharkhan Panchayat summarises the philosophy governing the forest-related decision making in Kharkhan. All decisions in this regard are taken collectively by the community, usually during the annual meeting of the village assembly or the Gram Sabha. These include decisions regarding what part of the forests to lease, the protection measures to be introduced, as well as decisions on investments that need to be undertaken. During this meeting, the statement of accounts is also shared with the community.

The Gram Sabha and the Panchayat enjoy the right to decide on how the income from the forests is to be utilised. This freedom implies that the investment is actually need based, and the process is such that is deemed most efficient given the village context. In the annual meeting of the Gram Sabha, suggestions are elicited towards possible investments that may be made, and a consensus is usually reached by prioritising the interventions needed. Care is taken to ensure that all the smaller hamlets too stand to benefit. Sometimes, where the estimated revenue falls short of the total investment required, the village as a whole decides on how to meet the difference. Usually a contribution is made, either in cash or in the form of voluntary labour. Where contributions are made in cash, the work is done by a labourer for a paid wage. Thus, the Panchayat generated works also result in creating wage-labour opportunities in the village.

Not all decision making is uneventful. There are times when differences arise. These may be on account of the activities or the process involved. In most cases, the community succeeds in resolving the issue through discussion. Where however, such consultation

fails, the decision of the Panchayat is considered final and binding. There has, however, not been any such instance to date.

The Role of the Forest Department

In Punjab, almost 83% of the forests are owned by individuals, groups of individuals or Panchayats. However, almost all these private holdings, including the forest of Kharkhan were brought under the direct managerial control of the forest department since the early twentieth century, vide the Punjab Land Preservation Choes Act, 1900. It was observed that in most areas of the forest Division under study, the extraction of forest produce was regulated but not completely prohibited, except in the case of timber. *Extraction of timber was largely prohibited, and wherever permitted was subject to approval by the Government.* As a result, in the private forestlands, the owners continued to accrue benefits from the sale of grass, fodder, etc. At the same time, in an attempt to rehabilitate the forests, the forest department undertook large-scale plantations.

Exhibit 2.: Bringing Private Forests under State Management: The Choes Act,1900

In the early twentieth century, an acute problem of soil erosion (Annexure 1) was being experienced in Punjab. To curb unrestricted felling and degradation of the forests, The Punjab Land Preservation (*Choes*) Act was enacted in 1900. This act, also referred to as the *Choes* Act was enacted with the aim of 'better preservation and protection' in areas 'subject to erosion or likely to become liable to erosion' or where the conservation of sub-soil water was critical. The *Choes* Act allowed the Provincial Government to '*temporarily regulate, restrict or prohibit*' even in private areas, rights of grazing, livestock 'retention, herding and pasturing,' as well as 'the cutting of trees, or the collection or removal...of any forest produce,' among other things. However, the extraction of grass, and forest produce for bonafide domestic requirement and agricultural purposes was permitted. The Act further provided that the Provincial Government could direct the owner of the land to undertake works that were necessary for achieving the purpose of the Act. In the case of territories situated 'within and adjacent to the Shiwalik mountain range,' the Act further allowed for 'control over the beds of *Choes*,' and suspension of rights in these areas under 'control' where deemed necessary. The period for such control could be extended by notification.

In the forests of Kharkhan too, the forest department implemented a few such programmes wherein saplings of khair and aonla were planted. In the period 1998-2001 alone, almost 400 acres were brought under plantation, though the *charand* was excluded from such intervention. Clearly, a substantial monetary investment was made by the forest department.

The Relationship between the Forest Department and the Local Community

The relationship between the forest department and the local community is essentially determined by the relationship that the forest-guard maintains with the village. According to the Kharkhan forest guard, in a situation where almost all the forests are under private ownership, the forest department necessarily has to undertake forestry in private forests in order to meet its own plantation targets. The challenge, however, is not as much in planting as it is in ensuring the survival of the plantations and protecting them from fire, and later, illicit felling.

The community admits that in the past it did not have the money to undertake large-scale afforestation works. Though money for the same may have been available on credit, the community was unwilling to take the risk associated with such borrowing. In any case, as the forest department started getting funding from various sources, it did not need any

monetary investment from the community to carry out the planting activities. What it did need was support in maintaining these.

In Kharkhan, the onus for ensuring the success of these plantations was taken by the community. In the early stages of plantation, the community carried out post-planting works such as weeding and watering. It also ensured that the plantations were protected from grazing and from fire. Such protection was carried out only through social fencing. However, for patrolling during the night, the Panchayat employed a watchman who was paid from the Panchayat's own funds. The arrangement between these stakeholders, thus, is one based on mutual benefit.

While it appeared as though the relationship between the forest department and the village community was a harmonious and cooperative one, there were undercurrents of resentment and tension between the stakeholders. The community resented the control that the department exerted over the forests. They believed that they had the competence to manage the forests and that they could do so if they were given the chance. The operations staff of the forest department, especially the forest-guards, however, had a diametrically opposite perspective. They acknowledged that the forests were owned by the Panchayat. However, they felt that since the State had control over the forests and since it had been incurring most of the expenses in rehabilitating them, the responsibility for the wellbeing of the forests too lay with the State. Therefore the powers of the forest department needed to be maximised such that they could control the access to the forests and regulate their use. The prevailing view was "...the villagers need the forest but, if the forest is to be preserved, it should be fenced and no one should be allowed to enter it."

The Bone Of Contention: Procedure or Tradition

In 1993, the Government of Punjab passed a resolution for participatory forest management (see Annexure 2) or Joint Forest Management in the Kandi Region of the State. In 1998, an afforestation program, the Punjab Afforestation Programme, was implemented with the assistance of the Japan Bank for International Cooperation. The Kharkhan forests too were part of this afforestation programme. An integral feature of the

programme was to build partnership between the community and the forest department in managing the forests. A Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC) needed to be constituted as part of the programme. However, the forest guards were quite unsuccessful in getting the people of Kharkhan to form a JFMC.

The Kharkhan Panchayat resisted this pressure on several grounds.

1. In the very first place, they stated, they did not understand the need for such an arrangement. The functions of the Committee, namely those of protection from fire, grazing and illicit felling were already being executed by the Panchayat.
2. The villagers also questioned the mandatory requirement of having to make a monetary contribution for the formation of the Committee. “The forest is ours, we have been protecting it. Why should we pay for the formation of a committee that we do not want in the first place?” was a question often raised by the villagers.
3. The Panchayat also had strong reservations regarding the sharing of the benefits from the forests. Hitherto, the Panchayat had had exclusive rights over the returns from the forests. Now these would have to be shared with the JFMC. This implied that the resources available to the Panchayat for its village developmental works would be considerably reduced. According to the 2001 resolution, the JFMC would enjoy the rights to Non Wood Forest Produce in the area, right to the sale of grass, and also free leases of *bhabber*. In addition, 25 percent of the income from timber, bamboo and *khair* would be given to the Committee, with 50 percent of the income from the above mentioned sources to be used for forest conservation. This implied that the Panchayat would lose control over the resources that supported village development. Such a reduction was likely to affect the pace of development and consequently, the village support to the Panchayat in its other tasks. The Panchayat as an institution is a political institution. “If we do not work for the village, why will people vote for us?” questioned the Sarpanch of the Kharkhan Panchayat.
4. The Panchayat was also certain that the implementation of the JFM programme would do more harm than good to the forests themselves. With the formation of the Committee, the Panchayat would lose its powers of decision-making and

control of the forest. Moreover, the Committee members would be allowed to extract their bonafide requirements of fuel-wood, fodder and grass from the forests. The Panchayat had been regulating such extraction by restricting it only to the *charand*. On the other hand, if the villagers are allowed to ‘use’ the entire forest, protection would become difficult, as would the regulation of the quantity and types of produce extracted. Also, the value of the forest plots would decrease because the *thekedar* (contractor) would be unwilling to lease such land where the level of interference would be high. Hence the returns from the forest would decrease.

5. The Panchayat was also concerned about the implications of constituting a parallel political institution in the village. They felt that the membership of the Management Committee of the JFMC would become a first step towards nurturing electoral support for election to the Panchayat. The ‘political divide’ in the village will become pronounced, and the focus of the institutions would shift from village and resource development to maintaining political power. In the long run, the practice of ‘collective decisions’ would be diluted. Such a political divide had been the primary cause of low development in some of the other villages in the division.

The local forest guard agreed that the purpose of participatory forest protection that was envisaged in the JFM programme was already being achieved in Kharkhan – more than it was being fulfilled in areas where the JFMCs had been formed. He also admitted that the creation of the JFMC was likely to lead to institutional conflicts. However, for the forest guard, the formation of the Committee is critical because that is what the afforestation project mandates. Till such a committee is formed, resources for forest developmental works earmarked for the Kharkhan forests would not be released. The State policy for developmental works in the forests directed that all such works be undertaken only through the JFMCs. Moreover, with the term of the project coming to a close, and a proposal for a second phase being submitted to the funding agency, it was necessary that the ‘targets’ were achieved. Also, the forest guard was held “...accountable for the failure to form a committee and this affected his performance evaluation.”

Over the years, with both stakeholders firm on their stand, the situation has now reached an impasse. The forest department is insistent on forming the Committee, and the Panchayat is determined to clear the forest if it is forced to comply with the will of the State. The problem, clearly, is one born from the blanket approach in implementing the JFM directives. Somewhere, in the efforts to meet the targets mandated by the JFM projects, the spirit of the new management regime is lost.

JFM was essentially envisaged to bring about peoples' participation in the management of the forests that formed a central part of their existence. In villages where such participation had already been institutionalised, a better strategy may have been to strengthen the existing institutions.

Creating Policy Spaces

In the late twentieth century, there was a growing realisation that sustainable conservation of all natural resources, including forests, would be difficult without the involvement of key stakeholders. In the case of forest resources in India, the local forest dependent communities were considered to be one of the most critical stakeholders and the Forest Policy mandated that efforts be made to facilitate a “mass people’s movement” in the protection and regeneration of the forest resources (Government of India, 1988)⁷. One of the essentials for forest management, to achieve this objective, was motivating the “forest communities to identify themselves with the development and protection of forests from which they derive benefits.” Joint Forest Management was introduced for institutionalising this people participation. However, in formulating the policy directives for JFM, little attention was paid to the already existing, community driven mechanisms of resource management, wherever found.

International funding in the forestry sector further mandated a participatory approach. These international projects, usually of duration of five years, left the forest department and the community with little time to understand the spirit of the new management regime. In the given case, the energy of the department was limited to the creation of committees, and where the forests were under their ownership they succeeded in doing

⁷ Government of India. 1988. National Forest Policy

so. The sustainability of these initiatives, however, remains to be evaluated. With the blanket approach being followed in the implementation of the programme, the government agencies focused only on the creation of institutions instead of first evaluating the need for the same. In Punjab where the forests are mainly under private ownership, the department met with resistance for two primary reasons:

- The JFM resolution was a ‘typical one’ with little consideration given to the fact that private ownership of forests resulted in a resource access and use pattern that was distinct from the one that prevailed in other parts of the country. The resolution reflects little understanding of community and individual sensibilities with respect to forests and, consequently, little thought seems to have been given to accommodating the same in the policy. There seems to be a general assumption that there are no existing cases of community partnership.
- Though the policy directs that the JFM programme be implemented in private forests only with the consent of the owner, this clause seems to have been completely ignored during implementation of the programme. To meet the targets of the forest department’s projects, the formation of the JFMC was often forced upon the villagers rather than demanded by them. It was envisaged that all forestry works would be undertaken through the JFMCs. In some villages the JFMCs were formed because the people perceived the JFM programme as yet another government initiated channel through which money would flow into the village with the formation of the Committees. Therefore, these village communities perceived a direct economic benefit from committee formation. However, there were cases like Kharkhan where JFM implied economic losses as well as social instability.

The essential prerequisites for people-government partnerships are ‘policy spaces’ that accommodate micro-level traditional practices and needs into the larger goals and policy guidelines. The creation of these policy spaces however presumes the acknowledgement of the existence of traditional resource management practices, and acceptance of their socio-cultural significance and effectiveness, if it exists, in the policy itself. Such

sensitivity to field based issues is likely to emerge only when ‘participatory policy making’ is engaged in, at least within the Government departments.

In the present scenario, feedback from the front line staff is rarely sought. Policies are envisaged and thrust on the implementers and community alike. As one front line staff quipped, “ we may have joint forest management with the local people, but where we (the forest department) are concerned, there is nothing ‘joint’ in the way we work.....after all, for how long can a new car run on hundred year old wheels?”

In the case of participatory management it is crucial to remember that the ultimate goal is that of sustainable forest management, and that the JFM programme was one of the means to achieve this objective. At the same time, it needs to be recognised, that this programme is neither the only means to the objective and nor does it always guarantee success. An evaluation of the need for such a management regime needs to be examined on a case to case basis. Where better alternatives exist, they need to be explored and strengthened. After all, the ‘jointness’ in forest management implies participation not only in protection but also in management planning and implementation.

Annexures

Annexure 1: The destruction of the Punjab Forests

Till the mid-nineteenth century, the forests of Punjab were strictly preserved as hunting grounds of the *Rajas* or Kings. The defeat of these *Rajas* in the Sikh wars (1846-1849), however, resulted in the annexation of the state. With the eviction of the Kings, Stebbing (1982)⁸ reports that, ‘...in the Government lands, the people...broke loose and for the first three years could not be restrained from reckless devastation of the timber’. In the mountainous areas, this unrestrained extraction of timber resulted in rapid soil erosion and the emergence of torrents that were locally called *Choes*. These torrents flowed with high velocity and carried huge loads of sand and gravel that was deposited in the agricultural fields on the lower slopes, thereby rendering them unfit for agriculture. In

⁸ Stebbing E.P. (1982). The Forests of India. Vol I. Periodical Expert Book Agency. New Delhi.

response to the growing problems, ‘the people framed laws for mutual observance, with the express object of maintaining the forests.’ In 1859, the Punjab Government also sanctioned a set of Rules for the preservation of timber in the Government forests. Whereas these rules curtailed the unrestrained exploitation of forests, they also directed that the ‘persons having an ancient right to graze, gather dry wood, or collect leaves for manure, in any government forest were still entitled to these rights’ albeit with some restrictions. However, as Grewal (1995)⁹ notes, the problem of degradation was aggravated in the latter half of the nineteenth century when forests were recklessly destroyed to meet the escalated demand of firewood for British troops stationed in the area, the labour force engaged in Sirhind Canal Construction and to meet the demand of sleepers and fuel of the Punjab Railways. With this exploitation, the problem of torrents naturally increased manifold. In Hoshiarpur district alone, the area affected by the *choes* increased from 192 sq.km. in 1852 to 286 sq.km in 1886. Soil Conservation therefore emerged as an issue of primary concern.

Annexure 2: The policy of participation

In 1990, the Government of India issued a circular¹⁰ directing the involvement of “local communities and voluntary agencies for the regeneration of degraded forest lands.” The arrangement essentially involved constitution of village level institutions in the form of JFM Committees. These committees were mandated to protect and regenerate the forests, in return for which they were accorded some forest benefits. In response to the Central Government Circular, the states formulated their own JFM Resolutions that were no doubt different from each other yet within the mandate of the Government of India’s circular. Thus they all required the formation of village level institutions for protection and regeneration of the forests, and delivery of benefits in return for the same.

In Punjab, in spite of the efforts to rehabilitate the degraded *Kandi*, there was limited success in complete control of forest degradation and consequent soil erosion, a fact evident in that there are 21 major and 120 smaller *choes* in Punjab. ‘A major reason for

⁹ Grewal S.S. (1995). Hoshiarpur Torrents-their extent, causes, characteristics and control measures. IN: *Torrent Menace: Challenges and Opportunities*, Dehra Dun, Central Soil and Water Research and Training Institute.

¹⁰ GoI Circular dated June (no.6-21/89-F.P)

soil erosion and land degradation was the non-sustainable exploitation of the forest resources by the impoverished villagers due to their overriding subsistence requirements' (Government of Punjab, 1993). It must be remembered that the mountainous tracts of the *Kandi* were not very conducive to agriculture. As a result, the local communities were heavily dependent on the forests for sustenance. It is also necessary to note that soil and moisture conservation in this area was imperative because erosion here resulted in destruction of the agricultural potential of the well irrigated plains, that formed part of what is popularly called the 'food-bowl' of India.

Almost 83 percent of the forests in the *Kandi* tract belonged to the local communities and private individuals, but was controlled by the Forest Department under the *Choes* Act, 1900. The entire income from these forests, by way of sale of timber, fuel-wood and non-timber forest produce accrued to the owners (Government of Punjab, 1993). There was a realisation that effective conservation of the *Kandi* forests would not be possible without the cooperation of the local communities. Therefore, in 1993, the Government of Punjab issued a Resolution on Joint Forest Management¹¹, directing the creation of village level institutions for participatory forest management.

The rationale for JFM was "to hasten the pace of development (by) involving village communities for effective protection and conservation of forests," provided it is in the economic interest of the owners to do so. Interestingly, the Resolution proposed JFM as a "**scheme** involving the rural community" for the protection of government and private/community forests, though the benefits to the Committee would accrue only from the Government forests. These benefits were in the form of dry/fallen twigs and leaves, medicinal herbs, wild fruits, and grass excluding fodder, from the Government forest. In the case of grass, it could be extracted for domestic purposes alone, only in those areas where it is not auctioned. Naturally, it is assumed that in the case of the private forests, there would be no change in the flow of benefits from the forest and all the benefits would accrue to the owner. Whereas the "economic interest" of the owners is evident in

¹¹ Notification No.46/27/93-Ft-III/8284 dated 14.7.1993

this scheme, there appears to be no direct benefit to the committee on account of its efforts in the private forest lands.

The JFM resolution was amended in 1995 but such amendments were “especially with reference to integrated watershed development project financed by the World Bank.”¹² The provisions of this amendment therefore, applied “only to the areas covered by the IWDP (Hills) Project, and that too on an experimental basis to achieve the ‘project’ aim of community involvement in the long term preservation of forest lands, even after the completion of the project. The institutional arrangement under this notification envisaged the Forest Protection Committees as sub-committees of the Panchayat, that would “cover common lands vested in the Panchayats as well as the Government forest lands.” In addition to the benefits mandated in the 1993 resolution, the amendment awarded a share of the returns from timber to be used “exclusively for conservation and regeneration of forest crops.” The returns to the committee from the Panchayat forest lands, however, remained unclear in this amendment.

Thus there emerged two parallel policies on JFM in the State, each one prescribing a different institutional structure. It also appears, from the documents and informal interaction with the Forest Department, that each of these policies was catering to a different ‘project,’ and since the mandates incorporated in the projects was different, so were the provisions of the policy. A policy conflict, though evident in these policy differences, was averted by ensuring that the project areas under the policies did not overlap. However, there were cases where the projects were implemented sequentially. Since neither project directed the disbanding of committees on the closure of the project, parallel committees exist, at least on paper, in these villages.

In year 2001 the Government of Punjab, in response to the slow “take-off” of JFM in the State, issued “revised and more comprehensive” guidelines. This notification¹³ was in super-session of the earlier JFM resolution and its subsequent amendment. According to

¹² Government of Punjab. Notification No. 43/29/94-Ft-III. Dated 13 June 1995

¹³ Government of Punjab Notification No. 46/242/99-Ft.III/3613. Dated 6 September 2001

the 2001 notification, two adult members, at least one a woman, from every household in the village could become members of the FPC by paying a token fee. The FPC will then elect a management committee to conduct the day to day activities of the committee. The forest guard or the forester will be the ex-officio secretary of the management committee.

As mentioned earlier, there were two parallel participatory institutions that had been formed under the JFM policy in Punjab- one where the FPC was independent of the Panchayat and the other where it was a sub-committee of the Panchayat. The 2001 amendment did not differentiate between the two. In villages where the committees were already existing, especially in the IWDP (Hills) therefore, the Panchayat would now lose control over the village FPC and this would in all likelihood, give rise to inter-institutional conflicts between the parallel institutions.

The 2001 amendment further mandated the formation of a committee in a village- village defined as a “hamlet, village or cluster of villages.” The areas allotted to these Committees for protection “need not be coterminous with the revenue village – i.e., forest areas of a particular revenue village may be managed under JFM by an FPC of another neighbouring village also.” It may be mentioned here, that the usual practice of protection of forests under JFM involved exclusion of all, other than the FPC, from the area allotted to the FPC. In a situation where the local communities were heavily dependent on the forest resources, the allotment of forest in one revenue village to FPC of another village increases the possibility of inter-village conflicts.

The 2001 notification further stated that the members of the FPC would have the first preference as far as wage employment in the Forest Department is concerned. As mentioned earlier, most of the area was not conducive to intensive agriculture and therefore wage-labour was an important source of income. In a situation of limited wage opportunity in the villages, the extension of wage opportunity in a villages’ forest, to

committees that may not be from the village is likely to result in inter and intra- village conflicts.

Going beyond the Government Forests, the notification directed that the “FPCs should take up the Panchayat Forest Area in consultation and concurrence of the Village Panchayat.” The benefit sharing between the FPC and the forest department included NWFP rights in the area, right to sale of grass, and free leases of *bhabber* to the committee. In addition, 25 percent of the income from timber, bamboo and *khair* (*Acacia catechu*) from the Government forests, would be given to the committee, with 50 percent of the income from the above mentioned sources to be used for forest conservation. The same system of benefit sharing was to be institutionalised between the FPC and the Panchayat.

As has been mentioned above, the JFM policy of the State of Punjab was inextricably linked to ‘projects,’ mainly afforestation and soil conservation projects that were implemented in the area. These included the IWDP (Hills), Phase I and II supported by the World Bank and the Japan Bank for International Cooperation funded Punjab Afforestation Project. To give effect to these projects, the forest department made extensive efforts to involve villagers in afforestation and management of the plantations. This was done inspite of the unresolved issues in the policy guiding the process of community participation and the possible conflicts, and lack of conviction about the need for JFM (Figure 1). Such implementation was necessary to meet the ‘targets’ set in the project. Thus in Punjab, we not only find a ‘project approach’ to policy, but a ‘target approach’ to project implementation.’

The village of Kharkhan, was a part of the area under the JBIC project. The JFM in this village was therefore based on the 1993 guidelines. At the time of the study, the amendments of 2001 had been issued and the process of formation of committees as per this notification was underway. The challenges that have been analysed in the following case study therefore are reflective of these challenges.

Annexure 3: The Kharkhan Panchayat

The village Kharkhan is located in the *Kandi* tract in the Hoshiarpur Range, of the Hoshiarpur forest division in Punjab. The village has 150 households, comprising Pandits, Jats and Schedule Castes, with the Pandits being the dominant caste group. The village appears to be a developed one, in terms of communication facilities, education and medical facilities, banking and trade. The literacy rate is low, especially among the women. However, since 1993 when a school was established, there has been 100 percent enrolment.

The primary occupation of almost 70 percent of the population is agriculture, either on their own land or as agricultural labour. During a process of settlement in the 1970s, the Government of Punjab allotted land to the landless, therefore there were no landless families in Kharkhan. The rain-fed area was not conducive to intensive agriculture, yet people were able to engage in mono-cropping. These landholdings, despite their small size, became the primary source of security for the villagers. In the mid-eighties however, there was a rumour that the Government, through its Army, had decided to acquire the land it had earlier allotted to the landless. In a state of panic, most small farmers sold their land in order to earn a little before their land was taken away. The land prices for these distress sales were a fraction of the actual value- for instance, land that was valued at about one and a half lakh rupees was sold for five to ten thousand rupees, depending on the bargaining power. Later, it was realised that outsiders who had wanted to acquire land in the area, for tree-farming, had perpetuated the rumour. As a result, today, almost fifty percent of the households are landless, whereas there are five farms of more than 100 acres each that grow *poplar* for industrial use.

The landholding is concentrated mainly with the *Pandits*, and some *Jats*. The size of these landholdings is small (Table 1), and therefore, in most cases agriculture is not enough to sustain the family through the year. Alternate sources of livelihood include dairying, wage-labour and rope making.

In Kharkhan, livestock rearing has always been a part of the lives of the people. The people reared bullocks for agriculture and goat and cows for meeting the domestic requirement of milk. In the absence of land and adequate opportunity for agriculture, therefore, dairying emerged as an alternate source of income. Today, the villagers' estimate, that on an average every household has about ten heads of cattle. Of the 150 households, about 55 families are actively engaged in dairying and for them this is the primary source of income. Some of these families not only own

local breed cows but also buffaloes and hi-breed cows. They have organised themselves in to a milk society and supply milk to the Verka Milk plant, that is close to the village.

Among other sources of income is forestry works, including plantation and cutting of fire lines that also provides the much needed wage opportunity especially to the landless families. The Punjab forest Department has been implementing afforestation programmes in the forest of Kharkhan. In the period 1998-2000, for instance, about 130 acres of land was brought under plantation and labour was required for this.

Rope-making with *bhabber* grass, was once a profitable livelihood alternative for the local people. The raw-material or bhabber grass was easily available, and the women would make rope that was sold at Hoshiarpur, by the men. With the influx of cheaper and

Table 1: Land distribution in Kharkhan¹⁴	
Size of landholdings	Number of families
Marginal Farmers, with land less than 2.5 acres	50
Small farmers, with Approximately 5 acres land	10
Semi-medium farmers with 5-10 acres land	10
Medium Farmers with 10-25 acres land	10
Large farmers with more than 25 acres land	5*
* These are more than 100 acre farms that are owned by large landlords from the nearby cities	

¹⁴ The classification of land holdings is as per that specified by the Statistical Wing of the Chief Agricultural officer, in the Agricultural Statistics of District Hoshiarpur

synthetic rope, however, the demand for *bhabber* rope steadily decreased. Moreover, the increased demand for *bhabber* grass in the paper industry, led to increased cost of raw material. Rope-making therefore was no longer a viable alternative and the activity is now restricted to meeting the domestic requirements.

Finally, with the development of the Border Security Force Camp, some families have set up small general and provision stores to cater to the demands of the families in this camp.