

LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS, COMMON PROPERTY LAND RESOURCES AND
RURAL POOR: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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WORKSHOP IN POLITICAL THEORY
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Introduction

In recent times, local organizations* have increasingly become an 'article of faith' in the development process. This emphasis on them is mainly due to the growing realization that "top-down" planning and administration is too rigid and less adaptive to local needs for effective programme implementation at the grassroots. Attention has now, therefore, shifted to organizational networks that could facilitate local participation in development and thereby, meet the aspirations of the rural populace.

Local organizations not only affect public service delivery in rural development programmes, but also the management of Common Property Resources (CPRs). These may include village pastures, minor forests, waste-lands, irrigation systems, tanks and ponds, and other commodities over which a community has traditional access. Such resources share two characteristics (E Ostrom: 1991). First, they are so large that it would be costly to attempt to exclude potential beneficiaries from using them. Second, the supply of such resources is limited and over consumption by one user reduces their availability to others.

It is these two characteristics that necessitate collective efforts on the part of the beneficiaries for managing the CPRs. But a survey of cases in CPR management indicates that no "one best way" exists for evolving effective collective action. One can find various combinations of private, communal and public

* Local Organization here refers to people's organization operating at the grass-roots. For further details see, Esman and Uphoff (1984) wherein they have discussed these organisations based on a very convincing comparison of 150 different cases.

arrangements in the management of CPRs (E Ostrom: 1991). Thus, an important research problem is how various organizational arrangements affect collective action in these resources. It is this problem that the paper attempts to examine by taking into consideration the 'social forestry' woodlot plantations on village waste-lands in India.

The ideas are discussed briefly over four sections. The first suggests a theoretical framework for comparative organizational analysis. Second, a methodology for analyzing a sample of three cases in social forestry woodlot management is explained. In third, the pattern of relationships between the organizational arrangements and people's involvement in the sample cases is reported. Finally, the paper concludes with some policy perspectives and theoretical implications of the findings.

Section 1

Before arriving at a theoretical framework for organizational analysis, it is first necessary to clarify that people's participation, without evolving apt strategies to make it genuine, will become a fad. Hence, although beneficiaries can participate as individuals or unorganized groups, such efforts will be more effective and sustained if they find expression in some organizations (Zeeman: 1984; Esman and Uphoff: 1984; Cohen and Uphoff:1990). In otherwords, institutionalization is an essential pre-requisite for effective people's participation.

At the same time, people's participation as a process cannot be measured. Only the base for participation (i.e., the organizations which evoke participation) can be examined in order to gauge its degree.

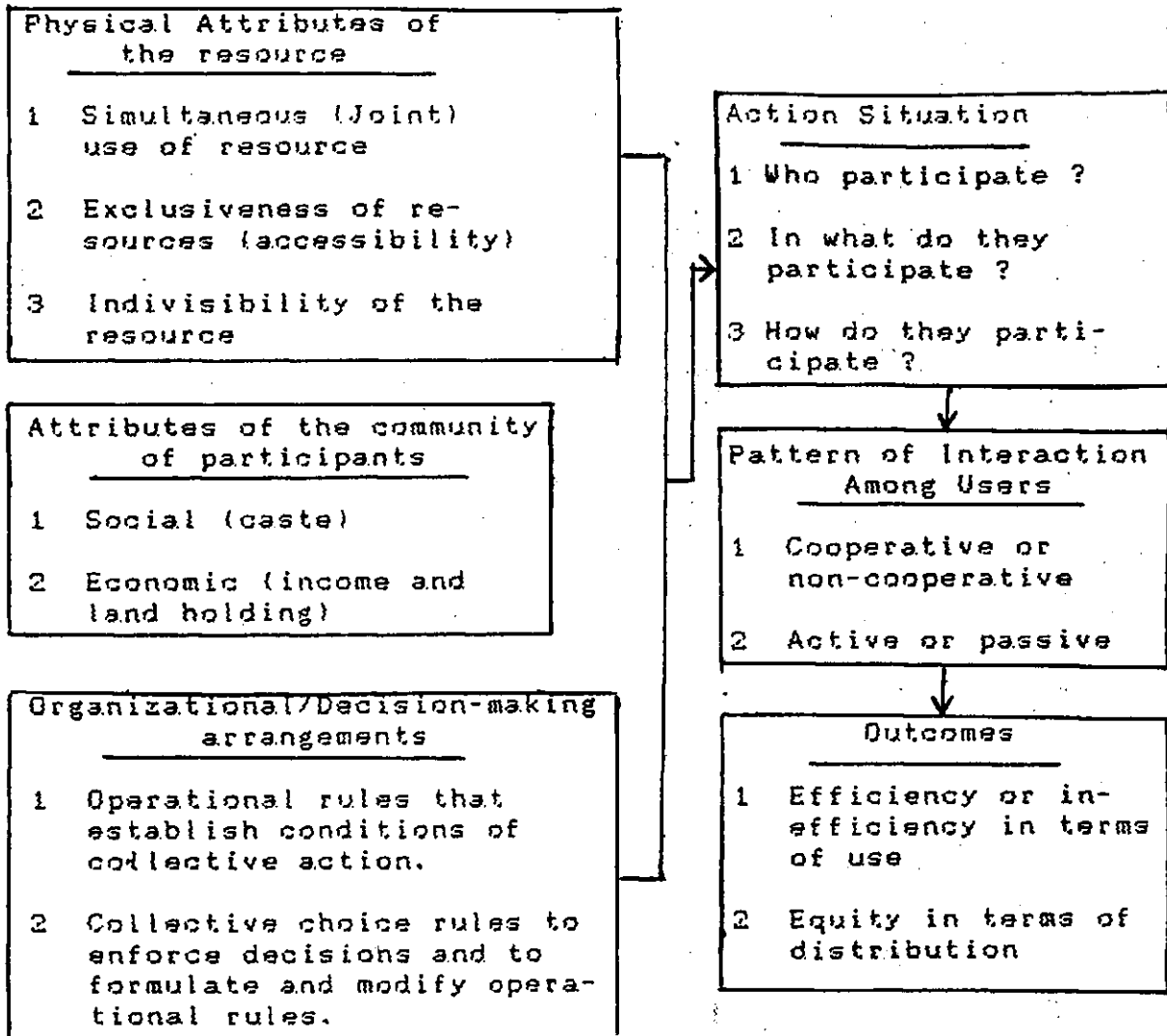
Against this backdrop, there is need for studying the role of local organizations in CPR management. Scholars have developed a general framework of institutional analysis to examine any organizational arrangements facing participants in such resource systems (Kiser and Ostrom: 1982; Oakerson: 1986; E Ostrom: 1986; Tang: 1991). The focal point of such an analysis is the "action situation" in which the individuals act. Three sets of factors mainly influence the "action situation" - (1) physical attributes of the resource; (2) attributes of the community of participants; and (3) the organizational or decision-making arrangements used. Participants react differently according to the incentives and constraints inherent in the situation and this, in turn, affects the outcome (See Figure 1).

From a policy perspective, the organizational arrangement is the most important factor that affects the 'action-situation' (Tang: 1991). It is this that determines the involvement of the people in the management of the resource on a collective basis. Whether the involvement is active or passive, or cooperative or non-cooperative, depends upon the type of organization and its rules of operation and collective choice. While the rules of operation determine who can participate in which situation and what the participants may or may not do, the rules of collective choice help solve problems of collective action in terms of rule formulation and enforcement.

On the lines of this general framework, the present study attempts to discern how different organizational arrangements affect people's participation in the management of CPR system.

Figure 1

A Framework for Organizational Analysis



Section 2

In this context, social forestry plantation on wastelands in and around human habitats has been identified for examination. As is obvious from the word "social", this new approach to afforestation is mainly concerned with tree plantation on village common lands to meet the basic needs of the rural people for fuel, food, fodder and small timber. As in the case of other types of CPR, so also in the case of social forestry woodlot

plantation it would be very costly to "exclude potential beneficiaries" from using it. Therefore, there is always the risk of "free-ridership" and hence of over-exploitation. Secondly, the available resource from the forest is not unlimited. Over usage by some may lead to non-availability of the resource to others. Hence, the question is both of proper allocation and replenishment of the resource in any effort towards its management. To tackle these problems there is an urgent need for active and positive involvement of local people through local organizations in project design and implementation.

The study, hence, analyses the governance of CPRs under two broad categories of local organizations - government-engineered people's organizations (GEPO) and non-government people's organizations (NGPO). While the former type are the outcome of government efforts, the latter are basically the outcome of voluntary or indigenous initiative on the part of the people. The analysis is focussed mainly on the "action situation", taking into consideration two interrelated issues - people's participation in rule formulation and rule enforcement.

The data for this study were collected through a research conducted in the state of Orissa in India*. This state has been the focal point of a number of innovative approaches towards CPR management.

In the first place, the region has had some of the strongest traditional community management regimes in the country

* The research was carried out as part of the ongoing Doctoral research work of Ms Madhusree Mallik.

(Gadgil: 1984). According to this system, the villagers had an informal "Village Council" called the "Mouja" which was the principal decision-making body in the village. The heads of the household were members of this Council, with an executive body of 5 to 10 persons drawn from the council members. The executive was selected by the Council through a simple process of voting. The tenure of its members was not fixed. They could be removed from the post by the Council on the basis of majority choice as and when the villagers lost faith in them. At least once a month (or when necessary) the Council met and ratified the decisions made by the executive. These informal 'Village Councils' were responsible for looking after common village resources like village school, ponds, common lands, minor forests near the village and village development funds.

Most of these traditional management systems have now collapsed due to growing government control of local resources and revenue and increasing influence of market forces. In spite of this, evidence on the existence of such systems can still be found in some parts of the state.

In addition to these traditionally existing CPR management initiatives, the introduction of SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) supported Social Forestry Project in the state during the early eighties, has also thrown a number of insights into CPR management. The primary objective of this project has been to create rural based village woodlots (Appendix A) on revenue and degraded forest lands through people's involvement for the benefit of the local population.

In keeping with this objective, the "Village Forest Committees" (VFC) were constituted in accordance to the provisions of the "Orissa Village Forest Rules, 1985" (Appendix B) to look after the plantations in the villages and to ensure people's involvement in the management.

Besides these alternative village level institutions, there are also a few NGPO (non-government people's organization) sponsored CPR management initiatives in the state. In this connection, reference can be made to the efforts of "Gram Vikas", a specialized NGPO particularly active in the tribal belts of Orissa.

In keeping with these types of CPR management systems in the state, a sample of three villages was identified. The selection was made on the basis of the "organizational arrangements" operating therein. At the same time, the villages were selected in such a way that they had, more or less, similar socio-economic background. In addition, it was also ensured that in all the three samples there was the woodlot component* of the social forestry programme.

Thus, by keeping the "physical attributes of the resource" and the "attributes of the community" constant, attempt has been made in this study to examine the degree of people's involvement by taking different organizational arrangements into consideration. In Village A afforestation was entirely the outcome of the efforts of a local non-government peoples organization (NGPO) called the "Friends of Trees" Organization; in Village B there was a government-engineered people's organization (GEPO) - The Village Forest Committee; and in Village C the social

forestry woodlot plantation was the result of a combined effect put in by the GEPO - Village Forest Committee (VFC) - and the NGPO (The Traditional Village Council). Here the VFC was identified with the executive body of the Village Council. Besides, in this village there was also youth organization or "Yuvak Sangha" which acted as a participatory sub-group complementing the larger membership organization.

The data from the villages were collected by canvassing separate questionnaires for the households and for the members of the organization operating there. A census survey method was followed to elicit information from the households. Information was specifically obtained about the organization's role during various stages of the programme implementation and about the participation of the local people through the organizations.

Section 3

On the basis of data collected through the research study (as mentioned in Section 2), a pattern of relationship between the organizational arrangements and the people's involvement is reported here. In this context, the paper focusses primarily on the extent of people's participation in the decision-making process (in rule formulation and rule enforcement). The "quantitative dimension" of this is defined in terms of the relative number of people involved. It has been estimated on the

* Plantation of trees on village waste lands or common lands to meet the basic local needs for fuel, food and fodder.

basis of a five-point scale from 1 = nil or nothing to 5 = exceptionally high.

The main indicators which have been taken into consideration for evaluating the degree of collective action are - the nature of involvement and level of involvement. The "nature of involvement" defines the type of involvement in the resource management. It includes the following :

- 1. No involvement
- 2. Indirect involvement through traditional village leaders or the elites.
- 3. Indirect involvement through democratically elected representatives.
- 4. Direct involvement by the people as "free individuals"
- 5. Institutionalized involvement (participation as members of the organization).

Similarly, the "level of involvement" has been used as an indicator to estimate the extent of people's involvement in plan formulation, implementation and utilization of the resource. The following "levels of involvement" have been considered -

- 1. No involvement
- 2. Involvement as paid labour to implement decisions made by the local leaders/representatives
- 3. Involvement as voluntary labour to implement decisions made by local leaders/representatives.
- 4. Engaged merely in making and endorsing decisions relating to the woodlot (an advisory/supervisory role).
- 5. Involvement in both making decisions related to the woodlot management and engaged in their implementation.

In the sample, Village C recorded the most effective form of participation. Here more persons were engaged in direct participation as members of the organizational arrangement

operating there and as such, were actively involved in both making and implementing decisions (See tables 1 and 2).

Table 1 : The nature of people's involvement in the sample

Nature of involvement	Village			Row Total
	A	B	C	
1 No involvement	1 (1.6%)	-	3 (2.8%)	4 (1.6%)
2 Indirect involvement through traditional leaders/elites	37 (57.8%)	-	5 (4.6%)	42 (16.5%)
3 Indirect involvement through democratically elected representatives	-	58 (69.9%)	12 (11.1%)	70 (27.5%)
4 Direct involvement as individuals	23 (35.9%)	17 (20.5%)	6 (5.6%)	46 (18%)
5 Institutionalized involvement	3 (4.7%)	8 (9.6%)	82 (75.9%)	93 (36.5%)
Column Total	64 (25.1%)	83 (32.5%)	108 (42.4%)	255 (100%)

Calculated Chi-square (P) = 275.26910
 Degree of freedom = 8 ; $P > \chi^2_{0.95}$

Note: Figures outside the parentheses indicate the number of households involved and within the parentheses indicate their column percentage.

Since the organization operating in this Village C is a combination of both the GEPO and the NGPO, it can be said that the plantation work here has been a joint endeavour of both "the state" and "the local". As the locals were actively involved in the management of the resource, there was a feeling of possession among them and they identified themselves with the forest.

Table 2 : The "level of people's involvement" in the sample

Level of involvement	Village A	Village B	Village C	Row Total
1 No involvement	3 (4.7%)	1 (1.2%)	3 (2.8%)	7 (2.7%)
2 Involvement as paid labour	-	57 (68.7%)	14 (13%)	71 (27.8%)
3 Involvement as voluntary labour	51 (79.7%)	-	4 (3.7%)	55 (21.6%)
4 Engaged only in making and endorsing decisions	7 (10.9%)	17 (20.5%)	11 (10.2%)	35 (13.7%)
5 Involved in both making and implementing decisions	3 (4.7%)	8 (9.6%)	76 (70.4%)	87 (34.1%)
Column Total	64 (25.1%)	63 (32.5%)	108 (42.4%)	255 (100%)

Calculated chi-square (P) = 288.35413

Degree of freedom = 8

$$P > \chi^2_{0.95}$$

Note: Figures outside the parentheses indicate the number of households involved and within the parentheses indicate their column percentage.

For instance, it was observed during the course of the research in Village C, that anyone at any time could go to the forest to collect dried leaves and twigs for fuel purpose. Regular pruning of the forest was carried out (once in a year) and all households had an equal share in the produce so collected. At the same time, no one was allowed to cut any tree. If anyone was found breaking this rule, he had to pay a fine which was decided by the "Village Council".

On the other hand, as observed in Tables 1 and 2, the nature of involvement in Village A is mostly "altruistic" and the people are mostly involved as "voluntary labour" to implement

decisions made by the local leaders. As such, here the people's "level of participation" in the resource management is quite low.

However, originally the NGPO in this village (Village A) had succeeded in mobilizing the people to meet the challenge of afforestation as one. Various types of collective efforts were devised by the people relating to tree plantation. Due to its work the NGPO spread considerably since its inception, covering 22 villages surrounding the newly created village woodlot. But at the time of the research, the initial euphoria relating to the NGPO had diminished. Although the people had been highly mobilized, this mobilization did not necessarily involve their participation in decision-making. Moreover, once the NGPO spread its network, it started functioning through a few local leaders arbitrarily selected by it. These were the NGPO's contact people in the village. Only they were informed about its plans and involved in making decisions relating to the management of the resource. Consequently, the people felt that the organization was not accountable to the locals. These factors eventually disheartened the locals. At the time when this research was carried out, a feeling of alienation was observed among the masses towards the organization.

In between these two cases (i.e., the "nature" and "levels" of involvement in Village A and C) lies the case of Village B. Here the "nature of involvement" is mostly in the form of "passive support" to the work of the Village Forest Committee (VFC) which represents the people. People here mostly participate by endorsing the decisions made by the VFC and implementing these decisions as paid labour. Whenever they are unhappy with the

working of the VFC, they change the members on the basis of majority decision, thereby, making it obvious that the organization is accountable to them.

Similarly, if "extent of involvement in the original idea of afforestation" is taken as a variable to establish the degree of involvement at the initiation stage, it is observed that in Village C the percentage of people involved in perceiving the need for afforestation and taking steps to initiate it is the highest. Contrary is the situation observed in Village A (See table 3). However, the percentage of people's mobilization is the highest in Village A. Once informed, the people in this village took active part in motivating others to cooperate with the afforestation work.

A review of the experience of CPR management in the sample cases, therefore, indicates that the organizational arrangement in Village C is most conducive for people's involvement in rule formulation and rule enforcement. Often major collective decisions concerning the resource management are made in general meetings comprising the heads of households. In Village B, and in Village A to some extent, collective-choice rules are unfavourable for affective people's involvement in rule formulation and rule enforcement. Most of the decisions are made by small section of the population - the traditional leader or the elite as in the case of Village A, or by the people's representatives as in Village B. The people themselves are either indifferent to the organization (Village A) or render passive support to its activities (Village B).

Table 3: The extent of people's involvement in the original idea of afforestation

Extent of involvement	Village A	Village B	Village C	Row Total
1 No involvement	-	-	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.4%)
2 Was informed through friends/relatives	-	2 (2.4%)	1 (0.9%)	3 (1.2%)
3 Attended a village meeting where was informed about the afforestation work	26 (40.6%)	43 (51.8%)	46 (42.6%)	115 (45.1%)
4 Once informed took part in motivating others	34 (53.1%)	25 (30.1%)	30 (27.8%)	89 (34.9%)
5 Involved in perceiving the need for afforestation and in its initiation	4 (6.3%)	13 (15.7%)	30 (27.8%)	47 (18.4%)
Column Total	64 (25.1%)	83 (32.5%)	108 (42.4%)	255 (100%)

Calculated chi-square (P) = 23.32713

Degree of freedom = 8 ; $P > \chi^2_{0.95}$

Note: Figures outside the parentheses indicate the number of households involved and within the parentheses indicate their column percentage.

Section 4

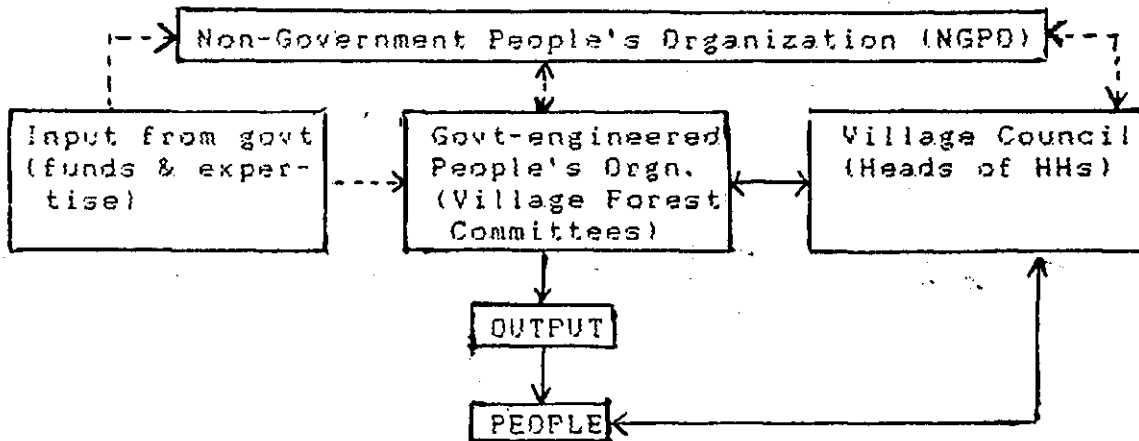
A review of the experiences of CPR management in the sample cases, thus, provides certain insights about "institutionalized participation" and as such, about the role of different local organizations in CPR management.

In the first place, it is obvious that involving only the local NGPOs in the management of CPRs can prove to be an ineffective proposition after some time. No doubt, it has often been argued that these organizations can effectively structure

local participation, enforce accountability of central planners to local concerns and thereby, ensure more sustainable implementation of programmes at the local level. But, as observed in Village A, this may not always be the case in reality. The inclusion of only this type of organizations in the management of CPRs may most likely undercut rather than undermine the factor of "organizational accountability" to the people. This is most likely because in such circumstances, there is no system of "checks and balance" on the NGPO's activities, neither from the people nor from the government. This, in turn, is due to the fact that the NGPO's members are not selected by the people and that, for all practical purposes, it is free from any sort of government control. Thereby, there is every possibility of NGPOs becoming "arbitrary" in the management of resource and hence losing "legitimacy" in the eyes of the local people.

On the other hand, the GEPOs like the Village Forest Committees which are specifically constituted by the state to manage the natural resources in rural areas can provide necessary "legitimacy". While allowing for people's participation through representatives, these organizations can ensure both the government's accountability to local problems, as well as the organization's accountability to the people. But such organizations lack the ability to act as "catalysts" since they allow only representative participation. It follows from this that no single organizational arrangement would optimize the goal of CPR management. There is, therefore, a need for an integrated approach to CPR management through a coordinated effort of both the state and the locals.

In the light of these arguments, a three-pronged organizational design involving the people, the GEPO and the NGPOs is being suggested for management of common property resources. The mechanics of this design can be highlighted through the following chart:



In the chart a strong relationship is implied between the GEPO and the informal Village Council. On the other hand, the relationship is the reverse between the government, the NGPO, and the Village Council. The double arrowed lines in the chart indicate a coordinated relationship between the GEPO, the NGPO, the Village Council and the people where each is accountable to the other. The role of the government is that of a supportive body.

The above model, thus, indicates a coordinated relationship between the state and the people in the management of the resources. The role of the NGPO is that of a catalyst in mobilizing the local people, generating awareness among them and, on the whole, acting as a pressure group in the management process. The main responsibility of carrying out the management activity could be allowed to rest on the GEPO which specifically

operates at the local level and which are accountable to the people. This GEPO could be made to operate as part of the informal Village Council. The Council could be the legislative body with the GEPO acting as the executive body accountable to the Council. In such a system the involvement of people in the management of resource could be greatly enthused, thereby, ensuring its efficacious management.

This organizational design is suggestive of a model which could be employed to work out the logistics of an organizational strategy to manage common property resources in India. Taking local conditions into consideration, this broad design could be modified, if necessary, to tackle the problems of CPR management.

APPENDIX - A

ORISSA FOREST ACT, 1972 (EXTRACT)

30 Constitution of village forests

1 The state government may, by notification, constitute any land at their disposal to be a village forest for the benefit of any village community or group of village communities, and may in like manner vary or cancel any such notification.

2 Every such notification shall specify the limits of such village forest:

Explanation - "Land at the disposal of Government" includes all unoccupied land, all temporarily occupied land or occupied without permission, whether assessed or unassessed, and all communal forests but does not include land recorded in the name of any private person or institution in the record of rights in force which is prepared and maintained or is deemed to be prepared and maintained under the Orissa Survey and Settlement Act, 1958, 3 of 1959.

31. Power to make rules for village forests

1 The state government may make rules for regulating the management of village forests and for prescribing the conditions under which the community or group of communities for the benefit of which any such village forest is constituted may be provided with forest produce or with pasture, and their duties in respect of the protection and improvement of such forest.

2 The State Government may, by such rules, declare all or any of the provisions of Chapter II to be applicable to village forests.

32 Inquiry into and settlement of rights

All claims to any rights, other than the rights of the village community or group of village communities for the benefit of which such village forest is constituted, shall be required into, recorded and provided for in such manner as may be prescribed.

APPENDIX B

THE ORISSA VILLAGE FOREST RULES, 1985 (EXTRACT)

Village Forest Committee:

3.1(i) The Management of every village forest shall vest in a Committee called the village Forest Committee comprising the Sarpanch/s of the concerned Grama Panchayat/s and the ward member/s belonging to the village for which the village forest is

notified the forester/s Revenue Inspectors and such other persons less than three and not more than five of the said village.

(ii) In a meeting of the villages convened for the purpose by the Forester, the villagers shall decide how many out of them are to be selected as members to the committee, who are to be selected and select such number of members;

(iii) There shall be at least one woman member among the member so selected; due regard shall be paid to the representation of the S T S C and landless labourers.

(2) (i) The Sarpanch of the Grama Panchayat shall be the Chairman of Committee:

Provided that where more than one Gramas are involved in Forest, the Sarpanch concerning the highest populated Grama shall be the Chairman of the Committee.

(ii) Every meeting of the committee shall be convened by the Forester and the Chairman shall preside over the meeting.

(iii) In the absence of such Chairman in the meeting of the Committee, the members present shall choose one amongst the non official members to act as the Chairman for that meeting.

(3) The term of Office of the non-official members of the committee selected under sub rule (i) shall be two years.

Maintenance of boundaries:

4. Every Committee shall suitably demarcate the boundaries of the village forest with the help of the Forester concerned and maintain the demarcation in good condition.

Acts prohibited in village forests:

5. Save as provided under these rules, no person shall cut, lopped or in any way injure appropriate or remove any tree or any lopping thereof, which is grown in any village forest or knowingly or willfully permit or abet the cutting, lopping, injuring, appropriating or removing of the same by any other person, without having first obtained the permit in accordance with these rules.

Protection:

6. It shall be duty of all person belonging to the community or communities for whose benefit the village forest is constituted to afford protection and ensure preservation of the plantations therein and, in the event of any injury to such plantations from whatever cause, as soon as possible report to the nearest local forest officer or police officer.

Meeting of the Committee:

7(1) The Committee shall meet for deliberations as often as required but atleast once in every quarter. The forester being the convener of the Committee shall issue notices thereof in a book called the Notice Bok to be maintained for the purpose, the Forester shall record the proceedings of every meeting in a book called the Proceeddings Bok to be maintained for the purpose and the proceedings so recorded shall be signed by the Chairman of the Committee. The Chairman shall forward resolutions of the Committee passed in the meeting to the concerned Range Officer and Tahasildar. The Forester shall be the custodian of the Notice Book and Proceeding book.

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