

Restoration of common lands for enhancing livelihoods of rural communities: a case study of GO-NGO collaboration in Andhra Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

Common Property Resources (CPRs) are considered to be important life support systems for the rural economy affecting agriculture, livestock and various other livelihoods of communities. Grazing on the commons is crucial to the viability of most of the small and marginal holders in rain-fed farming systems across Andhra Pradesh (AP). However, production as well as productivity of the CPRs is declining in the state due to excessive exploitation of natural resources and poor management practices. More over, the very existence of CPRs is under threat due to lack of comprehensive policy on their management with no specific rights or responsibilities assigned to the communities and encroachments. In the above context, a collaborative arrangement between the Rural Development Department of Government of Andhra Pradesh and NGO networks was established for strengthening the efforts to conserve, develop and protect common lands through community involvement in two districts; Anantapur and Chittoor under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). This paper discusses about the processes involved in the collaboration, community organization, strengthening the Village Institutions, natural resources development (NRM) and livelihoods enhancement. The outcome shows that there has been an encouraging community participation in planning and execution of CPR plans besides establishing inter phase between CPRs and livelihoods though there is a need for bringing convergence with other line departments involved in rural development. However, this pilot can be taken as a good model for preparing NRM plans; especially CPR----

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management component under NREGS and for scaling up with suitable modifications wherever there is large concentration of commons in the state.

Key words:

Common lands, natural resources, livelihoods, collaboration, government & NGO networks

INTRODUCTION

Common Property Resources (CPRs) are important sources of livelihood to rural households in India. The commons provide wide ranging contributions to village economy. CPRs in the context of natural resources located in rural India, refer to the resources on which a well defined village community has inalienable use rights (Jodha 1992). The National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO 1999) estimated commons at 15% of the total geographical area of India. Twenty three per cent of this area is community pasture and grazing lands, 16% is village forests and woodlots, and 61% includes village site, threshing floors, and other barren and wastelands. As per the report, the rural poor derived 54 % of their total income from the commons. The commons contribute 58% of fuel wood consumed by rural households. Fodder contribution from CPRs is also significant across the country in terms of both feed and pasture lands. The commons also function as buffer zones insulating the reserve forests from biotic pressures. However, with the decline of the commons, even forest patches are being threatened by over extraction leading to severe degradation. The important factors that contributed to rapid decline in CPRs are; population (human as well as livestock) growth, conversion of CPRs into private lands, fragmentation of land, and breakdown of community management systems. The important task ahead is to establish appropriate institutional mechanisms for management of the CPRs at the community level.

This report has three primary goals. First, in order to provide a backdrop of the CPR effort, we report the development of CPR management by discussing how various common lands have been used historically and by documenting relevant local, state, and national policies. Second, we bring to light the key roles of stakeholders in the

process of CPR management. Finally, we provide a case study of a recent CPR pilot project in two districts of Andhra Pradesh.

BACKGROUND

Management of the Commons

Wade (1986) presented a case of a successful collective management system that organized and directed in community grazing land in Kurnool District of AP. The case argued that both the fodder production and equity were higher with the management system's specific rules and institutions than they would have been in those same villages in the absence of rules and institutions. Arnold and Stewart (1991) stated that a CPR is subject to individual use, but not to individual possession and is used by a number of users each of whom has independent rights of use. The forest lands are managed by the forest department while the revenue department owns non-forest wastelands. Though the ownership of the forest and revenue CPRs lies with the state, they are accessed and used by the communities for various day to day needs in the form of open access and user rights. However, the state ownership of common lands or forests (alienating the CPR management from communities) had been a significant reason for the shrinkage of CPR area in Andhra Pradesh (Suresh Kumar 2000), thus, the participation of the communities and governance aspects acquire relevance in relation to access, control and use of CPR (Mishra and Bajpai 2001).

Policy of the commons

In 1985, the Government of India Government of India (GOI) created the National Wastelands Development Board in the Ministry of Environment & Forests (MOEF) to shoulder the responsibilities of regenerating the country's wastelands. This institution became the Department of Wasteland Development in 1992 under the Ministry of Rural Development and then was renamed the Department of Land Resources in 1999 (DOLR 2010). In 2007, the National Council for Land Reforms (NCLR) was constituted to lay down broad guidelines and policy recommendations on agrarian relations and land reforms. The GOI constituted a committee in this regard to look into the state agrarian relations and unfinished tasks in land reforms, with a sub-committee to exclusively look into issues of CPR. The committee submitted a report to the NCLR in October 2008, recommending the need to put in place a land use policy and the revival

of land use boards at the district level to ensure open use of agrarian land and access of the rural poor to CPR.

Discussions on grazing policy and thereby the local land use has also been in progress in different states. The recognition of community rights under the Forest Rights Act of 2007 and the enhanced allocation of funds for investments into natural resources through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), in the backdrop of the 73rd amendment of the Constitution (1994), enabled the devolution of powers to local self governing institutions and has opened several opportunities in establishing secure common property regimes across the country.

Status of commons in AP

Andhra Pradesh has a geographical area of 27.440 million ha. Wasteland accounts for 4.9 million ha or about 18% of the total area (GOAP 2008). An extent of 4.881 ha. of wastelands has been identified and mapped using remote sensing techniques in 19 districts of Andhra Pradesh. These constitute 19.78% of the total geographical area. Most of these waste lands lie in the region between the forest land and the low-lying croplands, being categorized as revenue land or non-forest wasteland. These lands are considered to be important life support systems for the rural economy that affect agriculture, livestock and various other livelihoods of rural communities. Grazing on the commons is crucial to the viability of most of the small and marginal landholders and most rural agrarian livelihoods are directly and indirectly linked to animal husbandry. There are no specific rights and responsibilities assigned to the communities either in the form of tenure or ownership over the commons. Over the years, due to the demand for cultivable land by the growing population, such patches were either distributed by the government to the disadvantaged sections of the society or leased out for various purposes or encroached by both the needy and greedy. This increased demand has led to denudation of the foothills and undulating landscapes and has led to negative effects on groundwater recharge, surface water harvest, and biomass reduction. On the other hand, lease of revenue land for legitimate mining has also reduced opportunities on the wastelands for they have deprived local communities of their access to traditional biomass resources (fodder, food, and fiber).

KEY ROLES OF STAKEHOLDERS IN CPR MANAGEMENT

The GO-NGO collaborative arrangements

A collaborative arrangement between the Commissioner of Rural Development (CRD), Government of Andhra Pradesh and NGO networks was established during the year 2008 on a pilot basis in two AP districts (Anantapur and Chittoor) for strengthening the efforts to conserve, develop and protect common lands through community involvement. The funds were leveraged under the CPR pilot project from NREGS for carrying out the activities aimed at ecological restoration of the commons.

Prior experience of NGOs

Prior to the current project discussed in this paper, NGOs and NGO networks in AP were carrying out commendable efforts in bringing communities into the fold of CPR management. CPR provides a resource base for livelihoods of landless people and for large numbers of livestock herders. This crucial role of CPR, combined with the fact that many CPR are located in environmentally important catchment areas of major streams, illustrates the need for conscientious use and management of common lands as these determine the health of streams and the condition of water harvesting structures downstream. Due to NGO efforts in CPR management, a provision was made by the AP government for long-term leasing of some common lands to tree growers cooperatives under a government order dated 21.06.1989.

The APPS (Anantha ParyavaranaSamithi) Network was initiated in 1992 involving 15 NGOs and all the partners focused on investing their energies to improve the status of commons by strengthening community level institutional arrangements. The environmental protection committees promoted by APPS secured user rights through the local administration. During the same period, Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), another NGO, worked with 1526 village institutions in 27 districts across six states in the country, and assisted the village communities in protecting 107 094 ha. of forest and revenue commons.

Efforts of both APPS network members and FES yielded positive results due to involvement of village institutions in protection and regeneration of revenue commons. This process benefited the dependent communities directly in the form of improved biomass (fuel wood and fodder) and indirectly through providing ecosystem services like pollination and pest control in agricultural crops. A study taken up by FES in Sadhukonda Reserve Forest of Chittoor at Thamballapalle revealed that each hectare of common land is capable of producing four tonnes of grasses and even if we deduct 50-75 % as unpalatable (*Cymbopogon martini* and other similar coarse grasses), still the remaining 25 % is enough to address the fodder scarcity issues considering the availability of large chunks of revenue commons (FES 2003). APPS network assessed the value of NTFP extracted from the community protected CPR to be around \$ 466 210 which benefited 2275 user groups.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) - an opportunity to regenerate commons

One of the most important interventions of the government in the recent years towards strengthening rural livelihoods is NREGA 2005 (NREGA 2010). The scheme not only provides the poor a short-term benefit in the form of wage employment through the right to work but also enables them to undertake interventions to strengthen their livelihoods base by rejuvenating their natural resources base – both in common as well as private lands. NREGA has also given prime importance to the Gram Panchayats (GPs) and the communities an opportunity to develop their plans and get them implemented. The scheme guarantees 100 days of employment in a financial year to any rural household whose adult members are willing to do unskilled manual work. The Act has come into force with effect from February 2006 in 200 districts initially and later on extended to all the rural districts of India from the financial year 2008-09. Dry land agriculture, unlike irrigated agriculture or other forms of non-farm livelihoods has strong links with commons and the key to the sustainability of dry land agriculture lies in reviving the linkages between the CPR and agriculture base in the area and strengthening the institutional arrangements for the governance of the CPR. In this context, the NREGS with its pronounced priorities of soil and water conservation activities provides a timely

opportunity to work on the sustainability of farming systems in rain fed areas through regeneration of common lands.

The role of the state government

On behalf of the state government, CRD implements natural resource based programmes in close association with rural communities through District Water Management Agencies (DWMA). CRD also coordinates implementation of NREGS which aims at providing minimum of 100 days wage employment to the rural poor. With the backdrop of success of some initiatives in regenerating common lands and generating livelihoods by NGOs, CRD was requested to support all initiatives of natural regeneration of common lands and also, to initiate a state level program to address this important and much neglected subject. Appreciating the importance of the issue, the CRD came forward to replicate the process of community protection and development of common lands belonging to the category of un-assessed waste (UAW) lands where ownership is vested with the revenue department.

Collaborative arrangements

Though FES and APPS network NGOs realized the potential of the NREGS to regenerate common lands, it required a special programme to be developed to give required push for investing in commons by the government. After several rounds of discussions, it was agreed by both partners that a collaborative arrangement between CRD and NGO networks would be established in the selected districts for strengthening the efforts to conserve, develop and protect common lands by harnessing the funding opportunities provided through NREGS. To formalize this process, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was arrived between the government and NGOs with the important terms being:

- a. Recognizing the importance of developing CPR lands under NREGS and the role of selected NGO in this process.
- b. Facilitating the convergence of the funds and programs at village/ block level community based institutions established for the purpose of protection and development of common lands in the selected villages/ blocks.
- c. Identifying selected NGOs in the pilot districts

d. A lead NGO acting as Network Coordinator for coordinating between NGO members and DWMA

CASE STUDY OF CPR PILOT PROGRAMME

The CPR pilot initiative came into existence with a purpose of managing and regenerating the degraded common lands through sustained community action and strengthening livelihoods of dependent communities. There is a necessity to study how far the collaborative arrangements have been effective in bringing the community, NGOs and the state government together for effective management of commons and enhancement of livelihoods through capacity building of stakeholders and to take any corrective action, if required.

Study objectives

- To capture the progress made in realizing the programme planning and execution
- To analyze the programme interventions in institutional arrangements from management and governance perspectives
- To assess the impact of this pilot initiative on community involvement and documenting the processes
- To explore the scope for up scaling the initiative in other districts.

Study area

Anantapur and parts of adjoining Chittoor are some of the poorest and most backward parts of Andhra Pradesh and they have been experiencing high drought incidence and heavy groundwater exploitation in recent years. The economy of the region is by and large based on rain-fed agriculture. As well, livestock holds a prominent place in the rural economy of the region. The bovines (cattle and buffaloes) constitute close to 40 per cent of the total livestock population in the region and the ovines (sheep and goats) almost 60 per cent. Among the non-land holding category, most of the people depend on farm labour for sustenance. In habitations close to commons, people make a living by cutting and selling fuel wood, and collecting, doing value addition to, and marketing non-timber forest produce (NTFP).

Study methodology

This study has been carried out by using both primary data compiled through visits to the villages where the CPR-NREGS programme has been under implementation in both districts and secondary data was collected from NGO Network Partners involved in facilitating the implementation of this pilot initiative. Seven Villages were selected on random basis representing the main regions of Anantapur District (five villages) and Chittoor (two villages) for conducting field visits. The specific purpose of the field visits and interaction with the communities was to understand the importance and impact of the programme from the communities' perspectives, basically to get a feel of the planning process and implementation, especially for understanding the role of the village institutions in managing the commons. The visits were also intended to capture the learning experiences of the communities from the pilot Initiative. Focused group discussions were held by involving all the representatives of APPS network partners, mandal (local administrative unit) level organizers who were part of the facilitation team and community leaders from the project villages to get a larger picture of the project processes involved in developing the action plans covering institutional arrangements, protection and management of assigned CPR lands, negotiating with village institutions and coordination with District Water Management Agencies (DWMAs) which work at district level under the rural development department to get the NREGS shelf of works (list of works to be executed in a particular year) approved, implementation of activities and understanding the immediate outcomes of the initiative. The study team also reviewed the project reports available with both APPS coordinating office and FES team to capture the processes involved in planning to implementation stage. FES worked on revenue wastelands of Chittoor district by involving communities.

Scope and coverage

The program was taken up in contiguous blocks of revenue or GP common lands such as village wastelands, hillocks, topes, social forestry lands, grazing lands and stream banks etc. Blocks of such contiguous lands exceeding 10 ha. in one block where communities depended for their livelihoods or production system needs were clearly marked on the cadastral maps and Survey of India (SI) topo-sheets. Within these blocks, villages where sufficient common lands (>40 ha.) are available, resolution from concerned GP has been taken for carrying out preparatory work and

developing the common land as per the project approach and readiness of community.

Programme components

- Organizing and capacitating dependent communities to establish rules and institutional mechanisms for protection and development of the demarcated common land, and also, establish rules for provisioning and appropriation of benefits of regeneration among communities.
- Facilitating formal assignment of usufruct rights over the regenerated common lands
- Planning for development of common lands with improved soil and moisture conservation, water harvesting and recharge measures to supplement aided natural regeneration and enrichment plantation.
- Strengthening common lands based livelihoods through procurement, establishment of required storage, processing, marketing infrastructure and other facilities

Implementation arrangements

Implementation arrangements were made at state, district, mandal and field levels to have clarity on roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders.

TABLE 1: *Project implementation arrangements*

| State Level | District Level | Mandal Level | Field Level |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p>A steering committee was constituted for the purpose of giving policy directions to the program at the state level which will be convened by the CRD.</p> <p>A state level technical consortium of resource organizations was established to provide detailed professional back-up to the program.</p> | <p>The DWMA would anchor the program at the district level.</p> | <p>A committee presided over by the President of the Mandal Parishad (Intermediate local body institution) would provide the necessary directions for</p> | <p>The project would be facilitated by experienced/trained organizations nominated by the DWMA at the field level (NGOs and federations of self help groups) and they would act as Project Facilitation Agencies (PFA). Each PFA would handle approximately 1000 ha. area or more for CPR development. The facilitating organizations will deploy full-time staff for the</p> |

| | | | |
|--|--|--------------|---|
| | | the program. | program with experience in community organization, natural resources development and livelihoods. |
|--|--|--------------|---|

Project Partners and coverage

Totally 88 257 ha. CPR area was identified. In Phase I and II, 178 villages were covered under the project against the original target of 113 villages and plans were drawn to cover 212 adjoining villages in Phase III to cover as much CPR lands available as possible. The pilot project was initiated in both Chittoor and Anantapur Districts during 2008 and initially APPS and Timbaktu Collective in Anantapur and FES & Outreach in Chittoor were part of the initiative. The details of the partner networks and the NGOs and the plans drawn up for different phases are given below.

TABLE 2: *Details of NGOs and villages involved in the programme*

| Sl. No. | District | Network/ NGOs | Mandals (Lowest administrative unit in the district) | NGOs | CBOs | No. of villages taken up so far | | | |
|---------|-----------|---------------------|--|------|------|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|-------|
| | | | | | | Phase I (ongoing) | Phase II (new) | Remaining villages ★ | Total |
| 1. | Anantapur | APPS | 25 | 13 | 107 | 25 | 82 | 123 | 230 |
| 2. | Anantapur | Timbaktu Collective | 3 | 1 | 10 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 13 |
| 3. | Anantapur | PRADHAN | 8 | 7 | 25 | 9 | 16 | 20 | 45 |
| 4. | Anantapur | Pancha Bhoota | 6 | 5 | 8 | 2 | 6 | 8 | 16 |
| 5. | Anantapur | FES | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 9 |
| | Sub-total | | 44★★ | 27 | 153 | 41 | 112 | 160 | 313 |
| 6. | Chittoor | FES | 3 | 1 | 23 | 3 | 20 | 52 | 75 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|-------------|----------|-------|-----------|--------|----|-----|-------|-----|
| 7. | Chittoor | OUTREACH | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | Sub-total | | 5 | 2 | 5+20 | 5 | 20 | 52 | 77 |
| | GRAND TOTAL | | 49 ★★ | 29 ★★★ | 46+132 | 46 | 132 | 212 ★ | 390 |

★ These villages are to be considered for planning during phase III

★★ About five mandals are repeated among NGOs but villages are different in such mandals

★★★ One NGO is repeated

Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of CRD, DWMA and PFA were clearly defined (Table 3) in a MOU signed by them.

TABLE 3 : *Roles and Responsibilities of implementing agencies*

| CRD | DWMA | PFA/NGO network |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide policy and administrative support by developing necessary software, guiding the district administration on the concepts, ensuring adequate funding support and allocation of usufruct rights to the communities, development and protection of common lands through appropriate legally binding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocate the project sites to NGO network and its members and consolidate the action plans prepared by them as per the rules of NREGS and take necessary steps for approval and further action Facilitate the convergence of departments and schemes Ensure the process of conferring of usufruct rights to the communities Support the process of capacity building of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designate facilitating team for initiating community level action and mobilize necessary financial costs Identify potential sites for treatment, facilitate the process of establishing and strengthening VIs, and develop action plans for conservation, development and protection of common lands Ensure that the works are executed qualitatively as per the timeframe through community participation |

| | | |
|---|----------------------|--|
| entitlements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalize and coordinate the partnerships among DWMA, NGO Networks and CRD through MOU. • conducting the meetings of partners • facilitate convergence and documentation of good practices | various stakeholders | and take care of usufruct rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide capacity building support to the CBOs and conduct participatory monitoring • Ensure that each partner performs as per the agreed roles and produce desired results |
|---|----------------------|--|

Village Institution arrangements

MOU with GPs

The GP under whose jurisdiction major area of the proposed CPR falls would facilitate formation of the cooperative with help from the PFA and other GPs. The cooperative is an institutional mechanism through which the GP would enable the development and management of the CPR. The GP would sign a MoU with the cooperative laying out the detailed terms of reference including roles and responsibilities and registration of the cooperative, payment of annual lease-fee to the GP, audited books of accounts, filing of returns and other procedural and constitutional aspects. The GP would help the Cooperative in enforcement of protection rules and in accessing government programs like employment guarantee scheme.

Common Lands Development Cooperative

A cooperative would be formally registered with individuals from habitations having customary rights on the CPR as members as identified by PFA under the AP Mutually Aided Cooperative Act 1995. Membership and other rules of the cooperative would be evolved in line with the above Act. Two members (men and women) from each household would become members of the cooperative. The PFAs would clearly identify secondary / subsidiary stakes of communities and make provisions of rights and

mechanisms for the equitable sharing of grazing and other usufructs over the commons. The Executive committee of the co-operative must represent various product interests, dependent communities and habitations with 50% representation of women. Either the President / Vice President and two of the other four office bearers should be women. User groups of various areas/ commodities should be formed mainly to decentralize the decision making, introduce sustainable harvesting systems, improving quality of the produce, collective marketing and for capacity building. Revenue department/ GP would give the land on lease to the cooperative as per a government order issued for this purpose. The lease period would be for a defined number of years and the lease would follow the terms as defined in the government order. The lands demarcated for the program had to be clearly defined as the land allocated for the biomass needs of the local communities and any change in the land use must be prohibited. The previous encroachments within the area being protected needed to be clearly demarcated and any encroachments vacated would also be entered subsequently in the POB.

Rights on the commons/products

Individuals have rights to collect the produce from the protected area for self-consumption or for sale by self-labour and abiding the rules of protection, extraction and management procedures as defined by the cooperative. The Cooperative of user groups would have clear and unalienable rights for the period mentioned in the government order over the usufructs from the regenerated common lands. The cooperative would maintain books of accounts clearly documenting the quantities of harvest, sales, appropriation by the user groups, revenue realized and payments to the GP. These books would be annually audited. The GP would have the right to revisit the MOU as per the procedures prescribed in the GO in case the cooperative becomes non-functional. It is important that the produce from commons is shared equitably giving due preference to the poor and women. The by-laws of the cooperative must include the local sharing rules as arrived by the communities and the preferential allocations to the poor. Membership fee paid to the cooperative is one of the key stake-building mechanisms. The cooperative society will form a sub-committee to manage the common lands. The task of this committee is to enforce the rules commonly arrived at and detailed in the by-laws, ensure maintenance of assets created etc.

Programme Strategies

Participatory Planning

The programme was planned to be implemented in three phases; phase I with 25% investment for initiating the processes and activities, Phase II with 40% investment when the communities internalize the sharing and management rules and Phase III with 35% investment for improving the biomass based livelihoods including livestock development. The participatory plans on natural regeneration, soil and moisture conservation, water harvesting, supplementary biomass planting measures were planned with active involvement of user groups (Table 4).

TABLE 4: *Program Phases*

| S.No. | Phase | Phase Activities | Time frame |
|-----------|---|---|------------------|
| Phase I | Institution Development Phase | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive awareness generation and capacity building of the communities. • Establishing institutional rules for protection and sharing • Formation of the Cooperative and user groups • Getting the formal lease agreements on the usufructs of common lands • Taking up natural resource development by getting sanctions of the proposals , enhancement of livelihoods and marketing initiatives in a small way | one to two years |
| Phase II | Intensive Natural Resources Development Phase | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of plan for intensive development of natural resources • Development of land, water and biomass • Identifying various forest and non-forest products, strengthening user groups, capacity building on extraction practices, and preparing livelihood development plans | Up to one year |
| Phase III | Intensive Livelihoods Development Phase | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing livelihood related infrastructure including storage, collective marketing initiatives etc. • Further development of natural resources | two years |
| Phase IV | Consolidation phase | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidation of the Institutions • Networking of Institutions | one year |

| | | | |
|--|--|----------------------------|--|
| | | • Preparing for withdrawal | |
|--|--|----------------------------|--|

Community Organization

Open access to the common lands is the foremost reason for their degradation. Several attempts for raising plantations in common lands failed in the past for lack of appropriate community level rules viz., restricted use, social protection and rule enforcement mechanisms. Experience indicated that community interest in protection of these lands was the key to the success of the program. Community organization had to be an inclusive process involving all the communities that have customary rights and livelihood dependence on the common lands. Also, the danger of exclusion of certain communities needed to be carefully looked into. Since the extent of the common lands varied across the districts and locations, the boundaries of common lands and the definition of customary rights did not follow administrative boundaries of villages / GPs / habitations. It was, therefore, essential to form and nurture separate organizations of the stakeholders (individuals/ habitations) having livelihood dependence on the CPR. The first step in the process of community organization was to identify the customary rights of habitations/ communities on the identified common lands in consultation with the GPs through participatory processes.

Processes adopted

The Pilot Project was taken up in those villages where the Partner NGOs have been working on Protection and management of common lands for many years. Partnering NGOs facilitated village level discussions, undertook transect walks with the community to analyze the status of the Common land and deliberated on the intervention plans. Apart from the activities to improve soil moisture status, water harvesting, groundwater recharge and land development, the communities were facilitated to come up with strategies and Intervention plans to improve the livelihoods of the commons dependant households. Initially, each NGO prepared a detailed action plan for development of common land in one village involving the community and shared the same with other partnering organizations. After several rounds of discussions, the common framework of action plan was finalized and plans were developed for Phase I villages to cover common land blocks in 46 Villages. The action plans, which were finalized and shared

in the habitation level Grama sabha (village meeting) to get the approval were later presented in respective GPs for approval for integration of the plans in GP shelf of activities, which could be taken up through NREGS. The Plans approved by GP were then shared with DWMA /Mandal Level NREGS team for getting necessary administrative sanctions and generation of estimates. CRD issued instructions to DWMAAs for integration of the CPR Plans into the NREGS work plans of respective GPs. The works were taken up as per the sanctioned estimates in the respective CPR blocks by involving the village institutions and GP. The leaders of Village Institutions took active part in getting the field works executed and ensuring the quality of the works being taken up as well as timely payment of wages to the workers

Protection Arrangements

The key arrangements for protecting the commons evolved over years with large scale experience on ground. Protection of commons from fire had been a major area of concern. Apart from taking up physical measures like creation of fire-breaks, strips and borders, fire-fighting committees were constituted for quick reaction in case of fire. A ban on hacking the trees was the second major important community norm tried to be institutionalized with appropriate enforcement mechanisms. Social fencing for regulated grazing is important and measures were taken to regulate grazing must be regulated at least for few years in areas where intensive seed dibbling or plantation activity were taken up. Appropriate grazing systems were evolved in consultation with the stakeholders, primarily herders. Institutionalizing protection rules needs intense discussion with the dependent communities and internalization of the rules by them. No provisions were made for watch and ward during the first phase of protection so as to increase the community level accountability, leadership and ownership. Community was expected to mobilize the costs by themselves, if essential. It was decided to provide nominal support during the subsequent stages where seed dibbling or supplementary plantation would be taken up.

Biomass regeneration

The bio-diversity being the key to regeneration of the degraded common lands, natural regeneration was taken as the principle vehicle for sustainable biomass improvement. However, dibbling seeds of the native trees/ grasses and selective plantations was

considered to be an important activity to augment the process of natural regeneration. Mono-plantations with one or two species were decided to be avoided. The user groups dependent on the common lands were given importance to have a final say in this regard.

Fund management

Detailed phase wise budget allocations would be worked out at unit cost of \$ 222.2 per ha and releases made as per progress. The funds earmarked for facilitation, capacity building and community organization would be released to the PFAs while the monitoring and evaluation funds would be spent by the DWMA. Funds for natural resources development, livelihoods and marketing will be released directly to the designated accounts of the cooperatives. The funds for livelihoods and marketing would be released in the form of revolving fund which would be rotated among the members subject to payment of prescribed percentage of interest. The project cost would be based on the action plans prepared for each block which would be integrated into shelf of activities under NREGS (Table 4). The funding pattern and payment for completed works would be as per the rules of the NREGS. Members of NGO networks would meet the facilitation costs from their own sources. Funding support for capacity building, strengthening of institutions and livelihoods promotion would be mobilized through convergence with DWMA's and DRDAs (District Rural Development Agencies) and funds raised by the respective NGOs.

TABLE 4 : *The budget break up*

| Item | Budget share |
|--|---------------------|
| Facilitation including planning | 25% |
| Capacity building and community organisation | 10% |
| Natural resources Development | 30% |
| Livelihoods and marketing | 30% |
| Monitoring and Evaluation | 5% |

The state level technical consortium would evolve appropriate evaluation rules, milestones and performance indicators for each phase. The broad success criteria for the program towards the end of the consolidation phase would include internalization of the rules of protection, management and sharing of usufruct rights and the enforcement mechanisms by the community, implementing all the participatory plans with active participation and community contribution, strengthening the livelihoods of dependent communities through product flows from the common lands and building the capacities of the community/ cooperative for regenerating the common land and addressing the livelihood issues as well as collective marketing issues.

Progress in Restoration of the Commons

Drainage line treatment and land development were important activities taken up for improving the moisture regime besides attempting regeneration and reforestation on a limited scale during the first two phases (Table 5).

TABLE 5: *Details of the nature of Works planned and actually taken up in Phase I & II*

| Nature works | Phase I | | Phase II | |
|--|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| | Planned % | Actual Amount Spent % | Planned % | Actual Amount Spent % |
| Drainage Line Treatment (for water harvesting and reducing run-off & erosion) | 27 | 39 | 30 | 43 |
| Land Development | 40 | 60 | 45 | 53 |
| Reforestation/Regeneration | 33 | 01 | 25 | 4 |

The Work plans were evolved incorporating the above activities for implementation in 25 villages during Phase I and in 88 villages during Phase II. The broad outlay of the plans along with the physical and financial progress taken up are given in Table 6.

TABLE 6: *Overview of the plans and Progress of Phase I & II*

| Phase | Mandals Covered | Villages | Hectares Planned to | Budget Planned | Expenditure incurred |
|-------|-----------------|----------|---------------------|----------------|----------------------|
|-------|-----------------|----------|---------------------|----------------|----------------------|

| | | | be covered | \$ | \$ |
|----------|----|----|------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Phase I | 25 | 25 | 3975.8 | 2 474 977 | 453 407 |
| | | | | | |
| Phase II | 25 | 88 | 14914.4 | 3 339 480 | 701 955* |
| | | | | | As on September 2010 |

Though the plans for reforestation/regeneration were made on full-scale, the progress in both phases had been quite slow as the saplings suitable to the sites were not available in the local nurseries. Secondly, it took considerable time to come up with relevant measures for taking up reforestation works in both districts. Meanwhile, the community went for seed dibbling with green manure species (*Sesbania alba*, *Glyricidia* etc) in their lands. Hence the progress under reforestation was noticed to be considerably low. Though the action plans prepared included livelihood components for which support ought to have been sourced from other line departments through convergence, it did not materialize due to the nascent stage of the pilot project. However, efforts towards facilitating convergence of line departments were already initiated in the respective districts. Meanwhile, PFAs initiated formation of user groups in the form of cooperatives with donor support for taking up procurement, processing and marketing of NTFP to augment livelihood source for the communities.

OBSERVATIONS

Community participation

The participation of the communities and the village leaders in getting the plans evolved and executed was quite encouraging. Different Groups who were dependant on the commons for their livelihoods actively involved in the planning process and ensured that the works that would benefit them are included in the works plans. The communities had given preference to take up works in CPRs to the private lands with the rational thinking in mind that the investment in CPRs would benefit agriculture and allied livelihoods since these lands have been neglected for long due to lack of focus or investment. Heartening thing was that the communities were quite aware of the benefits that would flow to the downstream villages through common land treatment upstream.

Communities owned up the processes and the work plans of the pilot project with zeal to ensure that the activities were implemented carefully besides using the resources judiciously to get maximum benefit out of the project. The CPR Project strengthened the Village Institutions and GP relationship. The GPs are now getting actively involved in protection of Commons by integrating CPR works into NREGS Plans of the GP for fund access.

Efforts of NGOs and NGO networks

Focus of the network partners in both the districts had been on strengthening the institutional arrangements from the management viewpoint and governance of the commons vis a vis the livelihood improvement. Efforts were made on regularization and streamlining of systems and mechanisms, basically from the perspective of analytical planning and getting those plans integrated in to the GP Level NREGS Plans. The processes adopted helped in improving the relationship between the habitations and the GPs, the resultant effect being the respective GPs issuing no objection certificates and passing requisite resolutions for facilitating the habitation level village institutions to take part in developing the common lands from both ecological and livelihoods perspective. Since the pilot project was taken up in those villages where the village institutional development process preceded the restoration efforts through NREGS, the facilitating NGOs did not have to spend considerable time and energy in evolution of Institutional arrangements to manage the pilot Initiative at the village level. The project gave a boost to the village institutions to further strengthen the already established rules and institutional mechanisms for protection and development of the demarcated common land, and provisioning and appropriation of benefits of regeneration among communities. Clear by-laws were written in all habitations for development of common lands and sharing of benefits among the dependant house holds equitably. Respective NGOs have initiated formation of user groups in the form of cooperatives with donor support which have been taking up procurement, processing and marketing of NTFP for providing major source of livelihood for the communities

Establishing link between commons and livelihoods

The pilot project had helped in reinforcing livelihood-CPR (mostly in ridges) link in agriculture and animal husbandry activities which are located inevitably in the down

stream low lying areas. Though the project was in its initial stages of implementation, the communities were able to see and appreciate the linkages mentioned above with the commons upstream. Communities appreciated the invisible ecosystem services of pollination, pest control, nutrient transfer, seepage of moisture, fodder, fuel wood and water availability, and seasonal collection of NTFP. Increase in population of small ruminants and dairy cattle (especially in Anantapur where district administration is planning to establish dairy units) and some tribal people returning to cultivation from brewing and selling liquor activity since their bore wells got recharged with ground water are some positive examples of the CPR management.

Gaps in implementation

- Project activities did not cover all the components as outlined in the original project document submitted to CRD due to planning gaps and practical difficulties in starting the project.
- Though the action plans included livelihood components for which support ought to have been sourced from other line departments through convergence, it did not materialize.
- The CPRs which have been under development and protection through the pilot project are still to be entered in the POB register to ensure the legal protection of the area and holding the usufruct rights over the regenerated lands by the communities involved in protection and governance.
- During the Phase I implementation, there was no ceiling of maximum of 100 days employment per household per annum under NREGS but during the current financial year, this restriction came into force affecting the financial progress.

Positive aspects of the CPR project vis-a-vis regular NREGS

Though grama sabha (village level meeting conducted by GP) approves the regular NREGS action plans, the works were identified through project mode planning (following packages with fixed activity components and unit costs) where as the CPR project gave total freedom to the communities in planning. Normally, the focus of the Job card holders taking up NREGS works is more on wage generation rather than the quality or end use of the assets being created where as the communities involved in the CPR project laid focus on asset creation and maintenance. Besides carrying out the

works, the habitation level institutions took care of monitoring the works during the execution of works and maintenance of assets through appropriate mechanisms like forming sub committees to look into specific functions of execution and quality control under the project. This monitoring aspect is not that strong in regular NREGS implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

The project is in initial stage of implementation to show visible impact but it started on a positive note and the results have been satisfactory especially on part of social mobilization and community participation paving way for scaling up such arrangements and activities by the state government. Still lot of efforts have to be made by the NGO partners in implementing all components of the project for achieving the targets so that the impact would be clearly visible. Similarly, progress has to be seen in convergence of schemes and departments necessitating lot of facilitation by NGO partners as well as the government. However, it can be concluded that this kind of common lands have good potential to support the livelihoods of the rural communities if they are managed efficiently by involving local communities by making strong institutional arrangements with the support from the government in the form of bringing out favorable policies and granting user rights as well as required tenure. Further, research has to be carried out to understand the dynamics of the institutional arrangements, outcomes and impact on livelihoods and the environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Efforts should be made by the CRD to ensure the POB register entry of the details of the common lands developed under CPR projects through an appropriate government order and persuasion with the revenue department as early as possible to avoid any future possibility of leasing out these lands for any other purpose.
- Convergence with other development departments of the government has to be brought forth to address the livelihood issues in a comprehensive manner.
- The project can be taken as a good model for preparing natural resource management plans; especially CPR management plans under regular NREGS

and the model can be scaled up with suitable modifications wherever there is large concentration of CPRs in the state.

- This GO-NGO collaboration model for CPR management needs to be further studied to assess various aspects of project implementation, impact and outcomes.

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|-----------|---|
| AP | : Andhra Pradesh |
| APPS | : Anantha Paryavarana Samithi (Network of NGOs in Ananatapur district) |
| CPR | : Common Property Resource |
| CPR-NREGS | : Common Property Resource-National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme |
| CRD | : Commissioner of Rural Development Department |
| DRDA | : District Rural Development Agency |
| DOLR | : Department of Land Resources |
| DWMA | : District water Management Agency |
| FES | : Foundation for Ecological Security |
| GP | : Grama Panchayat (Formal local body institution at village /cluster of villages level) |
| GOI | : Government of India |
| MOEF | : Ministry of Environment and Forests |
| MOU | : Memorandum of Understanding |
| NCLR | : National Committee on Land Resources |
| NGO | : Non Government Organization |
| NREGA | : National Rural Employment Guarantee Act |
| NREGS | : National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme |

| | |
|------|---|
| NRM | : Natural Resource Management |
| NTFP | : Non Timber Forest Produce |
| PFA | : Project Facilitation Agency |
| POB | : Prohibitory Order Register |
| PPS | : Paryavarana Parirakshana Samithis (Environment Protection Groups) |
| SI | : Survey of India |
| UAW | : Un Assessed Waste |