

INCORPORATING STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS IN PARTICIPATORY FOREST MANAGEMENT

Perceptions of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department

A Report by:

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Executive Summary

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department is the nodal agency for planning, implementing and monitoring programmes in the forestry sector, and therefore, a key stakeholder in Participatory Forest Management. For the purpose of this study, the stakeholder group was divided into three groups-state level bureaucracy involved in the development, planning and implementation of JFM as a policy, Division level staff who have been the nodal officers involved in the implementation of JFM in Harda and the CF Hoshangabad Circle, since the Harda Forest Division is part of the Hoshangabad Circle.

In the 1980s, the transition from a production focus to a people focus in forest management necessitated a change in the working of the State Forest Department, especially in terms of the objective of protection and the system for achievement of this objective. The State-People partnerships in the forest sector in Madhya Pradesh began in the late 1980s but were institutionalized through the Resolution on JFM in December 1991. This resolution was subsequently amended in 1995, 2000 and 2001. The perceptions of the Senior level officers and the Divisional staff, on various aspects of JFM are as follows:

- At the state level majority of the respondents perceive that Joint Forest Management is a strategy for meeting the challenges in balancing the demands of the local communities and the need for resource conservation. The respondents at the state level however emphasized that it's the resources of the FD are mainly for the purpose of protection though some of these may be invested in developmental works.
- At the divisional level, some respondents perceive that the transition to a 'people based approach' led to changes in the work culture within the department wherein senior level officials have become more 'accessible.' Some divisional level respondents however, perceive this increased access as 'indiscipline.' At the same time, other divisional staff do not see any change in the relationships within the department.

- The main problems in the villages in and around the forests were assetlessness, poverty and low level of developmental interventions. As the participatory regime was implemented, cross-sectoral integration gained importance—and the FD started collaborating with the other rural development agencies of the government.
- The paradigm shift from “working against the people” to working “with the people” was met with resistance from within the department. To overcome this resistance training sessions, workshops, and exposure visits were conducted. With the recent recruitment of field level staff, the acceptance of peoples’ involvement has gradually been increasing and the staff now ”recognises the rights of the people.”
- All the respondents at the state level and some of the respondents at the divisional level perceive that the participatory approach in forest management had resulted in improving relationship between FD and local people. Whereas this relationship was earlier ridden with hostility, suspicion and antagonism there is now greater acceptance by the FD staff, of the rights of the local communities and also a more cooperative effort from the communities. Other division level respondents believe that the relationship between the FD and the community was always pleasant.
 - The developmental tasks that were undertaken as Entry point activities not only led to peoples’ confidence in the ‘good intentions’ of the Department and generated the much needed wage employment in the village but they also demonstrated the direct link between participation and realization of financial gain. Some respondents feel that in the absence of entry point activities, the involvement of the people would have been much lower.
 - While there was a unanimous agreement that women’s participation in JFM is important for its success, respondents admitted that the department has had limited success in securing such, primarily on account of the prevailing social customs that restrict interaction of the women with the male forest guards, as well as the other men folk in the village. In the case of the marginalised sections also, the participation was limited due to the ‘elite capture,’ especially in the revenue villages.

- In Harda division, ample forest land was available and “land has been allotted (for protection) only after consulting the villagers.” Hence, inter-village conflicts were few and were resolved through dialogue that was facilitated by the department.
- Some respondents realise that there is potential for conflict at the village level on account of the creation of multifarious institutions in the village. These conflicts have not yet been manifested primarily because in most villages only “one institution, whether JFMC, or watershed committee or Panchayat has been strong enough to dominate.”
- Respondents at the division level feel that they cannot give sufficient inputs for JFM programme as they have many other responsibilities. Hence a separate team devoted to JFM was also considered as essential.
- The respondents perceive a definite improvement in the forest quality and density on account of the local communities’ assistance in protection. At the same time, the field level staff and one respondent at the State level felt that the responsibility of forest protection ultimately lies with the Forest Guard, and the accountability of the JFMC is limited, in spite of its getting funds for protection.
- While there is consensus on the positive ecological impact of JFM, the opinion on the issue of encroachment was divided. Whereas some respondents felt that encroachment had been limited, others observed that it was still a ‘serious problem.’
- In terms of the tangible, direct economic benefits, the respondents perceived some increase in the livelihood and income generation opportunities available at the village level. At the same time, the respondents largely felt that there had been no increase in the availability of nistar. Some respondents however observed that the availability of fuelwood had increased.
- There is a perception that the participatory approach in forest management has resulted in the emergence of several stakeholders in the forest sector. Majority of the respondents perceive that NGOs can act as bridge between FD and people. However the field level staff is apprehensive of the NGOs as they felt that these organisations tend to leave the work incomplete. Across the board the Mass Tribal Organisations (MTOs) are perceived as troublemakers. There

is a perception that these organisations are more interested in getting political mileage rather than solving the problems of poor tribals. Role of international donor agencies was considered to be important in forestry sector to provide resources and also to bring in focus and accountability. However there was concern about the hidden agenda of these donors. Some respondents felt apprehensive that though the state had sufficient resources necessary allocations were not made for FD, as forests were not the priority for the state government. A few respondents opined that this picture was changing for better. Respondents at the state level envisaged a significant role for the private sector especially for research and development. Some felt that it was high time government took steps to involve the private sector in forestry. However the respondents raised doubts if the private sector would be interested in forestry considering the lack of lucrative returns in the present scenario.

- There was a consensus among the respondents that the role of JFMC was to assist the FD and not to replace it. Majority of the respondents felt that there was no need to legally empower the institution of JFMCs. According to a few such empowerment will make the JFMCs corrupt and decrease the feeling of ownership.

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Glossary of terms

Nistar: Customary rights of local people over natural resources

Sangthan: Organisations with mass base working on issues concerning poor and marginalised

Forest village: A village community established in a reserved forest or protected forest for the purpose of maintaining a supply of local labour.

JFM: The practice of management of forest resources jointly by the Forest Department and the local communities which would entitle them in sharing of usufructs in lieu of their participation in protection and management of forest resources.

List of Abbreviations

1. APCCF: Additional Principal Conservator of Forests
2. CF: Conservator of Forests
3. CCF: Chief Conservator of Forests
4. DFO: Divisional Forest Officer
5. DRDA: District Rural Development Agency
6. FD: Forest Department
7. FG: Forest Guard
8. JFM: Joint Forest Management
9. JFMC: Joint Forest Management Committee
10. MTO: Mass Tribal Organisation
11. NGO: Non Government organisations
12. PFM: Participatory Forest Management
13. PCCF: Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
14. RFO: Range Forest Officer
15. SDO: Sub Divisional Officer

Background

1.1 The Context

In the last few decades, there has been an increasing interest in participatory management of common pool resources. While analytical frameworks for common pool resources have been developed, these have focussed more on ecological and economic variables. The DFID - funded project (7973), led by the University of Cambridge however, adopted a ‘policy focussed’ perspective and generated an analytical framework that facilitates understanding of stakeholders’ differential definition of the problem based on the differences in their knowledge of the empirical context, their world-view and their knowledge of policy. The framework was designed “to provide a basis for dialogue about common pool resource management among stakeholders, in contexts where such resources are subject to contestation among different stakeholders and conflict between multiple users” (Adams *et al*, 2002).

In order to field-test and develop the above - mentioned analytical framework further, the current project titled “Incorporating Stakeholder Perceptions in PFM in Harda” was undertaken. The project aims to study the perceptions of diverse stakeholders in the forest sector in Harda district, Madhya Pradesh, India to increase learning about differences in stakeholder perceptions over participatory forest management (PFM).

Participatory Forest Management in Harda is a Joint Forest Management (JFM) agreement between the State Forest Department and the local communities. Under this JFM agreement, popularly known as the ‘Harda Model,’ the Forest Department channelises development funds to wean local communities away from forest dependence and engage them in forest protection and development in a meaningful way.

While the Forest Department views JFM in Harda as a success, some other stakeholders, notably the *Sangathans* are of the view that JFM has increased the injustices meted out to the local communities. As a result of these different perceptions there have been conflicts among the stakeholders. Meetings that have

been organized over the last couple of years have been conducted in a confrontationalist mode that has accentuated the conflict instead of facilitating reconciliation and understanding.

Understanding the conflict from a policy perspective necessitated an understanding of perceptions of different stakeholders including the state forest department, local communities, NGOs and *Sangathans*, Legislators, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and Market linked Institutions. The present report focuses on the perceptions of the Forest Department.

1.2. Objectives and Methodology

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department is the nodal agency for planning, implementing and monitoring programmes in the forestry sector, and therefore, a key stakeholder in Participatory Forest Management. The present report attempts to map the perceptions of key representatives of the Forest Department to understand ‘Senior level’ and ‘Divisional’ staff’s perceptions on PFM as well as on the role of other forest sector stakeholders.

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department may be perceived as having two arms¹-the legislative and the technical. At the state level, the policies and programmes of the Department of Forests are steered by the Minister of Forests, who also heads this department. This is the “legislative” arm of the Department and represents it in the State Legislature. Since the legislators’ perceptions have been studied in detail in another component, the present report focuses only on the Technical Arm of the Department.

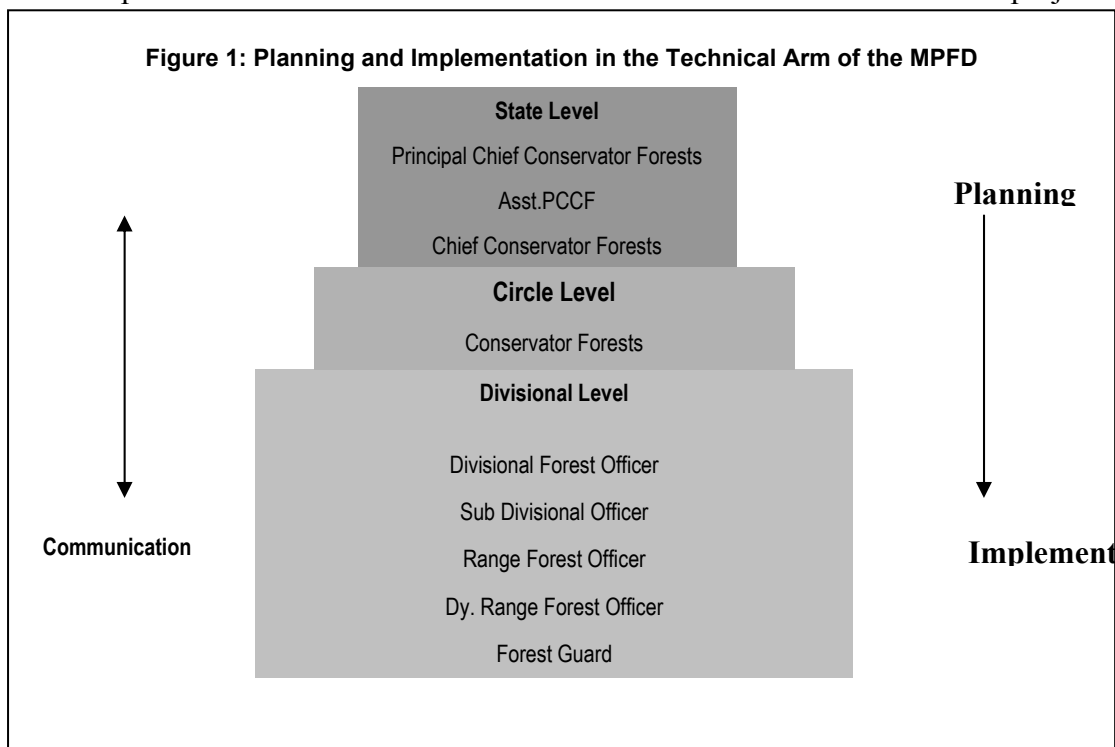
The ‘technical arm ‘ of the Department of Forest is headed by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF), who has operational responsibility and authority over the forests. He renders advice on policy and technical issues to the Government and oversees implementation of policies and programmes. The Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (APCCF) and the Chief Conservators of Forests (CCFs) who look the specific subjects assigned to them, assist the PCCF.

¹ The terms ‘legislative’ and ‘technical’ have been used for explanatory convenience. These are not mutually exclusive groups.

The technical arm of the department may further be perceived as being divided into planning and implementation levels². In the context of the state, planning is assumed to be the domain of the PCCF, APCCF and the CCFs, while the implementation of the plans is carried out at the Divisional Level by comprising the Divisional Forest Officer, the Sub-Divisional Forest Officers, the Range Forest Officers and the Forest Guards. (See Figure 1)

The functions of the Conservator of Forests, who normally heads a Circle,³ are a mix of planning and implementation. Keeping in mind this structure of the Forest Department, the stakeholder group was divided as follows⁴:

1. State level bureaucracy including the PCCF, APCCF, and CCFs who were involved in the development, planning and implementation of JFM as a policy
2. Division level staff comprising the DFO, the SDOs, and the RFOs of Harda Forest Division, who have been the nodal officers involved in the implementation of JFM in Harda. Since the field team involved in this project



² This does not imply that no planning takes place at the divisional levels. It only means that programme designing is at the State level and the implementation through the various forest divisions.

³ The Forest Department is spatially divided into Circles, Divisions, Ranges and Beats. A Circle comprises several Divisions. A Division comprises several Ranges and a Range comprises of Beats.

⁴ For a complete list of respondents, see Annexure 1.

had already studied the perceptions of the Forest Guards' and Deputy Rangers, the focus was on officers of Range Forest Officer rank and above.

3. CF Hoshangabad Circle, since the Harda Forest Division is part of the Hoshangabad Circle.

It may be noted here that some of the officers who were directly engaged in the process of participatory forest policy development in Madhya Pradesh in the early 1990s may no longer be in service. However, since policy processes are dynamic, it is assumed that their perceptions are reflected in the perceptions of the officers currently holding office.

The report is based essentially on the primary data collected through semi-structured interviews and Q-sorts conducted with respondents at all three levels.⁵

1.3. Organisation of the Report

The report begins with a brief history of forest management in India focusing on the establishment of state control on forest resources, the ensuing conflict between the State and the local communities and the introduction of a participatory management regime. The report then presents the forest departments perceptions on the changes in its working as a result of this transition. The third chapter looks at the respondents perceptions of the challenges and impacts of JFM in Harda, and the fourth presents the Department's perceptions of the other Stakeholders in the forest sector. Finally, the report analyses the findings from the study in light of the analytical framework.

⁵ For a compiled checklist, see Annexure 2. For more details on the Q-methodology as used in this project, see P. Dasgupta (2005) *Q methodology for Mapping Stakeholder Perceptions in Participatory Forest Management*, draft project report.

II. History of Forest Management

The State of Madhya Pradesh is a forest rich state with almost 31 percent of its area under forest cover (Shukla 2004)⁶. These forests are well distributed over all the agro-climatic zones, but the forest types differ because of immense heterogeneity of soil, geology, temperature and moisture conditions. Ranging from grassland and thorn forests there are vegetation variations all the way upto sub-tropical, semi-evergreen forests. Among other species, the forests of Madhya Pradesh are rich in *Tectona grandis* (teak) and *Shorea robusta* (sal), two high-valued commercial timber species.

2.1 Establishment of State Control over Forests: The beginning of the State-People Conflict

In the early nineteenth century, the demand for timber for shipping grew substantially and challenges in adequately meeting this demand catalysed the process of establishing State control over the forest resources. Later, in the mid-nineteenth century, demand for quality timber further rose with the development of the Railways. In addition to Deodar, Teak and Sal were the main sources of timber for railway sleepers and controls were placed on their extraction to ensure a steady and assured timber supply.

While there was a realization of the value of forests, there was no public agency responsible for forest management till 1865 when the Indian Forest Service was established under the Government Forest Act as an agency to initiate more systematic and efficient planning (Poffenberger and Singh, 1996).⁷ The formation of this agency marked the beginning of centralized, bureaucratic control of forestry in India.

Subsequently, the Forest Act of 1878 strengthened the regulatory powers of the Forest Service. The government paid little attention to the fact that “.... what appeared to be

⁶ Shukla A (2004). Madhya Pradesh. In Bahugna, VK., Capistrano D., Mitra K. and Saigal S. (Eds). Root to Canopy. Winrock International India and Commonwealth Forestry Association.

⁷ Poffenberger M and Singh C. (1996). Communities and the State: Re-establishing the balance in Indian Forest Policy. In Poffenberger, M. and McGean B Eds. Village Voices, Forest Choices. Joint Forest Management in India. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.

a highly destructive practice to the foresters was often only an alternate way of using the forest” (Rangarajan 1996). In accordance with its production agenda, as well as to “carefully preserve” the forests, the colonial government exercised its power of eminent domain to reserve large tracts of forests wherein the rights of the private users were considerably reduced, livestock in forest areas were denied access to the resource and initiatives were taken to settle the shifting cultivators. Gradually, the powers of the state were extended and “there was a significant shift from the ‘rights’ of the communities to their ‘privileges’ with the State enjoying the prerogative to determine which of these privileges was to be granted. (Rangarajan 1996; and Poffenberger and Singh, 1996).

In short, “the practices of colonial forestry were born from the revenue and strategic needs of the empire, and these practices disrupted the relationship of the forest-based communities with the land (Guha, 1983).⁸ They resulted in “the curtailment of rights and privileges (of forest dwellers) over forest resourcesinitiating a process of alienation from critical resources (and) leading to a deep-seated antagonism..” (Poffenberger *et al*, 1996).⁹

2.1.1 Forest Management in the Post Independence Period: 1947-1988

After Independence, the state forest departments carried forward the colonial legacy of unilateral and centralized systems of forest management forward. Indian Forest Officers were trained in the paramilitary tradition (Palit 1996)¹⁰, the state forest departments assumed a ‘quasi-police structure and the main effort of its officers was in establishing complete control over planning, policing, administration and revenue collection over forest areas and certain species in the non-forest areas’ (Sundar *et al*, 2001)¹¹.

⁸ Guha R (1983). Forestry in British and Post British India: An Historical Analysis. Economic and Political Weekly, Vol XVII.

⁹ Poffenberger, M., McGean, B., and Khare, A. (1996). Communities Sustaining India’s Forests in the Twenty-first century. In Poffenberger, M. and McGean B (Eds) Village Voices, Forest Choices. Joint Forest Management in India. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.

¹⁰ Palit S (1996). Indian Forest Departments in Transition. In Poffenberger, M. and McGean B (Eds) Village Voices, Forest Choices. Joint Forest Management in India. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.

¹¹ Sundar, N. Jeffery, R and Thin, N. (2001). Branching Out. Joint Forest Management in India. OUP. New Delhi.

In the early years of Independence, the forest management systems in India were an extension of the production agenda of the colonial government based on a policy of 'exclusion' and 'isolation' of the local communities. The National Forest Policy 1952 as well as the recommendations of the National Commission on Agriculture 1976 emphasized that interests of the local communities should be subservient to the "national interest" and were focused on commercial production of timber rather than meeting the livelihood and sustenance needs of the local communities. Thus, through the 1960s and the 1970s, the "forest departments viewed local communities as the primary impediment to successful protection...while the communities perceived foresters as the usurpers of their legitimate rights' (Palit 1996)¹².

2.2 The 'People' focus In Forest Management: The National Forest Policy 1988 and Joint Forest Management

In the 1980s the articulation of grievances by forest dependent communities, and growing international pressures for 'pro-poor' and sustainable policies set the stage for a pro-people, participatory forest management regime. The National Forest Policy 1988 brought a paradigm shift in forest management by recognizing the symbiotic relationship between the people living within and around the forests and the forest resource and emphasizing the need to protect their customary rights and interests. The policy mandated that the domestic requirements of fuel-wood, fodder, minor forest produce and construction timber should be the first charge on forest produce and that these and substitute materials shall be made available to the forest dependent communities through appropriate means¹³. From the policy and legal standpoint, this National Forest Policy 1988 was the precursor to participatory forest management in India.

In India, participatory forest management was awarded state recognition through a Government of India circular, issued on June 1,1990. This circular directed the secretaries of all the states to issue guidelines to give effect to Joint Forest

¹² Palit S (1996).Indian Forest Departments in Transition. *In* Poffenberger, M. and McGean B (Eds) Village Voices, Forest Choices. Joint Forest Management in India. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.

¹³ Section 4.3.4.3 of the National Forest Policy, 1988.

Management. Typically, Joint Forest Management envisaged an agreement between the State and the local communities wherein:

- Village level institutions called Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMC) are formed. These have representation from the Department as well as the local community.
- A patch of forests is demarcated and the JFMC entrusted with the responsibility for its protection and regeneration. This includes protection from of forests from fire, illegal grazing, illicit felling, illegal transportation, illegal mining, encroachments and poaching.
- In return for their co-operation in forest protection and development, the JFMC members are awarded usufructory rights.

The agreement between the department and the local communities is expected to take the form of a partnership between the two stakeholders, based on sharing of responsibilities and benefits.

III. The Changing role of the Forest Department: Perceptions of the Forest Department

The system of ‘scientific management’ of the Madhya Pradesh forests started with the appointment of Col. G.P. Pearson as the first Conservator of forests for the Narmada and the Sagar region in 1860. “Forest rules became more stringent with the formation of the Central Provinces in 1861” and restrictions were placed on peoples’ access and use of the resource (Rangarajan 1996)¹⁴. In 1956, with the formation of the State of Madhya Pradesh, the control and management of the States forest was handed over to the Department of Forests in the Government of Madhya Pradesh.

In the year 2000, a new state of Chattisgarh was carved out of Madhya Pradesh. Consequently, the Forest Department as well as the other government departments was restructured.

Box 3.1: The Beginning of State – People Partnerships

In 1989, when Mr. BMS Rathore took charge as DFO Harda Forest Division, the futility of traditional policing had been realized in some quarters of the Forest Department yet there was no policy on participation in force. At that time, one of the principal concerns in the Harda Forests was of illicit and large-scale teak felling in the ranges of Magardha, Temagaon and Rahatgaon. Conventional methods of policing were not only proving ineffective but also further straining the relationship between the department and the local communities. The DFO then introduced an innovative strategy that aimed to decrease dependence on forests by increasing the livelihood base of the people, and improve the relationship between the local communities and the forest department by initiating dialogue and interaction between the two stakeholders. Regular meetings were conducted with the village people. The passing of the JFM resolution further strengthened these efforts by providing an additional incentive to the communities for collaboration.

Note: For further information on the beginning of participatory forest management in Harda read [Bahuguna, V.K. \(1992\). Collective Resource Management: An Experience in Harda Forest Division, RCNAEB, IIFM, Bhopal.](#)

The State-People partnerships in the forest sector in Madhya Pradesh began in the late 1980s (See Box 1) but were institutionalized through the Resolution on JFM in December 1991. This resolution was subsequently amended in 1995, 2000 and 2001.¹⁵ By 2002, about 13000 committees had been formed in the State. These were involved

¹⁴ Rangarajan M (1996). Fencing the Forest. Conservation and Ecological Change in India’s Central Provinces 180-1914. OUP. New Delhi.

¹⁵ The detailed comparison of these is dealt with in the Report on the Legal Framework on forestry in MP.

in the protection and management of 42 percent of the degraded and non-degraded forests in the State (Shukla, 2004)¹⁶.

The transition from a production focus to a people focus, however, necessitated a change in the working of the State Forest Department. This section explores the perceptions of the FD staff on the changes that have taken place within the Forest Department as a result of the participatory mode of forest management, with emphasis on the changes in the people-FD interface. The perceptions presented in this section are based entirely on the views expressed by the respondents from the MP forest department. Two codes have been used- BHP to refer to the respondents from the state level bureaucracy while HAR refers to those from the Harda Division and the CF Hoshangabad.

3.1 Changes in Departmental Working

“The role of the forest department has not changed. Earlier we were concerned with protection of the forests, and even now we are concerned with protection of the forest.” (BHP). What appears to have changed, however, is the objective of protection and the system for achievement of this objective.

In the early years of forestry in Independent India, the focus of the forest department was primarily on production. The department functioned as a “closed system” wherein “the quantity of timber and bamboo produced was the main criteria for performance evaluation.” (BHP) This parameter for performance evaluation has undergone a change, and as one senior official observes, “...when we are in the forest, we hardly talk forestry. Instead we focus on what our staff have been able to do for the villagers.” (BHP)

Within the institution, some divisional level respondents perceive that the transition to a ‘people based approach’ led to changes in the work culture within the department. Such a change was necessary since “...*koi cheez karni hai to pehle apne aap ko sudharna padega.*” (To implement something new, we need to first change ourselves). These respondents observe that before the participatory regime, the staff was usually

¹⁶ Shukla A (2004). Madhya Pradesh. In Bahugna, VK., Capistrano D., Mitra K.’ and Saigal S. (Eds). Root to Canopy. Winrock International India and Commonwealth Forestry Association.

scared of and hesitant in approaching their superiors. “A proper channel was followed” (As indicated in Figure 1). However, in the present scenario, the relationship of the Front Line Staff with the superiors has become more ‘open’ and as one respondent states, “...*ab nakedar bhi seedhe DFO ke paas jaata hai.*” (Now even the forest guard approaches the DFO directly).

While some respondents see this ‘openness’ within the Department as a positive change, others perceive it as symbolising lack of discipline. They feel that the lack of discipline has affected their ability to get work done from their subordinates. In any case, “..... *ab maryada nahi rahi... beech wale ko acha nahi lagta,*” (there are no boundaries maintained and the intermediate officers do not like that).(HAR)

At the same time, some divisional level respondents take a diametrically opposite stand and state that there has been absolutely no change in the style of working within the department. They are disheartened by the fact that the “senior officials have friendly relations with the villagers but not with us” and wait for the day “when JFM will be implemented within the Department also.”

3.2 Changes in the FD-People Interface

The earlier production focus of the department implied that the forests were perceived only from the ‘economic’ perspective, and any such access and use that was likely to diminish the financial worth of the resource was curtailed. Naturally then, the relationship between the department and the local forest dependent communities was strained. “The forest department and the local communities were against each other- the department only took action against the people” (HAR). Moreover, the department believed in “terrorising” (HAR) the local people, through the use of force to keep them away from the forests. “ As a reaction to this policy, the people started thinking “...*jungle hamara nahi hai. Kharab ho jaaye to hamara kya jaata hai.*” (HAR) (The forest is not ours. If it gets damaged, it is of no concern to us).

In the 1980s, with the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act, the thrust of forest management the focus of forest management moved from production to conservation. In this new scenario, the “effectiveness of the old system decreased” (HAR). Officers

realised that the problems of forestry were inextricably linked to the problems of the villages in these areas and "... the local people emerged as a major force, rather the only force that would determine the survival of the forests and the forest officers started to look beyond the forest boundaries in order to solve the forestry problems." (BHP) It was felt that "...without the local peoples support, protection would not be possible; Participatory management emerged as the only tool." (BHP)

Participatory forest management involved reaching out to the people and exhibiting sensitivity to their needs and aspirations. It was clear that unless basic needs of the people were met, it was unlikely that they would concern themselves with forest development. On the basis of the assumption that "the solutions to forestry lie in adequate and appropriate rural development around forest," (BHP) a conscious effort was made to address the problems of the people.

The main problems in the villages close to the forests were largely problems of development. Two critical problems that were identified by the respondents were:

1. *Poverty on account of poor land quality and lack of livelihood alternatives, and consequently, assetlessness, and indebtedness.* The absence of livelihood alternatives in the areas close to the forests resulted in the "forest dependent lifestyles" that had been continuing for generations. Some officers felt that one of the primary challenges that the forest department faces today is development of mechanisms that can sustain this dependence. There is recognition that "if we (forest department) try to sever those links between the forest and the local people we will have to face resistance" (BHP) and such resistance may damage the forest resource. Some respondents further feel that the people do not want to harm the forest, but they have no choice but to sell timber, fuelwood and other NTFP for eking out a living. These people are also dependent on the forest department for wage employment.
2. *The second problem was of inadequate development because "development was slow; quantity of development was low; and Infrastructure was low."* (BHP) The responsibility for the rural development in the forest areas' villages was shared among several departments. However, these departments did not

“have a presence in the remote villages” (BHP) and were unable to reach the remote areas. Moreover, as “...these departments operated from the cities, with their staff living either in towns or in large villages where basic amenities were available” (BHP) they were not interested in the remote areas. The resources allocated to these departments were exhausted around the places where their staff lived. Hence, the government programs, government grants hardly reached the remotest people.

With the growing emphasis on building of partnerships the Forest Department took it upon itself to address these problems as much as possible. While the intentions were well in place, the department was constrained by the lack of resources available at its disposal for such purposes. “The forest department money was for protection and not for rural development. However, a part of these funds for protection are diverted for Rural Development.” (BHP)

In addition, the Department started networking with the other departments, encouraging them to conduct developmental works in the remote areas. “ We try to go to almost every rural development agency whether it is collector’s office, the DRDA, or the Agriculture department.....we make our infrastructure available to them whenever they want to work in the interior....we help them to achieve their targets also. In our own way we are trying bring in a kind of rural development which can sustain conservation.” (BHP)

Thus the participatory regime resulted in the transition of the Forest Department from a “closed system” to an “open” one, where cross-sectoral integration gained importance.

IV. Joint Forest Management: Challenges and Impact

The formulation of a policy on JFM in the Madhya Pradesh was a first step in institutionalising people's participation in forest management. While the policy document was far from ideal¹⁷, it reflected the State's commitment to decentralised management of the forests. From the point of view of policy implementation, taking JFM to the people was fraught with challenges on account of dissent within the Department as well as lack of trust from the local communities who were intended to be the primary "beneficiaries" from the changed management regime. In this chapter, we shall first present the Forest Department's perspectives on the challenges that they faced in implementing JFM, followed by their views regarding the impact of the programme.

4.1 Challenges in JFM Implementation

4.1.1 Building Acceptance for JFM in the Department

The paradigm shift from "working against the people" to working "with the people" was met with resistance from within the department. "There was a lot of debate in the first 5-6 years as a lot of people were not convinced." (HAR) According to one respondent, to ensure a 'positive approach' in implementation, "...anti-JFM officers were moved from field positions and pro-JFM officers were placed in the field." (HAR)

There was a felt need for orienting officers of various ranks to the guiding philosophy of JFM and equip them with the skills to effectively implement the transformed forest management policy. Hence training sessions, workshops, and exposure visits were conducted. This process of orientation took almost six years (HAR). Some respondents however feel that these training sessions were not enough to convince the officers about the 'workability' of the participatory model. As a result, even today, some of the older field staff are sceptical regarding the competence of the committees

¹⁷ JFM policies across the country have been criticised on account of several factors including their bias in favour of the Forest Department, insecurity of tenure, lack of autonomy and inadequate increases in rights to the produce. The legal and policy dimensions of JFM in MP have been dealt with in detail in the Report on the Legal and Policy framework for forestry.

to discharge their duties. They are reluctant to affect a transfer of power to the local communities. This reluctance has been strengthened by a perceived injustice resulting from the transfer of power to the local communities without an equal transfer of accountability (Box 4.1). In contrast, staff that has been recently recruited is perceived as being better oriented to peoples' involvement in forestry. As a result there has been a gradual recognition of the "rights of the people." (HAR)¹⁸

Box 4.1: Transfer of Powers but not Accountability

According to one senior level respondent and some of the field staff, the JFM policy and its implementation is imbalanced since it mandates a transfer of power from the department to the community without an accompanying transfer of accountability. For instance, the 'pro-people' approach has resulted in dilution of the policing powers of the FLS and the JFMCs have been empowered for protection. Towards this protection, committees are provided 'protection funds' that they utilize for measures for forest protection including payment of wages to patrollers, volunteers etc. However, it is only the field guard who is held responsible for forest offences and faces the probability of deductions from his salary to compensate for the losses due to these offences. While such deductions are rarely effected, they instil fear among the FLS increasing the reluctance for a transfer of power to the committees.

4.1.2 Challenges of Community mobilisation: From a process of alienation to instilling a sense of ownership

JFM was a Forest Department initiative and therefore it was the Department's prerogative to reach out to the people and convince them about the 'positive' interests of the Department. As mentioned earlier, the relationship between the forest department and the people was not always one of cooperation and harmony. People did not trust the department and it was difficult to convince them that the "law enforcement agency" (BHP) had changed to one that was "sensitive to the people's needs." (BHP) Hence, "it was difficult for the people to accept the forest department as a sympathetic force." (BHP) Consequently, community mobilisation proved to be a challenge.

The isolationist strategies of the department, moreover, had resulted in the alienation of the people from the forest resource. Though they were dependent on the forests for their daily existence, the communities did not perceive any role for themselves in the protection of the forest. In general, the peoples' attitude of "*jungle hamara hai, jhad hamare hain, par rakhwale hum nahi.*" (The forest is ours; the trees are ours; but we

¹⁸ It may be mentioned here that the term "rights" has been used in the general sense and not in light of the legal 'traditional rights' of the people.

are not responsible for the protection) (HAR) reflected a lack of sense of ‘ownership’ and responsibility towards the forests. Hence, convincing the community about the need for their involvement demanded considerable investment of time.

Further, the largely poor people “were more concerned with immediate benefits whereas forestry benefits were long term.” (HAR) They did not perceive any benefits in JFM and hence did not attend the meetings. In this scenario, entry point activities in the villages served to generate interest and initial involvement in the JFM. In a situation where people were reluctant to attend meetings because they did not perceive any direct benefits from doing so, the entry point served two purposes:

1. First, as a part of the entry point activities, developmental tasks were undertaken in accordance with the demands of the people. Such tasks generated confidence of the people in the ‘good intentions’ of the Department.
2. The works carried out as a part of entry point activities generated the much needed wage employment in the village, and demonstrated the direct link between participation and realization of financial gain.

Some respondents feel that in the absence of entry point activities, the involvement of the people would have been much lower. They believe that JFM is a “give and take” arrangement, and that people will participate only as long as their needs are satisfied. However, others feel that in the present scenario, “people understand the benefits of participation,” (HAR) and therefore the absence of entry point activities is not a “total set back”.(HAR) The JFM experience showed that only when some direct economic benefits accrued, usually in the form of increased wage opportunity, did local communities come forward to participate in the protection activities and in the meetings. It is important to mention here that the challenge of community mobilisation was perceived differently for the Revenue and the Forest villages (See Box 4.2).

Box 4.2: Difference between Revenue and Forest Village response to JFM

The field level respondents perceived differences in the challenges of implementation of JFM in the Revenue and the Forest Villages. In the case of the Forest Villages, they feel that since these villages were completely dependent on the forest department for their developmental needs and the department felt a sense of “ownership” (HAR) and “responsibility” towards these forest villages. As a result, some JFM had always been taking place in the Forest villages but it lacked “status” (HAR). Moreover, the forest village community was attached to us and they “picked up JFM faster.” (HAR)

In the case of the revenue villages however, the dependence on the forest department and the resource is believed to be lower. The “politics” in these villages was more pronounced causing the elite to not only stay away from JFM but also encourage others for the same.

While the Department was able to gradually convince the villagers about the need for JFM, there success in enlisting women's participation remained limited. Where committees had been formed, and where the JFM Committee meetings were conducted "regularly," the women did not attend these meetings. The staff was aware that the social customs prevailing in the villages did not permit women to voice their opinion in the presence of men. In fact, in some villages "women were not even permitted to sit with the men." (HAR) Since "ninety-five percent of the Forest Guards were male," (BHP) they were unable to communicate with the women. In some villages, where the social customs were not so prohibitive, the attendance of women suffered because the meetings were held in the night. Some respondents however feel that lack of women's attendance in the meetings does not necessarily imply that their views are not reflected in the decision for they are likely to communicate their stand in the discussion held within the family. However, there was a unanimous agreement that women's participation is critical for "they have different priorities and it is important to understand these," (BHP, HAR) and also, in some cases, because women are perceived as being more 'capable' than the men (HAR).

In the case of the marginalised sections too the participation was limited due to the 'elite capture,' especially in the revenue villages. However, the respondents felt that the participation of the marginalized sections ultimately depended on "how active the *sachiv* is and how much he can motivate them."¹⁹ (HAR)

Once the local communities were mobilised, the challenge remained in sustaining their participation. The problems of the people were not restricted only to forestry but, as mentioned earlier, were issues of rural development. Addressing these problems was a challenge for the Department as it did not have adequate resources for the purpose, thereby necessitating a "cross-sectoral" approach. The efforts however received impetus with the World Bank aided MP Forestry Project that provided financial support not only for physical works but also for institutional development.

¹⁹ Structure of JFMCs: one man and one woman from every household in the village are members of JFMC. The executive committee (EC) comprises of 11 individuals. The Forest Guard is the *sachiv* ie member secretary, sarpanch is ex-officio member, two places are reserved for women. Responsibilities of *sachiv* include calling the meetings, taking minutes, keeping accounts.

4.3 Impact of JFM

The impact of JFM in terms of area under plantation, number of committees and so on, has been well documented²⁰. In this section therefore, the focus is on the Forest Departments' perceptions of the impact of joint forest management in terms of the ecological impacts, impacts on community life and institutions and the FD-people interface as well as the impact on the workload of the Front Line Staff.

4.3.1 Ecological impacts

One of the primary objectives of JFM was "protection", because "in the government forests, the environmental considerations are of greater significance than rural development" (BHP). Respondents at the Divisional level observed that the four main problems of the forests were illegal felling, encroachment, unrestricted grazing and fires. Joint Forest Management envisaged addressing of these problems through the participation of the local communities.

Respondents felt that people's participation had a positive impact on the control of forest fires, illicit felling and unrestricted grazing. As a result, the density of forests and consequently, the wildlife increased.

In the case of encroachment however, two contradictory points of view emerged from the field level staff. Some respondents felt that JFM resulted in limiting encroachment, not only by developing a feeling of ownership but also by providing irrigation. Some others believe that encroachment is still a "serious problem," more so because of the governments' policy of regularising encroachment, as well as the encouragement given by the MTOs. In some cases, JFMC members are encroachers; in some other cases, though the JFMC members are not encroachers, their relatives are and committees, on the whole, have been unable to control the illegal capture of forest land.

4.3.3 JFM impacts on the community life and Institutions

In addition to forest development, JFM emphasised social development. It is therefore relevant to understand these impacts from the point of view of the agents of change, or the Forest Department.

²⁰ For details on these, see the website of Department of Forests Government of Madhya Pradesh at www.

Economic Impacts

The respondents perceive that JFM has resulted in increase in the livelihood and income generation opportunities available at the village level. With the formation of the JFMCs, the fund allocation for protection was deposited in the Committee account and other works like cutting of fire lines were implemented through the committees. This allocation and the entry point works discussed earlier were perceived to have substantially increased the wage opportunity available in the villages. In several villages the protection works specially were seen to have benefited the poor families by providing them employment as watchers. At the same time however, Divisional level respondents emphasised that critics of JFM must remember that employment generation was not the primary mandate of the programme.

Box 4.3 : Communities' Rights and Entitlements and JFM

The issue of local communities' rights in forest resources has been a contentious one. It is important to note here that while the term 'right' has a specific legal implication its use by stakeholders may imply different 'scopes'. For instance, the ideology of the Sangathans, believes that the rights of the local communities are essentially the rights of ownership and control of the resource. These rights have been systematically eroded through the process of colonization and establishment of state control over forest resources and their restoration is critical for ensuring 'life and livelihood' of the forest based communities. On the other hand, the Forest Department believes in the supremacy of its rights in the forests - rights that originate on account of its ownership in the resource as well as its investment in protection. At the same time, respondents from the Department acknowledge that 'means' have to be found to meet the basic requirements of the local communities especially the poor. Hence, when the FLS talks about the 'recognition of rights of the communities,' it essentially refers such access to forest resources that is critical for the survival of the community.

This essential difference in the understanding of the extent of 'rights' is reflected in the conflict emerging in the case of encroachment. Extension into the forest either for cultivation or habitation is seen as a 'right' by some - since the forest belongs to the communities, they can determine land use. For the forest department, on the other hand, encroachment is a serious protection related problem that has been aggravated by the political commitments of regularization of encroached lands that encourages people to encroach further. The conflicting stands on encroachment, within the policy framework, add to the complexity of the issue. Thus while the National Forest Policy, 1988 mandates that there should be no regularization of encroachment, the MoEF developed dispute resolution framework recognizes the need for regularisation of rights of tribals to such forest lands that have been occupied by them for decades.¹

It may be noted here that JFM as an agreement does not give the communities 'rights' in the legal sense. Joint Forest Management is based on the principle of reciprocity and has essentially entitled the local communities to bonafide requirements of forest produce in return for co-operation in forest protection.

While there has been a perceived improvement in wage opportunity, respondents perceived little impact on the availability of *nistar* except for fuelwood availability, which has increased. Some respondents feel that availability of *nistar* was inadequate before JFM, and is still inadequate. One divisional level respondent attributed the

“difference between the demand for *nistar* and its supply” as the primary reason for its transition from a right to a concession²¹ (See also Box 4.3).

Social Empowerment and JFM

At the village level, some respondents feel that JFM has led to social empowerment. They believe that it has built the organisational capacity of the local people. As one respondent describes, “JFM brought about a social upheaval.....people started coming together and thinking about forests in their area, which is a remarkable impact. ...They are free to debate, and they question our working.” (BHP)

While JFM was largely perceived as having a positive social impact, the field staff observed that in some cases, restrictions on access to forestland allotted to a JFMC for protection resulted in inter-village disputes. These conflicts occurred especially in those areas where adequate forest land was not available, and more than one village was dependent on the same patch of land for meeting requirements of forest produce. Such cases, however were exceptional in Harda division as ample land is available and “land has been allotted only after consulting the villagers.” (HAR) Moreover, wherever disputes arose they were resolved through dialogue that was facilitated by the department.

Some respondents further perceived the possibility of intra-village conflicts arising due to the formation of multifarious village institutions. They felt that such conflicts have not yet been manifested primarily because in most villages only “one institution, whether JFMC, or watershed committee or Panchayat has been strong enough to dominate” (BHP).

At the Divisional level, it was felt that inter-institutional conflicts especially with the PRIs were unlikely since the constituting bodies were the same, and also because forests, since they were not included in the village boundary, were not under the

²¹ Senior level FD staff are of the view that Nistar was never a right. It has always been a concession or *riyayat*.

jurisdiction of the Gram Sabha. In any case they feel that such conflict may have a positive impact in the development of “bottom-up approach to conflict resolution.”

4.3.2 The FD-Community Interface

As the ‘people focus’ was operationalized in the working of the Department, its relationship with the local community improved. Gradually, the “people realised that Forest Department *apna department hai.*” (HAR) (The forest department is our department.)

Senior level respondents feel that over the last decade considerable improvement has taken place in the relationship between the forest department and the local communities. They believe that, “the relationship between the Forest Guard and the people is like that in a family- they share their problems with him and he shares his with them.” (HAR) The people are no longer scared, and they approach the department with their problems. A relationship of “give and take” (HAR) has emerged wherein the “department tries to consider their demands” (HAR) and they come forward to participate in the protection of the forests. While some respondents caution that such a relationship is based only on the realisation of direct economic benefits, some senior officers feel that they are on the “path of establishing a wonderful relationship with the people.”

Most respondents at the state and the division level observe that in spite of the challenges posed by the new forest management regime, the forest department has been able to make headway in involving the local people. They feel that these efforts deserve appreciation, especially because considerable progress has been made in a short period. At the same time, they admit that there have been areas where they have not been able to achieve their objectives, and where the relationship with the communities is not as desired. Yet, they are not discouraged because they realize that, “*Jo phenomenon 100 saal main bana hai use 10 saal main kaise badla jaa sakta hai?*” (HAR) (A phenomenon that has developed over 100 years cannot be expected to change in 10 years)

4.3.3 Impact of JFM on the workload of the Front Line Staff

The Forest Department is the chief implementing agency for JFM, and the onus for community mobilisation and formation of the committees was with the Front Line

Staff (FLS). Some respondents feel that though implementation required efforts, in places where the community participated in protection, the workload of the FLS was considerably reduced. At the same time however, the nature of tasks became diverse such that the FLS today is involved not only in forestry but also in “activities related to health, soil and water conservation, education,” and any such task that may be for community welfare. With the formation of JFMCs and the transfer of money to them, the paper work of the FLS has also increased.

V. Forest Department's perceptions on the role of other stakeholders

The formation of committees and their engagement in forest protection and management resulted in the emergence of forest management as a subject of 'public interest', associated closely with the local communities (BHP). Almost suddenly, several stakeholders started taking an interest in the forests and the forest department and the *locus standi* of many of the interested organisations was doubtful (BHP). While some of these stakeholders played a constructive role, others were engaged in more in 'fault-finding.' As one senior level respondent notes, " JFM was an innovation born within the forest department and we (Department) have spent money and enormous amount of energy and time and effort in convincing everybody who mattered within the department, and outside the department that this is the way to go. Now people from outside are telling us this is not good enough, that the forest department is not keen in involving people in forest expansion, that our speed is not good enough and that our staff does not believe in it. Suddenly a lot of players have jumped in-they are trying to carve a place for themselves-some by criticising us others by supporting us."

In this Chapter we shall look at the Department's perceptions about the role of other stakeholders in forestry.

5.1 Non- Governmental Organisations': Bridging the Gap between Community and FD

"Good NGOs can help us do things faster and may be better.....because the forest department does not have the expertise in all areas." (BHP)

Though "forestry is a technical matter and the NGOs have neither the expertise nor the resources to engage in it," most senior officers and some of the field level respondents felt that the NGOs can serve as a "bridge between the Forest Department and the local community." They envisage a role for NGOs in community mobilization and confidence building, and ensuring quality of service delivery. The respondents feel that the NGOs can especially play a role in facilitating women's participation and participation from the marginalised communities because "people trust them". (BHP,HAR)

According to some respondents the strength of the NGOs lies in their “freedom of working,”(BHP) their ability to appoint “exclusive persons for exclusive tasks,” and their “simultaneous exposure to the field situation as well as the top level.” Some senior officials further believe that NGOs can bring continuity that is otherwise absent on account of frequent transfers of officers.

On the whole however, the contribution of NGOs has been limited because “there are few NGOs that work for forestry, at the grassroot level, and even where they are present, their credibility is suspect”.(BHP) The field level staff is quite apprehensive about the involvement of NGOs specially because they “they leave works incomplete” and also because they work only till the project demands it. There is no continuity in contact after the project period is over. In the specific context of JFM in Harda, it was mentioned that there are no NGOs working in the forestry sector in the area.

5.2 International Donors: Meeting the Resource Requirements

Some state level respondents observe that till recently, there had been a large deficit between the resources required for forestry and the state’s financial allocation to the sector, primarily because “ forestry was low in government priorities”. (BHP) The role of the international donor agencies was to “bring in money.....bring in focus.....and help us (forest department) to reach out to larger areas and larger number of people.” (BHP) However, these international donors had their “own agenda,” which is normally “not visible on the face of it.” (BHP) While it is not fair to “doubt their intentions,” the alternate agenda is likely to interfere with the process and also dilute the impact. In most cases, the agenda is merely a defense to protect themselves from the “radical NGOs.” (BHP)

Some other state level respondents observe that the forest department itself is responsible for the inadequate financial allocation. They believe that the state government has sufficient funds for forest sector development. Yet, the requisite amount is not allocated to the sector because the “higher officials” did not do enough to project the sector as a valuable one, and therefore the sector is low on the priority of the Government. However, they feel that in the present day the “image” of the sector among the “planners” has improved. Consequently, they hold that the State

allocation to the Forestry sector has increased substantially, thereby reducing the need for international financial aid. (BHP)

5.3 Private Sector Participation: Investment in Research and Development

In most cases, the respondents believed that the private sector had a role to play in forestry. The envisaged role encompassed activities ranging from financial assistance to rural development from “corporate with a conscience” (BHP) to investments in research and development to production forestry. Some respondents believe that with the increase in demand for timber, and the existing ‘conservation focus’ of the department, “*forest department se akele nahi chal payega.*” (HAR) There is a need for additional investment irrespective of whether it is the State, international agencies, or the private sector. At the same time there are apprehensions regarding the “motivation” for the private players because forestry does not promise “profits” that they normally seek. Some respondents state that there is no firm opinion on the subject, even within the department, especially since there were some ‘bitter’ experiences in the experiments involving private partnerships.²²

5.4 Mass Tribal Organisations-a debated agenda

In most cases, the issue of MTO involvement in forestry evoked sharp and emotionally charged responses. The respondents felt that these organisations “do not have faith in the Constitution,” (BHP) that they only work “against the system” (BHP and HAR) and that they are less concerned with the rights of the people but more with garnering electoral support.

While questioning the MTOs “mass” following, some respondents stated that “it was not enough to inform people about their rights, but also to do something about them.” (BHP) However, the “MTOs continually find fault with the Government working” (HAR) yet do not take any initiative to fare better. Moreover, there was a feeling that the MTOs do not let the people accrue benefits of government programmes, but

²² The former Chief Minister for MP, in experimenting with public private partnerships, had allocated government owned wastelands to private players for forestry. However, in several cases, it is reported that the plantations were limited and the land was used to construct permanent structures. As a result, while the Government is now engaged in long drawn legal proceedings against these players.

instigate them to fight with the FD. One respondent went so far to say, “*Ye MTOs naxalites bana rahe hai*” (These MTOs are turning people into naxalites”. (HAR)

Recent entry of some of the MTOs in electoral politics gave reason to some of the respondents to consider all their activities to be carried out to gain “political mileage” Many respondents were sceptical that MTOs were encouraging the people to bring land under cultivation by felling standing trees. Thus causing destruction of good forests.

At the same time however, the senior officers believed that the conflict with the MTOs could be resolved if both stakeholders were open for dialogue.

5.5 Politicians

At the field level, some respondents feel that the “interference of politicians in every step” proved to be an impediment. “*Aaj ki tareekh main DFO ek Forest Guard tak ka transfer nahi kar sakta – uske paas phone aa jata hai.*” (The DFO can’t even transfer a forest guard without the interference of the politicians). (HAR) The officers were however, reluctant to share the details in this regard.

At the same time, other respondents observed that they faced no political pressure and few requests that were “legal and legitimate.” (HAR) They tried to accommodate these requests wherever possible.

Some respondents further felt that since the relationship of the department and the people had improved, the people approached them directly with their problems instead of going through the local politicians. At the field level, officers felt that increasingly, the senior officials had been succumbing to the political pressures, and this affected the working at the lower levels. “*Agar senior officer kadak rahe to hi hum kadak rah sakte hain.*” (If the senior officers are firm, then we can remain firm). (HAR) In this regard, some field level respondents felt that women officers were better as they were less involved with the politicians and therefore able to take independent decisions. However in Harda there are no women officers at present.

Senior officials admit that they are under tremendous pressure from the state government, especially for bringing in international projects. While they are sometimes able to resist this pressure, at other times they give in.

Thus respondents at both levels, though more at the senior level perceived that if stakeholders want to contribute constructively, forestry as a sector has ample scope to accommodate them.

VI Discussion

Participatory forest management in India was a response to the recognition of the social dimensions of forestry. Over the years, the exclusion of communities from the management of the resource had led to a decline in the association that the local community felt with the forests. As a result, the efforts of the government to rehabilitate and protect the forests were largely unsuccessful. There was a growing realisation that people's involvement was necessary for forest conservation. The challenge in this approach lay in balancing the demands of the local communities with the ecological concerns in resource management.

If one looks at the role of the Department in a pre-participation and post-participation phase as 'Behaviour' in the form of a stimulus-organism-response equation we find that while the organism or the FD remained the same, the set of stimuli and the expected responses became more diverse in the post-participation phase. The transformed policy position, pressure from peoples institutions, and international emphasis on participatory approaches in addition to the experiences in the field and the forestry statistics formed a complex set of stimuli that demanded different and seemingly contradictory responses ranging from conservation to rural development with the overarching objective of 'overall' development. Where communities were poor, and areas under-developed, as well as in the forest villages the Forest Department could not restrict its activities only to forestry. As a 'representative' of the Government it needed to address concerns of health, education, infrastructure development as well as forestry. The transition from a 'closed' system of working to an inclusive one necessitated a change in the scope of the Institution's functioning.

The shift in the role of a forester from a 'regulator' to that of an agent of development and change was a sudden one and demanded an almost 'instant' transformation in the overt responses of the Officers. Though there were training programmes for orientation of the officers, it may be expected that internalisation of the changed regime required time, especially since the entire 'socialization' of the officers catered to a command and control regime. Even today, after more than a decade of joint forest management in the state, officers at the senior and the divisional level believe that

JFM committees have been created to perform the role of ‘assistants in protection’ rather than forest management.

At this juncture it may be important to note that the process of formulation of the ‘policy of participation,’ was far from participatory. From discussions with the FLS it seems as though JFM was introduced as a ‘scheme.’ Orders were given to the FLS to form committees and they did so. The approach, ironically, was a top-down approach. There is a common perception that the front line staff of the forest department resisted the introduction of a participatory regime because they felt that they would lose their power. While this may be true to some extent, it is also important to remember that the JFM in itself is not ‘balanced’ as far as accountability is concerned. As it emerged from the study, the front line staff feel that in JFM, all benefits are enjoyed by the community (essentially the protection fund) whereas the responsibility for the well-being of the forest lies solely on the Forest Guard. The JFM policy does endow the Forest Department with ‘powers’ but these are primarily vested in the DFO. Further, when JFM is implemented as a ‘scheme’ in which targets have to be met, the front line staff have little discretion in the formation of the committees. These committees are formed irrespective of whether the staff perceive them as being ‘capable’ of protection. Yet, if they fail to protect the forest and if theft takes place, then the front line staff is punished. Perhaps, this lopsided distribution of benefits and accountability is also a reason for the limited acceptance of JFM within the staff.

In this situation, the field level staff feels constrained by the shift in the approach of the department without a corresponding change in the functioning within the department. There is a growing feeling that the senior officials accord more importance to the community than to their ‘own people.’ While on the one hand there has been a change in the way the department interacts with others, there appears to have been little change in the way the system as a whole, functions.

With the introduction of the Madhya Pradesh Forestry project and the acceleration in JFM it is assumed that there was an increase in pressures for committee formation. Though committees were formed, and efforts made to facilitate their effective functioning, the field staff and the senior officials still seem to have little confidence

in the capabilities of the village people, and sustainability of the JFMCs as an institution. Respondents at both the levels believe that JFMCs exist to assist the FD and not to replace it. As a result they do not see the need for legal empowerment of these committees.

With respect to FD and Community relationships, the senior officials of the forest department feel that the implementation of the participatory management regime brought about a dramatic change in the relationship of the department with the people. Earlier this relationship was fraught with distrust and antagonism. With JFM, partnership emerged. However, at the division level, the front line staff did not perceive such a paradigm shift in the relationship with the people. They felt that their relationship with the community was always one of co-operation. The benefits that were accrued by the people on account of their association with the department had merely strengthened this relationship.

The differences in the perception of the senior and the divisional staff may, to some extent, be attributed to the fact that the relationship between the front line staff and the community operates at two levels, a professional and a personal one. The front line staff usually lived in close proximity to the local community and enjoy a position of 'power' in the social fabric of the community. This 'power' is primarily born from control over access and use of the forests in their territory, as well as 'providing' the communities with much need wage – opportunity through forestry works. In some cases, the staff informally permitted the extraction of bonafide requirements of fuelwood and fodder. Hence, the community's relationship with the front line staff was similar to one that exists with a 'benevolent elite'. In the case of the forest villages especially, the front line staff were the 'face' behind all the development in the village. At the same time there was some degree of dependence of the FLS on the local community since they were crucial for achievement of the target for physical works in the forest. Hence, instead of completing transforming the relationship between the Forest Department and the Community, JFM provided a kind of 'legitimacy' to an existing relationship.

While JFM may not have brought about a complete transformation in the FD-people interface at the field level, it did bring about changes in the 'scale' of partnerships,

their 'basis,' and their essential 'nature.' In the pre-JFM days co-operative efforts seem to have evolved on the basis of mutual 'interest.' The institutionalization of a participatory management regime however demanded concentrated efforts in forging of partnerships with the local people. These partnerships were no longer a matter of 'choice' but a part of the 'job profile' of the FLS. Moreover, they were to be extended to *all* villages in proximity to the forest areas. The 'nature' of the partnerships also underwent a change wherein village level institutions were to be created. The membership of these institutions, their responsibilities and benefits as well as overall functioning was 'prescribed.' Thus there was a transition from 'discretion' to 'policy prescription.'

As the 'scale' of committee formation increased, the challenge for the department lay in community mobilisation. Communities suffering from poverty and livelihood insecurity were reluctant to enter into an agreement with an institution that they had been in conflict with for decades. The economic incentives, either wage opportunity or entry point activities therefore played a central role in 'attracting' the community to the idea of a partnership. A critical issue that emerged with respect to committee formation and functioning was of women's participation. The senior officers as well as the divisional officers acknowledge that one of their shortcomings has been their inability to secure the active participation of the women. One of the main reasons for this lack of participation is the inability of the FLS to reach out to the women population in the villages since the socio-cultural norms prevalent in the villages did not permit interaction between men and women. The policy requirement of women membership in the committees did create space for their participation but in most cases the membership was limited to that on paper. There is an expectation that recruitment of women field staff will have a positive impact on the participation of women. However there are apprehensions that very few of these staff may actually be posted in the field.

Finally, at the field level, only the Department and the local communities emerge as the key players in the new participatory regime. There are few 'grassroot' level NGOs in the area and hence the 'role' of these institutions is unclear. At the same time however, there seems to be a more or less unanimous animosity towards the

Sangathans even though the FLS feel that the influence of these Sangathans has been limited. Questions were raised regarding the motive of these tribal organisations and there seemed to be a consensus that the strategy of MTOs was purely political. To some extent, this image of the MTOs may be attributed to their recent entry into politics.²³

FD and Sangthans: The Need for Dialogue

Some senior officers feel that the differences and animosity between the Sangathans and the FD are mainly on account of the differences in approaches rather than conflicting interests. According to these officers, both stakeholders want to work in the public interest and are concerned with the same issues of forests, land and water. However, the 'hostile' approach and 'anti-establishment' ideology of the Sangathans has been an impediment in collaborative working between the stakeholders. The need of the hour, according to these officers, is to develop a forum that facilitates interaction and dialogue between the Sangathans and the FD so that they can find a 'middle-path.'

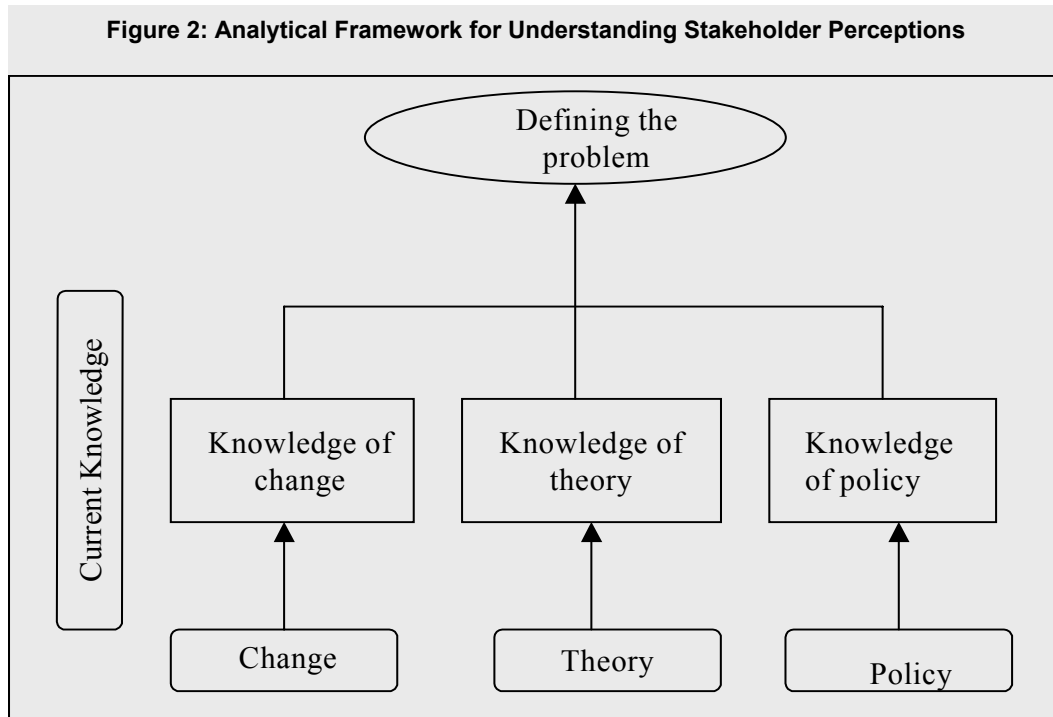
Understanding Perceptions in light of the Analytical Framework:

The conceptual framework for analysing stakeholder perceptions (Figure 2) in Natural resource Management states that stakeholders' definitions of problems stem from their perceptions about the problem situation. This perception is influenced by the stakeholders' current level of knowledge in three broad categories – knowledge about the empirical context, the cognitive framework and the knowledge of policy. At any point in time, different stakeholders' level of understanding may differ. Moreover, one stakeholders level of understanding may change over a period of time, thereby influencing his problem definition.

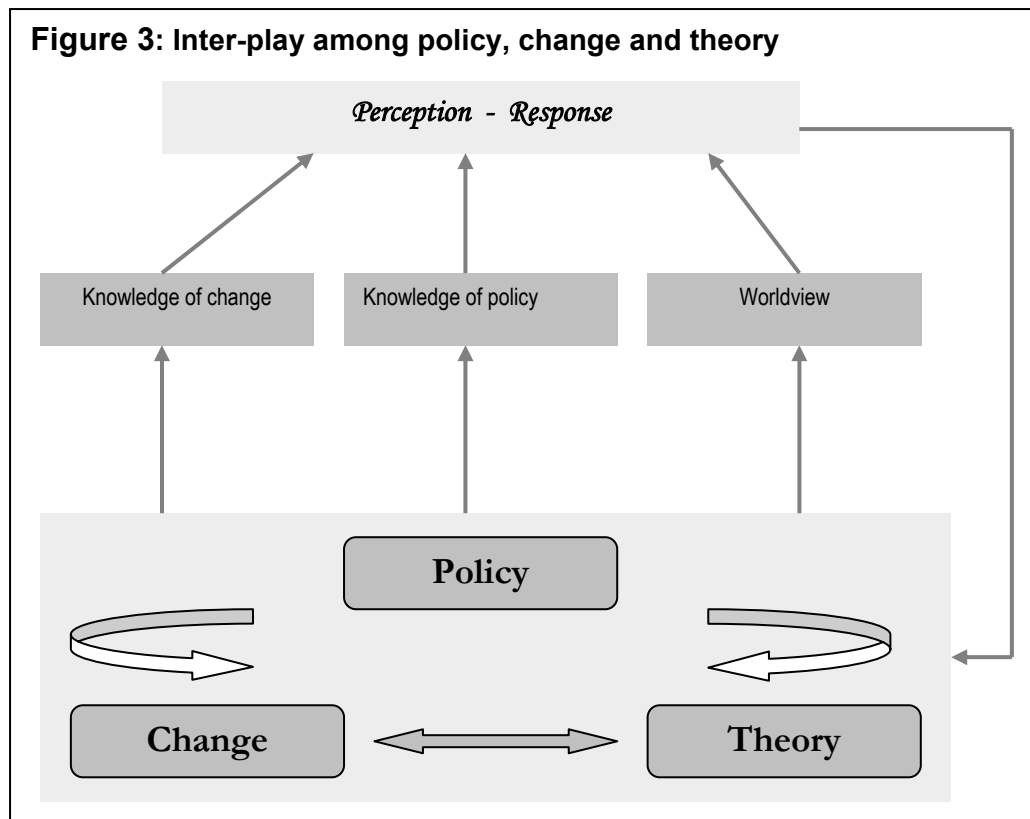
As can be seen in the Figure 3 change, policy and theory are the basis for perception formation. While these components may seem to be independent, the present study reveals that in a 'macro-scenario' they are in fact, inter-dependent. The inter-play among the three types of knowledge (See Figure 3), a dynamic process that is influenced by external factors, results in formation of perceptions that influence policy processes. Thus in the 1980s the Knowledge of change in forest quality and area, and escalating conflict between the Department and the forest dependent communities seems to have challenged the belief that forestry is a 'science' that can be practiced successfully in isolation with social concerns. As a result foresters started

21 Godbole Girija and Bhaskar Vira, March 2004, Towards an alternative politics: People's movements join the electoral process, Infochange News and Features, (<http://www.infochangeindia.org/features161.jsp>)

looking at other models of forest management. Gradually, as the knowledge of theory-participation and inclusion- gained ground, there was a focus on policy amendments. Thus we find issues of social and ecological balance at the crux of the National Forest Policy, 1988 and the subsequent JFM policy.

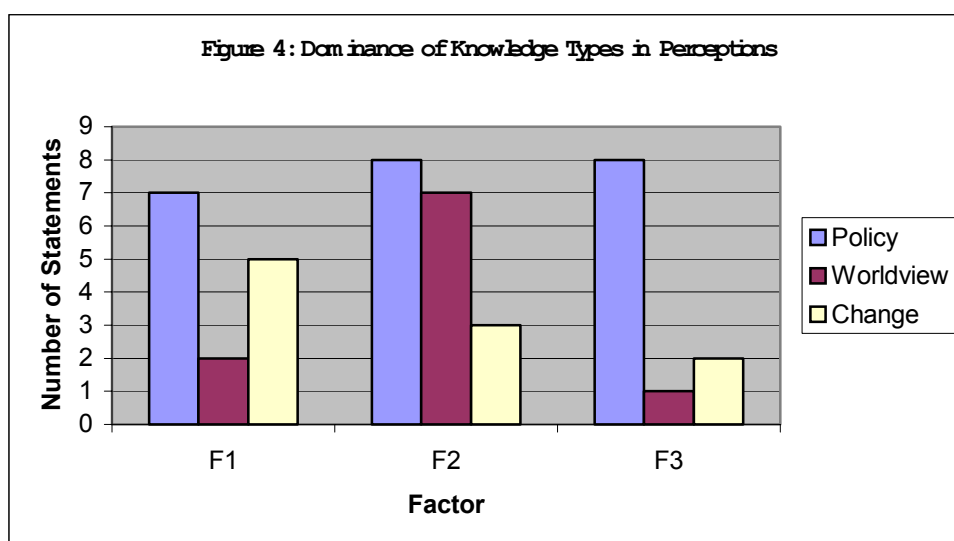


The implementation of the JFM policy resulted in ground level changes such as the formation of committees, allocation of protection duties, enhanced FD-community interaction, and training and capacity building. The results of these changes, and their knowledge are likely to have affected both, worldview of the respondents as well as policy provisions. Hence, there seems to be a somewhat cyclical process involved in problem definition (Figure 3).



Knowledge of policy-the dominant component in perception formation.

A q-sort was administered to all the respondents in the study. The statements included in this q-sort were equally reflective of knowledge of policy, knowledge of worldview and knowledge of change. An analysis of the responses reveals that the dominant ‘knowledge-type’ of the Forest Department respondents is policy knowledge (See Figure 4).



The dominance of such policy based knowledge in the Forest Department is not surprising considering that the Department is the primary agency for policy planning and implementation in the forest sector. Such knowledge is also evident in the pattern of change in the departmental focus and functioning. Thus the change from a production to a conservation focus is closely linked to the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 while that to a participatory regime is linked with the National Forest Policy 1980. At the same time, it may be noted that respondents of the Forest Department are Government functionaries and are unlikely to oppose Government policy and therefore their responses may be expected to be in keeping with the policy provisions.

While the dominance of knowledge of policy has been established, the role of knowledge of change and world-view cannot be over emphasised. In the early 1980s for instance, the statistics of increasing degradation and unsuccessful plantations brought with them the realisation that the 'policing' form of forest management was not working. Similarly, experiences like cases of illicit felling and continued encroachment, as well as irresponsible functioning of committees and squandering of money allotted to them have reinforced the perception that unless the FD maintains control over the forest area, nothing will be left of the forests. Further, the perception that money and monetary benefits played a major role in partnership with the people appears to be born from the experience of high level of participation of the people when sufficient funds were available and considerable investments were being made at the village level. Respondents observed that with the diminishing funding and consequently, level of activities, the level of participation has diminished.

The perceptions of the FD on the involvement of other stakeholders in forestry provide an insight to the role of worldviews in shaping perceptions. The FD, especially the divisional level staff has had little experience with stakeholders like NGOs, funding agencies and the private sector. Yet they have definite views on the nature and extent of their involvement in forestry. Only in the case of the Sangathans some respondents have had direct experience. For instance, the MTOs opposed the World Bank funded MP Forestry Project on the grounds of it curbing the rights of the local people. A public hearing was organized in which allegations were made by the

villagers of the FD being exploitative. The repeated agitations by MTOs were one of the major reasons for WB withdrawing from the project. The FD hence considers MTOs as troublemakers.

Thus we find that at all levels, knowledge of policy, change and world-view has played a role in the definition of the problem.

VII The Way Ahead: Suggestions from the Forest Department

The respondents feel that it is premature to label JFM as a success or failure because not enough time has lapsed since the beginning of the new programme. However, they acknowledge the need for strengthening the process. Some suggestions in this regard were:

1. Better management of people- forest interface is possible if physical and social infrastructural development is routed through forestry management system. Convergence is the order of the day and FD can play a lead role in forest dominated areas (BHP)
2. JFM should focus not only on participation in forest protection but should also include participatory planning. Local communities should be allowed to decide the flow of benefits from their area and sustainable practices for management (BHP).
3. To increase community participation in JFM there should be a field team that is dedicated only to JFM (BHP,HAR). Moreover, the participation of women can increase if the women forest guards are involved in JFM implementation. Alternately, the women health workers in the villages may be associated with JFM since they have a better “reach” to the women. (HAR)
4. To minimise the communities’ risk in forestry by private sector, a tripartite agreement among the community, private player and the forest department may be worked out. (BHP)

At the same time, the respondents limit the scope of forest management to participatory management and not community forest management. They feel that:

- The JFM Committees should not be given legal status because this is likely to “legalise corruption,” and decrease ownership. (BHP)
- In JFM, power is not a commodity to be traded. Empowerment through knowledge and understanding are important and accountability is likely to come with the development of understanding (BHP).
- The forests should not be handed over to the communities because their competence in protecting them is debatable and in the absence of adequate sources of livelihood they may be tempted to “clear fell” the forest. (BHP, HAR)

Conclusions

The perceptions of the FD at the divisional level and state levels differ on certain issues. For the front line staff issues concerning actual implementation are more important as they have to face the local people directly. There is also feeling that the sharing of responsibilities regarding protection is quite unfair as the field staff is held accountable in case of loss due to theft or illicit felling in spite of JFMCs receiving funds for protection.

There's agreement that JFM has helped improve relationship between FD and the local people. The field staff stress that within the department itself there's a need for dialogue among staff members at various levels.

MTOs are considered as troublemakers by both divisional and state level staff. However NGOs seem to be an acceptable partner in development activities.

The analysis of Q sort data bring out three discourses: first discourse favours FD led developmental model , it recognises people's rights but forests not to be handed over to people, cautious stand on JFM. Majority of the respondents who subscribe to this view are frontline staff. The second discourse is Pro-participatory approach, with greater recognition of community. It is in favour of collaborative partnerships village institutions (Gram Sabha), including people and PRIs. This view is not anti-JFM , the respondents don not think that rights of the local people are not curbed due to JFM. This view is reflected by FD senior officials at the state level who are considered to be pro-people along with a few frontline staff .

The third discourse is pro-FD; the view favours nationalization of forest produce diplomatic on JFM, there's emphasis on role of money.

It is necessary to contrast the perceptions of FD with other stakeholders such as local villagers, MTOs, legislators in order to suggest ways to resolve conflicts in Harda.

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10. Madhya Pradesh Forest Department website (<http://www.mp.nic.in/forest>) accessed on October 21, 2004

Annexure 1
List of Respondents

At the state level:

1. Mr. A. P. Dwivedi, Principal Chief conservator of Forests (PCCF)
2. Dr. H. S. Pabla, Additional PCCF ,Protection
3. Dr. Animesh Shukla, Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF), JFM
4. Mr. Anil Oberoi, CCF, Development
5. Mr. Jitendra Agarwal, Secretary to Chief Minister, MP
6. Mr. B M S Rathore, Conservator of Forests (CF), JFM

At Hoshangabad Circle level:

1. Mr. C. P. Rai, CF, Hoshangabad

At Harda division level:

1. Mr. Atul Khera, Divisional Forest Officer, DFO
2. Mr. Pandey, Sub Divisional Officer, SDO
3. Mr. Paliwal, SDO
4. Mr. Mhaskole, Range Forest Officer (RFO) Handia
5. Mr. Gupta, RFO, Makdai
6. Mr. Saxena, RFO, Temagaon & Rehetgaon
7. Mr. Sharma, RFO Borpani
8. Mr. Dubey, RFO, Magardha

Annexure 2

Compiled List of Issues covered during the Interview

- I. RFOs, SDOs and DFO:
 1. How do you think JFM programme is different from the other FD programmes?
 2. Are there any problems in the implementation of JFM?
 3. What problems do you face in the implementation of JFM?
 4. What according to you is the solution to these problems?
 5. Were these solutions tried out in the field?
 6. If yes, what was the outcome?
 7. If not, why?
 8. What is the relationship between FD and local people?
 9. Do you think the relationship between the FD & local villagers has changed after the JFM programme?
 10. If yes, in what way? (pl explain with example)
 11. Do NGOs have any role in forest management? What is this role? How can FD work with NGOs?
 12. Does the work of MTOs affect the JFM programme in any way?
 13. If yes, how?
 14. Is the decision-making at village level participatory?
 15. Do women and marginalised communities have any voice in decision making?

 16. Do think FD has ensured that the marginalised communities and women participate in the decision making process?
 17. If not, why? (pl list out the constraints)
 18. How according to you their active participation can be achieved?
 19. Which are the main ways in which villagers interact with forests?
 20. Is income generation an important issue for villagers?
 21. Has JFM helped to generate income for the local villagers? If yes, How?
 22. In the absence of Entry Point Activities (EPA) do you think the local people would participate actively in the JFM programme?
 23. What do you think has been the ecological impact of JFM?

 24. Has there been any difference in response to JFM programme in Forest and Revenue village?
 25. If yes, in what way? What could be the possible reasons?
 26. Is encroachment an important issue for the villagers?
 27. Has there been any change in the extent of encroachment after the JFM programme? Less/ more?
 28. Has JFMC contributed in checking the encroachment? (pl give an example where this has happened)
 29. What is the mechanism of releasing funds?
 30. How does the JFMC get to know how much money was released and how much was spent under various heads?
 31. Has JFM resulted in any disputes between villages?

32. Are there any cases of inter-village disputes on account of land allotted for protection to JFMC?
33. If yes, how were these disputes resolved? What was the outcome?
34. What is your role in resolving the disputes at the JFMC level? What do you do if you cannot resolve those?
35. Has there been any change in the workload of the Front Line Staff (FLS) after the JFM programme?
36. How are the problems at the FLS level conveyed to the higher level?
37. Is this mechanism sufficient?
38. If not, how could it be improved?
39. Does the money sanctioned for particular activities at the village level released on time?
40. If not, what kind of problems do you face because of that? How do you try to resolve those?

II Senior officials at the state level

1. What do you believe is the central role of the Forest Department today? How has this changed in the last (20) years?
2. How do you see your job/the FD changing in the next ten years?
3. In your opinion, what are the main issues that concern villagers in forest areas? What is/can be the role of the FD in addressing these issues?
4. What role do NGOs and civil society organizations have in the forest sector?
5. How can they fulfill this role? In what ways can they work with the FD?
6. What is your view of the MTOs that are active in the state? Can they play a productive and useful role in the forest sector?
7. The issues raised by the MTOs – *jal, jangal, zamin* – are crucial to the lives of villagers, and are also areas in which the FD has an important role. The MTOs have brought some of these issues into the limelight through their campaigning. Can these energies be utilized more productively to find mutually acceptable solutions? How?
8. In your opinion, do international donors have any role in the Indian forest sector?
9. What is this role?
10. Have they been performing this role effectively?
11. Have state governments been able to bargain more effectively with donors over forestry projects in recent years? Has this changed? How? Why?
12. In your opinion, what is the role of the private sector in forestry? How can these inputs be harnessed more effectively?
13. Personally, why did you join the FD?
14. What do you find are the most interesting aspects of the job that you currently do?
15. What are the most challenging aspects?
16. Are you aware of the arrangements under which the Rajaberari estate operates in Harda? (if not, give a brief description) Is this model replicable in other forest areas? Why, or why not?

Please Note: Some issues from both the sets were covered during the interview with the CF, Hoshangabad.

The order of questions was not strictly followed in all the interviews, and owing to the constraint in time, not all the issues were covered in each interview.