

Legislators' Perceptions about Participatory Forest Management and their Role: A Case Study of Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly

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Executive Summary

This qualitative study examines legislators' perceptions on PFM-related issues as well as their participation in the process of policy formulation and policy implementation in Madhya Pradesh. This study is primarily based on open-ended interviews and response to a set of 48 statements concerning issues related to PFM. The purposive sampling was confined to low and high forest cover districts having less than 14% and more than 31% forest cover respectively, and around 10 percent MLAs were chosen from such districts providing a total sample of 15 MLAs from 14 districts.

Law and Policymaking

The three basic functions of the legislature include representing public in making policies and laws, and exercising oversight. The legislators are expected to perform these three different roles simultaneously, which, at times, place diametrically opposite demands on them. Most of the legislators admit that they are not doing justice with their primary role of making policy and rules. The major constraints experienced by the legislators that limit their effective participation in the policy and law making include expectations of the constituency and political parties, personal competence, lack of resources and structural constraints.

Oversight function

The popular and preferred oversight tools used by the MLAs include questions, half-an-hour discussion, calling attention, adjournment motion and short notice question. The question hour seems to be one of the most popular tools among the MLAs. Therefore its use and effectiveness was chosen for study. Most of the MLAs view question hour as an opportunity to address the concerns of their constituency related to implementation. The questions framed by the MLA come from different sources that include personal experience and thinking, aggrieved party, party workers, public servants, interest groups, media and important persons from the constituency or party. Three criteria used by the legislators for prioritizing questions include seriousness of the issue, number of people affected or likely to be benefited and problems that cannot be solved locally. Most of the legislators are not highly satisfied with the outcome. The assessment of satisfaction by the members varied between 5 to 60 percent. Important reasons that appeared during interviews for ineffective use of question hour include quality of questions, attitude of ministers and rules for question.

Representative role

Most of the legislators feel that their constituents have become more demanding over the years therefore their representative role has acquired importance over the other roles. The interviews contained many examples, which suggest that the legislators mostly take care to address those constituent worries, which reach them directly. Although MLAs are accessed through telephones and post cards, direct meeting has greater significance. People from the tribal areas rarely visit legislators. The time spaces of the legislators are quite similar to open access resource, the use of which, to a large extent, depends on the capacity of the users. Therefore, the active segment of the society that are aware of their rights and are skilled enough to articulate their interest and resourceful enough to meet the legislators would access legislators more than the others in the society.

Priority assigned to forests by the legislators

Successful reform in the forestry sector requires policy changes and innovative legislation for which a sincere political will is required. Most of the legislators also feel that the change is not possible without political will. Legislators assigned priority to issues such as electricity, education, health, unemployment, agriculture; and law and order during the interviews. Forests cannot become priority of the legislators as long as the basic needs of the people are not fulfilled.

Rights and Concessions

Most of the legislators agree that the local people should have first right over forests. Some respondents feel that the forest fringe villagers should be allowed to meet their bonafide needs from forests free of cost. Some respondents feel that the people do not know even the existing rights and it is the duty of the forest officials to make them aware of their rights. Some respondents feel that this will improve the oversight function of the legislature, as the people will be able to detect omissions by the forest officials and report to the legislators. Some legislators feel that the settlement of encroachment was not done properly. Some respondents are not happy with the demarcation of the forest boundaries. Most of the legislators feel that the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 need amendment. Some legislators cited examples of hardship being faced by the tribal communities and expressed their anger and anguish towards these acts during interviews.

Participatory Forest Management

All respondents realize that without willing and active participation of the local communities, it is not possible to protect and regenerate forests. They also feel that forest protection is possible only when the socio-economic condition of the fringe villages improve.

Some respondents feel that the JFM committees are being constituted through a democratic process by observing the guidelines. In contrast, others feel that the elections for committees are being influenced either by the Forest department or the political elites of the village or both. Most of the respondents agree that the committees have been captured by the elites. Some respondents do not visualize escape from the elite-capture, as a poor person cannot devote time for the committee's work.

Some respondents feel that the Chairpersons are working as liaison worker of the forest department, not as the representative of the villagers. The protection of the forests has considerably increased by involving people. It has also helped in providing livelihoods to the people. Knowledge of benefit sharing arrangement is very low among legislators. Some respondents also complained that the forest officials do not explain the benefit sharing formula to the people.

Most of the respondents feel that percentage of effective committees is not very high. The reasons identified include improper constitution of committees, elite capture, interference of the forest department and self-interest pursued by the office bearers. Respondents have divergent views on the trend of inter and intra village conflicts. Some respondents feel that the conflicts have not increased while some view it as natural - associated with the role of protection. Most of the MLAs feel that the JFM committees should continue to maintain their separate identity. Three reasons specified during

interviews for not handing over forest management responsibilities to Gram Panchayats include politicization and corruption in the PRI and their inability to protect forests.

Most of the MLAs from the high forest districts feel that there are not many NGOs working in the forest fringe villages. Some respondents feel that the local NGOs are better than the outsiders. Some respondents were very much annoyed with the style of functioning of activist groups working in their area.

Forest Department

Most of the legislators realize that the existence of the forest department is essential for managing the forests. The views of the legislators on the role of the department were diverse. Most of the respondents feel that the forest department should act as a facilitator in empowering communities to manage forests. However, the level of intervention visualized differed. Some respondents advocate frequent monitoring and greater support to the JFM committees while others feel that the forest department should not interfere with the working of the committees. One respondent still feels that the forest department should be strengthened with arms and more stringent rules to protect forests.

Most of the respondents feel that foresters do not make efforts to build relationships with the legislators. Some respondents feel that the relationship of the forest department with the people has improved but it is still not satisfactory. Most respondents also feel that there is lack of transparency in the working of the forest department. Some respondents also suggested face-to-face interaction in the workshops and seminars or study tours to show the work being done by the department to improve relationships.

Difference in Perception of legislators from high and low forest districts

The JFM committees in the high forest districts have become politically very important for the politicians. There were no significant differences between the perceptions of the MLAs from the high forest districts and low forest districts. However, perceptions on three statements were found significantly different when Man – Whitney U test was used for testing the differences. Most of the respondents agree that World Bank assistance has boosted the PFM however over 87 percent MLAs from the low forest districts completely agree whereas around 43 percent of the MLAs from the high forest districts completely disagree with this statement. The perceptions of respondents of high and low forest districts also differ significantly on the statement whether the forest department has usurped tribal lands and rights. Around 63 percent MLAs of the low forest district completely or partially disagree with this statement whereas around 43 percent MLAs from the high forest districts completely agree with this statement (mean: 0.85). The perceptions of respondents of high and low forest districts also differ significantly on the statement whether the people will protect the forests but the real benefits will be reaped by the Forest Department under the JFM. Seventy five percent MLAs of the low forest district completely disagree with this statement whereas around 29 percent MLAs from the high forest districts completely agree with this statement.

To conclude, although the legislators are representing the needs of their constituents through oversight tools in the legislature, the learning from the oversight function normally doesn't feed into policymaking. Oversight tools should feed in to policy change to make policies more contexts specific and informed by the ground realities. The participation of the legislators in the implementation has increased over the years. They

need to disengage themselves from the implementation so that they could devote more time on their primary role of law and policymaking. Lack of awareness about the rights and the role of the legislators among citizens limit their support to the legislators in discharging their responsibilities. The legislators also need to build their own capacity and overcome structural constraints that limit their participation in policymaking.

It emerged from the discussion that forests cannot become priority of the legislators as long as the basic needs of the people are not fulfilled. Advent of JFM stimulated some political interest in forest management with focus on benefit flow to local communities particularly those from disadvantaged groups. However, neither the legislators nor their constituents are able to appreciate the linkage between the livelihoods and forests. The existing monitoring indicators of the forest department lack information by which the linkage between forests and livelihoods could be established. The forestry could probably find a place in the political agenda in the states when the forest department demonstrates linkage between improved livelihood and forest cover. The forest department needs communication strategy for building effective relationships with the legislators and the village communities. Efforts are also required to increase the proportion of 'JFM committees that perform'.

Legislators' Perception about the Participatory Forest Management and their Role: A Case Study of Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly

Introduction

Institutional reforms in the forestry sector in India have been extensively debated, discussed and implemented to some extent in the recent years especially under various externally aided forestry projects. Emergence of the Participatory Forest Management (PFM) has been the most prominent of the reforms, and widely acclaimed as a remarkable advancement in the forest policy. PFM attempts to ensure local people's participation and benefit-sharing arrangement in managing forestry resources. However, securing associated institutional changes requires supportive political will, and therefore, it is useful to understand the legislators' perception about (PFM). This qualitative study aims to examine legislators' perceptions on PFM-related issues as well as their participation in the process of policy formulation and implementation in Madhya Pradesh (MP)– the state having maximum forest area in India.

Table 1. Forest cover in the state of Madhya Pradesh in India (FSI, 2002)

Item	Madhya Pradesh		India	
	Area (sq. km.)	Percent	Area (sq. km.)	Percent
Forest Cover	77,265	25.07	675,538	20.55
Forest and Tree Cover	83,016	26.93	757,010	23.03
Recorded Forest area	95,221	30.89	768,436	23.37
Geographic area	308,245		3,287,263	

In democratic countries, legislators represent their electorate in the legislatures that are authorized by the people to make policies and law for the country or state. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines a legislator as "member of a law making body." The three basic functions of the legislature include representing publics in making policies and laws, and exercising oversight (Johnson & Nakamura, 1999).

Role and capacity of the legislators of developing countries in policy formulation and implementation is often discussed in the context of good governance, which is considered to be sine qua non for the sustainable development. According to the World Bank (1994), "Good governance is epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policymaking process; a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos; an executive arm of government accountable for its actions; and a strong civil society participating in public affairs; and all behaving under the rule of law." However, the role of the legislature is the most critical in good governance as, an effective legislature can set enlightened policy making process, and make executive accountable by using strong oversight tools.

Although expert-driven model of policymaking has been found misconceived and inadequate, the bureaucracy in India is ascribed to have pervasive role in the policy formulation (Jain 2001). Importance of engaging stakeholders in the policy process affected by development policies is now widely accepted (Hobley *et al.*, 2004). Legislators have opportunity to bring practical experiences and opinion of their constituents to the legislature, and initiate informed debate leading to development policies that work. To meet this requirement, the legislators need to engage their constituents in the policy debate, and bring contextual knowledge to the legislature for further deliberation. This is possible only when legislators have the capacity to do so and they consider policy making as their primary role.

Research questions

What the legislators in the Madhya Pradesh really do, and what they think about the forestry sector – are the two central questions in this study. As stated above, the aim of this study is to examine the participation of the legislators in the policy formulation and implementation, and to understand their perceptions on various issues related to the participatory forest management. More specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What is the role of the legislators in formulation and implementation of policy?
- What factors have supported or hindered effective participation of legislators in policy process?
- What is the role of question hour in the policy process?
- What are perceptions of the legislators on various issues related to the participatory forest management in Madhya Pradesh?
- Is there any difference in perceptions of legislators from low forest districts and those from high forest districts?

Methodology

This study is primarily based on open-ended interviews with purposively selected fifteen Members of the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly. The questions on PFM asked by the Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) in the Assembly House were used as the entry point for the study. The samples were purposively chosen to meet diverse criteria for sampling given below (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of the legislators interviewed by the criteria used

Criteria	Number of MLAs Interviewed as per Criteria					
Forest Cover (percent)	Low	08	High	07		
Gender	Male	14	Female	01		
Experience in the earlier Assembly	Yes	10	No	05		
Ministerial Experience	Yes	04	No	11		
Asked question on PFM in Assembly	Yes	04	No	11		
Political Party affiliation	BJP	08	INC	04	SP	03

Using the percentage of forest cover given in the FSI report (2002), all the districts in Madhya Pradesh were classified into three categories: low forest cover districts having up to 14% area under forests, medium forest cover districts (15 to 31%) and high forest cover district having not less than 32% area under forest cover. The purposive sampling was confined to low and high forest cover districts, and around 10 percent MLAs were chosen from such districts providing a total sample of 15 MLAs from 14 districts. Experience in the earlier Assembly, ministerial Experience, questions on PFM raised in the Assembly and political Party affiliation were other four criteria included to ascertain diverse viewpoints on the subject.

The legislators were also asked to respond to a set of 48 statements² concerning a wide range of the PFM-related issues on five-point scale consisting of ‘completely agree’ (+2), ‘partially agree’ (+1), ‘no opinion’ (0), ‘partially disagree’ (-1) and ‘completely disagree’ (-2).

The interviews were conducted between December 2003 and August 2004. The important political events that took place during this period include general elections for the Parliament and allocation of portfolios of the Ministers in Madhya Pradesh Government. Most of the interviews were conducted at the residences of respective legislators at their convenience to avoid distractions. The respondents allocated their time and attention to the interview sessions in the best possible manner. However, in many cases, the legislators continued to respond to the phone calls and also interact with the visitors that, at times, disrupted their flow of thoughts on some issues.

The legislators’ perceptions presented in this paper represent only a snapshot in time. In addition, the report has the limitations of qualitative study including limited sample size, the political sensitivity of certain questions, environmental influences of political events, etc. However, the data do allow at least a baseline interpretation of the legislator’s behavior and its key determinants in the State of Madhya Pradesh.

The Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly

Composition of the 12th Assembly

The state of Madhya Pradesh was created in November 1956 with reorganisation of states, and subsequently bifurcated into Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh in November 2000. The Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly has 230 members directly elected from territorial constituencies that includes 34 Scheduled Caste (SC) and 41 Scheduled Tribe (ST) members from the reserved constituencies. The twelfth assembly was constituted on 5th December 2003, and majority of the members belong to three political parties

² This set of 48 statements was prepared by the research team under the DFID-assisted project coordinated by Bhaskar Vira, Cambridge University.

namely: 173 from Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), 38 from Indian National Congress (INC) and 7 from Samajwadi Party (SP). The remaining 12 members are from other political parties or do not have any party affiliation (independent). The women members (19 in number) constitute little more than 8% of the house (ECI, 2003). A majority (130 members) has been elected for the first time. Farmers and businesspersons make overwhelming majority of the house, and most members had college education (Table 3).

Table 3. Educational qualification and professional background of the 12th MP Legislative Assembly members (*Dainik Bhaskar*, 02 January 2004)

Educational Qualification	Number	Percent	Profession	Number	Percent
Literate	04	1.7	Farmers	143	62.2
Primary school	10	4.3	Businesspersons	54	23.5
Middle School	16	7.0	Social/ political worker	12	5.2
High School	11	4.8	Lawyer	09	3.9
Higher Secondary & ITI	36	15.7	Former govt. officials	04	1.7
Graduate	47	20.4	Doctor	03	1.3
Post Graduate	33	14.3	Others	05	2.2
Law Graduate	22	9.6			
Law Post Graduate	12	5.2			
Engineering Graduate	07	3.0			
Post Graduate in Medicine	02	0.9			
Higher Education	13	5.7			
Educated (details not given)	17	7.4			
<i>Total</i>	230		<i>Total</i>	230	

Session schedule of the Assembly

The assembly, unless sooner dissolved, continues for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting. Business of the assembly is conducted as per provisions laid down in the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly Rules (MP Vidhan Sabha, 2003). The Speaker or Deputy Speaker presides over the proceedings of the Assembly. Normally three assembly sessions are held in a year. The time period of these sessions varies as follows the budget session during February to May, the autumn or monsoon session during July to September and the winter session during October to December. The duration of sessions vary from 10 to 30 days. The eleventh Madhya Pradesh Assembly remained in session for 288 days averaging around 58 days per year.

The business of the Assembly can be broadly divided in to two categories namely Government and Private Business. A tentative list of Government legislative and other business expected to be taken up during the session is published a few days before the commencement of each session. The last two and a half hours of a sitting on every

Friday are allotted for transaction of private members' business. Unless the Speaker otherwise directs, the Assembly ordinarily sits from 10.30 to 13.00 hours and from 14.30 hours to 17.00 hours making five hour sessions a day. The first hour of every sitting is usually available for responding to the members' questions. The concerned Ministers respond to the questions by rotation. The Ministries/ Departments of Government of MP have been classified into five groups for the purpose of Assembly questions.

Policy and law making versus representative functions of legislators

The legislature has the sole prerogative and responsibility to make laws and policies, and to scrutinize whether the executive has properly exercised the delegated powers to make regulations, rules, sub-rules, byelaws, etc. Legislators are aware of the supremacy of the legislature in the parliamentary democracy and their sole prerogative of passing laws. Most of the legislators also admit that they are not doing justice with their primary role of making policy and rules. One legislator commented, "The framers of the constitution would have never imagined the kind of things that are happening in the legislature. What we see inside is miserable, we only know... We do all kinds of things other than our primary job." Another respondent commented, "MLAs do not participate in the policy making process. They only react when the policies are implemented." Drawing analogy with the other services to prove that it is not uncommon, another legislator said, "We are like school teachers who do all sorts of things other than teaching." Some legislators having ministerial experience do not agree with these conclusions as one respondent said, "The Legislative Assembly does not remain silent even for a minute. When we debate through out the day, discussions on policy issues do take place".

However most of the legislators assign highest priority to their role as a representative of their constituency. The other significant factors that seem to influence role interpretation include their personal political histories, educational background, party relations and training. The new legislators lack good understanding of the rules on transaction of business in the house that, at times, limit their effective participation in the house.

The legislators are expected to perform at least three different roles simultaneously, which, at times, place diametrically opposite demands on them. Legislature is primarily known as lawmaking body, therefore its members are expected to frame laws as per the needs of the State. They are expected to represent the interests of their territorial constituency that may not be, at times, congruent with the larger interest of the State. They are also expected to pursue the political agenda of their parties for which often whips are issued that bind them to follow party's decision in the Assembly. However, it does not mean that they do not fulfill expectations of interest groups, other state institutions, the media, etc.

The major constraints experienced by the legislators that limit their effective participation in the policy and law making include expectations of the constituency and political parties, personal competence, lack of resources and structural constraints.

Expectation of Constituency

Most of the legislators feel that the expectations of the constituency have increased substantially over the years. Voters have least understanding of what a MLA should be ideally doing as one legislator put it, “ people do not have idea about the role of the MLA in a parliamentary democracy.” Voters view legislators as panacea. They expect legislators to solve all types of their personal problems. The legislators are approached not only to solve the substantive problems but they are also expected to fulfill emotional needs of their constituents related to power and approval. Therefore, the legislators are expected to attend marriage ceremonies or visit hospital when the voters are unwell as it increases the social status of the voters. Voters’ support is contingent upon the sensitivity shown by the legislators towards their substantive and non-substantive problems. One respondent said, “You have to regularly visit your constituency, people start making satirical comments like ‘MLA saheb is coming after an year’. Even the local newspapers will not spare you.

Voters very well understand that the survival of legislators depend on their precious votes. They are increasingly becoming very demanding. Most of the voters approach legislators with their personal problems that are concerned with either police or revenue department. One of the legislators expressed his frustration as, “our term ends up chasing TI (Police station-in charge) and the revenue officials.” Fulfillment of expectations that, at times, are beyond the purview of a legislator, often determine the success or failure of a legislator in the eyes of voters. Many legislators are approached to influence the transfer and posting decisions of the government servant or influence bureaucratic decisions that is done either by favoritism or taking liberal interpretation of law or at times ignoring the violation of law. One senior legislator with the ministerial experience said that this has increased substantially in the recent past. Such activities build dependence of the legislators on the bureaucracy. This may not be desirable as it might adversely influence the oversight function of the legislature.

Box 1. If you need Vote

One of the legislators used his MLA area development fund to fulfill the demand of the village to install a hand pump. After successful installation of the hand pump, the legislator asked the old lady standing nearby, “You must be happy now...I have fulfilled your demand”. The old lady, perhaps not in her best of moods, commented, “Dear Son! You will have to fetch water from the hand pump, and serve me. If you need vote, ... and you will come here ten times to do this”.

They are rarely approached for community demands as one of the legislators said, “people rarely come to me for construction of village road or to complain that there is no electricity in the village for the last two months ... no body thinks on those lines... they approach me for *patta* (title) of the land, pension or loan for purchasing goats.” Most of the legislators devote their substantial time in chasing bureaucracy for solving the problems of their constituency. As one legislator said’ “we have exchanged our roles, we are more busy in implementation therefore the policies are prepared by the bureaucrats.” When they were asked to comment on the trend of dominance in the policy making, most of the legislators agreed that the dominance of the bureaucracy has increased over the years. Some legislators with ministerial experience do not accept this generalization; they feel that a lot depends on the minister’s style of functioning and his understanding of the sector. One such respondent observed, “I have discussed the policy proposals in the MLA’s meeting of my party. If a MLA in the house wants to participate in the debate, he can definitely do so provided he is prepared for that. Most of the MLAs do not take pains to read the policy proposals.”

The average voter turnout in the last seven elections (1977-2003) for the State Assembly has been about 56 per cent (ECI, 2004). A large number of voters belong to poor communities who are lured by the politicians as groups before the elections. Their immediate concerns are of such urgent nature that it would be a futile to talk about issues that are going to affect them in future. In a situation where a large number of the targeted voters are fighting for secured livelihoods, it is difficult for the legislators to engage them in a serious policy debate. One of the MLA commented, “I know that the poor farmers will have to bear the brunt of the WTO (World Trade Organization) agreement in future, but they will not relish me discussing about that as they are struggling to get the basic needs such as entitlement of land, irrigation, drinking water, road, power supply etc.” The voters will continue to be myopic looking for short-term gains as long as their livelihoods are unsecured. Even after having secured livelihoods, the voters will be able to force the legislators to actively engage themselves in policy making only when they are informed about the long-term implications of the current policies and are also aware of the role of the legislators. The legislators themselves, in general, do not seem to be interested in ending this information asymmetry between them and voters.

Expectation of Political Parties

Political parties play very important role in the recruitment and career of a legislator in the politics. The behavior of the legislators appears to be essentially party-centered. Many senior legislators of Madhya Pradesh have gone on record saying that their first and foremost loyalty is to their party. One of the legislators who was elected for the first time as an independent candidate and later on in the second term decided to join a political party admitted, “it is impossible to survive in a parliamentary democracy without support of a political party as you need lot of resources to win election which you can not mobilize as an individual.” Legislator must first be recruited, and then find a place in the party’s electoral list in order to sustain a legislative career from term to term

for which he should enjoy the confidence of the party's central leadership. Legislator's career extends well beyond a successful electoral candidacy. Appointment to important positions in the assembly such as ministerial position and committee appointments depends on the loyalty demonstrated by him. In case s/he does not win election s/he can be assigned important party responsibility that would provide him/her enough resources to make a comeback in the assembly. Therefore, loyalty to the party becomes a key determinant of the behavior of legislator.

Some legislators feel that all political parties mostly function in undemocratic manner where the decision-making powers are concentrated in the hands of a few national leaders. One of the legislators summarized his experience as, "Political parties lack internal democracy even for the intellectual discussion. As far as I know there is only one party (name of the party) where you can observe at least democratic deliberation on political issues otherwise, every thing moves around 'high command'. Whatever s/he says is the manifesto of the party...that is policy...that is strategy... that is politics. If some one opposes, s/he is putting his/her political career at risk." Floor crossing is another excuse which political parties give for controlling the activities of the legislators. Indian chief ministers experience extraordinary political pressures to retain control over their party, because of constant political intrigue between different constituencies (Manor, 1995). The power to issue whips give yet another type of leverage to political parties to control the behavior of the legislators. These factors limit the possibility of democratic deliberations on the policy issues.

The respondents feel that the style of politics has also changed substantially over the years. Political parties try to win elections at any cost. The approach of the political parties was summarized by one respondent as, "How do you win elections? ...Pickup a few popular issues... promise something ... populist politics to woo the mass of uninformed voters has become pervasive these days ...what is the basis of giving tickets to the candidates? ... caste, muscle power ... capacity to provide funds ... more or less all parties use these criteria ... how do you expect thinkers in the electoral politics? He can be part of the think tank...knowledge of policies and winning elections are not even remotely connected." Another respondent said, "Earlier the focus was on building relationships with people which changed to 'how to get more votes' and now the focus is on techniques of winning election... ultimately, what matters is votes from the ballot box that are counted in your favor ...look at the taste of the people ...actors are used for getting votes...people like ...(well known for his contribution in the policy arena) lose election "

Some legislators also expressed their concern over criminalisation of politics. One such respondent said, "People spend crores of rupees in election. It is difficult for a worker, who depends on building relationship with people, to survive in elections. They (today's politicians) move with bad people. The day you become closer to criminal you will be cut off from the public. There are only a few good people in the politics. We will also lose such people gradually in this environment." Another respondent identified

absence of 'role models' as one of the major reasons for failure to attract and retain good people in politics.

Attracting people who could engage themselves in a serious policy debate is increasingly becoming challenging. When asked to suggest ways to attract good people, one respondent said, "we need hard decisions... it should become mandatory for every citizen to cast vote ... you will see the difference if this happens ... the bad persons will be gradually eliminated ... this will also drastically bring down the cost of election."

Serious discussions on policy issues are uncommon in the political parties. Commenting on the manifesto of his party one respondent said, "the ideological stand point of my party is still unclear. Manifesto of political parties are usually not pursued seriously by the MLA." It is difficult for the legislators to specialize in each and every subject to effectively participate in the policy debate. Political parties do not promote structures like shadow cabinet that provides opportunity for legislators to specialize in a particular subject. Commenting on this issue one respondent said, "a small group of people in our party has started something similar to shadow cabinet although it is undeclared. We have divided topics on which we work. However, I do not see a future for this with the emergence of multi party coalition government in the country."

The political parties are also promoting adversarial relation with other political parties. The ability to silence the opposition even by adopting unbecoming behavior is appreciated in the political parties. What is of interest here is the forms and styles of these debates leading to fierce verbal fights and to the adjournment of the house. One respondent said, "The adversarial relationship among the political parties has led to negative competition. People are least bothered about maintaining the decorum of the house. Most of the time is wasted in allegation and counter allegation; and altercations." Another respondent said, "the political parties are working with vengeful motive. How can you do justice when you are working with such attitude." Many legislators feel that most of the time of the legislature is wasted in non-substantive issues leaving very little time for serious policy debate. One respondent said, "the budget is passed amidst noisy scene without debate." Reacting on the general perception that most of the time of the house is wasted on allegation and counter allegation, one respondent said, "While making allegations we do raise policy issues and discuss on that. It is not correct to say that legislature do not devote sufficient time on policy debate." However, most of the legislators are of the opinion that the adversarial relationship among political parties severely limits the scope of democratic deliberation in the assembly.

One legislator talking about the type of attitude that is required for policy debate said, "the legislators should not enter in the assembly with the party identity. After election the identity of political party should be over only then we can think about state and nation. If someone who opposed in my constituency during the election approaches me for a genuine help, I must help him... whatever happened during election should be forgotten

as soon as the election is over. Development is possible only if we work with this kind of mentality.”

Resource Constraints

Legislators keep moving from one contingency to another contingency. People start approaching legislators from early in the morning and they continue to do so till late in the evening. One legislator observed, “Some times I do not get time for my personal work...I wanted to visit the school where my son studies...I have not been able to do so...we work very hard...only a few people know the kind of hard work we do as MLA. By the late evening you are completely drained...how do you expect us to do serious reading after that... I have been keeping some important papers for a long period for serious reading but I could not find time”.

Legislators are provided one staff to assist them in discharging their duty. Most of the time of the staff is consumed in looking after appointments, answering phone calls and preparing recommendation letters for the visitors. Staff working with the legislators has neither skills nor time to assist him in preparing for the policy debate. Participation in the serious policy debate requires wider consultation and collection of lot of data.

Prevailing Assumptions

The assumptions prevailing among legislators also hinder their participation in the policy debate. The assumptions revealed during interviews that constraint participation of the legislators in participating the policy debate include participation doesn't pay; one should spend less time in Assembly to win election and its seniors job. One respondent said, “People in political circle jokingly often quote that those who spend more time in the Legislative Assembly and read a lot are likely to lose elections. Personally, I have found this to be true. I have never seen (one member) speaking in the house on any issue, he is rarely seen in the house but he always wins election ”

The legislators learn with the experience the tricks of the trade that help them to strike a balance among the various roles. The maturity also provides a stature and network of relationships, which in turn provide them a sense of security to retain their seat. Once their primary concern to get reelected is sufficiently addressed they start making investment in other roles, which they view as gateway to higher positions in the legislature or political party. One newly elected member said, “participating in policy formulation is the job of senior members of the party who have state level stature, I am more concerned about my constituency. I know for sure that if I fail to fulfill the aspirations of my constituency, I will not be reelected.”

Structural constraints

Decision-making Process

Matters in the Assembly are generally decided by 'division' i.e. dividing the House to decide by majority vote. After the motion has been moved, the Speaker formally proposes the motion for consideration of the House and invites those who are in favor of the motion to say "Aye" and those against the motion to say "No". While reacting on the decision making process one respondent belonging to the political party that has a small number of seats in the Assembly said, "When the decisions are taken on the basis of "Ayes" and "Noes", what is the relevance of participating in the policy debate? Whatever the majority proposes will be passed. Why should I waste my time?"

Allocation of Time

Most of the legislators feel that the Assembly should remain in session for longer period. The eleventh Madhya Pradesh Assembly remained in session for about 58 days per year. One respondent said, "I consulted seventy books to speak on division of the state and I was not even allowed to speak for seven minutes ... I could not place my arguments in such a short time. Why can't we have longer sessions? MP Assembly is like '*andho me kana raja*³' as it remains in session for 70 days in a year.

Another respondent highlighting the importance of serious debate said, "There is hardly any difference between ordinance and law as there is hardly any debate in the House. Most of the bills are brought in the House at the end of the sessions and passed hurriedly after a quick debate. It is moral duty of a MLA to make good laws. The laws passed by us must achieve the intended objective. It should also withstand the challenges of judiciary. It is not an easy job. Brilliant lawyers debate on these laws and try to make use of the loopholes. We need lot of time to make laws. The sessions could be divided in to two parts. The first part could be used for questions and other works and the second part should be exclusively reserved for making laws."

The allocation of time for debate on budget, bills, demand of grants etc. is decided by the Business Advisory Committee using formula in which time is allocated to various political parties on the basis of seats in the Legislative Assembly. It is ironical that the numbers of seats are not commensurate with the percentage of votes received by the political parties. Therefore the time space of the legislature is not shared in proportion to votes received by the political parties. This structure also doesn't facilitate participation of political parties with less number of seats.

³ Amongst blinds, the one eyed person is the king.

MLA Fund

The MLA area development scheme was introduced in 1994, under which a fixed amount is placed at the discretion of the MLA for development of his or her constituency. Since 2002–03 in Madhya Pradesh the annual amount per MLA constituency has been increased from two million rupees to four million rupees (Singh et al. 2003). MLA has the authority to allocate resources from the ‘MLA fund’ to solve the pressing needs of his constituency. This amount is allocated to the *Zila Panchayat*, which on authorization of the concerned MLA allots the fund to the concerned department to complete the work. Describing the experience of handling the fund one respondent said, “There are around 100 *Gram Panchayats* in my constituency that compete for 4 million rupees. If you take an average, it comes out to be 40,000 rupees per Gram Panchayat, which is a meager amount for development works. Most of the people approach me for works that would require at least 2 lakhs rupees. People approach you for all kinds of work. Some times you get puzzled.” The MLA fund has put additional burden on the time of the MLA. This system of directly engaging the MLA in the implementation has further pushed them in the business of policy implementation.

Willingness of MLAs

A prerequisite for effective participation in the policy debate is good understanding of the issue being discussed for which extensive reading is required. Most of the MLAs agreed that they do not get time to read. Some of the respondents also agreed that most of the MLAs lack reading habit.

Attitude of the Government

Some legislators seriously doubt whether the government desires to have a serious debate on the policy issues. One respondent said, “I have seen people at the top feeling helpless. They do entire politics with the objective to protect their chair... come what it may... this is the policy. They have many policies in their mind but they lack courage to push them. It’s unfortunate that the people at the highest level are doing survival politics.”

Box 2. Titihiri

The plight of government is similar to that of Titihiri (Red wattled lap-wing). Titihiri raises its leg while resting assuming that even if the sky falls, it will be able to withhold the sky with the raised legs and escape unhurt. Similarly those who are voted to power make all efforts to remain there as long as they are alive at any cost. The system doesn’t support development as good human being. Honest people are gradually sidelined by the system. Those who pursue vested interest and form gang survive. They are eating away the system. This is today’s politics.

Attitude of Bureaucracy

Some of the respondents feel that the bureaucrats do not want involvement of the legislators in the policy formulation as they want to maintain their dominance. Most of

the respondents were unhappy with the attitude of the bureaucracy of not sharing information.

Role of the Civil Society Organizations

The role of civil society organizations has also been *dismal* in informing people on the policy issues, which obviously seem to be a daunting task amidst illiteracy and poverty. Most of the legislators had very little interaction with the Civil Society Organizations on policy issues. Their interactions with legislators are mostly confined to the implementation issues. Only one legislator mentioned about a group that consistently provides support for policy debate in the House.

Role of Intellectuals

Legislators had mixed opinion on the role of intellectuals in policy debates. Some legislators feel that they can help them only to a limited extent. As one respondent put it, “We can definitely take help of specialist...but the awareness has to come among the legislators... after all he has to speak in the House... specialist can’t speak for him. We have ushered in computer age. You have the freedom to build your own capacity (using information technology)”

Another legislator expressed his unhappiness over the attitude of the intellectuals and said, “Intellectuals only look for approval of their status by the powerful people in the government. Once their needs are fulfilled they keep justifying deeds and misdeeds of the government. They are not willing to make sacrifices therefore they don’t do those things that their intellect suggests... I have challenged some of them by saying, if you believe in democracy why don’t you fight election. They are scared of loosing security deposits. You need guts to lose... Intellectuals are not only found in Delhi or Bhopal... you can find them in the villages as well. They will pursue their self-interest by falling in line with the authority. They will never challenge the authority.”

Role of Media

Legislators recognize the importance of media in effectively performing their key roles. However, legislators had diverse opinion on the role of media. Some legislators feel that the media do not provide enough importance to the debates of the legislature. The print media is perceived to be more appropriate for policy debate than the electronic media by the respondents. One respondent said, “All the debates of the legislative assembly ultimately find their place in the library of the Legislative assembly... who will read that... important discussions do not reach to people.” Reacting on the recent initiative of live telecast of the parliamentary proceedings, he further said, “It is a good thing but it is not done every where (in MP). Electronic media is totally temporary. People keep changing the channels...you heard one news... then second news... it

doesn't stay in your mind. There is no permanent record. When you read newspaper. You engage yourself in-depth study which leaves long lasting impression on your mind.”

Some legislators also expressed their concerns about the coverage of issues in the media and their partisan approach. One respondent said, “Media tends to cover negative stories. There will be lot of coverage of incidence in which the patient is robbed off in the hospital, but if the patient gets help from another patient there will be hardly any coverage to this. I feel media is one of the responsible pillars of the democracy; they should publicize positive instances too. Media should also give equal importance to everyone. They should be impartial. If a MLA raises an important issue but doesn't have good contacts in media his/her point does not get media coverage.”

Hopes for Change

Most of the legislators feel that they are not making contribution to the policy and law making to the extent desired. Some of the respondents were also unhappy with the existing political culture. The sense of urgency to change was perceptible in some of the legislators. Some of the legislators feel morally obligated to contribute more seriously to the policy and law making. It was observed during interview that a small group of legislators who keenly participate in policy debate exchange information on policy issues above party lines. The ability to participate in serious debate is still appreciated above party lines.

Two legislators who have participated in the study tours abroad found it to be very useful. These tours have improved their understanding about their role. One such respondent while narrating his discussion with the German Parliamentarian said, “He asked me to describe what I normally do as a legislator (chasing bureaucracy to solve the problems of the constituents). He was surprised to hear what we do as a legislator. He said that his political career would be doomed even if he wrote a letter to the bureaucrats. The division of work is clear. Policymaking is our role. Implementation is the role of the bureaucrats. They do not deal with the bureaucracy directly.”

Some respondents feel that the people are becoming gradually aware and this awareness would generate pressure on legislators to devote more time on policy making. As one respondent talking about the hope in this kind of environment said, “I have a firm belief that if people suffer beyond a limit due to any policy they force the government to change the policy or change the government.”

Legislative oversight

The parliamentary democracy is based on the principle of the “separation of powers”. The legislature, executive and judiciary are separated from each other to keep checks and balances on each other to ensure accountability of the system. The effectiveness of

legislative oversight of the acts and omissions of the executive is critical for good governance.

Legislative oversight has been defined by Lees (1977) as “the behavior by legislators and their staffs, individually or collectively, which results in an impact, intended or not, on bureaucratic behavior.” In a study of 83 countries by Pelizzo and Stapenhurst (2004), it was found that oversight potential is greatly affected by the form of government, per capita income levels, and levels of democracy. Countries with parliamentary forms of government, higher income levels, and that are more democratic have a greater number of oversight tools and greater oversight potential.

The oversight tools that have been found in the more democratic countries with parliamentary system of government and higher per capita national income include committee hearings, hearing in plenary sessions of the parliament, the creation of commissions of inquiry, questions, question time, interpellations, the ombudsman, auditors general, and the public account committees. All such oversight tools and power of impeachment are available to the Madhya Pradesh Assembly to carry out oversight function despite the fact that it can be categorized as low-income economies as per criteria used in the study⁴. A brief description of important internal oversight tools are given below (MP Vidhan Sabha, 2003):

Question: By giving notice at least 21 days in advance, each member can ask not more than 2 starred and 2 un-starred questions for the same day for oral or written answer from the concerned minister respectively (Figure 1).

Short notice questions: Question on matter of urgent public importance may be asked with notice shorter than 21 days with the approval of the Speaker and the consent of the Minister concerned.

Half-an-hour discussions: Discussion on matters of sufficient public importance arising out of answers to questions of current or preceding session may be held on Thursday and Friday.

Adjournment Motion: Members can also give notice at least 2 hours before the commencement of the session for one Adjournment Motion to draw the attention of the House to a recent matter of urgent public importance having serious consequences.

⁴ The World Bank (2002) has categorised the countries in three groups based on the gross national income per capita: High-income economies \$ 9,266 or more; middle-income economies between \$ 755 to 9,265; and low-income economies, below \$ 755. In year 2002-03, Madhya Pradesh had INR 11438 or US\$250 per capita Net State Domestic Product at current prices (<http://indiabudget.nic.in>)

Calling Attention: A member may, with the previous permission of the Speaker, call attention of a Minister to any matter of urgent public importance and the Minister may make a brief statement immediately or ask for time to make a statement at a later time. A member cannot give more than 2 such notices on the same day.

Discussion on a Matter of Urgent Public Importance & Short Duration Discussions: Any member desirous of having discussion on a matter of urgent public importance may give notice in writing to the Principal Secretary/Secretary specifying clearly and precisely the matter to be raised. Speaker may allow discussion for a maximum period of 90 minutes. Similarly, a maximum duration of 45 minutes has been fixed for the short duration discussion.

Cut Motions: Members may give notice of Cut Motions for the reduction of a demand for grant by or to a specified amount.

Committees: There are 18 committees that can be broadly classified under two categories namely financial committees that include Public Accounts Committee, Public Undertaking Committee and Estimate Committee; and other committees. These committees have extensive powers that include inspection of records, on spot inspection, power to constitute sub committee etc.

The external tools available in the State include ombudsman (Lokayukta) and auditors general. Lokayukta has been constituted in the state to improve the standards of Public Administration, by looking into complaints against administrative actions, including cases of corruption, favoritism and official indiscipline in administrative machinery. Madhya Pradesh Lokayukta Act includes the Chief Minister as well into the definition of 'Public Servant'. Madhya Pradesh Government has also constituted Advisory Committees for various government departments, which comprises of MLAs.

The popular and preferred oversight tools used by the MLAs include questions, half-an-hour discussion, calling attention, adjournment motion and short notice question. Only a few MLAs make optimum use of all the opportunity. One such respondent commented, "I fully utilize all the opportunities... question hour...zero hour...calling attention... It's a lot of work. Just imagine, you have to prepare around 120 questions for a session, then for calling attention, you need to be in touch with the people. I do it regularly like common people do worship every day. I start getting phone calls from the morning that continues till late evening... People like representatives of people's organizations and aggrieved party also come to meet me to present their problems. I also receive post cards."

The question hour seems to be one of the most popular tool among the MLAs therefore its use and effectiveness was chosen for study. Respondents feel that this is one the most powerful tool available to a private member of the legislative assembly.

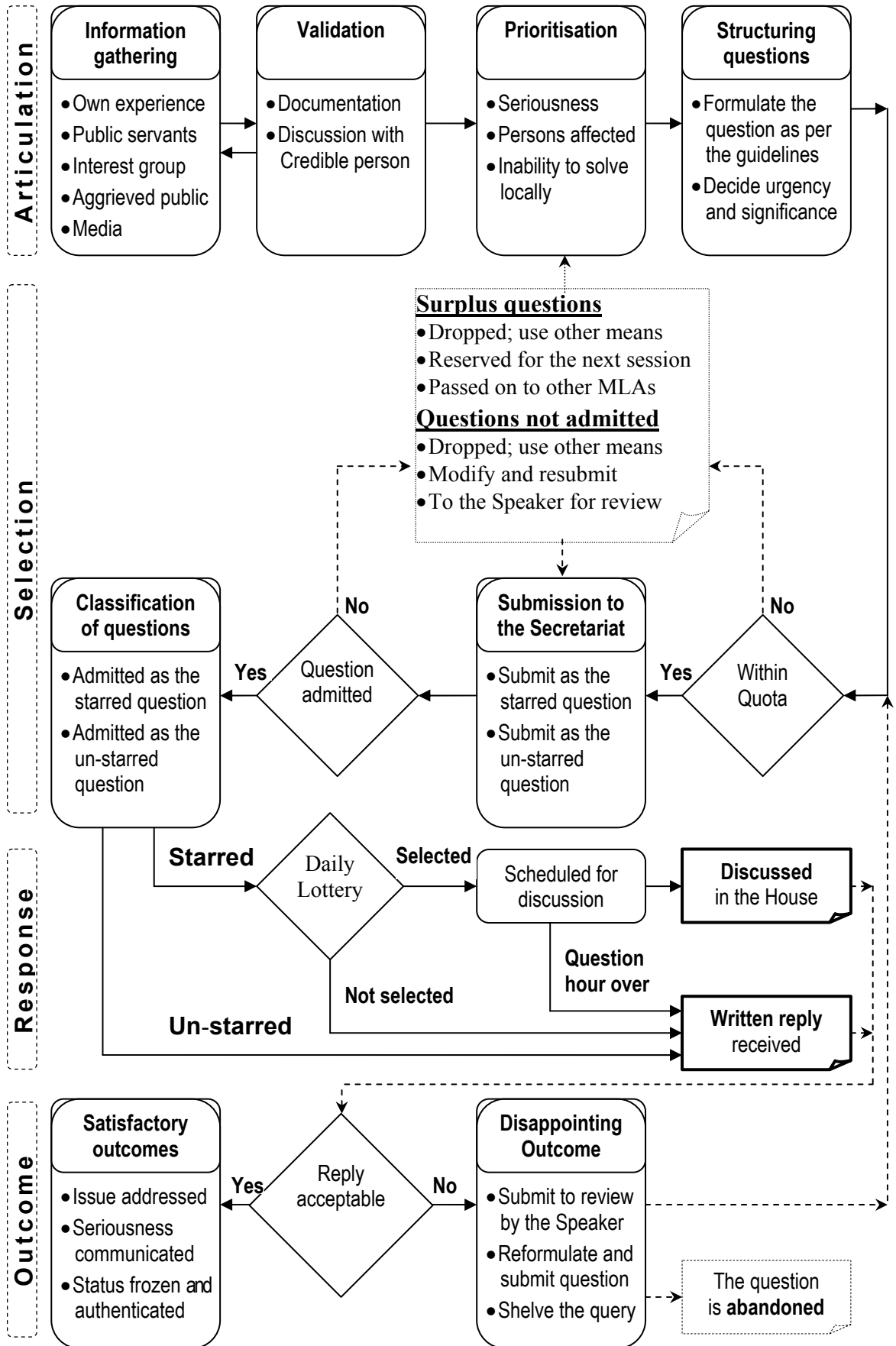


Figure 1. Journey of a Question

Purpose

Most of the MLAs view question hour as an opportunity to address the concerns of their constituency related to implementation. One respondent said, “Generally we are aware of what is happening in our constituency at the ground level. We point out the irregularities/ shortcomings when things are not done according to policies.” Some of the respondents view it as an oversight tool that can be used either for constituency or State level issues. One respondent did not agree with such narrow interpretation of the question hour. According to him it should feed into policy change.

The question hours are also used for getting media attention and pressurizing bureaucracy. There is always a political motive behind even the simple questions that per se appears to be asked for seeking information. Reacting on whether questions are asked for merely seeking information, one respondent said, “We do get the information from the concerned department, but questions are not asked just to get information, but the aim is to get attention of higher officials and the concerned Minister on those issues, to have discussion so that the lacunae are pointed out. If decisions are taken after discussion it has to be implemented. The bureaucracy is compelled to take action.”

Sources

On the basis of its source the question asked can be classified in two categories viz. sponsored and un-sponsored questions. Un-sponsored questions are those that are basically drafted by the MLAs themselves whereas the sponsored questions are drafted by the others, which the legislator may submit to the Assembly with or without amendment.

The questions framed by the MLA come from different sources. The important sources mentioned during interview include personal experience and thinking, aggrieved party, party workers, public servants, interest groups, media and important persons from the constituency or party.

Personal experience and thinking of the MLA seems to be the most important source. Most of the MLAs tour extensively in their constituency. They meet different people who approach them with various problems and suggestions and also observe many things during the tour that give them opportunity for on spot inspection and validation of claims by different groups. These experiences coupled with their own thinking on various issues shape their perception of problems in their constituency to a great extent.

Party workers and other ‘important persons’ from the constituency are another major source of the questions. They are spread all over the constituency and remain in regular contact with the legislators. The important persons cited during interviews include senior politicians, retired government servants, and subject matter specialists. Commenting on

the legislators' learning ability, one respondent said, "We try to learn from different people as we have to deal with various issues. I have raised very serious questions on the policy of Information Technology. I didn't know any thing about this till recently. I had to learn from the knowledgeable people. I don't have inhibition in learning. Any body can become my guru... he may be minister, government servant or anyone else."

Public servants approach MLAs because of internal conflicts in the government departments. This is a very important source that provides lot of information on the functioning of the various government departments to the legislators. However, they have to check the reliability of the information as some times wrong information is fed to the legislators to harass the rival group. Public servants, especially from the subordinate services, also approach them to get their grievances redressed.

Legislators have diverse opinion on media. The television and newspapers are important source for some of the legislators. It helps in identifying issues on which questions could be asked. Others do not consider it a good source. One respondent narrated his experience as, "Once there was some news on some television channel about water being polluted in (name of the place) locality, so I took a number of people there, but later it turned out that there was hardly any element of truth in that story".

Sources of sponsored questions include interest groups, government servants and aggrieved party. Some times the MLAs get request from the fellow legislators especially when one legislator has more than 4 important questions, which s/he wants to ask on a particular day. In rare cases, they also receive questions from the ministers. The ministers themselves cannot ask questions related to their constituency therefore they request some MLAs to do that.

Criteria for Prioritization

In majority of the interviews the respondents treated three criteria as most important viz seriousness of the issue, number of people affected or likely to be benefited and problems that cannot be solved locally.

The value frame of the legislator guides the definition of the 'seriousness' of the issue. Some senior legislators when asked to assign relative importance between constituency and state said, "I do not know about others but I will give higher importance to the state level issues. My constituency is within the state. I can always approach Minister or bureaucracy for my constituency. My priorities are different. I want to work in public interest. I am not sure if an average MLA will do the same thing."

Clubbing of departments is also an important issue in assigning relative importance to a particular department. If a particular department is clubbed with very important

departments the chances of facing questions in the Assembly automatically decreases. One respondent said, “The forest department is clubbed with the ‘heavy weight’ departments like agriculture, revenue, mining... MLA has to assign relative importance among these departments... this is one of the reasons for lesser number of questions on the forests.”

Reliability of information is very important for the legislators, as they are concerned about their image on the floor of the House and also they make themselves responsible for the accuracy of such statements vide Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly (Rule) rule 35 (3). Some legislators cross check the information from other sources before asking the question and while doing so they particularly look for documentary evidences. Reflecting on the issue of reliability one respondent said, “we might not be asking questions that truly reflect people’s need as the questions that are adequately supported by documentary evidences given more weight.” The credibility of source therefore becomes very important in short listing the questions.

Most of the legislators try to solve problems locally but when they feel that it cannot be solved locally they bring it to the House. Explaining as to why he doesn’t ask questions related to forests one respondent said, “If I will ask questions on forests then I will not get the desired result. My constituents request me to influence the forest officials for not forcing them to evict encroached land. I get my job done with interpersonal relationship. I promise the forest officials that they will not encroach further, please do not force evict them. If I had raised the question, the Forest Department would have given me reply that they are taking this action under legal provisions. Most of the problems of my constituents related to forests cannot be solved in the legislature.”

Fairness of the Process

Role of the Speaker and Secretariat of the Legislative Assembly are important for admissibility or amendment of the questions and subsequent discussion on supplementary questions on the floor of the House. There is elaborate rule for asking

Box 3. Criteria for Prioritization

The following quotations are illustrations of what criteria are used by the legislators for prioritizing questions:

“My top priority is incidences of injustice, atrocity and corruption especially in tribal areas”

“I fight for the right of the people”

“How many people are going to be benefited? It should be in public interest.”

“I try to bring out issues of corruption ... especially misuse of public money.”

“I weigh the seriousness of the question on my mental scale. If the subject is very serious only then I take it to the House.”

“If someone is killed by a wild animal it’s a serious issue...if the crops are damaged... it’s a serious issue...if a large number of people are affected by any thing ...it’s a serious issue.”

“Issues that can not be solved at the local level.”

“At times, we also assess the possibility of getting credit, fame... publicity by asking a particular question.”

questions, which clearly defines boundary for asking questions. The questions that cannot be asked as per rules are returned to the legislators. Some questions are also returned for amendment by the Secretariat.

Most of the MLAs feel that the process related to admissibility of questions is fair to a large extent. One respondent did not agree with this general perception, he said, “The uncomfortable questions (for the government) are not admitted. There is a nexus of the top bureaucrats that works behind it.” Another respondent did not agree with this contention, he said, “If you are well versed with the rules (of the Legislative Assembly) your questions will be admitted. Is it necessary to bring every thing to the House in the form of questions? There are other forums available which can be appropriately used.”

Starred questions are drawn by lottery system therefore it is considered completely fair by all the MLAs. The MLAs dissatisfied with the action of the Secretariat meet the Speaker seeking redress. Most of the respondents feel that the Speakers have been impartial irrespective of their party affiliation. In a very guarded language mindful of his duty not to speak against the Speaker, one respondent said, “Speakers, at times, take lenient view towards the members of the ruling party and those who are in his good books. You need to be in good books of the Speaker.” Some legislators suspect partisan elements in the decisions of the Speaker in the admission of the ‘Calling Attention’ and time granted for the supplementary questions. Another respondent while trying to explain as to why the Speaker can’t become partial said, “Try to understand the psychology behind the impartiality of the Speakers. You can afford to be partial before a few people but you can not do that before more than hundred people.”

Processes outside House

In some cases MLAs are approached directly or through known persons with a request not to raise a particular question especially if an influential person is likely to be affected from the outcome of the discussion on the floor of the House. When they fail to influence the decision of the legislator, they try to influence the Secretariat. One respondent said, “The influential people also try to contact the secretariat (Legislative Assembly) to see that the question is not brought in House. However, if any MLA is adamant and follows up the question patiently it is different then”.

Sometimes bureaucrats also approach legislators either directly or through their supporters in the districts with requests related to questions. One responded narrated his conversation over telephone with one bureaucrat who said, “You have to decide whether I should do my job as (name of the post) or devote my entire time in preparing answers of your questions... people’s interests are being harmed.” The legislator further said, “Bureaucrats feel uncomfortable when we ask questions. Sometimes they take it as personal attack. There is a problem with the attitude.”

Sometimes Ministers try to read the mind of the MLAs or negotiate on a particular issue before the question day. One respondent describing his experience said, “ Sometimes Ministers will give you a call to read your mind before answering on the floor of the House. They will try to dig out exactly what do you want. What is your motive? This may be followed by assurance outside the House. This happens especially with those MLAs who have the capacity to corner the Minister in the House.”

Behavior in the question hour

The primary objective in the starred question is to get assurance from a Minister on the floor of the House for which they try to corner the Minister by building arguments on the information provided. On the other hand the Minister concerned generally tries to defend the Executive. This debate continues in the oral answers as long as the Speaker desires. Noisy scenes during question hours are very common. The behavior of the MLAs from the ruling party is not different from the behavior of the opposition on questions related to their constituency. However, the closure of the debate is softer when the member of the ruling party has asked the question. The behavior of the opposition changes drastically as the election approaches, the attack on the Ministers become sharper.

Effectiveness

Most of the legislators are not highly satisfied with the outcome. The assessment of satisfaction by the members varied between 5 to 60 percent. Specifying reasons for dissatisfaction, one respondent said, “the replies are prepared by the bureaucrats, most of the ministers simply read that in the house. They (bureaucrats) hide vital information to maintain status quo. They do not want change; they are in this business for a long period. It is very difficult to take out desired information from them.” However, one respondent said that he was completely satisfied with the outcome. Analyzing his experience, he said, “If you are well prepared, you can dig out what you want. I never had a bad experience, even in my first term as MLA. I think it all depends on your skills.. your acumen... your acuity” Skills of the MLA seems to be important for effective use of this tool.

Good questions raised in the House are mostly appreciated by the fellow legislators, and sometimes by the Speaker of the House. One respondent proudly recalling his experience said, “I raised a question related to corruption involving large amount in the House. I collected lot of data to prove the charges. Honorable Speaker especially thanked me for this. He appreciated my efforts.” Another respondent narrated how his interaction with the Speaker helped him in understanding his rights related to amendment in the questions.

If MLAs are dissatisfied with the answer provided, they could approach the Speaker who may refer the matter to the Question and Reference Committee. This committee consists of not more than 11 MLAs nominated by the Speaker. The Ministers cannot become member of the committee. The working of the committee was adjudged fair in all the interviews. Most of the MLAs do not use this opportunity frequently to increase their level of satisfaction on account of two reasons; one the committee takes lot of time to decide the referred matter as the processes are long drawn, secondly the legislators themselves are surrounded by many problems therefore they hardly have time to pursue one question.

Reasons for ineffectiveness

Important reasons that appeared during interviews for ineffective use of question hour include quality of questions, attitude of ministers and rules for question.

Quality of questions

Some respondents feel that the quality of questions has deteriorated over the years. Important reasons cited during interviews for this include attitude of the bureaucracy of not sharing information, declining habit of reading among legislators, casual approach and adversarial culture being promoted by the political parties.

Box 4. Quality of questions

“In the previous government there were 25 cases of dacoity. In our time it is 23 ...we find avenues to hide our own mistakes and therefore we raise such issues. What are we trying to prove? Are we proving our mettle in dacoity?”

Some MLAs feel that absence of adequate structures at the district level that could have allowed frequent interaction between the MLAs and the bureaucracy has led to increased number of question that are mainly asked for seeking information. Some respondents feel that regular meetings of the district governments would help in improving the quality of questions in the Legislative Assembly as the constituency level concerns of the MLAs would be addressed to great extent in the district meetings.

Attitude of Ministers

The Ministers are generally concerned only about the starred questions. Therefore, in most cases, the concerned Secretary does not send the reply of the unstarred question to the concerned Minister for approval before sending it to the Secretariat, MP Legislative Assembly. One respondent with ministerial experience reacting on the issue said, “I was so surprised to discover that the unstarred questions were directly being sent to the Secretariat without my approval. I immediately issued an order to send all the questions to me. Interestingly enough, it helped me a lot in discovering the political motives of the MLAs as they try to get information on record through unstarred questions and then ask

the starred question to corner you on the floor of the House. You can understand the trap if you analyze them together.”

Some of the respondents feel that most of the Ministers develop loyalty towards bureaucracy and therefore they try to defend them. One respondent said, “the Ministers should realize that we are not asking questions from them, we are asking question from the concerned department and expect action against the erring officials.” Only a handful ministers learn from the questions and make correction in the implementation of policies. Most of the Ministers end up discerning political motive behind the question and defending the executive as they think it is their duty to do so. Commenting on his experience as Minister, one respondent said, “MLAs bring only serious issues in the House. It is not necessary that they will be discussed and even if it is discussed some action will be taken... There is an assumption among the people sitting on the government benches that it is their responsibility to protect bureaucracy. I never did that. I have taken action even before giving reply in the House. I think Ministers should learn to take corrective measures from the questions raised in the House.”

Rules for Question

Many respondents feel that the policies in general are good and if they are implemented properly one can get the intended results on the ground. However, there are serious problems with the implementation of the policies. As one respondent said, “As far as I have been able to understand casual behavior of executive and corruption are the two major reasons for bad implementation of the policies.” Most of the policies suffer from the implementation failure. The views of the MLAs are also supported by the findings of Ascher & Healy (1990) that the implementation difficulties are particularly prevalent in the developing countries that result even after a problem has been correctly diagnosed and a sensible policy has been framed.

Some legislators feel that the legislature should devote more time in finding out the challenges of implementation and suitably amend the policies by learning from the statewide experiences. At present, the learning from the question hour rarely feeds in to policy changes. The question hour addresses more of symptoms than the root causes underlying problems. According to MP Legislative Assembly (Rule) rule 38 (other conditions) questions should not have broad scope and for seeking statewide information.

One respondent view this rule as a constraining factor for policy debates during question hour. Describing his experience on this issue, he said, “It really pains me when I am not allowed to use the question hour for policy debate. Whenever I ask questions that require state level information, it is returned to me... they say it should be more focused. How can you really address the problems of implementation by discussing only issues specific to local level” Some other respondents do not agree with this view as they feel

that there are other forums available in the Assembly for policy debates, which are not optimally used by the legislators. Some legislators feel that the quota of 4 questions should be increased and the time for question hour should also be increased. One respondent said that he could not ask some important questions in the last session therefore he is planning to ask them in the next session.

Despite availing the opportunity for better and optimal use of the question hour some legislators feel that it cannot bring social transformation. Legislature needs to produce good policies and laws for social transformation, which is possible only when legislators take keen interest in policy debate inside and outside the House.

Role of committees

Most of the respondents do not view the committees as very effective tools for oversight. They were specifically critical about the Advisory Committees constituted by the government of Madhya Pradesh for the various government departments.

Another important observation that came up during interviews was that the legislators generally try to pursue their constituent's interests even in the committees. One respondent who was also a member of the committee didn't agree with this generalization. According to him the functioning of the committees depends on the interests and capabilities of the members. Another respondent described his experience as; "I have been made members of committees on such subjects that are of least interest to me. Also you hardly get time for preparation as you are informed at the eleventh hour. I don't know whether it happens by design or default, mostly the meetings have been organised on the dates when I am not in Bhopal." Another respondent said, "They (committees) are all formalities. They visit a few places may be once in five years. Unless people take keen interest nothing will happen. A child studies in class I.. studies further then becomes expert. You can't become expert in a few days meeting."

Representative role

The population of the State of Madhya Pradesh is 60.4 million according to census of 2001. There are around 37.84 million electors spread over 45 districts in the state of Madhya Pradesh who are represented by 29 Members of Parliament (MP) in the Lower House of the national parliament and 230 representatives in the Legislative Assembly of the state (ECI, 2003). Most of the MLAs feel that people access them with their problems more frequently than the MPs primarily because their constituency is comparatively much larger than those of MPs and most of the development related issues are dealt by the State Government. The visibility of the MLAs is also high because of his presence in the state for a longer period than any average MP who is supposed to be in New Delhi at least for the parliamentary sessions. One respondent overwhelmed with the problems of the constituents said, "People do not consider MPs accountable for the development works as the area of his constituency is quite large. We remain in direct

touch with the people. They come to us with all sorts of problems. Our responsibility is bigger.” Most of the legislators feel that their constituents have become more demanding over the years therefore their representative role has acquired importance over the other roles.

The interviews contained many examples, which suggests that the legislators mostly take care to address those constituent worries, which reach them directly. Although MLAs are accessed through telephones and post cards, direct meeting has greater significance. The time spaces of the legislators are quite similar to open access resource, the use of which, to a large extent, depends on the capacity of the users. It is difficult to get exclusive time from the legislators, as they are too busy a person. People meet them without prior appointment. He may consider the requests of different people weighing his importance in his constituency but he normally cannot deny meeting anyone and giving patient hearing. It was observed during interviews that people kept pouring in with problems citing some reference of known persons of the MLAs. The MLAs normally either give assurance or explain the aggrieved party why particular work cannot be done.

Sources of questions can also be used as an indicator for access to the legislators. The various categories enlisted by the legislators as a source of questions include personal experience, party workers, aggrieved party who are able to reach them personally or through letter or telephone, organised interest groups like home guards, Patwaris and Mass Tribal Organization, public servants, media and important persons from the constituency or party. All categories of people enlisted by the legislators except personal experience have the capacity to access legislator as they know how to access MLAs and they have resources to do so. The literacy in the state is 64.1 percent as per census of 2001. The knowledge of policy and laws that give good understanding of the ‘rights’ rests with a small limited segment of the society. Commenting on the understanding of rights in tribal areas in his constituency, one respondent said, “It is the duty of the public servants to explain the rights of the people, which they rarely do. People in tribal areas have little understanding of their rights therefore they are not in a position to identify violation of the rights by the public servants.” Another respondent said, “People from the tribal areas rarely visit us. We have to visit them at times to find out their problems. I have found that there complaints are mostly authentic, they do not normally indulge in politicking.” It seems that when too many people are competing to access the legislator’s time those having better resources stand better chance. Poor people normally cannot effort to visit MLAs, as they do not have luxury of time because they need it for earning their livelihoods. Legislators also use credibility as a criterion for short-listing the questions for which they look for documentary evidences. It is unlikely that the poor people will be able to provide such evidences to the legislators. Therefore, the active segment of the society that are aware of their rights and are skilled enough to articulate their interest and resourceful enough to meet the legislators would access legislators more than the others in the society.

The criteria used by the legislators for prioritizing the questions can also be used as indicators for relative importance assigned by the legislators to various constituents. The legislators give importance to the number of people affected or benefited. Thus the organised interest groups stand better chance to access legislators. The other criterion used by them is 'seriousness' of the issues which depends on the value frame of the legislators. Examples of concerns to the downtrodden and weaker sections of the society abound in the interviews. If these criteria are clubbed it validates the finding of Sen (1999) that democratic governments can not insulate themselves from the popular sufferings

Legislators also support community development works or address issues that concern entire constituency or at times the entire State. Highlighting his achievements of the last two terms, one respondent proudly said, "I have achieved something which appeared to be impossible earlier. I brought irrigation projects in my area, which provide irrigation to around 10,000 ha. This was result of my consistent efforts. My next target is to bring another 10,000 ha under irrigation. This time it will be completely tribal land. I am waiting just for the clearance for the diversion of forest land for the construction of dam."

Another important issue that came up during most of the interviews that in a conflicting situation most of the legislators assign higher importance to their constituency interest than the interests of their political party and the issues concerning state wide interests provided political parties have not issued whip, which is used rarely.

The representation of the interests of the constituency in the policy formulation is limited as the legislators themselves have low level of participation in the process.

Perception of Legislators on Forestry Issues

Priority assigned to Forests

Successful reform in the forestry sector requires policy changes and innovative legislation for which a sincere political will is required. The lack of political will for reforming the forestry sector in India seems to be one of the major reasons behind inadequate resources for the forestry programs and inordinate delay in translating the policy into statutory provisions. Allocation of funds to the sector, the rate of policy change and the time devoted by the legislature debating on forestry issues may be considered as indicators of importance assigned to the sector by the legislature. These indicators indicate that the forestry sector has been getting less attention than it really deserves. According to Chopra *et al.* (2001) the forestry sector contributes about 2.37% of GDP at the market prices. However, the allocation of plan funds to the sector has been less than 1% of the total plan outlay of the country except seventh five-year plan in which it was 1.03 percent. The allocation of funds from Employment Generation Schemes of Ministry of Rural Development for afforestation activities has also reduced significantly from Rs.2400 million in 1989-90 to Rs. 340 million in 1995-96 (Planning Commission 2001). The first Forest Policy of independent India was formulated in 1952 and it was reviewed and revised in 1988 after a gap of around 36 years. Similarly, the Central Government has not been able to update the Indian Forest Act, 1927 for bringing it in conformity with the National Forest Policy, 1988.

The Forest cover in the India is 20.55 percent of its geographical area. The State of Madhya Pradesh with 77,265 Km² of forest cover has the maximum forest cover amongst all states and Union Territories of India and it constitutes 31 percent of its geographical area (FSI, 2001). There are 51806 populated villages in Madhya Pradesh out of which 21797 villages are located in the forest fringe (Bahuguna et al, 2003). The state has the largest population of tribal in the country that live in these forest fringe villages. The forests of the state play a very important role in livelihoods of the forest fringe villages. However, the state has not promulgated a state forest policy. The allocation of plan funds to the sector in Madhya Pradesh has been 1.46% of the total plan outlay of the State in 2002-03, which has increased to 2.18% in 2003-04 (Planning Commission, 2004).

The average percentage of questions on forest and environment in the total questions asked in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) and Lok Sabha (Lower House) during the year 1999-2003 is 2.69 percent and 2.63 percent respectively. In contrast, the average percentage of only forestry questions in the total questions asked in the MP Legislative Assembly during the same period is 7.2 percent. These figures indicate that the forestry sector in the state of Madhya Pradesh has received higher relative priority than at the national level.

The priority issues that appeared in the interviews include electricity, education, health, unemployment, agriculture; and law and order. Most of the MLAs feel that their priority by and large reflects the priority of the constituency. One of the respondents from the low forest district said, “The interest and curiosity about forests both are low among my constituents in general. Recently, I raised several questions on forests for different reasons, which was related to conversion of forest villages to the revenue villages.”

Another respondent said, “I am willing to make forests as my 5th priority provided I get a proper support from the forest officers.” Most of the respondents accepted that forests deserves more attention as it faces lot of pressure because of illicit felling of trees, encroachment and the promises made by the political parties for regularizing these encroachments. One respondent expressed his unhappiness on this approach of the political parties as, “What we need is vote. We have all come for this in politics. Should we promise regularization of the encroached forestland for the vote bank? This is not good. I know for sure that all encroachments can be evicted provided there is political will.” Another very senior respondent said, “I have not observed any government morally committed to save forests.”

There is no significant difference between the priority of the legislators from the low and high forests districts. Their priorities are basic necessities for the voters. Commenting on whether the change in the government changes the priorities, one respondent said, “The faces in the House change but the issues by and large remains the same.” It is interesting to note that the present state government has included forests among the five priorities along with people, water, land and livestock. Reacting on this policy one respondent said, “You will see... nothing is going to change... these are political gimmicks.” It is obvious that the forests cannot become priority of the legislators as long as the basic needs of the people are not fulfilled. Political will is necessary if the change has to sustain for a longer period. Most of the legislators feel that the change is not possible without political will.

Box 5. Importance of Tree

Recently, we organised a rally for planting saplings with the help of students and teachers of the government school. We covered around 10-15 km on foot planting trees in different schools along the way. In one village, I faced a jeering crowd talking among themselves, “ Look at our MLA! He does not have any important work... He is busy planting saplings.” They were laughing at me as if I was doing a menial task. I really got annoyed. Controlling my anger and realising their level of ignorance about the role of MLA, I explained to them the significance of trees. I spent one whole hour explaining the importance of trees, their relation to the rainfall and how rainfall is decreasing due to the destruction of forests. But it all went down the drain! They kept standing in a corner with perplexed look on their faces. What should I do? When I help someone in bailing him out from the Police Station, then I am a very ‘good’ MLA but if I do tree plantation then I am jeered at for not having any other significant work!

Table 4: Political will

Questions	Low Forest Districts			High Forest		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
Meaningful change is not possible without gaining political power.	1.88 (0.35)	1.58	2.17	1.14 (1.57)	-0.31	2.60

Forestry sector having unfinished agenda of reform faces serious challenge in the wake of low priority assigned to the forests by the legislature.

Policy & Law

Most of the legislators agree that the local people should have first right over forests. Some respondents feel that the forest fringe villagers should be allowed to meet their bonafide needs from forests free of cost. Explaining the field reality one respondent said, “Around 98 percent villagers do not cut trees for selling outside. Most of them fell trees for their personal bonafide use, which should be made free. They are already doing this. It is unrealistic to expect that they will pay for it. Why not regularize them? Otherwise what is happening? If someone needs four poles, he is bringing 8 because of uncertainty. Around 2 percent people who are involved in illicit felling for sale should be controlled.” Most of the respondents feel that defining rights of the local community is important for the forest protection. Some respondents feel that the people do not know even the existing rights and it is the duty of the forest officials to make them aware of their rights. Some respondents feel that this will improve the oversight function of the legislature, as the people will be able to detect omissions by the forest officials and report to the legislators. One respondent commenting on the Nistar rights said, “It is not possible to deny Nistar rights to those people who do not participate in the forestry programs. You may have such rules but they cannot be enforced.”

Table 5: Rights and Concession

Statements	Low Forest Districts			High Forest Districts		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
Local people have the first right over forests.	1.38 (1.41)	0.20	2.55	1.86 (0.38)	1.51	2.21
The Forest Department has usurped tribal lands and rights.	-0.75 (1.04)	-1.62	0.12	0.86 (1.22)	-0.27	1.98
Tribals have not been given rights over forests, only concessions.	0.50 (1.69)	-0.91	1.91	1.71 (0.49)	1.26	2.17
Nistar should be made available only to those people who take part in the programmes of the forest department	0.88 (1.36)	-0.26	2.00	-0.43 (1.81)	-2.11	1.25

Land Use

The state government has settled the encroached forestland to the eligible encroachers up to December 31, 1976. The process of settlement of encroached forestland before enactment of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 is still underway. Some legislators feel that the settlement of encroachment was not done properly. One respondent unhappy about the status of settlement of encroachment said, “Many people come to us for the title of the encroached land. We succeeded in getting consent of the central government but the Supreme Court gave stay order. The encroachment till date should be regularized.”

Table 6: Land Use

Statements	Low Forest Districts			High Forest Districts		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
All encroachments on forestland are illegal.	0.13 (2.03)	-1.57	1.82	-1.00 (1.73)	-2.60	0.60
The control of forest villages should remain with the forest department.	0.00 (1.85)	-1.55	1.55	-0.43 (1.72)	-2.02	1.16

There are also disputes due to unclear boundaries between forest and revenue land. The state government had constituted committee in each district in the year 2000 to settle these disputes. Some respondents were not happy with the demarcation of the forest boundaries. One such respondent from the high forest district said, “The forest boundaries are still not clear. Some revenue area is shown under forest map. There are several disputes in my district for which committees were constituted but the final order has not been issued as yet. Why can’t we demarcate the forest areas properly and end this dispute?” Another respondent from the low forest district highlighting the need for appropriate land use said, “There are many large barren and stony areas in my constituency that has been notified as forest land. You can’t stop mining in these areas and you can’t plant trees in these areas either. Most of the forest staff remains busy in controlling illegal mining and in this process the real forest areas remain unattended resulting in illicit felling. I cannot understand the priorities of the forest department. Why can’t we set aside such areas for mining and denotify them. Acquire those areas that can be planted.”

Forest Acts

Most of the legislators feel that the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 need amendment. Some legislators expressed their anger and anguish towards these acts during interviews. One such respondent said, “Even the construction of the girl’s school, community hall and hospitals have been stopped in the tribal villages that are located in sanctuary. After all the schools and community halls are also being constructed under the government projects. And people who live in these villages with their families also require these facilities.”

Box 6. Inhuman Rules

The rules made by the government may be right in themselves but, at times, they appear inhuman to me. For example there's a river in the protected area between (place) and (place). We are facing lot of problem because of the prohibition on extraction of sand from the riverbed. Forest Department doesn't allow extraction of sand as it is prohibited under the Forest Acts. Since the sand is not extracted the river swells during the rains. Even after light showers the water overflows from the bridge causing traffic jams. Now what kind of logic is there in having such rules, which cause so much of a problem!

Participatory Forest Management

Madhya Pradesh is one of the leading states in implementing JFM. The Government of M.P. issued the first JFM resolution in this regard in 1991 that has been revised in 1995, 2000 and 2001. By the end of March 2004, 14,173 JFM Committees have been constituted that includes 9,014 Village Forest Committee (VFC), 4,456 Forest Protection Committee (FPC) and 703 Eco Development Committee (EDC). Around 60,000 sq. km of forest area is under JFM, which constitutes around 63% of the total forest area of the State. More than 1.7 million families have been involved in the programme (MPFD, 2004). The quantitative analysis of perceptions of the legislators on statements related to JFM policy is given below:

Table 7: JFM Policy

Statements	Low Forest Districts			High Forest Districts		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
JFM is the only way to ensure the protection of forests.	1.88 (0.35)	1.58	2.17	0.86 (1.68)	-0.69	2.41
It is impossible to protect the forests without participation of the local people.	2			2		
These days people do not have a sense of ownership of participatory forestry	-0.25 (1.75)	-1.72	1.22	0.00 (1.73)	-1.60	1.60
All forests should be handed over to local communities.	-0.75 (1.83)	-2.28	0.78	0.14 (1.77)	-1.50	1.78
Forest protection is possible only if the overall level of village development improves.	1.63 (0.74)	1.00	2.25	2		

All respondents realize that without willing and active participation of the local communities, it is not possible to protect and regenerate forests. Illicit felling of trees, encroachment and fire were identified, as the three most important reasons for forest degradation, which legislators feel cannot be controlled without involving the communities in the forest management. Some respondents also feel that the forest guards

cannot protect large forest areas that are under their jurisdiction. They also view poverty in the forest fringe villages as one of the most important cause for forest degradation therefore they feel that forest protection is possible only when the socio-economic condition of the fringe villages improve. Even the respondent who was very unhappy with the way JFM is being implemented said, “JFM as a concept is very good. However, there are serious problems with the implementation.”

The opinions of the legislators on handing over forests to the local community also differ. One respondent who opposed the proposal said, “People are not beyond selfish motive even in villages. May it be any village? Poverty has increased in the villages and they have limited resources. Extremely limited resources! They will require some means for livelihood. Where is the resource? They will cut forests and till the land. This is not at all practical.” Another respondent from the high forest district said, “This will create anarchic situation. Every one will do whatever s/he will like. There will be competition for clear felling the forests for agriculture. Instead of handing over the forests we should involve them in regenerating forests and provide them benefit on sustainable basis. They will take interest in regenerating forests only when they will get income.”

Some respondents emphasized the need for making villagers aware of their rights for instilling the feeling of ownership among them. Commenting on the understanding of rights among villagers, one respondent from the high forest district said, “The foresters are not explaining the rights to the members of the (JFM) committees which is important for involving people in the JFM.” Another respondent from the low forest district said, “The feeling of ownership will come only by providing rights to people which is necessary for the protection of forests. They must feel assured about their rights over forests”

Implementation of JFM

Formation of committees

The State Government has approved a JFM manual, which includes detailed instructions on constitution of committees, preparation of micro plan and account keeping (MPFD, 2004). Respondents had divergent views on the extent to which these instructions for formation of committees are followed. Some respondents feel that the committees are being constituted through a democratic process by observing the guidelines. In contrast, others feel that the elections for committees are being influenced either by the Forest department or the political elites of the village or the both. One such respondent from high forest district said, “The process is democratic. Officers follow election process as laid down in the government resolution. There may be exceptions somewhere. This also happens because of either corrupt officials or politicians.” In contrast, some respondents feel that there are serious problems in the election processes. One newly elected respondent from the low forests district said, “I know how the committees were formed in my area. MLA (his predecessor) had handed over list of

desirable names (for office bearers) to the DFO.” Another respondent from the high forest said, “Committees are not being constituted as per rule. It has been politicized. There are many influential people in the village... *Sarpanch*, or the one who has lost the *Panchayat* election.... there are groups in the villages. These influential people constitute committees as per their will. The poor people do not get their due share.”

Most of the respondents agree that the committees have been captured by the elites. However, the respondents have divergent viewpoints on the statement that the decision of the Executive committee is the decision of the committee. Some respondents do not visualize escape from the elite capture as one respondent said, “How do you expect a poor person to devote time for the committee’s work- one who is fighting to get a square meal! It is utopian to expect that poor people will run the committees.” Another respondent challenged the application of elite and non-elite classification for most of the forest fringe villages by saying, “Economically well off families are rare in the forest fringe villages. Land around forests is generally stony. Some of them have managed to get some land irrigated. However, their plight is not very different than the labors. They also know the problems of labors. They are not exploiters.” Another respondent from the high forest district said, “I have not come across any complaint from the tribal belt of my constituency. People sit together and decide collectively. There is no problem in these areas.”

Another respondent from the high forest district said, “The committees have been co-opted by the forest department. The Chairpersons are working as liaison worker of the forest department, not as the representative of the villagers. I have observed all those distortions that are common in the electoral politics-using public office for pursuing self-interests. Those who oppose forest department in the meetings are not to be seen in the next term. Those who support the Forest department continue and start working against the interest of the village. They will impound cattle of other village but allow their own people to fell trees. How can you get community feeling, when objective is how to benefit yourself? ”

Table 8: Functioning of Committee

Statements	Low Forest Districts			High Forest Districts		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
The decisions of the Executive Committee are the decisions of the entire VFC.	1.25 (0.89)	0.51	1.99	-0.14 (1.57)	-1.60	1.31
Money is a key part of partnership with the people.	0.88 (1.55)	-0.42	2.17	1.14 (1.07)	0.15	2.13
The presence of the World Bank has boosted the participatory forestry program.	1.88 (0.35)	1.58	2.17	-0.14 (1.77)	-1.78	1.50
JFM has been introduced mainly to get foreign funds.	-1.13 (1.13)	-2.07	-0.18	-0.57 (1.81)	-2.25	1.11

Most of the respondents agree that money has played an important role in the spread of JFM. The respondents of the low forest districts feel that the assistance from the World Bank has boosted the implementation of JFM. This perception is supported by the increase in number of committees formed after launching the World Bank assisted project in September 1995. Only 1932 committees were constituted in 1995, which increased to 7571 committees* in 1996. One respondent from high forest district contended this viewpoint and said, “No one gets pay from the JFM program. JFM is like a movement. People have realized their responsibility. They are aware of the ill effects of forest degradation and now they have realized that they can share benefits by protecting forests.” Reacting on the role of the World Bank he further said, “The State has not received a single pie in the last 4 years however, it has emerged stronger. Success of JFM depends on the will power of the people. If the government has will power then the JFM will emerge stronger.”

Most of the MLAs feel that the protection of the forests has considerably increased by involving people. Making overall assessment one respondent from the high forest district said, “Overall protection of forests has increased after formation of the committees. They have apprehended even those offenders, whom the forest department could not. They have also seized vehicles and guns from these offenders. They (villagers) don’t have arms (to protect themselves). The miscreants are now threatening these simple villagers and Police and Forest department have distanced themselves.” According to Government resolution on JFM, the members of the committee would be treated as Public Servant under different Acts similar to Foresters during patrolling of forests. However, some respondents feel that the committee members do not enjoy enough protection.

Knowledge of benefit sharing arrangement is very low among legislators. All respondent, except one, lacked clarity about the formula for sharing. Some of them suggested sharing arrangements that already exists. Some respondents also complained that the forest officials do not explain the benefit sharing formula to the people.

Box 7. Benefit Sharing

The Forest Protection Committee is entitled to 10% of the value of forest produce from final felling of timber coupes and 20% of the bamboo coupes, after deduction of the harvesting cost.

The share of the Eco-Development Committee in the forest produce would be equivalent to the share of the adjoining FPCs.

The Village Forest Committee is entitled to 100% of the value of forest produce from the final felling of the planted area / forest produce from rehabilitation of degraded forest, after deduction of the harvesting cost.

Source: Government of MP Resolution on JFM, 2001

* The figures of number of committees are of undivided Madhya Pradesh.

Impact of JFM

The forest cover in the state has increased by 376 sq. km and 2,128 sq. km in the two successive assessments undertaken by Forest Survey of India (FSI 1999 and 2001). One respondent assessing the positive impact of the JFM said, “I give ninety percent credit to the JFM for increase in the forest cover in the state. It has helped in arresting (illicit) felling and increasing greenery. It has contributed to the livelihood of the people. It has instilled sense of involvement among people. The hands that use to fell trees are protecting forests today.” Another respondent from the high forest district said, “Some committees are doing excellent work. I will give you an example of (name) committee, which is making good quality *muraba* (candy) of Aonla (*Emblica officinalis*) although they are facing problems in selling their products.” Some respondents feel that the committees will become more effective as the people will become more aware and start getting benefits. One such respondent from high forest district said, “If the forest dwellers will consistently get benefit they will come forward. Timber is not the only source for sharing benefit with people. Teak is one thing.. Aonla, herbs, medicinal plants... there are so many things that can give results in a year or two. Opportunities should be given to people to get benefit.”

Table 9: Positive Impact of JFM

Statements	Low Forest Districts			High Forest Districts		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
JFM has empowered the villagers	0.25 (1.49)	-0.99	1.49	0.71 (1.60)	-0.77	2.20
The JFM programme has empowered the community to take decisions related to the forests	0.63 (1.51)	-0.63	1.88	1.14 (1.46)	-0.21	2.50
Forest committees have created an equal relationship between the villagers and the forest department	0.88 (1.55)	-0.42	2.17	0.29 (1.89)	-1.46	2.03
The lives of the villagers have improved due to JFM	1.63 (0.52)	1.19	2.06	0.14 (1.77)	-1.50	1.78
JFM has helped in village development	1.25 (0.71)	0.66	1.84	0.43 (1.51)	-0.97	1.83
FPCs have helped collectors get a better price for forest produce	0.88 (1.25)	-0.17	1.92	1.00 (1.41)	-0.31	2.31
Wage labour has been the only benefit that people have derived from JFM	0.13 (1.81)	-1.39	1.64	-0.43 (1.81)	-2.11	1.25

Most of the respondents have mixed reaction on the effectiveness of the JFM committees. They feel that percentage of effective committees is not very high. Identifying one of the major reasons, one respondent from the low forest district said, “The major reason behind this is greed. Actually that is the reason in 75% cases. The Chairperson of JFM committee is a lucrative position one can accrue a number of benefits. People with vested interest will come forward as long as the committees would

handle money.” Another respondent from the high forest district said, “Most of the forest committees have not been constituted properly. Forest department interferes a lot from the stage of formation. In my constituency one forester constituted entire committees without consulting villagers right on his desk. When I complained the Gram Sabha was called.” Another respondent from the high forest district did not agree with the perception that the elite capture is the reason behind ineffectiveness of the committees, “There are many principled elites who want development of their area. They work for the poor people and I have observed some of them spend their own money. If some elites are corrupt, why the forest officials do not control them? Committees are not completely independent. If irregularities take place, the forest officers should control that. I do not think it is proper to blame villagers.”

Increasing the level of monitoring was also suggested for increasing the effectiveness of the committees. One respondent said, “Officers should monitor the functioning of committees every month. One forest guard should look after one committee instead of 2-3 committees.”

Respondents have divergent views on the trend of conflicts. One respondent from the high forests district said, “I do not think conflicts have increased. There are factions in every village, which is good because they keep a vigil on each other. Yes! If the corruption continues, the animosity also increases and the parties in conflict try to cause damage to each other.” Another respondent view it as natural, “When they are protecting forests they will have conflict with the people who come for illicit felling. Sometimes when the rival group is apprehended they also try to settle score with them.”

Reacting on whether inter village conflicts have increased one respondent said, “it doesn’t happen, every village has mutual relationship with the nearby villages. People in the nearby villages are related to each other. Sometimes villages develop political affiliation to a particular political party and they try to have separate identity. It doesn’t mean that they end up fighting with each other.” Another respondent from the high forest district said, “The conflicts have increased as the committee members are behaving exactly like forest department. JFM is basically joint policing. Committee members impound cattle of other villages. They are using forest as their personal property.”

Table 10: Negative Impact of JFM

Statements	Low Forest Districts			High Forest Districts		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
JFM has increased conflicts among people	-0.63 (1.77)	-2.10	0.85	0.57 (1.81)	-1.11	2.25
The creation of committees has increased problems associated with forests	-0.75 (1.75)	-2.22	0.72	-0.29 (1.50)	-1.67	1.10
Closure of forest areas has given rise to inter-village conflicts	0.50 (0.93)	-0.27	1.27	0.71 (1.25)	0.45	1.87

Statements	Low Forest Districts			High Forest Districts		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
The JFM programme has curbed the rights of the local people over forests	0.25 (1.49)	-0.99	1.49	0.71 (1.38)	-0.56	1.99

Role of Panchayat Raj Institutions

The Government Resolution on JFM envisages integrating the local institutions by involving the Gram Sabha in the formation and functioning of JFM Committees. The perceptions of the MLAs from both high and low forest districts on the functioning of Panchayat and its coordination with JFM committees are given in table.

Table 11: Functioning of Panchayat

Statements	Low Forest Districts			High Forest Districts		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
Panchayat institutions can exercise scrutiny over government expenditure	0.13 (2.03)	-1.57	1.82	1.14 (1.46)	-0.21	2.50
There is no coordination between the panchayat bodies and the forest committees	0.50 (2.07)	-1.23	2.23	1.00 (1.41)	-0.31	2.31
The Gram Sabha is the best institution for managing MFPS	1.00 (1.31)	-0.09	2.09	1.29 (1.11)	0.26	2.31
The Panchayat bodies are dominated by elites	0.75 (1.49)	-0.49	1.99	1.14 (1.07)	0.15	2.13

Most of the MLAs feel that the JFM committees should continue to maintain its separate identity. Three reasons specified during interviews for not handing over forest management responsibilities to Gram Panchayats include politicization and corruption in the PRI and their inability to protect forests. One respondent from the high forest district said, “In my opinion it (JFM committees) should be kept separate. Panchayat should oversee the functioning of the committees. Gram Panchayat can not effectively protect forests.” One respondent who did not agree with the majority view said, “Sarpanch has free time. He can undertake this additional responsibility. If we continue to constitute different committees for different work, it will create distortion in the society. Panchayat is properly elected body therefore they are more accountable. We should give them the status envisaged in the Constitution (of India). Creating parallel structures for governance at village level bypassing constitutional body is not good. There is legislative assembly at the state level. Will you like to create a legislative council and different bodies for managing different function at the state level?”

Role of NGO/ MTO

Most of the MLAs from the high forest districts feel that there are not many NGOs working in the forest fringe villages. Some respondents feel that the local NGOs are better than the outsiders. As one from high forest district put it, “The local NGOs are working well. The outsiders mislead simple villagers and create animosity in the villages and go away from the village. They are also corrupt. The local NGOs can not afford to do this as they have to live here throughout their life and maintain relationships.”

Table 12: Non-Government Sector

Statements	Low Forest Districts			High Forest Districts		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
The non-governmental sector is more corrupt than the government	0.38 (1.60)	-0.96	1.71	-0.14 (1.35)	-1.39	1.10

Some respondents were very much annoyed with the style of functioning of activist groups working in their area. One such respondent said, “They are spreading anti government sentiments and encouraging people to clear forests. They are against JFM and the Forest department as their collaboration has adversely affected their political interests. They are least interested in the welfare of the tribal. Most of them do not belong to this State.” Another MLA who works closely with the activists said, “There are only a few people in politics, who work on tribal issues. People’s organizations work for them and I work with them.”

Forest Department

Most of the legislators realize that the existence of the forest department is essential for managing the forests. The views of the legislators on the role of the department were diverse. Most of the respondents feel that the forest department should act as a facilitator in empowering communities to manage forests. However, the level of intervention visualized differed. Some respondent advocate frequent monitoring and greater support to the JFM committees while others feel that the forest department should not interfere with the working of the committees. One respondent still feels that the forest department should be strengthened with arms and more stringent rules to protect forests.

Table 13: Relevance of the Forest department

Statements	Low Forest Districts			High Forest Districts		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
Without the forest department, the forests would have been destroyed	1.38 (1.41)	0.20	2.55	0.71 (1.89)	-1.03	2.46
The forest department is the real enemy of the forests	-0.50 (1.85)	-2.05	1.05	-0.57 (1.81)	-2.25	1.11

Relationships with legislators and people

Most of the respondents feel that foresters do not make efforts to build relationships with the legislators. One such respondent from high forest district said, “It is the duty of the officers to invite us in their meetings and seminars. They can suggest us the issues to be raised in the legislative Assembly.... But forest officers don’t give information to people’s representatives. On the contrary, they want to maintain distance.. so that we could not get the information that we desire. They avoid us.” Another respondent while analyzing the reason for avoidance said, “As far as I have understood, the reason is negligence and corruption.” Some other respondents also expressed their concern about corruption in the forest department. As far as the trend of corruption is concerned some respondents feel that it has neither increased nor decreased. Some respondent disagree with such generalization as one respondent put it, “It is improper to categorize any department as corrupt. There are good as well as bad things in every department. Even today, there are many good people in the forest department. The projects are being implemented and they also giving good results. If a few people are doing irregularities you can’t blame everyone.”

Some respondents feel that the relationships of the forest department with the people have improved but it is still not satisfactory as one respondent from the high forest district said, “The forest department has not been able to build rapport with the people to the desired extent. It has not been able to win the trust of the people.

Most respondents also feel that there is lack of transparency in the working of the forest department. One such respondent from the high forest district said, “Forest department feels that it is all together different. The public bodies do not know much about their activities and the works that they are doing. We only get to know about the department when some one makes complain against it.”

Some respondents also suggested measures that the forest department should take to improve relationships. One such respondent said, “Don’t send us printed materials expecting that we are going to read them. That is unrealistic. Invite us in workshops and seminars or organize study tours to show us the work being done by the department. We have very little knowledge about the working of forests.”

Table 14: Relationship of the forest department

Statements	Low Forest District			High Forest District		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
Nationalisation of forest produce has broken people’s relationship with the forest	0.38 (1.60)	-0.96	1.71	1.57 (0.53)	1.08	2.07
The forest department illegitimately exploits poor labourers in the name of shramdan (labour contribution)	0.25 (1.49)	-0.99	1.49	-0.71 (1.60)	-2.20	0.77

Statements	Low Forest District			High Forest District		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
The oppression of local people by the Forest Department has continued in spite of JFM	-1.00 (1.20)	-2.00	0.00	0.57 (1.81)	-1.11	2.25
Under JFM, the people will protect the forests but the real benefits will be reaped by the Forest Department	-1.63 (0.74)	-2.25	-1.00	0.00 (1.73)	-1.60	1.60
Dependence on foreign funding for forestry increases corruption	0.00 (1.51)	-1.26	1.26	0.71 (1.60)	-0.77	2.20
Appropriate action has not been taken against corrupt forest officials	1.00 (1.60)	-0.34	2.34	1.29 (1.25)	0.13	2.45
The FD and other departments cooperate in undertaking developmental activity at the village level	-0.88 (1.64)	-2.25	0.50	0.29 (1.89)	-1.46	2.03
For development related decisions in forest areas, it is appropriate for the DFO to be given the highest position	0.38 (1.41)	-0.80	1.55	0.00 (1.63)	-1.51	1.51

Changes in the forest department

There are mixed opinions on the changes in the forest department. One respondent from the high forest district said, “The interest of the legislators in the forest department has increased in the recent years that is why the number of questions asked in the legislative assembly on forests has also increased. The forest department has gained importance among the people of the state.” Another respondent from the high forest district did not observe change in the working of the department as he said, “The forest committees are also speaking the same language. They have also joined hands of the forest department in policing.”

Table 15: Changes in the Forest department

Statements	Low Forest District			High Forest District		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
JFM has improved the relationship between the forest department and the villagers	1.38 (0.74)	0.75	2.00	-0.14 (1.77)	-1.78	1.50
The forest department is learning to listen to the voice of the people	0.50 (1.41)	-0.68	1.68	-0.14 (1.57)	-1.60	1.31
Beat guards have built a good rapport with the villagers	0.25 (1.49)	-0.99	1.49	-0.29 (1.60)	-1.77	1.20
The beat guard faces pressure from both sides – the higher officials as well as the people	0.38 (1.41)	-0.80	1.55	0.14 (1.57)	-1.31	1.60

Statements	Low Forest District			High Forest District		
	Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)		Mean (σ)	Confidence Interval (95%)	
The forest department respects the knowledge of Tribal communities	-0.75 (1.58)	-2.07	0.57	-0.71 (1.60)	-2.20	0.77
Today's forester is less knowledgeable than in the past	0.38 (1.60)	-0.96	1.71	1.14 (0.90)	0.31	1.98

Difference in Perception of legislators from high and low forest districts

Legislators have shown keen interests in the JFM program. Over 53 percent MLAs that include all MLAs from the high forest districts and one MLA from the low forest district had personally visited JFM committees. Around 27 percent MLAs from the low forest districts knew about the program but never visited any JFM committee. Around 20 percent MLAs from low forest districts didn't know about the JFM, as they sought briefing about the program's objectives and implementation. Incidentally, the constituencies of these legislators are largely located in the urban areas. The JFM committees in the high forest districts have become politically very important for the politicians. One respondent from the high forest district said, "You will not find any legislator from the rural areas who does not know about JFM."

There were no significant differences between the perceptions of the MLAs from the high forest districts and low forest districts. Obviously the legislators who had visited the committees had more knowledge on different aspects of the PFM than the one who didn't visit or didn't even know about the JFM. Man – Whitney U test was used for testing the differences of perceptions between the respondents of high and low forest districts. The test was undertaken with 95 % confidence limit. The differences have been found significant for only three statements out of forty-eight as shown in the table.

Table 16: Man Whitney U Test

Statements	Man Whitney	Wilcoxon W	Z Value	Significance
The presence of the World Bank has boosted PFM	6.000	34.000	-2.803	0.005 (p<0 .05)
The Forest Department has usurped tribal lands and rights.	9.000	45.000	-2.2 52	0.024 (p<0.05)
Under JFM, the people will protect the forests but the real benefits will be reaped by the Forest Department.	12.000	48.000	-2.015	0.044 (p<0.05)

Over 87 percent MLAs from the low forest districts completely agree (mean: 1.88) that the World Bank assistance has boosted the PFM. In contrast, around 43 percent of the MLAs from the high forest districts (mean: -0.14) completely disagree with this statement. The perceptions of respondents of high and low forest districts also differ significantly on the statement whether the forest department has usurped tribal lands and

rights. Around 63 percent MLAs of the low forest district completely or partially disagree (mean: -0.75) with this statement whereas around 43 percent MLAs from the high forest districts completely agree with this statement (mean: 0.85). The perceptions of respondents of high and low forest districts also differ significantly on the statement whether the people will protect the forests but the real benefits will be reaped by the Forest Department under the JFM. Seventy five percent MLAs of the low forest district completely disagree (mean: -1.63) with this statement whereas around 29 percent MLAs from the high forest districts completely agree with this statement (mean: 0.00).

Conclusion

The legislators are expected to represent their territorial constituencies in addition to participation in the policy and rule making as well as in oversight over the executive. The electoral politics has constricted the space for the rule making functions of the legislators because of the other expectations of the electorates. There appears a need for the mass awareness program for defining rightful expectations from the legislators and their priorities. It is obviously a daunting task considering illiteracy, poverty and severe livelihood-related problems. The civil society organisations (CSOs) including NGOs have also nearly confined themselves to implementation issues particularly the lobbying for effective monitoring of official schemes. The CSOs should play active role in generating awareness among electorates about importance and priority of the policy and rule-making roles of legislators. They should provide preparatory materials to the legislators enabling them to identify policy problems and generate alternatives for deliberation in the house.

Proper separation or division of the State functions among bureaucracy, legislature and other components inevitably requires clarity of roles and linkages among different constituents. Overlap of roles and functioning between the government officials and the legislators are perceived as hindrance in their performance. Hence, it is important to restore the highest priority to the law-making function followed by the legislative oversight through the instruments defined by the legislature. Although the stipulations do not provide for direct involvement of legislators in implementation of the rules and schemes, such interventions are part of the prevailing norms and routine. Such interventions in many other democracies are not approved by the society. Similarly, the dominance of bureaucracy in policy and rule making process are held as regular, which is reinforced by data availability, analytical capability and attitudinal frame within the bureaucracy. In this era of survival politics, the government always defends officials' action, and avoids serious and informed debates on the policy issues. The policies and rules are seldom precise enough to make them predictable at the implementation stage. Hence, it is important to address the relevant norms and the capacity issues.

Under the Weberian model of bureaucracy should ideally engage in faithful implementation of the policies, and provide feedback to evaluate the policy. The academia and CSOs should feed in the policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation. The legislature should be a forum for the policy deliberations, law making and legislative oversight.

In addition to developing a common vision for the legislators' roles, it is also important to build up the legislators' capacity - individually and collectively - for effective participation in policy and law making processes. It is heartening to note that most legislators felt it as part of their obligations and desired to improve the situation. However, the structural and normative as well as resource constraints limit their ability to bring about changes on their own. Therefore, the society and government should look into arrangement for capacity building of legislators and creating greater space for policy deliberations. Many MLAs advocated for longer legislative sessions and a part of sessions to be devoted exclusively for policy deliberations. The information asymmetry of the state government and common legislators could be addressed by providing support structure and financial assistance to legislators on the line of MLA development funds. Proper information would enable the legislators to define policies and rules adequately. Hopefully, the situation should also help to bring in transparency and effective functioning of legislative oversight because day-to-day intervention in implementation issues could be avoided.

It is interesting to note that a lot of interventions mentioned by legislators are related to internal functioning of bureaucracy. Hence, a reform in administrative processes should help in reducing avoidable legislators' interventions. Strengthening of external institutions like Ombudsman, the Civil Service Boards and audit bodies should further create a space for grievance redressal and relieve legislators from the mundane engagements.

It is expected that the legislative oversight should lead to better policy formulation and precise regulations. When legislative oversight is effective and administrative processes are accountable and transparent, the delivery machine should be able to address specific target segments. It would be required that policies are grounded in social, economic and political realities, and people's aspirations are addressed in fair and equitable manner.

The study has indicated that legislative oversight through legislative questions has serious limitations in affecting policy level changes. First and foremost, a policy description would generally be broad in its coverage, and therefore, would not be considered acceptable for the discussion. If accepted for discussion in the house, most questions are responded through written reply of routine nature. In practice, the oversight mechanism results in little beyond highlighting the concern of the house.

Most MLAs accorded very high value to political will for bringing about meaningful changes in forestry sector. The forestry and natural resource management seldom get the required attention of legislature. Very often, the forestry subjects in the legislative deliberations are clubbed with other subjects of greater and immediate interest, and therefore, they are relegated to subordinate status. In the forest rich areas, the legislatures would prefer to improve developmental inputs in preference to the forestry development. In low forest areas, the forestry is not considered important enough warranting legislator's prolonged interests. Thus, forestry receives lower priorities in either situation. Advent of JFM stimulated some political interest in forest management with focus on benefit flow to local communities particularly those from disadvantaged groups. However, neither the legislators nor their constituents are able to appreciate the linkage

between the livelihoods and forests. One MLA observed that local people considered his interest in tree planting as of trivial nature. The existing monitoring indicators of the forest department lack information by which the linkage between forests and livelihoods could be established. The forests became politically important in seventies and eighties, at least for the central (federal) government, which resulted in policy and legal changes. Many professionals working in the sector feel that the forestry as a subject has fallen out of the political agenda. The forestry could probably find a place in the political agenda in the states when the forest department demonstrates linkage between improved livelihood and forest cover.

The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 have been cited by MLAs as a source of anguish. They are viewed as hindrance in vital developmental process like drinking water supply, village roads and electric transmission. The diversion of forestland for such important activities has been simplified in recent guidelines issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India. It is desirable to communicate such changes to the legislators, as they are generally not aware about the forest management and its activities in the field. Most MLAs found the forest department as less communicative compared to police, revenue and other work departments. JFM program has improved communication with civil society. However, the communication is still far from satisfactory. Most of the legislators don't know even about the benefit sharing arrangement in the JFM. Lack of awareness about right of local people over forest resources is also a cause of concern as it has adverse impact on people's participation. In some areas, JFM has brought inter-village conflict over forest use on the surface. Many legislators recommended greater role for Panchayati Raj institutions and civil societies in the forest management. JFM is attributed for improving villagers' relationship with the forest department. However, the forest department is still looked at with suspicion by the MLAs, and local level functioning is considered as supportive of its own self-interest. The forest department needs to make greater efforts for confidence building among the legislators and the village communities.

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