



Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas.

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Excerpts from the report of a committee constituted by the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) for looking into the Support, Management and Funding of Community Conserved Areas (CCAs)

Introduction

It is now widely realized that several high value biodiversity formations such as sandalwood, red sanders, white cedar, rhododendrons, Southern Tropical Montane forests, grasslands, alpine meadows of Himalayan region, deserts, tropical swamps, rivers, estuaries, bamboo and reed breaks, mangroves, coral reefs, deserts etc. lie outside PAs and often form crucial corridors connecting PAs and wildlife habitats, etc. The tenurial status of such habitats ranges from government-controlled reserved forests to protected forests, revenue forests, revenue lands, village forests, private forests, religious forests and territorial waters. Such habitats also act as corridors for wildlife between PAs thus ensuring connectivity in the landscape.

Recognizing that many such habitats are being conserved by several traditional community-initiated-and-driven conservation programmes, the Central Government has decided to provide financial and technical support to such initiatives through central schemes. Such Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) may not necessarily be officially notified but should still be eligible for

support as an incentive for community-led conservation practices. Support to such CCAs will ensure coverage to such otherwise neglected ecosystems and widen the focus of conservation beyond the frontiers of conventional PAs.

Keeping the above in view, the Ministry of Environment and Forests constituted a committee, comprising of persons having wide experience on community based natural resource management, to look into the management and funding of such Community Reserves, Conservation and other Community Conserved Areas - which would be of use while rendering assistance to such areas under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme "Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats" during the 11th Plan period.

A summary of some of the relevant information from the draft report of the committee is provided below.

SECTION 1:

1.1. Definition

Natural ecosystems (forest/marine/wetlands/grasslands/others), including those with minimum to substantial human influence, containing significant wildlife and biodiversity value, being conserved by communities for cultural, religious, livelihood, or political purposes, using customary laws or other effective means.

Where

a. Community is.....

A group of people geographically, culturally and traditionally linked, sharing an interest in and/or interacting with a common natural resource base (ecosystems and species). The term, 'community' does not necessarily indicate a homogeneous entity.

b. Conservation is.....

Maintenance of one or more natural ecosystems and species.

c. Area is....

Sites where conservation values are operating within (customarily or legally) specified boundaries. Systems, rules and regulation are implemented within this area.

Apart from the above, CCAs also need to be seen as a philosophy of biodiversity conservation based on transparency and participation, a philosophy that is open to a vast array of approaches in which, at any given time and place,

Protection of sea turtle eggs, hatchlings and nesting sites by fisher folk communities is taking place at Kolavipaalam in Kerala, Galgibag and Morjim in Goa, and Rushikulya and Gokharkuda in Orissa. In 2006 and 2008, over 100,000 olive ridley turtles are reported to have nested at Rushikulya.

the local context would determine the most appropriate approach towards conservation.

1.2. What are the main objectives of CCAs?

Communities appear to have a range of objectives for which they conserve biodiversity. Indeed the primary objective is not necessarily always biodiversity conservation. Some of these objectives are given below.

- Resource enhancement and/or maintenance,
- To counter ecological threats,
- To fight external development threats,
- Religious sentiments associated with species, sacred landscapes and other elements,
- Cultural concerns and traditional systems,
- Political reasons like a movement towards self-rule, local empowerment etc.
- Biodiversity concerns,
- Economic reasons.

SECTION 2: CATEGORIZATION OF CCAs

As mentioned above, CCAs are site-specific in their approach and varied in their origin. In the following sections, it is attempted to develop a categorisation of CCAs. Note that the 'categories' are

not necessarily distinct, and that CCAs will not always neatly fit into one or the other category. Also to be kept in mind is that this analysis is based on information that is not necessarily always comprehensive about all aspects. Some of the characteristics used for defining categories could be:

1. Origin,
2. Objectives or motivations,
3. Area under conservation,
4. Ecosystem types,
5. Management systems being followed, and
6. Institutions established.

An example of a broad categorisation based on three of many characteristics:

SECTION 3: COSTS PAID AND THREATS FACED BY CCAs

3.1. Costs paid by conserving communities-

Conservation does not come without a cost even when it is being done by communities themselves. Some of the major costs incurred by communities for which they look for help include:

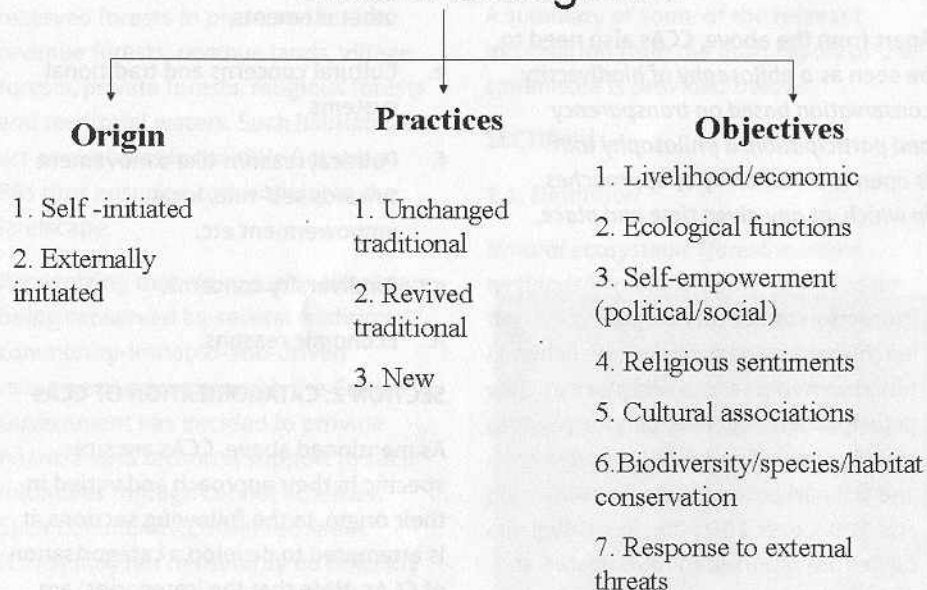
- a. Investment of time and effort for protection, management and planning activities: Most

of the communities involved in conservation activities are subsistence farmers, forest produce collectors, fishers and other economically underprivileged people - who must work everyday on their farms or forests, wetlands or pastures, or be engaged in daily wage activities, to be able to sustain family incomes. In these situations, giving a certain number of days for conservation activities can have a serious impact on the family's income.

- b. Temporary loss of access to natural resources: When the objective of management is regeneration of natural resources, villagers have to face self-imposed restrictions and hence scarcities of resources for a few years till their resources have regenerated.

- c. Cost of conflict situations with neighbours or migrating communities: Once communities start protection, they need to clearly identify the boundaries within their jurisdiction. Sometimes this leads to conflicts with the neighbouring OR migrating communities who may also be extracting resources from the same area.
- d. Cost incurred due to increased crop depredation due to increase in wild animal populations: In villages like Jardhargaon in Uttarakhand, Bishnoy villages in Punjab, Buguda village in Orissa and Khonoma in Nagaland, crop depredation by wild animals is a major problem faced by the villagers.
- e. Cost of lost opportunities of livelihoods in areas other than conservation: When the pressure

Broad Categories



Sacred groves and landscapes are found throughout India, serving to protect rare and endemic species, as well as critical biodiversity assemblages. Such groves also help meet the religious, cultural, political, economic, health and psychological needs of communities. Local livelihood needs are sometimes met through restricted harvesting of biomass. Sacred forests (orans) in the desert regions of Rajasthan are typically managed by the gram sabhas (village assemblies). Some are open to limited grazing by livestock. Orans are important components in the recharge of aquifers in the desert, where every single drop of water is precious. In most orans, particularly in western Rajasthan, the dominant tree, khejari, is worshipped for its immense value, as the tree enriches soil nitrogen, and during drought and famine its bark is mixed with flour for consumption.

to generate a livelihood begins to mount, this often becomes a reason for abandoning conservation activities.

- f. Opportunity cost or other economic cost: In many heronries (e.g. Kokkare Bellur in Karnataka), villagers have to let go of the harvest from tamarind trees if the storks and pelicans happen to be nesting on those trees.

3.2. Threats faced by conserving communities

Often many internal and external factors threaten the existence of CCAs. Below are given some such factors that have an influence on a CCA and can threaten its existence:

- a. Communities are often highly stratified with many decisions made by the dominant sections of society (men, large landowners, 'upper' castes) without considering their impacts on the less privileged (women, landless, 'lower' castes) and often create local

dissatisfaction and affect the long-term sustainability of the initiative.

- b. Traditional knowledge systems have eroded to a great extent because of a number of reasons. This has weakened communities' abilities to manage their own environment.
- c. The education system does not emphasise or even acknowledge the value of local natural resources, culture and traditional knowledge. Little traditional knowledge passes on to the newer generation and their interaction with the surrounding environment ends up becoming indifferent or negative.
- d. Party politics often enters villages in perverse ways, completely politicising local institutions and creating divisions and conflicts with the villages. The local concerns and issues in such circumstances take lower importance over the 'larger' matters of the concerned political party.

- e. There is no comprehensive government policy to support CCAs per se. Many CCAs are on lands owned by the government, over which the community does not have ownership or recognised access rights. The government can decide to change the land-use or lease the land for any other purpose without consulting or even informing the conserving communities.
- f. CCAs that contain commercially valuable resources (e.g., timber, fauna, minerals) are often encroached upon or threatened by commercial users, land grabbers, resource traffickers or individual community members.

SECTION 4: KIND OF SUPPORT REQUIRED BY CCAs

In many CCAs villagers have indicated and often demanded that management or conservation should be a joint activity of the communities and the government officials or any other effective agency. Communities often realize the difficulty of managing natural resources on their own, especially given the internal and external social dynamics and political and commercial pressures (as mentioned in section above). As of now there is no national, state, or sub-state agency or system that can help communities on a regular basis.

4.1. Kind of support that is often required by the communities

4.1.1 Greater recognition and support in making information available, documenting examples of community-based conservation, developing detailed maps using GIS, maintaining and updating a national level database on CCAs, legal recognition, effective administrative and political support, creating national, state or sub-state systems and/or institutions for continuous support, guidance and monitoring of CCAs.

4.1.2 Site specific help providing support in areas of financial transactions, conflict resolution (inter/intra community), designing systems, drafting rules and regulations, facilitating greater equity and transparency in their decision-making process, formulating management plans for conserved resources and species, facilitating the adaptation of appropriate ecologically friendly technologies for enhancing their livelihoods, establishing interfaces to link remotely located communities to markets, tackling the critical threats from powerful elites, timber smugglers, poachers, industrial forces (e.g. the mineral industry), etc.

4.1.3. Providing technical support related to ecological, social, and economic issues

Communities in hundreds of villages across India have protected heronries (e.g., Sareli in UP, Nellapatu in Andhra Pradesh and Chittarangudi in Tamil Nadu). At Kokkare Bellur, Karnataka, villagers offer protection against hunting and untoward treatment, sometimes even foregoing their tamarind yield so that nesting birds are not disturbed. In Tamil Nadu, the 700 ha Chittarangudi tank attracts storks, ibises, herons, egrets, cormorants and other migratory birds. Villagers do not allow any hunting or stealing of bird eggs. They do not burst crackers during Diwali and avoid commercial fishing. Local communities are protecting similar tanks throughout coastal and wetland regions of India.

4.1.4. Supporting Legal and policy measures:

- a. Exploring possible legal options (only if desired by the community and with full consent of the community) for providing protection and support to each CCA, including those available within the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 (Community and Conservation Reserves), the Forest Rights Act (community forests), the Environment Protection Act (Eco-sensitive Area), the Forest Act (Village Forest), and others, including state-level laws such as the Village Council Act of Nagaland.
- b. Bringing about changes in existing policies and laws to further facilitate and enable community-based approaches, and, meanwhile, preparing clearer guidelines to maximize the available spaces in these policies and laws. This includes amendment of the community reserves provision of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to encompass community-conserved government lands as also to empower a diversity of community institutions. Among the critical changes/strengthening needed is in the area of tenurial rights and responsibilities of local communities over natural resources. It should be ensured that no legal recognition leads to co-option or disruption of the initiative.

- c. Incorporating of community-based approaches into relevant conservation schemes and programmes.
- d. Through a consultative process, developing and finalising guidelines for legally and otherwise supporting CCAs where they exist, and facilitating their replication in other areas.

4.2. Creating support forums

It is also important to note that CCAs have decentralised decision-making systems - so they also need a decentralised support and facilitation system. Such a forum should be well represented by members of the concerned community/s, government line-agencies, non-government agencies, and individuals associated with the initiative. Such forums or, any other process of recognition and support of CCAs, need to be based on:

- a. An understanding of the local systems in operation in the community conservation and an independent assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, needs, and limitations of these initiatives.
- b. Mechanism for regular interaction and information/experience sharing, and constant adaptation of strategies based on the learning from this.
- c. Systems that support the community to overcome its

limitations, constraints and weakness, while appropriately taking into account local sensitivities.

- d. Organises capacity building programmes whenever necessary.
- e. Systems that help communities monitor the impacts of their activities and create an appropriate and non-exploitative market link.

SECTION 5: WHAT KIND OF INTERVENTION CCAs DO NOT NEED?

The closest that many state governments have come to supporting CCAs, in recent times, is by implementing Joint Forest Management (JFM) or equivalent schemes, or using some other existing legal and administrative spaces such as the category of Community Reserves under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. In some areas, this has been useful for the communities but largely it has been counter-productive, especially where these systems have been imposed on top of a pre-existing community initiative. There are examples of community forest management in the country where JFM was implemented in areas where communities were already managing their resources. In some cases (subject to the interest level and social sensitivity of the implementing officer and level of existing local empowerment) JFM provided the support that the community needed. However, in most cases it resulted

in breaking down existing systems. Considering the diversity and complexity of CCAs, a 'straight jacket approach' for conservation is unlikely to work.

SECTION 6: WHAT ISSUES SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND WHILE SUPPORTING CCAs?

6.1. Core issue to be kept in mind

Experience shows that at the core of any successful CCA and an effective support intervention is the strength of the local governance structure. Any recognition and support process should therefore ensure that international principles of good governance - which entail recognition of diverse knowledge systems, openness, transparency and accountability in decision making, inclusive leadership, etc. - are being followed.

6.2. Precautions that must be followed before providing support

Legal status of the CCA should not be changed unless the community wishes it to, and is fully aware of the implications of such a change. The existing system (institutions, rules and regulations) should be accepted (allowing modifications where such institutions are not inclusive and just). The kind of support to be provided (social recognition, legal backing, funds, technical inputs, etc.) must be decided only in consultation with and the consent of the community. A system

for accountability and monitoring the impact of help/funds provided should be worked out with the communities.

6.3. Security of tenure

As a sense of belonging or custodianship towards the area, resources or species being conserved, is one of the most important factors in the decision of a community to start and carry on conservation efforts, security of continued tenure of the land and resources being conserved, is key to a successful community initiative.

6.4. Site-specific and decentralised management

Uniform and straitjacketed models of development and conservation are not necessarily sustainable. Typically, community initiatives are decentralised, site-specific and varied in their objectives and approaches. This is in contrast to many government or sometimes even NGO efforts, which tend to become centralised, top-down and working under uniform legal and management prescriptions, not taking site specificities into account. However, making laws and policies flexible as well as firm and strong against misuse of the flexibility is a tricky question, and will involve serious debates and explorations.

6.5. Coordinated action and support

Rather than providing large funds specifically for conservation, it is often more useful to mobilise available

resources by helping to pool together the budgets of various line departments. For example, in Amravati District of Maharashtra, an enterprising official put all the line agency budgets together, and managed to generate adequate resources for ecologically sensitive development inputs for villagers in/ around the Melghat Tiger Reserve. Now it is eminently possible to use schemes like the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, and other rural development and/or tribal development schemes.

6.6. A landscape approach

It is extremely important to orient regional planning towards the ecological and cultural dimensions of an area, including community conservation efforts. Allowing resource-intensive or polluting activities in the surrounding areas could put more pressure on the biodiversity of the area to be protected, or act in contradiction to conservation objectives.

6.7. Institution building and local institutions

It is important that while entrusting the village community with the responsibility of resource management and protection, time and effort is also spent in building institutions and capacities to handle such responsibilities.

6.8. Role of local leadership

Considering that a large amount of the local community's time must go into earning a livelihood, it is sometimes difficult to sustain the fervour for protection activities, especially if there are no immediate threats. These are the times when a leader (an individual or a group of individuals) from within the community play an extremely important role in motivating the community and guiding the entire initiative. It is important to bear in mind that such leaders, working largely for the social cause, cannot be replaced by leadership emerging out of financial, political, and other selfish motives.

6.9. Funding

Often, donor-driven community conservation programmes collapse as soon as the donor pulls out unless financial sustainability has been built in from the start. Sometimes, community initiatives get embroiled into internal conflicts as soon as funds come from outside. Sometimes, the funds coming under a certain programme become the most important incentive for the community to participate in conservation activities; this also affects the sustainability of the programme. The need for financial sustainability is the basis for a series of innovative mechanisms - such as trust funds and foundations - that are now being evolved by governments, NGOs, and donors.

SECTION 7: WHAT CRITERIA COULD BE USED TO SELECT CCAs FOR SUPPORT?

For the purposes of the MoEF or other schemes, a process of prioritising CCAs could be to shortlist those which will depend on various permutations of ecological and social criterion along with a clear perception of threats and needs of the area. These could be:

- a. Ecological criteria
 - i. Whether the CCA is an Important Bird Area?
 - ii. Whether the CCA is a habitat for endangered species?
 - iii. Whether the CCA is a high diversity/endemism/ concentration of species?
 - iv. Whether the CCA is an important corridor for wildlife?
 - v. Whether the CCA harbours threatened ecosystem?
 - vi. Whether the CCA is critical for providing ecosystem services?
- b. Social criteria
 - i. Whether the CCA is crucial for sustaining people's livelihoods?
 - ii. Whether the CCA is crucial for sustaining local cultures?
 - iii. Whether the CCA has established a model governance structure



that requires support, encouragement, and up-scaling?

- iv. Whether the CCA institution can take the responsibility of the support provided and can help in monitoring the implementation and impact?
- c. Threat and need factor
 - i. Is the CCA threatened by development pressures from outside?
 - ii. Is the community facing threats from timber mafia, poachers, neighbours and not able to deal with it?
 - iii. Are the costs paid by the community making it difficult for them to sustain the initiative? For example human-wildlife conflicts, financial burden and so on.

- iv. Are lack of employment opportunities or effective livelihood options discouraging the community and forcing them to abandon the effort?
- v. Has the community clearly identified and articulated a need, such as help in water harvesting, help in marketing and so on?

SECTION 8: PROCESS BY WHICH THE MOEF OR OTHER SCHEMES CAN SUPPORT CCAs

Schemes for recognition and support of CCAs could be implemented keeping in mind all the dos and don'ts listed in sections above. Eventually a broad-based scheme or programme overseen by the Planning Commission and with the central participation of relevant communities perhaps on a rotational basis, to recognise and support CCAs, could be considered.

Briefing note

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