ABSTRACT

Devolution and decentralisation of power to the local community for forest resource conservation and management have become vital policy measures for many developing countries since the 1980s. The apparent change in policy from the state-managed top-down approach to the community level is fueled by the recognition of the limits of government agencies in managing resources at the local level, which has resulted in massive degradation of natural resources and of the local livelihood system. Since three decades, India has been at the forefront of involving local communities in natural resource management, specifically in the forest sector. Forest conservation is one of the crucial mitigation strategies to curb the current increasing climate change and global warming situation. Various local, i.e., joint forest management (JFM) and community forest management (CFM) institutions, are involved in sustainable management of forest resources across the country. The forest outcomes deviate across the institutions because of differences in institutional arrangements, governance systems, resource bases, and localities. This raises a few important issues. First, which form of local institutions (e.g., JFM and CFM) performs better in conserving forests and improving local livelihoods in the community? Second, what are the factors influencing differential forest outcomes in CFM and JFM communities? Third, to what extent are local people participating in CFM and JFM forest management and regeneration activities? Finally, which household gets more benefit from CFM or JFM forests in terms of forest products? To address these questions, the present study attempts to examine the factor determinants of the performance of CFM and JFM regarding forest conservation and livelihood outcomes, identify and analyse factors affecting the extent of household participation in forest management, and determine the distribution of benefits from the forest. This study used primary as well as secondary data and applied appropriate econometric techniques and statistical tools to address the research objectives. Semi-structured questionnaires have been used to collect 40 community-level and 288 household-level quantitative data from the Indian state of Odisha. The study found that larger CFM communities seem to be performing well compared to their counterparts, JFM communities, concerning forest growth and local livelihoods. Community-initiated forest protection committees and the presence of temple land in the community are more likely to efficiently manage forests, while the construction of roads to improve transport and communication and resource scarcity have a detrimental impact on forest growth. Hence, the more degraded reserved forest may be allotted to well-organised, self-initiated CFM communities to achieve both forest conservation objectives and promote local livelihoods.

Keywords: Local Institutions; Collective Action; Property Rights; Forest Conservation; CFM; JFM; Odisha; India.