

ABSTRACT

Forest is an essential resource for survival of human beings, especially those living in and around the forest. However, alarmingly, they are under continuous severe degradation and depletion the world over. Unfortunately one of the major causes is unsustainable exploitation of the forest resources, often by the very people whose survival depends on these forests. Joint Forest Management (JFM) in India is a programme to save forests by active involvement of people's institutions referred to here as Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC), synergistically with the Department of Forests. This study is an attempt to discover the underlying sociological and institutional factors that enable or inhibit functioning of JFMCs in the district of Paschim Medinipur, in the state of West Bengal in India.

The study has been carried out in 63 JFMCs from four territorial forest divisions of Paschim Medinipur. Data has been collected from 200 Executive Committee (EC) members and 150 General Body (GB) members of the JFMCs, 19 FD officials, as well as key PRI representatives of the district. The study includes both quantitative and qualitative investigations on various aspects of the functioning of JFMCs.

Findings of the quantitative study suggest that, the institutional arrangement is the most important factor, influencing the functioning of JFMCs significantly. However, it is also seen that the combined effect of characteristics of the JFMCs, their institutional arrangement, and the forest department's role improves the level of their performance. In the qualitative study, these aspects have been further probed for deeper understanding. The study reiterates the findings of the quantitative studies. Moreover the results show nature of these aspects and the way they hinder or facilitate the functioning of JFMCs. The qualitative study also helped to understand the reasons behind the inability to demonstrate the relevance and significance of certain aspects in the quantitative study.

Key words: Joint Forest Management, Community Participation, Institutional Arrangements, Group Characteristics, External Environment, Functioning.