

**WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES:
INFLUENCE ON JFMCS IN WEST BENGAL**

**A case Study submitted to
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ABSTRACT

Considering the importance of women's involvement in Joint Forest management (JFM) as the primary users of the forest resources, Government of West Bengal grants joint membership status and right to represent the household to women with their husbands. Moreover, it is assumed that, their representation in Executive Committee (EC) of Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) would help to perform JFMCs in a more effective manner. The present study, carried out in ten JFMCs in West Bengal, tries to explore, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the level of involvement of women and the nature of their role within the Executive Committees of JFMCs. It also looks at whether joint membership status and their presence in the EC can ensure real participation of women in the decision making processes and influence the functioning of JFMCs.

Keywords: JFM, West Bengal, India, Community Participation, Women's role.

1. Background and Objectives

Village women are the primary users of the forest resources, interacting directly with the forest biosphere for prolonged durations and on a daily basis for collection and sale of a diverse range of forest produces and participation as wage labours in developmental work sponsored by the forest department. Due to their regular interaction with the forest women have always played a major role in forest protection either positively or negatively. Moreover, their maternal role in inculcating a sense of value in forest conservation in the young minds of the next generation members of the forest community can never be underestimated.

Recognising the importance of women's involvement, Government Order of West Bengal (No 8556-For dated 15.11.1991) also grants joint membership status to women with their husband and right to represent the household. In a very recent order in 2004, it has also been promulgated that at least 33% of members of the EC of each JFMC should be women. However this order has not yet been put to effect.

In spite of their significant contribution and intense involvement in JFMC functioning, as well as the policy support towards their induction into the leadership positions in the EC, the asymmetric social-cultural and economic positions of rural women often impede them in expressing their views during the policy making process in JFM and question their real involvement in the JFM programme.

This case study aims to make a qualitative and quantitative assessment of level of involvement of women and the nature of their role in the decision making processes within the Executive Committees of JFMCs. It also aims to examine whether the current framework of JFMCs provides ample scope and opportunity to them to express and find solutions to their problems at an equal footing with the menfolk. The study is to investigate specifically, whether joint membership status and their presence in the EC can ensure real participation of women in the decision making processes and influence the functioning of JFMCs as well as identify positive and negative factors influencing the same.

2. Description

West Bengal is known as pioneer in the field of Joint Forest Management. Back in 1971-72, the then DFO, Silviculture (south) Division, Mr. Ajit Kumar Banerjee attempted, for the first time, to protect the forest by involving villagers of Arabari. The FD-FC partnership model invented in the Arabari experiment was finally recognised and established through the Government Memorandum issued in March 1987. Besides Arabari, other field experiences of the West Bengal Social Forestry Project, and the National Forest Policy (NFP), 1988, had significant impact on forest management practices in the region (Palit 1989, Poffenberger 1990a). Formation of people's forum to conserve forest continued to spread throughout South -West Bengal and forest began to show signs of revival. Finally, in 1989, in a Government order, the Govt. of West Bengal issued a policy resolution (Ref 4461-For. dated 12.07.89) for entire South-West Bengal on the role of JFMCs mechanism of usufruct sharing. Thus, the philosophical tenets of JFM were firmly established and experimentation started on the development of better techniques to implement various aspects of JFM (Raju et al 1993, Sarin 1996).

In these more than fifteen years, JFM in West Bengal has taken shape of a movement. With passage of time, the setting of forest management has become more complex and multifaceted. Thus, today, effective forest management requires coordination among a number of institutions and groups. These groups are diverse in many ways such as their objectives, authority, socio-cultural standing, organisational features and capacity as well as nature of interactions. The following are the primary actors who have considerable interaction with the forest and influence the status of forest.

- Forest Community (FC)
- Forest Department (FD)
- Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI)
- Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)
- Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs)

Forest Community (FC)

People living inside or adjacent to the forest constitute the forest community. They interact directly with the forest, everyday, in various ways and play the most important role in influencing the quality and extent of a forest, either positively or negatively. They are economically dependent on forest resources for their fuel, fodder, food, medicine, agricultural equipment, house construction materials, raw materials for cottage industries and other needs. They are thus, engaged in different activities to meet their needs, which have significant bearing on the health and the size of the forest, as categorised below.

- **Collection of fuel wood:** Twigs, branches or even whole trees are cut for this purpose.
- **Grazing of cattle:** Uncontrolled grazing has detrimental effect in loosening up the top soil and also damages the biodiversity existing on the forest floor.
- **Collection of fruits, seeds and other edible products:** Injudicious harvesting may lead to extinction of species resulting in loss of biodiversity.
- **Harvesting timber:** Illegal felling is carried out as organized or individual activity.
- **Collection of medicinal plants:** Wrong method of extraction can lead to exhaustion, or even extinction of species resulting in loss of biodiversity.
- **NTFP collection for generating alternative income:** Items include green and dry *Sal* leaves, date palm leaves, mushrooms etc. If extraction is not proper, it can severely damage the forest.
- **Setting Forest on fire:** This is mostly carried out with the intention of extracting timber from the charred trees, since felling of such trees no longer implies damaging the forest.

Forest Department (F D)

The state forest department, headed by a Minister, comprises a forest secretariat and forest directorate. While a forest secretary is in-charge of the former, the principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) heads the latter. Under the PCCF there are a number of chief conservators of forests (CCF) and each one looks after a number of circles. Each

circle is headed by a conservator of forests (CF). Each CF, in turn, looks after a number of forest divisions that constitute circle. Each forest division is managed by a divisional forest officer (DFO). A division is further subdivided into a number of ranges supervised by range officers (ROs) and the ranges further into beats or sections that are seen by beat officers (BOs) with the help of forest guards and forest workers.

The beat is the smallest management unit of FD. It is at this level that the actual forest management activities are executed as per directives of the higher management. Besides they are required to interact with the FC. The BOs, therefore, form the interface of the department with the people. As such, due to the critical role that he is required to play in JFM, a BO has been designated to be the ex-officio member secretary to the executive committee (EC) of a JFMC. On the other hand, the ROs and DFOs interact with the Block level committee of the local self government (known as Panchayat Samiti) and District level committee of the local self government (known as Zilla Parishad) respectively. In particular, the DFO selects beneficiaries to constitute the JFMC in consultation with the Gram panchayat (the lowest or village level in the three tier system of local self government) and forest standing committee of the concerned panchayat samiti. Moreover, upon recommendations of the forest standing committee, the DFO approves the constitution of JFMC and its EC. The concerned DFO is empowered to take appropriate action, even dissolution of any JFMC or its EC, on recommendation of the panchayat samiti. The concerned RO may be authorised by the DFO to take proper action, even termination of an individual membership on recommendation of the EC of JFMC. It is the responsibility of the FD to execute all the forestry activities such as thinning, pruning, multiple shoot cutting etc. in the area under its protection with the help of JFMC. The FD also carries out protection, plantation as well as harvesting of the forest produce.

Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI)

Panchayats, the people's local self-government, which is constituted by elected representatives, particularly in West Bengal, have played an important role in the initial stages of JFMC formation (Guhathakurta & Roy 2000). A strong PRI and its supportive role are considered as the main reasons of success of JFM in West Bengal. Being the

closest among all the institutions working in rural areas, programmes supported by panchayats get extra leverage of success. Although, in many cases, panchayats often do not consider JFM as a priority area, because it does not meet the short-term requirements of their political agenda.

The West Bengal government order on JFM stipulates the formation of a standing committee for forest and land reforms; named “Ban-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti” (BOBSSS), which is a part of the district level panchayat body (Zilla Parishad) and headed by a Karmadhyakshya. He is responsible for planning, management and coordination activities at the district level related to forests. Similarly, at the block level, there is one nominated member of the panchayat samiti, known as Karmadhyakshya, who is responsible for those at block level. To establish linkage with the panchayat, the Sabhapati (chairman of block level panchayat body) or his representative from the panchayat samiti and the panchayat Pradhan (head of village level panchayat body) or his representative from gram panchayat (village level panchayat body) are made members of the EC of each JFMC.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

These are voluntary organisations, which work on development-oriented programmes for the people. Many NGOs have played effective role(s) for the success of JFM. However, particularly in West Bengal NGOs did not have much role in formation of FPCs. They have been involved in much later stage especially for the following activities:

- Strengthen weak FPCs through build capacity of people in various areas to make them self reliant and effective to discharge their responsibilities.
- Train JFMC members to generate income without damaging the forest resources through development of skills.
- Train FD representatives on various issues of participatory development and management.
- Assist FD in developing micro-plans by involving people in decision making in a participatory manner.

- Play an important role between FD and FC. They can create an independent yet common platform to be shared by FD and FC for discussion and debates. Being an independent body, they often enjoy the confidence of both the sides. Both FD and FC share their goals, constraints and views more openly and authentically with the NGO members rather than other bodies.
- Initiate action research and networking.

Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs)

As per the West Bengal Government Order (GO) for South-West Bengal (Ref 4461-For. dated 12.07.89), a JFMC consists of one or more villages, the number depending upon the extent of the forest patch and availability of villages around that. Initially, according to the original GO, only the economically backward people were entitled to become members of JFMCs. However, after subsequent amendments (Ref 5962 –For. dated 20.7.90 and 8759 – For. dated 20.11.91), people living in villages around a given forest patch were given the right to join JFMCs as members and form the general body. From the general body, a nine member EC is formed with at least six members from the villagers. However, the very recent GO issued in 2004, has permitted upto 10% of the total members subject to a maximum of 25, to join the EC in a JFMC for more effective participation. Apart from villagers, representative of the head of the gram panchayat and panchayat samiti (the middle tier of the three tier system encompassing a block) are also members of EC. The local forest officer, known as beat officer, acts as the ex-officio member secretary of the JFMC.

While there was no specific mention about the participation of women in the 1989 GO, the 1990 GO explicitly gives the option to willing women to become a member. However, considering the less effectiveness to evoke the desired participation of women in village society optional membership has been changed to automatic joint membership to women in 1991 GO.

Box 1.1: Salient Features of JFM Resolution in South West Bengal

Membership: Especially meant for the economically backward class, but open to all families including female members interested in protection of forest. Both husband and wife enjoy joint membership status.

Executive Committee (EC): Nine- member EC including 6 elected members from JFMC, sabhapati or his representative from BOBSSS at Panchayat Samiti level, Gram Pradhan or a member of the local Gram Panchayat and the concerned beat officer as the Member Secretary.

Functional Supervision: BOBSSS is responsible for monitoring, reviewing and supervising JFMCs and advising forest staff on distribution of usufructs.

Usufruct: Free access to all NTFPs except Kendu (*Diospyros*) leaves and Sal (*Shorea robusta*) seeds.
25% of the net sale amount of cashew fruits, 25% of produces from intermediate yields and 25% net of final harvest of timber.

Termination of Membership: The Range officer, authorised by the DFO, can terminate the membership of JFMC or EC on recommendation of BOBSSS.

Study Area

For the present study, the Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal, India has been selected as the study area, which is the pioneer in JFM concept. There are four territorial forest divisions in Paschim Medinipur which have nearly 1200 JFMCs, scattered all over the district. These committees consist of one or more villages, depending upon of the availability of the forest patch and the villages around that. There are wide variations in the functioning of JFMCs based on their number and its beneficiaries, extent of forest area protected by them, nature and quality of the forest, proximity to towns/semi urban places, ethnic composition and political interests of the villagers and their socio-economic conditions.

However, keeping in mind the objective of the present study, ten JFMCs have been selected from two territorial forest divisions namely, Kharagpur Social Forestry Division and East Medinipur Forest Division. Selection of JFMCs are primarily through purposive sampling ensuring adequate representation of both effective and ineffective JFMCs (as per records of the Forest Department) as well as JFMCs with women EC members and those without. Efforts have been put to include JFMCs with sufficient variation in their characteristic features, such as, number of constituent village, ethnic homogeneity,

distance from the nearest town, quantum of forest land available per family etc. To maintain uniformity, only the JFMCs which are functioning for more than 12 years (Registered up to 1993) have been selected. The amount of benefits received from the forests is one of the crucial factors which motivate JFMC members to conserve it for its continuity. However, the benefits from the natural forests and the plantation areas to the JFMCs can vary considerably. Therefore, only the JFMCs, which have *Sal* forest in at least 50% of the total designated area protected by them, have been selected.

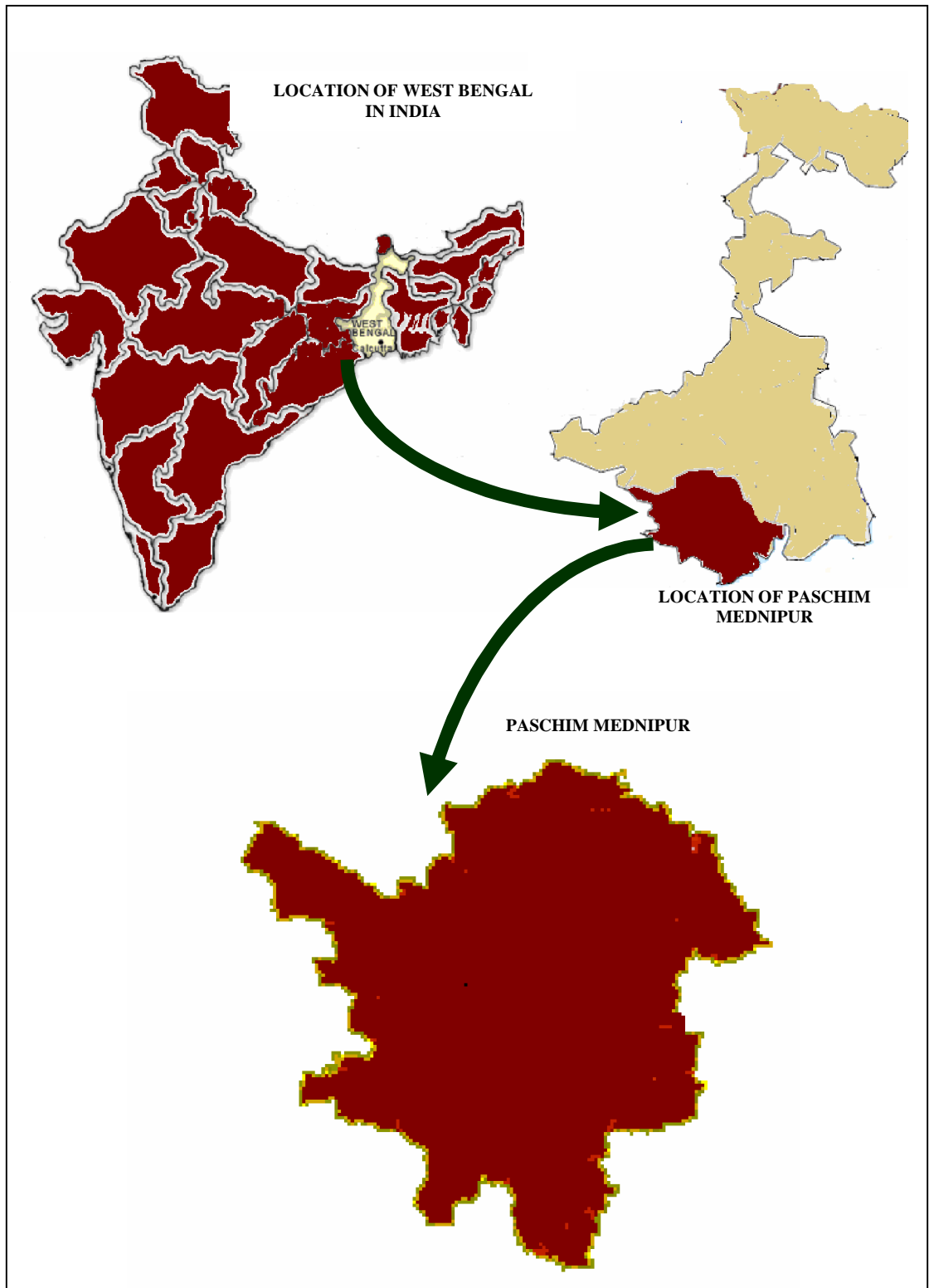
For data collection, major focus has been given to the members of JFMCs. This is based on the assumption that attitude, will, priorities and interests of the JFMC members towards their women counterparts would be reflected in the nomination of women members in the executive committee. Even, participation of women in the JFMC meetings, to a great extent, depends on prevalent social norms of those areas regarding the role of women.

3. Methodology

Data has been collected both from primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from 31 Executive Committee (EC) members of 10 JFMCs, 3 of which have women members in their ECs. Among the 31 members only 4 were women. Out of these 10 JFMCs one is an “All Woman Committee”, where all the EC members are women. Apart from EC members, data was also collected through group discussion from the members of the General Body. However, effort was made to ensure participation of women members in those group discussions. Their participation in the group discussions have helped to validate the information received from the EC members and provide insight into the general attitude of the members towards the women members, the relationships between the general body and the EC, as well as between the men and the women members. The collected data was coded, assigned scores and analysed with the help of a statistical computer software package. Inferences were finally validated and supported with qualitative analysis.

The objective of the present study is to investigate specifically, whether joint membership status and the presence of women in the EC, which has been considered as the

Figure 2.1: Study Area



independent variable, can ensure real involvement of them and influence the functioning of JFMCs, considered as the dependent variable.

The effectiveness of JFMC functioning is taken as the dependent variable in this study. Effectiveness is measured based on secondary data provided by the forest department. The West Bengal government order on JFM (Appendix- I) stipulates a number of activities for members of the JFMCs, to facilitate forest conservation practices. On the basis of the degrees of their success in those activities, and based on the ecological parameters (Table 3.1), the forest officials classify and grade the JFMCs into five categories, namely, A+, A, B+, B and C (Recorded in Departmental Report to the Divisional Forest Officers sent by the Range Officers). This gradation of JFMC by the West Bengal Forest Department has been adopted as the indicator for their functioning. Independent measurement of status of forests and their gradation to determine functioning is beyond the scope of this study.

Table 3.1: Criterion for ranking of forest by FD

<i>Rank</i>	<i>Crown density</i>
A+	Above 0.8
A	0.61 - 0.8
B+	0.51 - 0.6
B	0.41 - 0.5
C	Below 0.4

In the present study, involvement of women (IW) has been examined both from quantitative and qualitative points of view. The quantitative study looks into two distinct aspects, namely, their presence in the EC and participation in the general body meetings. On the other hand, the qualitative study looks into their involvement in the day to day activities of JFMCs including the decision making process and the extent to which rules are followed by them.

Measures

For the quantitative study, a numerical four point scale of 0, 1, 2 and 3 has been used to assign scores to the responses. Keeping in mind the objectives of the study highest score

of 3 has been assigned to those JFMCs where the women are both present in EC and majority of the women participate in general body meetings of JFMCs. Similarly, lowest scores are assigned to those, where there is no women member in the EC and women participation in the general body meetings are negligible or very low.

4. Result and Discussion

As already described, the study is carried out based on the survey in 10 selected JFMCs in 2 forest divisions of Paschim Medinipur District in the state of West Bengal. These JFMCs are varied in their sizes, number of constituent villages, and extents of membership in the villages, areas of protection, ethnic composition as well as their activities. Moreover, the level of women's participation also varies in those JFMCs.

Chart 4.1: Percentage of Different Gradations of JFMCs

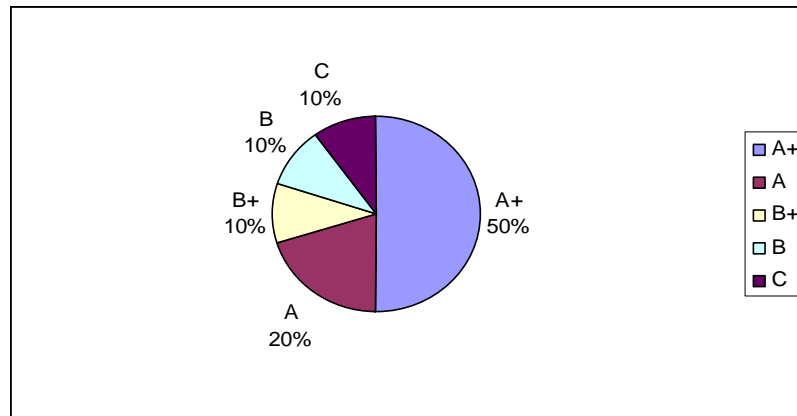


Chart 4.1 shows the proportion of different grades of JFMCs in the sample. It is seen that the maximum number of JFMCs (50%) are in A+ grade. While, 20% sampled JFMCs are in A grade, B+, B and C each of these grades have 10% of sampled JFMCs.

In the present study, as already discussed, IW has been judged based on the following two aspects,

- Their presence in EC (PEC), and
- Participation in general body meetings (PAGM).

Chart 4.2 shows the distribution of those in JFMCs along with their gradations. Table 4.1 numerically represents the correlations among the above two parameters of IW as well as that with gradations of JFMCs. On the basis of Chart 4.2 and Table 4.1 the following observations are made.

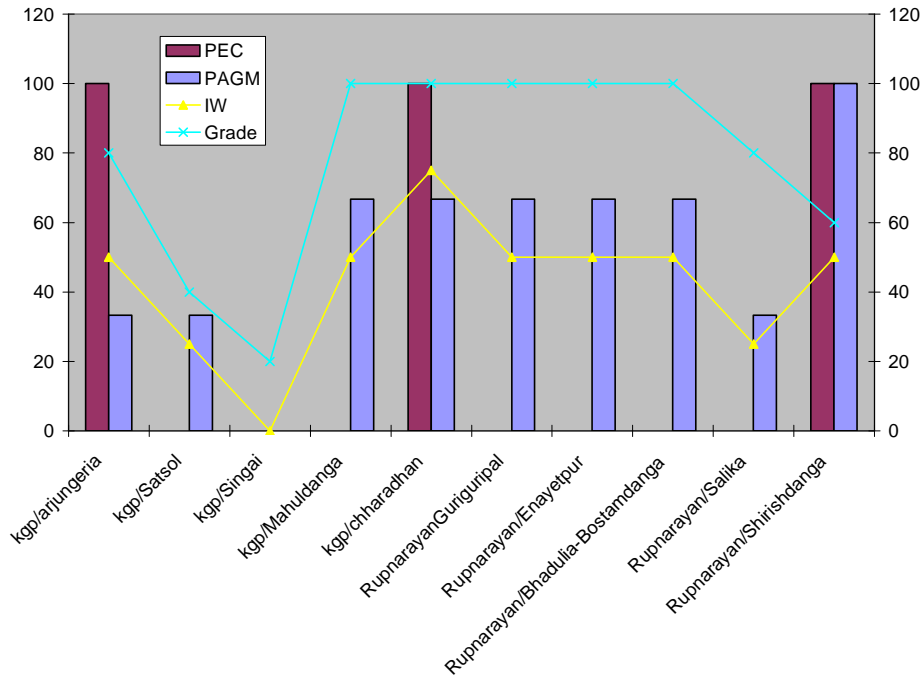
Table 4.1: Correlation of constituent parameters of IW with gradation of JFMCs

	<i>PEC</i>	<i>PAGM</i>	<i>IW</i>	<i>Grade</i>
PEC	1			
PAGM	0.327327	1		
IW	0.530859	0.768221	1	
Grade	0.047619	0.600099	0.810258	1

- Table 4.1 shows that IW has a high (81%) correlation with gradation of JFMCs. The detailed inspection reveals that while PEC has negligible (05%) correlation, PAGM has moderately high correlation (60%) with the grades. Though, this very small data set does not have much statistical significance, the result indicates that, presence of women members in EC does not necessarily indicate high gradations and their absence also does not indicate low scores in gradation. In Arjungeria, Chharadon and Shirishdanga, where there are women members in EC, overall gradation also vary between high moderate to very effective i.e. B+, A or A+. Though the reverse is not always true; rather in JFMCs like Mahuldanga, Guguripal, Enayetpur and Bhadulia-Bostamdanga despite the PEC score being zero, performance is at its highest.
- However, participation of women in AGM has significant correlation with gradations. This may be because of the reason that, their participation in AGM shows at least they have certain interests in the activities of JFMCs. Qualitative survey also later on reveals that participation in AGM has a fairly high relationship with their participation in day to day activities of JFMCs and abiding by rules framed by the JFMCs.
- High correlation of IW score with grades in the quantitative study is primarily due to moderately high correlation between the grades and participation of women in AGM. However, the presence of women in the executive committee as stipulated by the government order does not necessarily lead to higher gradations of JFMCs. Because,

presence in EC is not the only indicator of the involvement of women. In Guguripal, Enayetpur, Bhadulia-Bostamdanga and Salika, FGD reveals that, while there are no

Chart 4.2: Distribution of Constituent Parameters of IW with Gradations



women members in EC; the general body members including the women members generally abide by the rules of the JFMCs. This proves that, without being the members of EC, women can follow the institutional arrangements prevailed in the JFMCs, which ultimately influence the gradations of JFMCs positively.

These conclusions are further strengthened by multiple regression analysis presented in the next section.

The purpose of multiple regression analysis here is to assess the following:

- The contributions of IW in explaining JFMC functioning.
- The contributions of both the parameters (PEC and PAGM) under IW in explaining JFMC functioning
- To identify the significant parameters in terms of their explained variances as well as their significance

- To compare the findings from regression analysis with those obtained based on the correlations above.

To examine the above goals, first, a single factor regression model has been built with the IW. Table 4.2 presents the results the single factor regression model. From Table 4.2 the following points may be noted.

Table 4.2: Simple Regression Model of IW

Model	Factor	B	SE B	β	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	t
1	IW	1.14	.29	.81	.66	.61	15.29	3.91*

* = significant at 0.1 level

- The result of single factor model indicates that in terms of adjusted R², IW can explain 61% of the variance in the gradation of JFMCs.
- The t-statistics for the estimated coefficient of IW indicate that model is significant at 0.1 level (Miller and Miller 2002).
- According to F statistic, estimated coefficient of IW is not significant. However, it can be assumed that, this can be due to the very small data set in the present study.

Table 4.3: Summary of Stepwise Regression Analysis of IA, GC, EE and RR

Factor	B	SE B	β	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	t	R ² Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
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Model 1

PEC	2.857E-02	.212	.048	.002	-.122	.02	.13	-	-	-
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Model 2

PEC	-1.000E-01	.19	-.17	.38	.21	2.19	-.53	.38	4.35	.07
PAGM	.67	.32	.65	-	-	-	2.09*	-	-	-

* = significant at 0.1 level

Based on the above observations, next, multiple regression models are built including the parameters of IW in steps to identify the contributions of both the parameters and to find out the significant parameter among them, if any. Thus first a simple regression model

with only PEC is computed, followed by model combining PEC with PAGM, The results are presented in Table 4.3.

From Table 4.3 the following points may be noted.

- Among the above set of multiple regression models containing two factors, it is seen that PEC can not significantly explained the variance of gradations in its single factor regression model.
- However, R square changes show that PAGM can explain 38% of variance of the gradations of JFMCs.
- From the standardised beta also, it is seen that, PAGM contributes considerably (.65) in explaining the gradations of JFMCs. This is more or less consistent with the result of correlations presented in Table 4.1.
- For the model including PEC and PAGM, the t-statistics for the estimated coefficient of PEC is not significant. However, that for PAGM is significant at 0.1 level. These are, therefore, fairly accurate.
- The above results are in consistency with the observations made from correlation analysis.

This completes the quantitative analysis of the data. In the next section, the qualitative aspects of the study are discussed.

5. Qualitative Study: Women in EC- JFM in West Bengal

This section presents the qualitative aspects of the study carried out for an in-depth understanding of the role of women as EC members in JFM in West Bengal. The section includes the methodology adopted in the qualitative investigations and the results that are obtained on the basis of Focus Group Discussions. It may be pointed out here that while specific investigations have been carried out in the context of the present study, the author has had the advantage of being involved in similar studies particularly in West Bengal and also in many states of India for the last ten years in her professional context, even while she was engaged in her doctoral work.

Methodology

Sampling: The study has been undertaken in ten JFMCs of two territorial forest divisions in Paschim Medinipur. Table 5.1 below presents detailed characteristics of the JFMCs in which the study was carried out.

Data Collection: Data has been collected through Focus Group Discussion (FGD). FGDs helped in validating the information through triangulation method, which is essentially the technique of cross checking responses on the spot from multiple respondents (Mukherjee, 1997). Moreover FGDs provide insight into the general attitude of the general body members towards the executive committee members in general and women members in particular and the relationships between them.

FGDs were conducted with permission from the concerned BOs after preliminary discussion. Time for the FGDs was decided after discussing with the villagers and as per their convenience. Each FGD took about forty five minutes to one hour to be completed. The number of participants in the FGDs varied from eight to twelve members of the general body based on the strength of JFMC and availability of the members. Participants were randomly selected from the general body. Special effort was made to include women members in the discussion. However in Singai, it was not possible to involve them due to logistic and circumstantial reasons. Usually, FGDs were organised in common places in villages. All the interviews were conducted after briefing the respondents about the nature of the study and assuring them that all the information provided would be kept strictly confidential.

As the results presented quantitatively reflect the importance of women in functioning, the author's observations during FGD also revealed that women have considerable importance in the functioning of JFMCs and conservation of forests. Women, in any part of the world, are the primary users of forest resource. This is not different in the study area too. Their roles include collection and sale of a diverse range of forest produces including fuel wood, participation as wage labour in developmental work sponsored by the forest department, participation in entrepreneurial activities using NTFPs as raw material (Khare 1987), such as *sal* leaf plate making etc. As key users of forest resource, they are the persons who help in maintaining rules and norms set by JFMCs. Moreover,

apart from the formal patrolling system, women play crucial role in forest protection during their prolonged visits to the forests for collection of NTFPs.

Table 5.1 Profile of the Sample JFMCs

Sl. No.	JFMC	No of constituting villages	Area protected in Ha	No. of beneficiary	No of persons present in the FGD
1.	Arjungeria	1	50	68	8
2.	Satsol	5	100	204	10
3.	Singai	1	45	167	8
4.	Chharadan	1	69.95	31	8
5.	Mahuldanga	1	128.76	53	8
6.	Gurguripal	1	200	210	12
7.	Enayetpur	1	110	107	10
8.	Bhadulia- Bostomdanga	2	100	24	8
9.	Salika	1	90	80	8
10.	Shirishdanga (All Woman Committee)	2	100	112	10

Finally, their role in socialising the next generation members of the forest community to the value of forest conservation can never be underestimated. Their perception of the importance of forest is qualitatively different from that of men.

Theories of eco-feminism as well as “women, environment and development (WED)” mention a special relationship between women and environment. Eco-feminism believes in natural and spiritual content of women’s closeness with the nature and indicates a natural affinity between women and environment (Locke 1999). On the other hand, WED considers this relationship is based on the social construct of division of labour based on sex. According to WED, due to their role in resource use, women are more informed and interested in environmental issues (Rocheleau 1996).

During the study also it is seen that women play the role of primary resource users. As they are responsible to provide food to their family members, collection of fuel wood or food items from forest predominantly becomes their responsibility. Even women in most of the villages in the study area are also engaged in selling of *sal* leaf plates to supplement additional income to their families. Therefore, their views towards forest are more as a resource base which meets their subsistence needs.

The realisation of women about forests as a renewable but finite resource which is essential for their own survival is an outcome of a long history of forest management in the region. In south-west Bengal, especially in the Medinipur (Currently Paschim Medinipur) and Bankura districts, forest land was close to complete degradation in the 1970s and the 80s. At that time, the villagers of these districts, in particular the women, faced acute scarcity of fuel wood and other forest resources. On numerous occasions, local people, in response to acute shortage of fuel, came forward voluntarily, formed a forum and decided to protect the degraded forest land for regeneration (Poffenberger et al, 1996). A few progressive foresters also started to explore the viability of involving people in protection of the forest resource, which enabled people to get wage employment from work related to forestry and rural development sponsored by the forest department (Malhotra and Poffenberger, 1989; Deb and Malhotra, 1993; Roy 1993). Successful cases of people's involvement on their own initiatives, as well as the initiatives from a few foresters, set the stage for the West Bengal government to adopt people's participation in Forest Management as a feasible management option (Poffenberger 1996). Discussion with the community members, especially the women, revealed that many a times the memory of acute scarcity of forest resources acted as a strong motivation for forest conservation. Women members explicitly expressed that at least, after JFM, they travel smaller distances for collection of fuelwood.

During the study it is found that women's view about the forest is typically different from those of their male counterparts. Table 5.2 illustrates the most common answers given by men and women during FGDs regarding the benefit of forests and their membership in JFMCs.

To supplement the idea of differences in perception, the groups were asked, during FGDs, about the acceptability of a hypothetical situation, wherein the government

decides to build a factory in their forest area with a promise that one member from each household would get a job. Male members were hesitant to answer; even in three groups the idea was quite acceptable to them. However, in eight out of ten cases, women summarily rejected the idea. They were the first to feel that the forest is more important to them than the employment of one member of their families. When asked, they described the reasons behind their feelings in words such as those below.

- “Service may provide some money, but where would we get fuel wood from?” in Shirishdanga, the women wondered.
- “Without forest, there will be no rain and thus, agricultural activities will be hampered”.
- “May be one person from each household would get a job for the time being, but what will be left for the next generation? On the other hand forest is for everyone over generations”.

Table 5.2: Perception Regarding Benefits of Forest and Their Membership in JFMC

Men	Women
25% timber share	Fuel food and other things
Improvement of environment	Income from selling of <i>sal</i> leaf plate
Right over forest, respect from others	25% timber share
Women’s income from selling of <i>sal</i> leaf plate	SHG, opportunity of getting loan
Fuel, agricultural implements and other things	Improvement of relationship with FD
Benefits from government, employment opportunity	Employment opportunity

Thus, qualitative investigation reveals that, participation of women is not always explicit in the form of their presence in the EC or their participation in meetings. Rather, it reveals that in the JFMCs like Gurguripal or Enayetpur, while there are no women members in EC, JFMCs are functioning well. Further probing shows that, institutional arrangements play an important role in those two JFMCs for conservation of forests.

Institutional arrangements are mentioned as one of the most important factors which affect the functioning of JFMCs and its absence indicates non-functioning character of JFMCs. Different parameters of institutions have also been mentioned by different

authors (Sarin 1996, Das 2003). Usually, institutions of JFMCs are confined to the rules framed and put into operation by the JFMC members. It is true that rules formed and implemented certainly indicate the level of proactiveness among the members. However, knowledge on institutional arrangements can not be complete without knowing the system of information sharing, monitoring and control mechanisms. Therefore, in the present study, the institutional arrangements are explored based on five aspects, namely the extent of following rules, mechanism of monitoring and control, system of information sharing and conflict resolution, which represent comprehensive picture of the functioning of JFMCs.

The study reveals that, these institutional arrangements are the backbones of functioning of JFMCs. The better the institutions work, more is the likelihood of JFMCs to be effective. Therefore if the JFMCs can make aware, motivate and involve their members in their day to day activities of forest protection, they are likely to be effective irrespective of whether they have women members in EC. It is also found that JFMCs, in general, function better wherever majority of general body members, including women, are actively engaged in forest conversation. In Mahuldanga, it is found that, even without any active participation of women in patrolling or other daily activities, condition of the forest is very good. It was also found that women's participation in AGMs were not satisfactory. However, when enquired about need for participation of more women, the male members mentioned that whether the women be present in the meetings or not, it is ensured that all women get the salient information regarding resolutions taken in the meetings either from their husbands or from their fellow women who attended the meeting. It is seen that, this kind of informal information sharing system, many a times works better in village society. Therefore, it is not their presence in EC or AGM rather their conformance to the norms and rules is important for smooth functioning of JFMCs. Furthermore, whether the conformance exists or not that depends on women's realisation of scarcity and importance of resource and the monitoring and control mechanism followed by JFMCs.

There also exist considerable differences in the competency levels of women members in ECs of various JFMCs. Shirishdanga being an "all women committee", women are much

more competent in decision making. All the major decisions are taken by the EC members themselves with approval from their male counterparts, wherever appropriate. On the other hand, in Chharadon, it is found that the two women members in the EC are not as active as their counterparts in Shirishdanga. However, they are fairly aware of the JFMC activities and take part in the meetings. They are also not hesitant to voice their opinions in front of the male members, although, in general, it is the male members of ECs who are the most vocal.

In Arjungeria the situation is diametrically opposite. There are two women members in the EC of Arjungeria JFMC too. While conversing with one of them it was found that the particular member does not know about her roles and responsibilities as an EC member. In fact, she did not even know her colleagues in the EC. It is understood that her presence in EC is more to maintain the formal requirement of the government order than to involve her in the decision making process.

During the study, by and large it is found that, women, who were already involved in panchayat activities or as members of *Mahila Samiti* and subsequently got selected as EC members in JFMCs, have active and meaningful participation in JFMC activities also. From that point of view, panchayat has played an important role in capacity building of women for JFM. In the same way, it is also found that, in a few cases, where some women have shown their potential in leading the JFMC, like in Shirishdanga, panchayat has chosen them as probable candidates to represent their party in election.

However, overall the FGD illustrates that neither the presence of women in EC nor their absence there are responsible for effectiveness of JFMCs. Rather, wherever the majority of men and women collectively have understood the value of the forest resource for their own survival and are working in a supportive manner to each other, JFMCs are meeting their purpose more or less effectively.

This completes the qualitative analysis of role of women which influence the functioning of JFMCs.

6. Policy Recommendations

Inclusion of women members in EC to consider their viewpoint in the decision making process was undoubtedly an important move. However, the study reveals that, due to an asymmetric social position held by women with respect to men, presence of one or two women in a male dominated EC often do not necessarily represent the viewpoint of the whole body of womenfolk and evoke the desired level of participation. On the other hand, due to intervention of an NGO or the FD itself, wherever women's groups have been involved in JFMC activities, such as in Satsol or Shirishdanga, functioning of JFMCs has been strengthened. Their presence has certainly been able to represent the women's perspective in a more effective way.

These experiences, both positive and negative, can be used to chalk out future strategy for involving women directly in JFMC activities. Selection of women volunteers and organisation of training for them, formation of a women's committee may be right step to improve functioning of JFMCs. However the desired improvements may not come through, unless selection of appropriate volunteers is made and the authorities and responsibilities of the women's committee are made commensurate, vis a vis that of the EC and the GB.

7. Key Learning

Involving women in the mainstream of development has been the agenda of all development programmes to support the goal of gender equality. This initiative was the outcome of the understanding that bringing the gender equality to the centre of the development process is important as it makes a qualitative difference in the whole process. As expected, it has helped in creating several positive instances where women are influencing and participating in the mainstream of development. However, such instances are limited in number. The asymmetric socio-economic position of women, especially in the third world, has prevented them from taking full advantage of these interventions.

Moreover, this discrimination and inequity are somewhat also related to gendered approach of economy. The approach differentiates between the productive and

reproductive economy. Productive activity involves the production of goods and services that enter the market at a price. Reproductive activities are usually undertaken at the level of the household, and involve domestic work (water and fuel collection, food preparation, cooking, cleaning, care of children, older people and the sick and household production) that is for direct subsistence and not the market. From a gender perspective, both the productive and the reproductive economies are social construct on the basis of a gender wise division of labour, which assigns primacy of men in productive and women in reproductive activities. And gendered approach of economic analysis prioritises the productive, largely ignoring the reproductive (Kanji and Barrientos (2002) and that way establish the supremacy of men and subordination of women in the society.

Therefore, the recent understanding is that to have effective participation of women in development programs there is a need to change the perception and social construct towards productive and reproductive economy. It necessitates a shift from a women-centric approach to gender mainstreaming by ascertaining gender equity. The gender approach is distinct in the way that it focuses on men as well as women and not on women alone.

In the present study also, it is found that in the villages under JFMCs, the majority of families are dependent on home produces, either based on agriculture or based on forest resources, to satisfy family needs and demands. In absence of modern technological and infrastructural supports, the production is primarily based on available natural and human resources. There both men and women spend a considerable amount of time and human energy to transform available natural resources to consumables. Furthermore, in case of a poor state of natural resources they are forced to work hard for long hours to make a living. Wherever this struggle helped them realize importance of the resource for their survival, both men and women are working together for conservation of forests.

Therefore, attention should not be limited to women or to men alone, rather on both, and to create an amicable working relationship between them with understanding and cooperation.

8. Conclusions

The present study was carried out with an exploratory approach to examine the relationship between the involvement of women and the functioning of JFMCs, which ultimately determine their performance reflected in terms of their gradation carried out by the FD. In quantitative study, involvement of women is measured based on two aspects referred to as parameters here, aggregate to constitute the broad factor. The study has also identified the significant parameters that explain the functioning of the JFMCs in terms of their gradation done by the FD.

Data for the present study have been collected from 31 executive committee members and 90 general body members of 10 JFMCs in Paschim Medinipur. To arrive at a consolidated score for a particular JFMC, on IW and its constituent aspects, average scores of individual respondents belonging to that JFMC have been considered. Established statistical methods like correlation and multiple regressions have been used to analyse the data with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS10.0) for Windows. Qualitative probing has also been undertaken of specific JFMCs mainly through Focus Group Discussions. Based on statistical analysis and qualitative field experiences, how involvement of women and its parameters that affect functioning, have been presented in the present study.

Result shows that, IW is an important factor to explain the functioning of JFMCs as reflected in the gradation done by the FD. It shows that, success of JFMCs in their functioning is critically dependent involvement of women. However, the result shows that the mere presence of women can not induce desired change in the functioning of JFMCs. Qualitative study reveals that even where there are women members in EC, real participation is hindered for many reasons. Firstly, in male dominated rural West Bengal, it is hard for two women members to influence in decision making or even voice their opinion in front of other male members including the panchayat representative and the forester. It becomes harder when among other members some are from their in-laws. Moreover, competencies of the women members often become an impeding factor. It is true that, the number of women in rural society with formal education who can express themselves in formal meetings is not large. Even if there are a few of them, during

selection of the EC members often efforts are not put to select them. Finally, in the present state of affairs there is no scope for organised training for managerial capacity building of the EC members. Collectively, due to all these factors, presence of women in EC often remains unsuccessful to bring much desired results in JFMCs' performance. However, after getting the right impetus through policy support for involving women, selection of deserving women candidates for formation of women committees, imparting them appropriate training and deciding about the authorities and responsibilities of the women's committee vis a vis that of the EC and the GB would help to achieve the desired outcome.

Lastly, the study illustrates that wherever women are in harmonious relationship with the menfolk, participate in meetings, follow the local norms set by the JFMCs for conservation of forests, condition of forests are good and JFMCs are functioning in an effective manner.

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Appendix I

West Bengal Government Resolutions

Resolution No.4461 -For/D/IS/16/88 (covering South- West Bengal) of 12.7.89

Whereas the Forest Department has taken up a massive programme for "Resuscitation of *Sal* Forest of South-West Bengal" with the objective to re-establish moribund sal and other hardwood forests in the districts of Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia, Burdwan and Birbhum, for converting the areas into productive forests;

Whereas active participation and involvement of *local* people are vital for regeneration, *maintenance* and *protection* of aforesaid forest/plantations and *successful* implementation of the programme;

Now, therefore, the Governor is pleased to decide that Forest Protection Committees shall be constituted for this purpose and beneficiaries acting as members of such committees shall be allowed, as a measure of incentive, 25 per cent of the Usufructs subject to observance of the *conditions* provided in the Resolution.

The composition, duties and functions, the Usufructuary benefits and restrictive measures pertaining to such protection committees shall be as follows:

Composition

1. (i) The Divisional Forest Officer in consultation with "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of the concerned Panchayat Samiti shall select beneficiaries for construction of Forest Protection Committee(s). Within their jurisdictions, and within the framework of this Resolution;
 - (ii) The beneficiaries shall be identified from amongst the economically backward People living in the vicinity of forests concerned;
 - (iii) The concerned Gram Panchayat(s) shall extend necessary support and help to such committee(s) to ensure their smooth and proper functioning;
 - (iv) Each Forest Protection Committee shall have an Executive Committee to carry out the various activities assigned to the Committee;
 - (v) The composition of the Executive Committee shall be as follows:
 - (a) Sabhapati or any member of the Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti of the local Panchayat Samiti Member
 - (b) Gram Pradhan or any member of local Gram Panchayat(s) Member
 - (c) Elected representatives of the beneficiaries (not exceeding 6) Member
 - (d) Concerned Beat Officer Member-Secretary
- The Members of the Executive Committee shall elect the president in each meeting.

- (vi) Constitution of the Forest Protection Committee including Executive Committee will be approved by the Divisional Forest Officer concerned on recommendation of the "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" to the concerned Panchayat Samiti;
- (vii) The "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of the respective Zilla Parishad will monitor, supervise and review functions of the Forest Protection Committee;
- (viii) If any inclusion or change in the Committee/Executive Committee is necessitated, after initial constitution, the Executive Committee shall make suitable recommendation to the Divisional Forest Officer concerned, duly endorsed by the "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of local Panchayat Samiti, for approval;
- (ix) The Beat Officer, as Member-Secretary shall convene the meetings of the Executive Committee as well as Forest Protection Committee, as per scheduled procedure;
- (x) The representatives of the beneficiaries to the Executive Committee shall be elected in each year in annual general meeting of the Committee, where the concerned Range Officer shall be the observer.

Duties

- 2. (i) The Forest Protection Committee shall maintain a register showing necessary particulars of beneficiaries as well as members of the Committee, e.g. name, father's name, address, age, number of family members, name of nominee, etc. The nomination forms duly filled in and approved by the Executive Committee should be pasted in the register. Such registers are also to be maintained in the concerned Range Offices of the Forest Department for permanent record;
- (ii) The Forest Protection Committee shall maintain a minutes book wherein proceedings of the meetings of the Executive Committee held from time to time as well as the proceedings of the annual general meeting of the Forest Protection Committee will be recorded under the signature of the president of the Committee and such minutes duly attested shall be sent to the concerned Range Officer for record.
- (iii) The Forest Protection Committee shall hold an annual general meeting once every year where activities of the Committee as well as details of distribution of usufructuary benefits are to be discussed, besides electing representatives of the beneficiaries to the Executive Committee.

Functions

- 3. (a) (i) To ensure protection of forest(s)/plantation(s) through members of the committee;
- (ii) To protect the said forest(s)/plantation(s) with the members of the Committee;
- (iii) To inform forest personnel of any person or persons attempting trespass and willfully or maliciously damaging the id forest(s)/plantation(s) or commit theft thereon;
- (iv) To prevent such trespass, encroachment, grazing, fire, theft or damage.
- (v) To apprehend or assist the forest personnel in apprehension of such person or persons committing any of the offences mentioned above.
- (b) (i) To ensure smooth and timely execution of all forestry works taken up in the area under protection by the Committee;
- (ii) To involve every member of the Committee in the matter of protection of forest(s)/plantation(s) as well as other duties assigned to the Committee;
- (iii) To assist the concerned forest official in the matter of selecting/engaging of labourers required for forestry works;

- (c) (i) To ensure smooth harvesting of the forest produce by the Forest Department.
- (ii) To assist the concerned Forest Official in proper distribution of the earmarked portion (i.e. 25% of net sale proceeds) among the members of the Committee (as per list maintained by "Sthayee Samiti");
- (iii) To ensure that usufructuary rights allowed by the government is not in any way misused by any of the members and forest/plantation sites are kept free from any encroachment whatsoever .
- (d) (i) To prevent any activities in contravention of the provisions of Indian Forest Act of 1927 and any Acts and Rules made thereunder.
- (ii) To report about activities of a particular member which are found prejudicial and detrimental to the interest of particular plantation and/or forest to the concerned Beat' Officer/Range Officer, which may result in cancellation of membership of the erring member;
- (iii) To assist the Forest Officials to take action or proceed under Indian Forest Act of 1927 and any Acts and Rules made hereunder, against the offenders, including any erring member of the Committee found to be violating the Act or damaging the forest/plantation.

Usufructuary Benefits

4. (i) The members will have to protect the forest/plantation for at least 5 years to be eligible for sharing of usufructs under this programme;
- (ii) The Forest Official in consultation with the Executive Committee and with the approval of the Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti of the concerned Panchayat Samiti will distribute to the eligible members his proportionate share of usufructs from the harvesting, not before 10 years, upon satisfactory performance of functions detailed herein before;
- (iii) The members shall be entitled to collect following items free of royalty without causing any damage to forests/plantations:
 - (a) fallen twigs, grass, fruits, flowers, seeds (excluding cashew), etc.
 - (b) one-fourth of the produce obtained as Intermediate yield from R.D"F. coppicing, multiple shoot cutting, thinning etc. and also 25 per cent of the net sale proceeds of cashew where available to be shared proportionately;

This will not in any manner, extinguish the rights and privileges already granted to the members of the scheduled tribes by the State Government in their Order No. 2001-For" dated 20.4,81 and/or may be granted in future.
- (iv) Entire sal seeds and kendu leaves so collected shall have to be deposited with the West Bengal Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation Ltd., through the local LAMPS and LAMPS will pay the members, in approved tariff, against their individual collection;
- (v) The concerned forest Official shall set apart 25 per cent of the net sale proceeds at every final harvesting of the concerned plantation/forest (i.e. timber, pole, etc.) and shall pay to all eligible members or his nominee their proportionate share out of the said earmarked funds, as per para 4(ii) of the Resolution.

Termination of Membership, Dissolution of Committee, Appeal, etc.

5. (i) failure to comply with any of the conditions laid down hereinbefore as well as contravention of provisions of the Indian forest Act of 1927, or Acts and/or Rules made thereunder, may entail cancellation of individual membership and/or dissolution of the Executive/forest Protection Committee, as the case may be, by the Officers of the forest Department as stated below:
- (ii) The concerned Divisional forest Officer, shall be entitled to take appropriate action, even dissolution of any Executive/forest Protection Committee, on the grounds stated above, on the

recommendation of the 'Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti' of the concerned Panchayat Samiti.

- (iii) The concerned Range Officer may be authorised by the Divisional forest Officer to take proper action, even termination of an individual membership, on the above mentioned grounds, on the recommendation of the Executive committee of forest Protection Committee;
- (iv) Appeal against any such penal action by the Range Officer may be preferred to the concerned Divisional forest Officer through local Panchayat Samiti;
- (v) Appeal against any such penal action by Divisional forest Officer may be preferred to the concerned Circle Conservator of forests, through the concerned Panchayat Samiti and the Zilla Parishad, whose decision shall be final.

The State Government modified its July 1989 orders with a new Resolution (No.5062 -For/D/IS-16/88) dated 27th July, 1990. It is as follows:

In partial modification of this Department's Resolution No. 4461- for. D/IS- 16/88 dated the 12th July 1989 the Governor has been pleased to direct that the composition, duties and functions, the usufructuary benefits and restrictive measure pertaining to forest Protection Committee\$ shall be as follows:

Composition

1. (i) The Divisional forest Officer in consultation with "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of the concerned Panchayat Samiti shall select beneficiaries for constitution of the forest Protection Committee(s) , within their jurisdictions, and within the framework of this Resolution.
- (ii) The beneficiaries ordinarily shall be economically backward people living in the vicinity of the forests concerned. Every family living in the vicinity of the forests shall, however, have the option of becoming a member of the forest Protection Committee, **if such family including the female members is interested in the work of protection**
- (iii) The concerned Gram Panchayat(s) shall extend necessary support and help to such Committee(s) to ensure their smooth and proper functioning;
- (iv) Each Forest Protection Committee shall have an Executive Committee to carry out the various activities assigned to the Committee;
- (v) The composition of the Executive Committee shall be as follows
 - (a) Sabhapati or any member of the Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar

Sthayee Samiti of the local Panchayat Samiti as may

be nominated by the Sabhapati

- Member

- (b) Gram Pradhan or any member of Local Gram Panchayat(s),
as may be nominated by the Pradhan(s)

-Member

- (c) Elected representatives of the beneficiaries (not exceeding (6)

-Members

- (d) Concerned Beat Officer

-Member-Secretary

The members of the Executive Committee shall elect the president in each meeting

- (vi) Constitution of the Forest Protection Committee including Executive Committee will be approved by the Divisional Forest Officer concerned on recommendation of the "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of the concerned Panchayat Samiti;
- (vii) The "Bon-O Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of the respective Zilla Parishad will monitor, supervise and review functions of the Forest Protection Committee
- (viii) If any inclusion or change in the Committee Executive Committee is necessitated, after initial constitution, the Executive Committee shall make suitable recommendation to the Divisional Forest Officer concerned, duly endorsed by the "Bon-O Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of the local Panchayat Samiti, for approval;
- (ix) The Beat Officer, as Member-Secretary shall convene the meetings of the Executive Committee as well as Forest Protection Committee, as per Scheduled Procedure
- (x) The representatives of the beneficiaries to the Executive Committee shall be elected each year in Annual General Meeting of the Committee, where the concerned Range Officer shall be the observer

Duties

- 2. (i) The Forest Protection Committee shall maintain a register showing necessary particulars of beneficiaries who are Members of the Committee, eg name, father's name, address, age, number of family members, name of nominee, etc. The nomination forms duly filled in and approved by the Executive Committee should be pasted in the register. Such registers are also to be maintained in the concerned Range Offices of the Forest Department for permanent record;
- (ii) The Forest Protection Committee shall maintain a minutes book wherein proceedings of the meetings of the Executive Committee held from time to time as well as the proceedings of the Annual General Meeting of the Forest Protection Committee will be recorded under the signature of the resident of the Committee and such minutes duly attested shall be sent to the concerned Range Officer for record;
- (iii) The Forest Protection Committee shall hold a general body meeting once every year where activities of the Committee as well as details of distribution of usufructuary benefits are to be discussed, besides electing representatives of the beneficiaries to the Executive Committee.

Functions

- 3.(a) (i) To ensure protection of forest(s)/plantation(s) through members of the Committee;
- (ii) To protect the said forest(s)/plantation(s) with the members of the Committee; (iii) To inform forest personnel of any person or persons attempting trespass and willfully or maliciously damaging the said forest(s)/plantation(s) or commit theft thereon;
- (iv) To prevent such trespass, encroachment, grazing, fire, theft or damage;
- (v) To apprehend or assist the forest personnel in apprehension of such person or persons committing any of the offences mentioned above.
- (b) (i) To ensure smooth and timely execution of all forestry works taken up in the area under protection by the Committee;
- (ii) To involve every member of the Committee in the matter of protection of forest(s)/plantation(s) as well as other duties assigned to the Committee;
- (iii) To assist the concerned forest official in the matter of selecting/engaging of labourers required for forestry works. (c)(i) To ensure smooth harvesting of the forest produce by the Forest Department; (ii) To assist the concerned forest official in proper distribution of the earmarked

portion (i.e, 25% of net sale proceeds) among the members of the Committee (as per list maintained by "Sthayee Samiti");

- (iii) To ensure that usufructuary rights allowed by the government is not in any way misused by any of the members and forest/plantation sites are kept free from any encroachment whatsoever.
- (d) (i) To prevent any activities in contravention of the provisions of Indian Forest Act of 1927 and any Acts and Rules made thereunder and the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972;
- (ii) To report about activities of a particular member which are found prejudicial and detrimental to the interest of particular plantation and/or forest to the concerned Beat Officer/Range Officer, which may result in cancellation of membership of the erring member;
- (iii) To assist the Forest Officials to take action or proceed under Indian Forest Act of 1927 and the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and any Acts and Rules made thereunder, against the offenders, including any erring member of the committee found to be violating the Act or damaging the forest/plantation.

Usufructuary Benefits

- 4. (i) The member will have to protect the forest/plantation for at least 5 years to be eligible for sharing of usufructs under this programme;
- (ii) The Forest Official in consultation with the Executive Committee and with the approval of the "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of the concerned panchayat samiti Will distribute to the eligible member his proportionate share of usufructs from the final harvesting, not before the crop attaining the age of 10 years, upon satisfactory performance of functions detailed herein before.
- (iii) The members shall be entitled to collect following items free of *royalty* without causing any damage to forests/plantations :
 - (a) Fallen twigs, grass, fruits, flowers, seeds (excluding cashew) etc. and leaves;
 - (b) One-fourth of the product obtained as intermediate yield from R.D.F. coppicing, multiple shoot cutting, thinning etc. and also 25 per cent of the net sale proceeds of cashew where available to be shared proportionately.

This will not in any manner, extinguish the rights and privileges already granted to the members of the Scheduled Tribes by the State Government in their Order No;/2001- For. dated 20.4.81 and/or may be granted in future.

- (iv) Entire sal seeds, and kendu leaves so collected shall have to be deposited with the West Bengal Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation Ltd., through the local LAMPS and LAMPS will pay the members, in approved tariff against their individual collection.
- (v) The concerned forest official shall set apart 25 per cent of the net sale proceeds at every final harvesting of the concerned plantation/forests (i.e., timber, pole, etc.) and shall pay to all eligible members or their nominee their proportionate share out of the said earmarked funds, as per para (4 (ii) of the Resolution.

Termination of Membership

- 5. (i) Failure to comply with any of the conditions laid down hereinbefore as well as contravention of provisions of the Indian Forest Act of 1927, or Acts and/or Rules made there under, may entail cancellation of individual membership and/or dissolution of the Executive/Forest Protection Committee, as the case may be, by the Officers of the Forest Department as stated below:
- (ii) The concerned Divisional Forest Officer, shall be entitled to take appropriate action, even dissolution of any Executive/Forest Protection Committee, on the grounds stated above, on

the recommendation of the 'Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti' of the concerned Panchayat Samiti;

- (iii) The Range Officer concerned may be authorised by the Divisional Forest Officer to take proper action, even termination of an individual membership, on the above mentioned grounds on the recommendation of the Executive Committee of Forest Protection Committee;
- (iv) Appeal against any such penal action by the Range Officer may be preferred to the concerned Divisional Forest Officer through local Panchayat Samiti;
- (v) Appeal against any such penal action by the Divisional Forest Officer may be preferred to the concerned Circle Conservator of Forests, through the concerned panchayat samiti and the Zilla Parishad, whose decision shall be final.

Resolution No.8554 -For of 15th November 1991 covering North Bengal

Whereas the Forest Department has taken up a massive programme for resuscitation of the degraded forests of the State as a whole for converting the areas into productive forests;

And whereas active participation and involvement of local people are vital for regeneration, maintenance and protection of aforesaid forests/plantations and successful implementation of the programme;

And whereas necessary resolution in this connection has already been passed covering the districts in South-West Bengal;

Now, therefore, the Governor is pleased to decide that Forest Protection Committees shall be constituted for the purpose of development and protection of degraded forests in North Bengal plains area and beneficiaries acting as members of such committee shall be allowed, as a measure of incentive a share of the usufructs subject to observance of the conditions provided in the Resolution.

The composition, duties and functions, usufructuary benefits and restrictive measures pertaining to such protection committees shall be as follows:

Composition

1. (i) The Divisional Forest Officer in consultation with "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of the concerned Panchayat Samiti shall select beneficiaries for constitution of the Forest Protection Committee(s), within their jurisdictions, and within the framework of this Resolution;
- (ii) The beneficiaries ordinarily shall be economically backward people living in the vicinity of the forests concerned. Every family living in the vicinity of the forests shall, however, have the option of becoming a member of the Forest Protection Committee, if such family including the female members is interested in the work of protection.
- (iii) There shall be normally a joint membership for each household (i.e. husband becoming a member, wife automatically becoming a member). Either of them two can exercise rights to represent the household at any point;
- (iv) The concerned Gram Panchayat(s) shall extend necessary support and help to such Committee(s) to ensure their smooth and proper functioning;
- (v) Each Forest Protection Committee shall have an Executive Committee to carry out the various activities assigned to the Committee;
- (vi) The composition of the Executive Committee shall be as follows:
 - (a) Sabhapati or any member of the Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti of the local Panchayat Samiti as may be nominated by the Sabhapati; Member
 - (b) Gram Pradhan or any member of Local Gram Panchayat(s), as may be nominated by the Pradhan(s); Member

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| (c) Elected representative of the beneficiaries (not exceeding 6) | Members |
| (d) Concerned Beat Officer | Member-Secretary |

The members of the Executive Committee shall elect the president in each meeting. ,

- (vii) Constitution of the Forest Protection Committee including Executive committee will be approved by the Divisional Forest Officer concerned on recommendation of "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of the concerned Panchayat Samiti;
- (viii) The "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of the respective Zilla Parishad will monitor, supervise and review functions of the Forest Protection Committee;
- (ix) If any inclusion or change in the Committee/Executive Committee is necessitated, after initial constitution, the Executive Committee shall make suitable recommendation to the Divisional Forest Officer concerned, duly endorsed by the "Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti" of local Panchayat Samiti, for approval;
- (x) The Beat Officer, as Member-Secretary shall convene the meetings of the Executive Committee as well as Forest Protection Committee, as per agreed procedure;
- (xi) The representatives of the beneficiaries to the Executive Committee shall be elected each year in the annual general meeting of the Committee, where the concerned Range Officer shall be the observer.

Duties

- 2. (i) The Forest Protection Committee shall maintain a register showing necessary particulars of beneficiaries as well as Members of the Committee, e.g. name, father's name, address, age, number of family members, name of nominee, etc. The nomination forms duly filled in and approved by the Executive Committee should be pasted in the register. Such registers are also to be maintained in the concerned Range Offices of the Forest Department for permanent record;
- (ii) The Forest Protection Committee shall maintain a minutes book wherein proceedings of the meetings of the Executive Committee held from time to time as well as the proceedings of the annual general meeting of the Forest Protection Committee will be recorded under the signature of the President of the Committee and such minutes duly attested by the member-secretary shall be sent to the concerned Range Officer for record;
- (iii) The Forest Protection Committee shall hold an annual general meeting once every year where activities of the Committee as well as details of distribution of usufructuary benefits are to be discussed, besides electing representatives of the beneficiaries to the Executive Committee.

Functions

- 3.(a) (i) To ensure protection of forest(s)/plantation(s)/wildlife through members of the Committee;
- (ii) To protect the said forest(s)/plantation(s) with the members of the Committee; (iii) To inform forest personnel of any person or persons attempting trespass and wilfully or maliciously damaging the said forest(s)/plantation(s)/wildlife or commit theft thereon;
- (iv) To prevent such trespass, encroachment, grazing, fire, theft or damage;
- (v) To apprehend or assist the forest personnel in apprehension of such person or persons committing any of the offences mentioned above.
- (b) (i) To ensure smooth and timely execution of all forestry works taken up in the area under protection by the Committee;
- (ii) To involve every member of the Committee in the matter of protection of forest(s)/plantation(s)/wildlife as: well as other duties assigned to the Committee;

- (iii) To assist the concerned forest official in the matter of selecting/engaging of labourers required for forestry works;
- (c) (i) To ensure smooth harvesting of the *Jorest* produce by the Forest Department; (ii) To assist the concerned forest official in proper distribution of the earmarked portion of the net sale proceeds among the members of the Committee (as per list maintained by "Sthayee Samiti");
- (iii) To ensure that usufructuary rights allowed by the government is not in any way misused by any of the members and forest/plantation sites are kept free from any encroachment whatsoever.
- (d) (i) To prevent any activities in contravention of the provisions of Indian Forest Act of 1927 and any Acts and Rules made thereunder and the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 as amended from time to time;
- (ii) To report about activities of a particular member which are found prejudicial and detrimental to the interest of particular plantation and/or forest/wildlife to the concerned Beat Officer/Range Officer, which may result in cancellation of membership of the erring member;
- (iii) To assist the Forest Officials to take action or proceed under Indian Forest Act of 1927 and the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and any Acts and Rules made thereunder, against the offenders, including any erring member of the Committee found to be violating the Act or damaging the forest/plantation/wild life.

Usufructuary Benefits

4. (i) The member will have to protect the forest/plantation/wildlife *for at least 5 years* to be eligible for sharing of usufructs under this programme;
- (ii) The members shall be entitled to collect following items free of royalty without causing any damage to forests/plantations :
 - (a) fallen twigs, grass, fruits, flowers, mushroom, seeds, leaves and intercrops raised by FPCs, subject to any restrictions imposed from time to time, provided however such collection will not be allowed in National Park, core area to Tiger Reserve and sanctum sanctorum of sanctuary.
 - (b) Medicinal plants in North Bengal will be permitted to be collected by the FPC members free strictly on the basis of approved micro-plans, except in National Park, core area of Tiger Reserve and sanctum sanctorum of sanctuary;
 - (c) Members of the FPC will receive 25 per cent net of sale proceeds of firewood and poles which are harvested during thinning and cultural operations. The poles for the purpose of this order will be upto 90 cm bhg for all species except teak. for teak the upper limit of bhg is 60 cm.
 - (d) Timber would not be subject to revenue sharing. However, lops and tops derived out of clear felling as per approved working plan which comes under a category of firewood would be shared on 25 per cent net sale proceeds basis.
- (iii) Entire sal seeds so collected shall have to be deposited with the West Bengal Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation Ltd., through the local LAMPS (where LAMPS are functioning) and LAMPS will pay the members, in approved tariff against their individual collection.
- (iv) The concerned forest official will distribute to the eligible members their proportionate share of the usufructs from the harvesting after satisfactory performance of functions detailed herein before.
- (v) The usufruct sharing will be subject to restrictions imposed from time to time on account of silvicultural and management requirements and from preservation of wildlife point of view.

Termination of Membership, Dissolution Committee, Appeal, etc.

5. (i) Failure to comply with any of the conditions laid down hereinbefore as well as contravention of provisions of the Indian forest Act of 1927, Wild Life protection Act or Acts and/or Rules made thereunder, may entail cancellation of individual membership and/or dissolution of the Executive/forest Protection Committee, as the case may be, by the Officers of the forest Department as stated in (ii) and (iii) below;
- (ii) The concerned Divisional forest Officer, shall be entitled to take appropriate action, even dissolution of any Executive/forest Protection Committee, on the grounds stated above, on the recommendation of the 'Bon-O-Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti' of the concerned panchayat samiti;
- (iii) The Concerned Range Officer may be authorised by the Divisional forest Officer to take proper action, even termination of an individual membership on the above mentioned grounds, on the recommendation of the Executive Committee of forest Protection Committee;
- (iv) Appeal against any such penal action by the Range Officer may be preferred to the concerned Divisional Forest Officer through local panchayat samiti;
- (v) Appeal against any such penal action by the Divisional Forest Officer may be preferred to the concerned Circle Conservator of Forests, through the concerned panchayat samiti and the Zilla Parishad, whose decision shall be final