

Building bridges for greener future: Maharashtra State Participatory Forest Management Network

Girija Godbole

Abstract

The present paper studies the structure and functioning of the Maharashtra state PFM network. It analyses the strength and limitations of the network. The example of the Maharashtra state PFM network may be of use to organisations and individuals who are committed to strengthening the JFM programme in their region through collective leadership and sharing of responsibilities and resources.

Key words: collective leadership, dialogue, mutual learning, capacity building

Background:

The National Forest Policy 1988 brought a paradigm shift in forest management by recognizing the symbiotic relationship between the people living within and around the forests and the forest resource and emphasizing the need to protect their customary rights and interests. In India, participatory forest management was awarded state recognition through a Government of India circular, issued on June 1, 1990. This circular directed the secretaries of all the states to issue guidelines to give effect to Joint Forest Management. Typically, Joint Forest Management envisaged an agreement between the State and the local communities wherein:

- Village level institutions called Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMC) are formed. These have representation from the Department as well as the local community.
- A patch of forests is demarcated and the JFMC entrusted with the responsibility for its protection and regeneration. This includes protection from of forests from fire, illegal grazing, illicit felling, illegal transportation, illegal mining, encroachments and poaching.
- In return for their co-operation in forest protection and development, the JFMC members are awarded usufruct rights.

Although people's participation was conceptually accepted in 1988, JFM got a necessary boost due to the World Bank's forest sector lending to India, in 1992. Under the World Bank promoted Economic Development Program, a two-pronged approach is followed to involve communities: increasing the stake of the neighbouring communities in the management and utilization of the forests, and creating alternative sources of employment to reduce the pressure on forests. These include work on plantation and regeneration activities as well as building sources of drinking water supply, approach roads, schools, check dams, and other facilities¹.

Involvement of NGOs

The circular from the Government of India Ministry of Environment and Forests on 1st June 1990 mentions the following regarding the involvement of NGOs in JFM:

Committed voluntary agencies/NGOs with proven track record may prove particularly well suited for motivating and organising village communities for protection, afforestation and development of degraded forest lands, especially in the vicinity of habitations. The State Forest Departments/Social Forestry organisations ought to take full advantage of their expertise and experience in this respect for building up meaningful people's participation in protection and development of degraded forest lands. The voluntary agencies/NGOs may be associated as an interface between State Forest Departments and local village communities for revival, restoration and development of degraded forests (Government of India 1990: Section 3)

It is not clear, though, whether the concept of 'jointness' in JFM, as manifested in the Government of India's 1988 and 1990 policy statements and in subsequent state resolutions and planning processes, necessarily involves NGOs. The essential partnerships in JFM are between Forest Department staff and villagers, with NGOs sometimes being offered temporary and ill-defined roles to facilitate these new partnerships. Nor is it clear that the diverse category of agencies defined negatively as non-governmental offers a meaningful basis for policy or procedural guidance (Thin et al, 1998).

¹ Preliminary Report on alleviating Poverty through Participatory Forestry Development: An Evaluation of India's Forest Development and World Bank Assistance, January 7, 2000.

In spite of the lack of clarity the JFM programme has led to considerably greater involvement of NGOs in the forestry sector although there is significant variation from state to state. While there is very limited NGO participation in states like Himachal Pradesh and West Bengal, over 250 NGOs are involved in the JFM programme in Andhra Pradesh. In some states, such as Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, Forest Department officials and NGOs have worked together at the field level in the form of Spear Head Teams (Saigal 2001). In Maharashtra however the involvement of NGOs in JFM programme has not been significant except for the eastern Vidarbha region of the state which is rich in forest resources.

JFM network at the national level:

To strengthen the JFM programme at the national level a number of initiatives were taken. The national network on Joint Forest Management (JFM) was informally evolved in 1998-99 by a small group of foresters, NGOs, researchers and individuals who believed in participatory forest management and envisioned the need and importance of networking for transforming JFM into a national movement. In 1992, the existence of network was formalised with the establishment of a National Support Group (NSG) with the support of the Ford Foundation, with Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development (SPWD). The goal of the National Network was to develop and strengthen the capacity of communities, government agencies and NGO's to plan and implement JFM. These research groups were constituted in 1993, namely Ecological and Economic Research Network (EERN), Training Research Network (TRN), Institutional Research Network (IRN). In 1994 Gender and Equity group was constituted with in IRN. Since then, the membership of the network has increased steadily and the research groups nested within the national network have progress well with their research on training, gender and equity, ecological and economical aspects of JFM. The current focus of NSG is to facilitate formation of regional and state networks to strengthen the movement of participatory forestry (SPWD 2006).

In February 2000, Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) issued a notification for the creation of a JFM Network at the national level consisting of 28 persons representing different stakeholder groups such as MoEF, State Forest Departments, national NGOs, grassroots NGOs, donor agencies, research organizations and training institutions.

The objectives of the JFM Network are twofold:

- To act as a regular mechanism of consultation between various agencies engaged in JFM work in the country
- To obtain constant feedback from various stakeholders on the JFM program for proper policy formulation and suitable direction to the states

So far, four meetings of the JFM Network have been organized, the first in July 2000, the second in October 2000, the third in October 2001, and the fourth meeting was held on November 27, 2002. The JFM Network is the official mechanism of MoEF to obtain feedback on various aspects of the JFM program from different stakeholders in the program. RUPFOR provides logistical support to the JFM Network. (RUPFOR 2006).

Objectives of the study:

In Maharashtra the Government resolution on Joint Forest Management (JFM) was passed in 1992. The participation of NGOs in JFM programme was marginal in the initial stages. In 1996 a few NGOs of eastern region of Maharashtra (popularly known as Vidarbha) came together to form Maharashtra State Participatory Forest Management (PFM) Network. Gradually NGOs from other parts of the state also joined in. In addition to NGOs, researchers interested in the issues related to participatory forest management have also been associated with the Network.

In spite of it not being a registered body and facing internal power tussle the network has succeeded in keeping majority of its members together and strengthening their work on forest related issues. Analysis of the network will provide an opportunity to draw lessons, which can help in building and strengthening similar networks for effective implementation of forest protection and management.

The present study aims to understand the genesis and functioning of the Maharashtra State Participatory Forest Management Network; to analyse the strengths and limitations of the network.

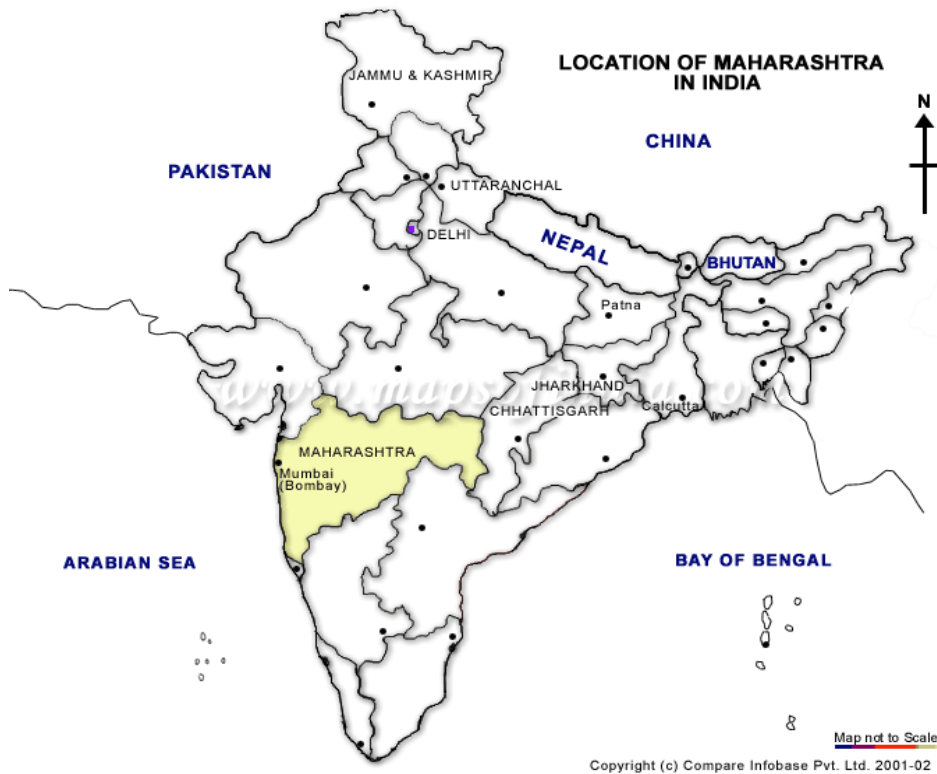
Methodology:

Primary data was collected through detailed discussions with the founder members of the network, NGOs associated with the network, Forest Department officials, and village level

members of JFM committees who take part in the PFM network meetings. Secondary data is available on this network is very scarce.

Forests of Maharashtra:

Maharashtra state is one of the most industrialised states in India. It has a total geographical area of 3,07,6902 sq. km, which is 9.4% of the country's area. Mumbai, the capital of the State, is also the Financial Capital of India.



Maharashtra is divided into six administrative divisions and 35 districts. Conventionally the state comprises of four major regions viz. Western Maharashtra which is the most developed in terms of infrastructure and industrialisation, Konkan- the coastal region, Marathwada the central region which receives very little rainfall and Vidarbha region where most of the forests of the state are concentrated. Since the formation of the state in 1960 a large portion of the state funds have been spent for the Western Maharashtra due to the influential politicians. This has given rise to feeling of resentment among the people of other regions. A demand for separate state of Vidarbha

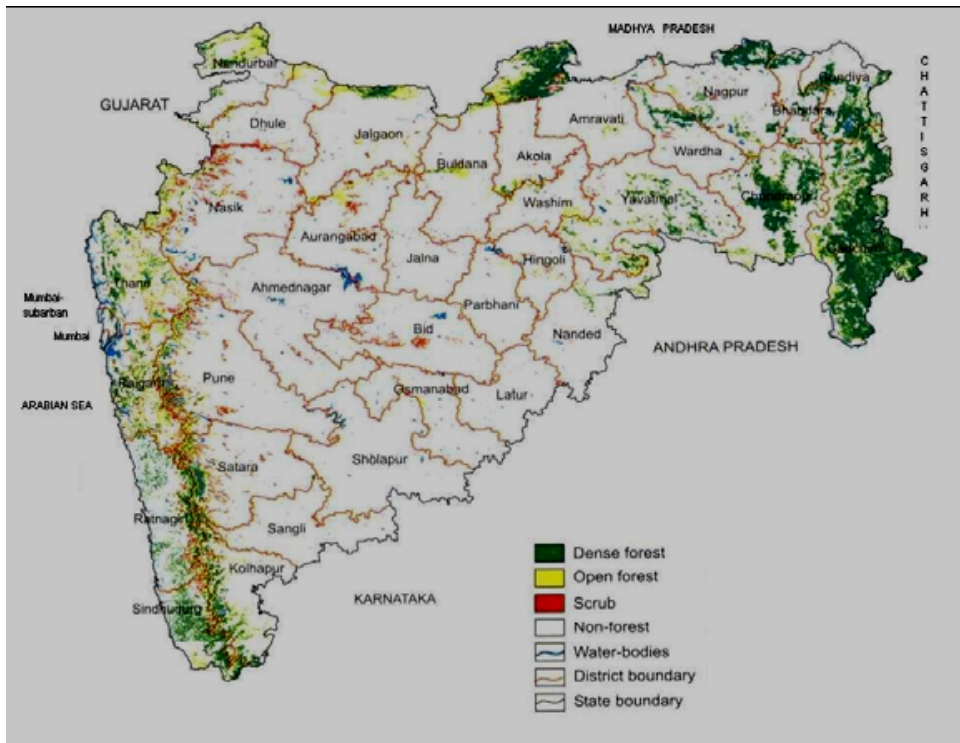
surfaces occasionally in the name of development of the region. But it is mostly for fulfilling political ambitions of certain politicians and does not seem to have mass support.

The recorded forest area of the state is 63,874 Sq. km. constituting 20.75 percent of its geographical area. A forest area of 56248.63 Sq. km. is under the management and control of the Forest Department (FD), 5249.13 sq. km. being in charge of the Revenue Department, about 4970 sq. km forest area is with the Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra Ltd., and 495 sq. km. being private forests brought under the possession of the Forest Department. The forest cover of the state indicated increasing trend in both the 1997 and 1999 assessments of satellite data conducted by Forest Survey of India (<http://fdcm.nic.in>)

The broad forest types occurring in Maharashtra are Southern Tropical Semi-Evergreen Forests (5%) Southern Tropical Moist Deciduous Forests (17%), Southern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests (62%) and Southern Tropical Thorn Forests (16%). From functional classification point of view, there are 6 categories of forests viz. Tree Forests (36%) Minor Forests (37%) Pasture Forests (10%) Protection Forests (11%) and Miscellaneous (6%) while all forests under the Revenue Department are under Minor Forests and Pasture Category. (<http://fdcm.nic.in>)

Along the coast line it also has littoral and swamp forests. Most of the poverty stricken areas of the state are the remaining thickly forested areas, especially from the Vidarbha region of eastern Maharashtra.

The following map shows different categories of forests in various districts of Maharashtra



The forests area in charge of Forest Department in Maharashtra State has been divided into 11 territorial units, called circles. These circles are further divided in 43 divisions and 5 independent sub-divisions.

JFM in Maharashtra:

Maharashtra has long history of forest management. History of Forest conservancy in the state dates back to 1805. Charter for protection and preservation of Forests was promulgated in 1865. As a part of erstwhile Bombay Presidency, the state has a rich tradition in forestry. The subject 'Forests' was included in the seventh schedule of provincial legislative list referred to in Section 100 of the Government of India Act, 1935. The subject has now been included in the concurrent list in 1976, as per 44th amendment to the constitution to of India. Working Plans prepared by the state FD regulate the scientific management of forests.

Government of Maharashtra issued a Government Resolution (G.R.) for Joint Forest Management in the degraded forest and non-forest areas of the State on the 16th March, 1992. On the 25th April, 03, the State Govt. issued a revised G.R incorporating the Govt. of India's guidelines dated 21.2.00. The new G.R. extends, on a pilot basis, the concept of J.F.M. to dense forests.

Currently, 1.43 million ha of forest lands are being managed under the JFM programme through 5322 committees in most of the districts in Maharashtra through the initiative of the Maharashtra Forest Department. The JFM program took off in the year 1996-97 under the World Bank aided Maharashtra Forestry Project and till 1999-00 it was implemented in 602 villages spread over 11 territorial circles of the state (www.mahaforest.nic.in).

Financial assistance was provided by the State Government to a JFM. village under the Maharashtra Forestry Project for the following activities:

1. Preparation of Micro-Plan
2. Creation of awareness
3. Soil & Moisture Conservation
4. Entry Point Activities
5. Plantations

On an average Rs 9.73 lakhs(Rs.0.973 Million) was spent on each village and the total expenditure on the program during the period from 1996-97 to 2000-01 was Rs. 30.52 crores (Rs. 305.2 million) Plantations have been raised under the program in 26,437 hectares of degraded forests.

After termination of the Maharashtra Project, the JFM program was continued with funds provided by the State Government, and since 2001-02 it is supported under the Centrally Sponsored of National Afforestation Program for the Forest Development Agencies (FDAs). At present FDAs have been set up in 46 out of 48 territorial Forest Divisions and Sub-Divisions. In addition, F.D.As have been established in 5 out of 14 Wildlife Divisions (comprising national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, including 3 Tiger Reserves) (www.mahaforest.nic.in).

Genesis of Maharashtra state PFM network:

Though the Government Resolution (GR) for JFM in Maharashtra was passed in 1992, not many NGOs participated in the programme. Lack of direct benefits to the NGOs is considered to be one of the major reasons behind this. However NGOs working in the forest rich Vidarbha region of Maharashtra state were keen to get involved in the programme.

A national level workshop on JFM organized in Delhi in 1995 acted as precursor to the birth of the network. Mr. Kirpekar retired Director of Forest Research Institute Dehradun and Mohan Hirabai Hiralal, Director of NGO Vrikshmitra working in the Vidarbha region attended this workshop. Both were involved in participatory forest management initiatives at the grass roots

levels. After attending the workshop both of them realised that it was important to bring together the NGOs and researchers working on the forest related issues. Subsequently they started discussing the idea with other NGO colleagues who responded enthusiastically.

In February 1996 a state level workshop on JFM was organized at Wardha in Maharashtra. This workshop was attended by about forty NGOs from all over the state and a few state Forest Department officials. It was decided to organize a joint workshop of the FD and the NGOs. The FD initially showed interest however eventually backed out of the process in spite of consistent follow up by the NGOs. The FD seemed to be keener on promoting the World Bank assisted Maharashtra Forestry Project than the approach of joint management of forests. The proposed dates of the workshop were changed twice by the FD without consulting the NGOs. Finally the NGOs decided to go ahead with their own dates instead of relying on the FD.

At Nagpur in September 1996 during a meeting organized the participating NGOs working on forest related issues it was decided to form a network of NGOs. As a starting step in depth study of the GR on JFM was undertaken through discussions with experts in forestry sector. This exercise proved to be useful to build understanding of the programme. At a later stage village level workshops were organized to disseminate information about JFM programme among the villagers.

In the initial period the coverage of network was restricted to the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra state which is rich in forests. NGOs from other parts of the state began participating at a later stage. However their number is much smaller than the

To achieve flexibility in functioning it was decided since the beginning of the network not to register it under any legal provisions. The emphasis was to bring together the organizations and individuals who are interested and committed to work on the issues of forest management rather than in getting any monetary benefits.

Regular meetings of the network and workshops at the village level began to show good results in terms of making people aware of the provisions in the JFM programme and also to understand the lacunae in the same.

Structure and functioning of the network:

Maharashtra state PFM network comprises of organisations, JFM committees and individuals interested in the issues related to participatory forest management. Majority of the organisations are working at the grassroots level. The network is not a registered body with a written constitution. The secretariat of the network is hosted at the organisation of the convener. The network holds a two days meeting once in every six months. The meetings of the network are hosted by the participating organizations by turns. The host NGO makes provision for the expenses from the current projects or in some cases approaches donor agency for that particular event. The host organisation or JFM committee makes arrangement of accommodation and food but the travel cost is not borne by them. In some cases the NGO Vrikshmitra pays for travel of a few deserving participants who cannot afford it.

The majority of the NGOs and JFM committees that attend the network meeting are from the Vidarbha region. On an average about 25 NGOs, 80 JFM committees and 15-20 individuals have been attending the PFM network regularly for the past three years. If the meeting is organised in Vidarbha region the number goes up. A register of the participants is maintained by the convener of the network. Generally participation of the local NGOs and JFM committees at the place where the meeting is organised is much higher. Local FD officials are invited to participate in the meetings. Their participation usually depends on the relationship of the host organisation with the FD. In some cases the FD officials attend the network meetings in personal capacity.

In spite of consistent efforts by the founder organisation to involve NGOs from other parts of the state it has not succeeded. Lack of interest by NGOs and less dependence of the people on forests for livelihood may be the possible reasons according to the participating NGO members.

To make the network more focused it has been collectively decided to adopt membership based structure. However the process is underway and the records of the total number of members are being compiled. Nominal membership fees of Rs 75, Rs. 25 and Rs. 50 for organization, individual and JFM committee respectively will be charged.

The network has one convener and two to three co-conveners. They are chosen during the network meeting through consensus. They belong to the participating organisations or in rare cases take the responsibility in personal capacity. At least one of them is woman. The

responsibility and expenses related to correspondence etc are borne by the convener's organisation. There is no fixed tenure for the convener; it is decided by mutual convenience. Since 2004 regional conveners for Western Maharashtra, Marathawada (central region), Konkan (coastal region) and Vidarbha (eastern region) have also been appointed. They are expected to collect information on the existing JFM committees in their region and liaison with them and the local FD officials. However except for the Vidarbha region other conveners are not active.

Analysis of the network:

The networks such as this provide the social capital of institutions. They may help the member organisations to expand their capacity to achieve certain objectives. A network appears to be a very versatile instrument which can be used to obtain results with relatively few resources. According to Engel², the activities carried out by a network are: (i) reciprocal learning; (ii) service provision; (iii) advocacy; (iv) execution of projects; and (v) institutional strengthening.

He believes that there are four levels of activity or spaces/areas of inter-institutional interaction taking place within networks which may be used for analysis:

- Service provision: Advising, training, capacity development, communication, documentation and information, making use of and boosting existing capacities among members. The organisation of a network generally sustains professional capacity and a certain infrastructure in order to generate services in preferential areas.

The PFM network organises workshops and discussions on the issues related to JFM for the JFM committees and participating organisations. The resource persons are generally drawn from the network itself. The network also assists the members to resolve their problems. To give an example the network assisted JFM committee of village Botha in Buldhana district in fighting a court case against the JFM committee members filed by the powerful grazier community. The network organised an investigation team of experts and also arranged for legal aid.

The network has published a booklet giving information about its recommendations on the state government JFM GR of 25th April 2003. It also contains information about the network with

2 P. Engel , 1993, Daring to share: Networking Among Non-Government Organizations» in C. Alders, B. Harverkort and L. van Veldhuizen, Linking with Farmers: Networking for Low-External-Input and Sustainable Agriculture. Intermediate Technology Publications, London-England.

contact details of the conveners. The proceedings of the network meetings are distributed to all the participants.

- **Mutual learning:** Learning through the exchange of experiences, ideas, information and knowledge and joint reflection with the purpose of improving the performance of each one of the participating institutions/persons. The approach and methodology may be different, but the following elements are usually emphasised: diagnosis, self diagnosis, research, exchange, reflection and systematising.

The network meetings offer a platform for its members to share their experiences and voice their problems. In every meeting the first two sessions are dedicated to narrating the field situation in different districts to which the participants belong to. One session is reserved for discussing the recent developments at the policy level. Information of new schemes, programmes is also given during the meetings. Local FD officials are invited to share their views. The future course of action including dates and venue for the next meeting is decided collectively in the concluding session. An organisation willing to host the event puts forward the proposal and then decision is taken collectively.

- **Advocacy:** Generation of proposals and participation in public debates on development in order to influence international, national, regional or local development policies. This may be achieved by different means such as the organization of conferences, the publication of articles in specialized magazines, the creation of strategic coalitions with other spaces/areas with common objectives or through the channelling of specialized contributions in terms of changes in norms and legislation.

The network has not succeeded much in influencing policy decisions on forest management in the state. It suggested changes in the JFM GR of 25th April 2003. However the FD did not even acknowledge these in spite of consistent efforts by the network members. In the state level committee constituted in October 2005 under the chairmanship of the state Forest Minister two representatives of founding organisations of PFM network were appointed. However there is no representative of PFM network. Efforts are being made to get official recognition to the network. There is no clear cut strategy of the network for advocacy related issues. Though some of the network members have good rapport with higher level FD officials and policy makers it has not been used in making the network an effective pressure group.

- **Institutional strengthening:** It is understood as the organisation and management of inter institutional relations and activities. It includes all those activities which are needed to create

and maintain the space for interlocution at a level which is adequate for the networks' purposes.

The network has encouraged and facilitated inter institutional cooperation. Within the network NGOs working in the same geographical area undertake a number of collaborative activities.

The principal factor which determines the possibilities, not so much of a larger participation in massive terms, but of a participation that is sufficiently committed to the network as a fundamental condition of its success is a clear definition of purposes, subject areas and network spaces of interaction. A network's eventual representativeness does not depend on the number and type of its members, but rather on the quality and pertinence of the processes it promotes and the products it generates.

There has not been any dramatic change in the number of participating organisations, JFM committees and individuals since its formation. The majority of the members who have been actively participating continue to do. Within the last two years a couple of organisations from Marathwada region and 4-5 organisations from Western Maharashtra have joined the network.

To ensure sustainability of the network the founding members built an understanding that the network is not a power apparatus in the traditional sense, but is the space for innovation, experimentation, learning and the capacity for generating proposals; they also distributed different types of responsibilities across the network, giving priority to those areas where members can contribute more. They have adopted transparent and consensual methods for the assignment of resources and incentives.

The participating organisations and individuals are involved in management and decision making. This has contributed to: (i) the realisation that the structure is not immutable, but can be modified quickly according to demand; (ii) the aim to obtain better quality human resources, rather than more of them, for the network to function; (iii) stimulate the kind of institutional strengthening that will benefit, at the same time, both the network as a group and its members, via the participation and responsibility of the latter in some of the managerial activities.

Power tussle within the network:

It has been commonly observed that when any entity such as a network becomes popular and powerful it invites actors who try to seize control. The Maharashtra state PFM network has

managed to survive similar turbulences that were designed to take control of the network by a few NGOs.

In 1999-2000 as the network picked up momentum one of the organisations attempted to take control by trying to create rift among the founding members of the network. It co-opted a few organisations and pushed for registration of the network to be able to receive large external funding. However the other network members were firm as they believed in collective leadership and did not want to create centres of power within the network. The trouble making organisation then tried to disrupt the work at the grassroots level. Village level workers of the founding organisations were offered lucrative salaries. They also tried to create a parallel network to weaken the PFM network. However these efforts were not successful. But this power tussle slowed down the momentum of the network. The network is committed to bring everyone working towards participatory forest management together. Therefore instead of severing ties with the erring organisations the network members decided to keep the channels of dialogue open. Their efforts have paid off and the organisations that created trouble have shown keen interest to join the network again.

Strength:

Flexibility in functioning, absence of hierarchy in structure has encouraged participation of different levels of organizations including village level JFM committees.

Regular meetings provide the platform to share and learn from each other's experiences. It also gives an opportunity for the JFM committee members to interact with researchers and NGOs working in the other parts of the state. Majority of the participants of the network do not have access to internet so such interactions are crucial for them.

The network believes in dialogue. Hence in spite of apathy of the state FD to collaborate with the network it has maintained dialogue with the officials at various levels. Linkages with organisations from neighbouring states have enhanced learning. Strong bias towards women has facilitated in underlining the significance of women's participation in JFM programme among the network members.

Constraints:

In spite of the network being active since 1996, it has managed to exert little influence on the state level policy decisions regarding JFM in Maharashtra. The network has not succeeded in acting as a pressure group for improving the policies. The FD has not given any official recognition to the network. In the state level committee constituted in October 2005 under the chairmanship of the state Forest Minister two of the individuals belonging to founding organisations PFM network were appointed. However there is no official representative of PFM network. Efforts are being made to get official recognition to the network. According to one higher level official the fact that the network is not a registered could be one possible reason why the FD has not given any recognition to it. However a few other officials feel it is the lack of interest of the FD in the JFM programme as well as the fear of losing its power are the main reasons behind the apathy of the department towards the network.

Inconsistency in the commitment of NGO workers has been a major challenge for the network. In a number of cases the staff members of NGOs who were trained to carry out expansion of the network left either due to personal problem or to pursue their personal aspirations. This has given a major setback to the momentum of building the network at the grassroots level.

One of the major challenges for the network is that the participating organisations and individuals have not been able to give sufficient inputs for expansion of the network. Since the work related to PFM network is voluntary in nature it is seldom given priority. Some members feel that since it has been decided that the network will not take up any projects on its own, it should help its member organisation to do projects related to forest management which will ultimately assist in strengthening the network.

Regional differences have also been a challenge for the network. It has been observed that it is difficult to bring the NGOs in Western Maharashtra together because of the ego problems. However the NGOs in eastern region seem to get over their differences and get together for a common issue.

To build network of JFM committees at the grassroots level and to expand network beyond Vidarbha region there is a need to appoint full time persons. However due to lack of resources in the network it has not been possible. This has in turn restricted the growth and strengthening of the network.

Initiatives of the PFM network

The network has taken steps to strengthen the participatory forest management in the state. The members believe that to make JFM successful it is crucial to build capacity of the local people and to ensure active participation of women in decision making and implementation. The network has established linkages with organisations from other states to share learning.

Following are the major initiatives of the network

a. Strengthening women's participation:

Since the conception of the network efforts are being made to encourage participation of women in the decision making process of the network. At least one post out of the convener and co-conveners is reserved for woman. A core team of women NGO workers, researchers, village level workers known as 'Mahila Core team' was formed in 2003 which meets regularly to discuss the issues related to participation of women in the JFM programme. Recently on the committee constituted by government of Maharashtra to review the GR of 2003 on JFM not a single woman member was appointed as a member. The PFM network sent a protest letter. As a consequence of that government invited a senior woman researcher as a special invitee for the meeting. However the network is following the issue with the government to ensure that minimum two women are appointed as committee members.

b. Establishing the network of JFM committees at the tehsil and range level:

The network has realised that to sustain the participatory forest management it is necessary to create a strong network of JFM committees from the bottom. In the Chandrapur and Gadchiroli districts the network has played an active role through the workers of NGOs Vrikshmitra and Amhi amchya Aorgyasathi in establishing the network of JFM committees at range and district level. Regular meetings of these networks are organised. Similar networks exist in district of Buldhana which were started by an enthusiastic FD official. However they suffered a setback after he was transferred. The PFM network is in the process of supporting those through some of the JFM committee members from that district who attend network meetings regularly.

c. Sharing of experiences with the other states:

To learn from the experiences of participatory forest management of similar groups from other parts of the country the network has established linkages with organizations and networks from states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttaranchal. The network members including members of village level JFM committees visit the sites in these states and share experiences with the villagers, voluntary organizations, government officials. Learning from these visits is then discussed at the state level PFM network meetings.

Suggestions:

Maharashtra state PFM network offers a unique example of how committed organisations and individuals can sustain a loosely formed voluntary body through mutual trust and understanding. Its collective decision making and sharing of responsibilities, lack of hierarchy and commitment to promoting participatory forest management have helped to bring and keep a diversity of actors together.

Though some of the organisations in the PFM network have cordial relationship with the state FD there has not been much effort by the FD to involve the PFM network in the JFM activities. Some of the FD officials genuinely interested in promoting participation of local people and NGOs in JFM programme have been participating in the network meetings regularly. They consider that NGOs can work as bridges between FD. They feel that collaboration of FD and PFM network will help to make JFM programme a success. However number of such officers is small. The network also believes in working with the FD rather than being in the confrontational mode. The members are optimistic that the FD is beginning to realise the significance of such networks and is slowly taking steps to foster collaboration.

The example of the Maharashtra state PFM network may be of use to organisations and individuals who are committed to strengthening the JFM programme in their region through collective leadership and sharing of responsibilities and resources.

Bibliography:

1. Bennett Jon, 1995, Meeting needs: NGO coordination in practice, Earthscan, London
2. Engel P., 1993, Daring to share: Networking Among Non-Government Organizations in C. Alders, B. Harverkort and L. van Veldhuizen, Linking with Farmers: Networking for Low-External-Input and Sustainable Agriculture. Intermediate Technology Publications, London-England.
3. Ghate Rucha, 2004, Participatory Forest Management : Collective Action under three Different Institutional Regimes, South Asian Network Development and Environmental Economics (SANDEE) Policy Brief, Number 3-04, August 2004
4. Ghate, Rucha, 2004, Uncommons in the commons, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi
5. Hiralal, Pers. Comm.2006, Personal Communication with Mr. Mohan Hirabai Hiralal of Vrikshitra, Chandrapur
6. Ranabaldo Claudia and Pinzas Teobaldo, 2003, United we stand? A study about networks involved in sustainable development, ICCO, ETC Andes
7. Saigal Sushil, 2001, Joint Forest Management: A Decade and Beyond, at <http://www.rupfor.org/downloadq/jfm-nationaloverview.pdf>.
8. Thin Neil, Peter Neeraj and Gorada Prafulla 1998, Muddles about the Middle: NGOs as Intermediaries in JFM, Edinburgh Papers In South Asian Studies Number 12, Social Anthropology, School of Social & Political Studies, University of Edinburgh.

Websites:

1. www.mahaforest.nic.in (accessed on March 15, 2006)
2. <http://fdcm.nic.in> (accessed on February 13, 2006)
3. www.spwd.org (accessed on February 10, 2006)
4. www.rupfor.org (accessed on March 13, 2006)

Useful contacts:

1. Mohan Hirabai Hiralal, Director- Vrikshmitra, next to Chiddalwar Hospital, near RTO office Chandrapur 442401, Maharashtra, Tel: 07172- 258134. Email: mohanhh52@yahoo.co.in
2. Dr Satish Gogulwar, Convener, Maharashtra State PFM network, Director- Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi, Post & Tehsil: Kurkheda, District: Gadchiroli, Maharashtra. Tel: (0) 9422123016, Email: arogyasathi@rediffmail.com
3. Dilip Akhade, Rural Communes Narangi, Post: Donvat, Tehsil: Khalapur, District: Raigad 410203, Maharashtra. Tel: 02192-278040
4. Girish Gandhi, Vanrai, C/o Maharashtra Rashtabhasha Sabhabhavan, Near Shankarnagar Square, Nagpur., Maharashtra. Tel: 0712 2235361, Email: vanraitrust@rediffmail.com
5. Dr. Kishore Moghe, Gramin Samasya Mukti Kendra, Post: Jalka, Tehsil: Maregaon, District: Yavatmal, Maharashtra. Tel: 07239 225974. Email: abhaymoghe@rediffmail.com

Details of the author:

Name: Girija Godbole

Address: B-2, 501, Kumar Pride Park,
Senapati Bapat Road, Pune 411016

Tel: 020 25652324

Email: girija_godbole@yahoo.com

Association with Maharashtra State PFM Network: Since 2001. Worked as co-convener from 2003-05 in honorary capacity.