

Continuing the Forest Conservation Debate

Rhetoric and Reality of Green India Mission

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The National Mission for a Green India proposal, released under the aegis of the National Action Plan on Climate Change, is a significant attempt to integrate the mechanism of ecosystem services in the overall framework of forest conservation in India. It suggests a series of strategies for improving the quality of forests and proposes reforms for strengthening joint forest management. This paper discusses the likely impact of these reforms on current forest use practice. It does so by analysing the various provisions of the mission and how they support or contradict ongoing forest uses. It also explores whether the institutional reforms proposed in the Green India Mission have adequately addressed the current limitations of JFM.

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1 Introduction

The approach to forest conservation in India has taken several twists and turns in the past three decades. The National Forest Policy (1988) signified the first critical transition from the traditional exclusionist paradigm to community-oriented conservation practices (Jodha 2000; Gadgil and Guha 1995). In 1990, joint forest management (JFM) guidelines (1990) were drafted for managing degraded forest areas and the next year, an integrated conservation and development plan for the management of protected areas was drawn up. The following decades saw several policy initiatives and legislation, both inside and outside the forest department, to devolve forest rights at the grass roots and link such rights with conservation. The guidelines of the National Afforestation and Eco-development Board (2002), the Biological Diversity Conservation Act (2002) and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) of 1996 are some examples.

Such policies and legislation did achieve some success in regulating livelihood-oriented forest uses (Springate-Baginski and Blaikie 2007) and brought visible changes to the state–people relationship (Jodha 2000; Gadgil and Guha 1995). But the role of communities remains inequitable in matters related to ownership, enforcement and benefit-sharing. Sundar (2000) argues that JFM failed to bring about structural equities to forest governance because communities were not involved in decision-making capacity. Banerjee (2007) lists lack of progressive reforms—empowering people to manage forests—and the absence of a bottom-up approach in the preparation of working plans as JFM’s important constraints. Springate-Baginski and Blaikie (2007) identify insecure community tenure and lack of a legal anchor as the programme’s other shortcomings. Through empirical analysis, Bose (2009), Mansuri and Rao (2004), and Kumar (2002) illustrate that the JFM regime reflects the social preference of the rural non-poor; they argue that the poor are the net losers in this programme.

After such disappointments with the performance of community conservation policies, the Government of India passed the Forest Rights Act (2006). The act is seen as the first legislation to recognise the rights of indigenous and forest-fringe communities in India over forests (Gadgil 2007). In spite of uneven implementation across regions and negligible progress in recognising community ownership (GoI 2014), the act generated optimism amongst stakeholders. Gadgil (2007: 2067) believes the act would “put our forests and biodiversity resource management on a sounder footing to

devise flexibility, knowledge intensive and participatory systems of management.”

Amidst such hope, the Ministry of Environment and Forests released the National Mission for a Green India proposal under the aegis of the National Action Plan on Climate Change (2010). The Mission aims at responding to climate change by (i) enhancing carbon sinks in sustainably managed forests and other ecosystems; (ii) adaptation of vulnerable species/ecosystems to the changing climate; and (iii) adaptation of forest-dependent communities (MOEF 2010). It intends to achieve its aim through an additional plantation of 5 million hectares as well as through rehabilitation of 5 million hectares of degraded lands spread over various forest types and agricultural lands (MOEF 2010). The Mission document also states:

Local communities will be at the heart of implementation, with the gram sabha as the overarching institution overseeing Mission implementation at the village level (MOEF 2010: c).

In this context, the Mission proposes to revamp joint management committees by making them subcommittees of gram sabhas.

The Mission is a turning point in India’s conservation trajectory for several reasons. Though there was increasing interest in the valuation and accounting of forest ecosystems in the country (Vira et al 2012) before the introduction of the Mission, the programme is the foremost attempt at the policy level to integrate the mechanism of ecosystem services in the overall framework of forest conservation. Second, the Mission lays emphasis on shifting the “traditional focus on merely increasing the quantity of our forest cover towards increasing the quality of our forests cover and improving provision of ecosystem services” (MOEF 2010: c).

So, for the first time, the Mission addresses the critique of the biennial forest cover assessment, particularly the estimates of dense and open forest cover undertaken by the Forest Survey of India. This is significant. For, as Puyravaud et al (2010: 1) claim, “The loss of dense and moderately dense forests within the recorded forest areas is being hidden under the garb of increasing forest and tree cover.”

Similarly, Kant and Shuirong (2008) argue that deforestation continues in India in unclassed forests (for example, in the north-eastern states) where ownership as well as rights and privileges have remained unsettled. Lastly, the Mission proposes several institutional reforms to the forest committees constituted under JFM. For example, it recommends that states recognise forest committees as subcommittees of gram sabhas through their panchayati raj legislation. It also proposes to give these committees the power of a forest officer under the Indian Forest Act. These two provisions provide much-needed legal anchor to JFM forest committees. However, forest rights activists, such as those belonging to the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers and the campaign for Survival and Dignity, see them as attempts to undermine community empowerment envisaged under the Forest Rights Act (Jha 2011). They also see it as “a formula for more land and resource grabbing” (NFFFW 2011). There is, moreover, widespread belief that the implementation of the Mission would affect the

livelihoods of forest dwellers in an adverse way, especially in the absence of strong safeguards (TERI 2011; Jha 2011).

In this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is twofold. It will, first, explore the likely effect of the Mission proposal on the current forest use practice for meeting livelihood demands. To do so, I analyse the Mission’s various provisions and if they support or contradict the ongoing forest uses (both the type and extent of forest use). Second, this paper explores whether reforms proposed in the Mission have addressed JFM’s limitations adequately. This analysis, however, does not address the issues raised by the debate on the perils the Mission presents to the Forest Rights Act 2006. In the conclusion, I draw attention to the contradictions and dilemmas in the Mission proposal.

2 Methodology

The paper draws on the fieldwork undertaken in Bankura (north) forest division of the south-west West Bengal in 2010–11. I conducted fieldwork over 13 months, and interacted with people of two villages (referred here as village A and village B) in Patrasayer and Indkata forest ranges, and with the staff of the forest department and other local institutions. Tribal communities were the dominant social groups in both the villages. People depended primarily on agriculture, wage work and forests. I developed a livelihood profile of people across wealth ranks in the villages, especially their reliance on forests. I collected data from 77 households using a broad-scale survey and from 213 households in three repeat surveys. Details of each family member, including age, sex and occupation were sought in the broad-scale survey. A reference adult equivalence (RAE) for each family was calculated using this information.¹ I also obtained data on average daily firewood consumption from five families (of various sizes) in village B. These estimates were used to arrive at the average annual firewood consumption per family by estimating firewood consumption per RAE. Although dry leaves were used for boiling paddy, for convenience of analysis, firewood of equivalent proportion was taken to estimate total firewood dependency. There was a consensus amongst villagers that boiling one quintal of paddy requires around 6 kg of firewood. Therefore, the estimate of firewood consumption includes quantities used for cooking and for boiling paddy.

Around the time I completed the first repeat round survey, the draft Green India Mission proposal was released. I identified the interventions proposed in the Mission document, and asked the key informants the implications of each of these interventions on current uses of forests. I undertook 40 key informant interviews; a majority of these interviewees were from different hierarchies of the forest department. In addition, I also spoke to a few ecologists—both academics and non-governmental organisation activists. Comparing and contrasting these two analyses (that is current use and impending effect on forest uses) provides an understanding of the Mission’s likely effects on forest inhabitants.

I also used participant observation for studying organisational functioning of forest and other local institutions.

The study of live processes in my research sites through participant observation showed the “complex interdependencies” (McCall and Simmons 1969: 2) in organisational and social systems.

3 Local Livelihood Dynamics and the Mission Proposal

3.1 Use-pattern of Tangible Forest Produces for Livelihood:

Apart from environmental services, a wide range of tangible goods, such as firewood, grass as well as non-timber forest products are regularly extracted from forests. Much like other studies of the region (Banerjee 2007), I found that firewood was used for subsistence needs, such as for cooking and paddy processing, in all households in both villages. On an average each family used 2,792 kg and 2,076 kg of firewood per year in village A and village B respectively for cooking and paddy boiling (household survey). Villagers acknowledged that they “use more firewood, as it is available free and abundant in forests.” In addition, 17 families in village A and 22 families in village B used dead dry poles for room heating during the winter in 2009–10 (household survey).

Besides families living at its fringes, the forest is also a source of dependence for families from neighbouring villages and town—as reported in literature on the region. Although such dependence, at times, leads to destructive extraction and inter-village conflict, Banerjee (2007) finds increasing evidence of forest committees taking an empathetic approach towards these activities. Committees in my study villages allow people from neighbouring settlements to collect headloads of firewood essential to their survival. One of the committee members said, “Our village is small. So, there are enough twigs in forests for people of the neighbouring village.” Two non-tribal families in village A were selling this forest produce while an estimated 150 families in Indkata beat (village A falls under the Indkata beat) live on firewood sale. Poles of a 2-inch girth are mainly sold in market as firewood.

Moreover, people from towns situated as far as 15 km away come to gather dry leaves from the forests of both study villages to use as fuel in lieu of small payment. According to an estimate, 181 bullock and buffalo carts full of dry leaves were transported from village A forests in 2009 and 112 carts of such produce was transported in 2010. Hence firewood dependence was not only concentrated in the forest fringe areas; it stretched far afield.

Open grazing is the common practice in both study villages, as well as in the neighbouring areas. The forest is the main source of fodder for all livestock, especially during the crop growing seasons. Livestock was stall-fed in only one household in village A. A total of 147 total livestock unit² (TLU) were left to graze openly in the forests on an average of 156.25 days (std dev 109.78) in 2010–11 in village A. During the same period, 107.5 TLU of the livestock in village B grazed in the forests on an average of 231.89 days (std dev 138.7).

Villagers collect sal leaves, mahua flowers and fruit, two varieties of mushrooms (grown in June and October), and piyal fruit. Sal leaves were perhaps the most extensively harvested

non-timber forest products (NTFP) in the area followed by mahua flowers, mahua fruit, piyal and mushrooms. It is important to mention here that people from neighbouring villages also collected NTFP. It is also important to state that availability and extraction of various fruits and flowers varies from year to year. For example, one tribal family of village A mentioned that it got 64 kg of oil from mahua in 2009 but could get only 20 kg in 2010.

Therefore, the regenerated forests in both the villages had been used for subsistence, as well as commercial purposes. The dependence on forests for daily subsistence was not limited to members of the local forest protection committee. Women from neighbouring villages and men from further afield visited the forests for subsistence needs. The committee allowed the users to extract forest produce free of cost, as long as they carried it and did not use a bicycle or bullock/buffalo cart.

3.2 Imperatives of the Green India Mission Proposal:

We must first understand the extent to which the implementation of the Mission in forests located at the edge of 1,00,000 villages would affect the programme’s overall success—or failure. The areas targeted under sub-mission 1b (eco-restoration of degraded open forests) will mostly be in the fringe of villages (MoEF 2010: 10). The incremental annual mitigation potential of the sub-mission 1b is estimated at 27.0 MtCO₂, compared to the total Mission mitigation potential of 55.0 MtCO₂ (MoEF 2010). This suggests that 49% of the total estimated MtCO₂ would come from JFM areas.

The Mission document does not have direct reference on curtailing access to firewood. However, it emphasises the promotion of firewood-saving devices, such as improved cook stoves or the use of liquid petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders as cooking fuel. However, improved cook stoves have, in the past, been unpopular item in rural areas and the issue could well bedevil the Mission as well. Transporting LPG will be a critical issue in forest villages. For example, the towns nearest to my two study villages were 5 to 7 km away. Villagers either walked or used bicycles to get to work, school or the market (with the exception of three families in village A, who had motorcycles). In such circumstances, how feasible will it be for families in these villages to use LPG? When asked people about their eagerness to use a simple fuel for cooking, the relatively well-off responded, “When we take so much trouble to protect forests, why should we not use dry wood from forests for cooking?” A shift in this attitude and a desire to switch to an easier fuel (such as LPG) requires big change in mindset and socio-economic status. That is unlikely to happen in the near future, a forest department official said.

The Mission document further emphasises that, for promoting alternative fuel, the “primary targets will be areas burdened with unsustainable harvesting and use of fuelwood” (MoEF 2010: 21). There is, however, no elaboration on the criteria to define “unsustainable harvesting and use of firewood” or how to and who will decide the criteria. When asked, the local stakeholders (as diverse as villagers and forest guards

and beat and range officers) identified “firewood sale” as an unsustainable practice. At the same time, it was acknowledged that it was mostly women who sold firewood sales, and that was an indication of extreme poverty. Therefore, without considering a strategy for economic rehabilitation, targeting the unsustainable harvesting of firewood would affect the most economically vulnerable families of the area.

The Mission document identifies “unregulated grazing” as one of the reasons for forest degradation (MOEF 2010: 9). It proposes various mechanisms, such as a bar on grazing on a rotational basis in Type A forests, which are areas with plenty of rootstocks that have little to no scope for planting (MOEF 2010: 10), and the regulation or closure of grazing in Type B forests, which are open, blank areas with limited rootstock (MOEF 2010: 11). Restoration of grasslands in arid and semi-arid areas and restoration of scrublands are the other strategies for improving the supply of fodder grasses for livestock.

Sending animals to graze inside forests has many facets. For example, villagers in my study area could see the benefit of sending their livestock to the forests, particularly goats. As one woman pointed out, “People prefer to buy goats from forest villages, as they grow up eating healthy forest leaves.” Moreover, considering the current status, regulating open grazing is an extremely difficult proposition. A range forest official suggested that the process has to be gradual. According to another beat forest officer, such approach needs extensive consultation with forest committees. Such caution in approach is, however, missing in the Mission’s strategy document.

3.3 Local Realities: Moreover, there is also a proposal to improve livestock quality by reintroducing indigenous breeds, reduction in the number of ordinary nondescript animals and improvement in marketing of animal products (MOEF 2010: 13). It is important to mention that the attitude towards livestock amongst tribal communities is different from that of many pastoralist communities in India. In both study villages, tribal families kept cows not for milk, but for cow-dung, which was used in agriculture. Moreover, as a tribal villager says, “We cannot afford to have large numbers of livestock. We don’t milk cows every day, but we also cannot think our family complete without a cow, pig and goat.”

Distance from the market was another reason for pastoralist families in village A not selling milk. The livestock development assistant with the gram panchayat also pointed out:

In poor forest areas, people are busy in their daily economic struggle. They do not have time to take care of their livestock on a regular basis. That is why most of the goats provided by the gram panchayat to the self-help group in village B died within a year. Livestock are reared as ‘saving account,’ which could be sold at the time of financial hardship.

For example, livestock sales contributed to as high as 50% of the total cash income amongst the poor and medium class families in village B in 2010–11. Thus, although livestock is a part of their everyday lives, livestock-centred income

generating initiatives have a limited scope due to lack of supportive infrastructure.

The Mission places much emphasis on promoting sustainable harvesting practices and livelihood improvements through NTFP-based enterprise development. There was a general agreement amongst the ground-level forest staff in the study area that general awareness of sustainable harvesting practices was good in forest areas, especially among the tribal communities. Policymakers of the state accept that non-availability of data on the productivity and NTFP harvesting was a barrier to introducing plantation and other income generating activities. The Mission document is again silent about the absence of baseline data, which will pose a problem in preparing a robust business plan for enterprise development.

The architects of the Mission see a great potential to generate employment for the poor in forest fringe villages. The Mission proposes to create a cadre of 1,00,000 educated youths (MOEF 2010: 6)—they will be called self-employed change agents (SECA) and will be in charge of implementing the programme. Thus, according to this estimate, the Mission would provide employment to one educated youth in every village. Another estimate by Kant (2010) projects the need for one forester, two forest guards and 12 forest workers for five months in a year to carry out intensive management in 1,000 ha of open and medium density forests. Assuming that the two forest guards and 12 forest workers would be recruited from villages we can estimate the potential employment opportunities in any area. The Sonamukhi Range (where the study village A is located) had 7,899 hectares of forest spread across 50 villages/forest committee. According to the above figures, the Mission interventions are likely to generate five months’ worth of employment for nearly 112 people, whereas forest committees have a total of 5,116 members, according to 2010 data of the range forest office. In addition, a few more men and women will be required for monitoring and evaluating forest carbon change, a task assumed to be similar to technical interventions. Therefore, the Mission will generate a total of 10 months worth of employment for 112 people. But when we disaggregate these figures at the village level, we do not get an encouraging picture: the Mission will generate 6.5 days/year worth of employment per family (as family is the unit of membership according to the guidelines).

In sum, although the Mission document repeatedly mentions the needs to ensure people’s access to services, the document also betrays a clear intention to reduce pressure on forests from livelihood demands. And, the proposed technical choices for achieving the Mission’s goals of reducing pressure on forests and sustaining provisioning services do not sync with area’s socio-economic profile. Moreover, in spite of recognition in the literature that firewood is one of the important fuels for towns and cities, there is limited knowledge of the role of forest fringe villages in meeting that demand. So in absence of a comprehensive approach, a stricter regulatory regime in forest villages would upset the ongoing system of reciprocity. As far as ensuring employment is concerned, the Mission in effect would just be doing a window dressing.

4 Rhetoric and Realities of Institutional Reforms

The Green India Mission proposal has brought two significant institutional changes. First, as mentioned before, the Mission has proposed amendments to provide the critical legal recognition to JFM. It further proposed to revamp the institutional structure of the Forest Development Agency. Second, the Mission envisages an institutional framework for the implementation of United Nations Environment Programme's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) mechanism in India.

4.1 Gram Sabha and Local Forest Governance: Making JFM committees a subcommittee of gram sabha, and empowering them with the power of a forest official gives a legal status to these agencies. But in practice, the structure of the committees will remain the same. In West Bengal, this situation is more complex. In 2008, the state government issued an amendment to the Forest Rights Act, which replaced the gram sabha with the *sansad*. The lowest tier of the panchayat institution in West Bengal is known as the *sansad*, which mostly comprises several villages, depending upon the size of electorates. The *sansad* of village B, for example, has eight villages and eight forest committees. So, in reality, it is the village-level forest protection committees, rather than the *sansad*, which have direct access and control over all village-level activities, including forest protection.

In theory, the gram sabha is the most powerful foundation of decentralised governance, ensuring elected representatives are directly and regularly accountable to their electorates. But in reality, the gram sabhas have not been working effectively, and its meetings have either been irregular or marked by "disinterestedness of the participants" (Jayapalan 2001: 324). An expert on panchayat further points out that the gram sabha's decisions may or may not be binding to any institution, such as the gram panchayat. Therefore not only does the Mission vest responsibility of its implementation with a non-functional institution, by bypassing the gram panchayat, the active representative democratic body, it has missed the opportunity to integrate conservation in the broader development framework. In fact, greening India should have been one of the tasks of the gram panchayats. But by delinking the Mission from the functional representative body, forest governance again disengages from the realities of everyday politics of the governed (Chatterjee 2004).

At the same time, the Mission's proposal to revamp the forest development agency with the zilla parishad is another contradiction in its approach. At the grass-roots level, the Mission avoids linking JFM with the panchayat system (gram panchayat); however, it proposes to integrate the forest development agency with the zilla parishad in order to create convergence with the panchayat system. In this way, the Mission's plan also contradicts the Biological Diversity Conservation Act 2002, which proposes a three-tier institutional structure at the village, sub-district, and district levels overlapping with the panchayat structure. Replicating a similar structure could provide an institution for collective decision-making at the

gram panchayat, sub-district, and district levels for the implementation of any programme of the Green India Mission.

4.2 Green India Mission and REDD+: There is often a debate amongst academicians, policymakers and activists on whether or not Green India Mission is independent of India's REDD+ programme. Academicians and activists see the Mission proposal as India's REDD+ Action Plan (Jha 2011; EQUATIONS 2011). Key MoEF officials have different opinions. One official says:

Implementation of the Mission is not totally tied up with the REDD+ funding. The World Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency and Department for International Development (DFID) have already expressed their willingness to support its implementation.

Another official argues that, the national REDD+ strategy would likely interface with the Green India Mission.

A glance at the document validates its broader approach. The document's Foreword notes, "the mission proposes to take a holistic view of greening, not merely focus on plantations to meet carbon sequestration targets" (MoEF 2010: c). Further, the core principles underscore the significance of forests in terms of climate change mitigation. However, there are references about the potential scope for convergence of the Mission with REDD+. It talks about capacity building of the frontline staff on REDD+. Most importantly, the Mission proposes to set up a REDD+ cell following the rules agreed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (MoEF 2010). The Mission further points out that "a majority of interventions under the Mission have potential to qualify under REDD/REDD Plus" (MoEF 2010: 36). Moreover, in its submission to UNFCCC, the Government of India clearly says, "India expects a sizable part of additional cost of GIM being met from the REDD plus financial support" (GOI 2011: 3).

Money has already been allocated by the central government for the implementation of the Mission. Nevertheless, if the Mission document is India's strategy for REDD+ a number of important issues need deliberation. The most important of them is the institutional mechanism for implementing safeguards at local levels, and also its monitoring mechanism. Apart from the challenge of embedding safeguards within the overall forest governance, implementation of REDD+ will redefine the ongoing federal style of forest governance. While the national approach to REDD+ implementation is an effective mechanism in any country for addressing leakages within national boundaries (Phelps et al 2010), the approach essentially means the entire country has to come under the project at the same time. Forests are on the concurrent list of the Constitution, thus providing each state the freedom to adopt federal policy direction at its own pace. In JFM's case, although the first central guidelines came in 1990, it was not until 2005 that all states and union territories adopted the programme by passing their own guidelines (Kishwan et al 2005). Thus, concern has been raised at the state level on the modality of the state-centre relationship in implementing an international programme like REDD+.

It could be argued, though, that the Mission indeed aims to take a holistic approach towards implementing ecosystem services. But then it has no institutional mechanisms for implementing other ecosystem services such as watershed and biodiversity services.

5 Conclusions

This paper reveals several contradictions, dilemmas and missing links in the Mission's strategies. The Mission document notes that the "life sustaining resource base for the rural communities shall remain in the public domain" (MoEF 2010: 5), while at other places it emphasises the developing of alternative sources of firewood and fodder on non-forest lands. It also says: "Community driven innovative/adaptive silviculture is of critical importance to successfully implement mitigation/adaptation strategies in restoration of forest/ecosystem" (MoEF 2010: 8). It further mentions that "operational guidelines will stress site-specific bottom-up planning at the level of gram sabha and its forest committees" and refers to "linkages of such village-based plans with Forest working plans" (MoEF 2010: 27). At the same time, the architects of the Mission provide options for management strategies (for example, the closing of grazing or shifting to improved cook stoves) to people in the "Sub Mission" section. In spite of all homilies on "community driven" action, the document seems to be talking of "Mission driven" adaptive silviculture, where the community has to adopt strategies from a set of given "menu."

In this context, empirical studies in Section 3 indicate a number of missing links in the Mission's understanding related to infrastructure, socio-economic and political perspectives. These could have adverse impacts on local livelihood, especially for the most vulnerable population. Most importantly, the Mission is ambiguous about the status of the working plan, a legally binding document for forest management in India. For example, it is unclear about whether forest departments will discontinue existing working plans prepared in a traditional methodology. If not, is it possible to link a village-based plan with an already existing working plan prepared for 10 years?

This paper also throws light on the gaps in institutional reform. First, the lack of integration with local representative institutions, such as the gram panchayat, leads to absence of an interface with mainstream politics. It thereby weakens political commitment towards forest governance in general, and creates impediment to the Mission's success in particular. Second, it provides a broad road map for its organisational structure at the national, state and district levels. At the village level, it envisages a local-level institution, the gram sabha and a committee of this village body to be the primary agency responsible for planning and implementation. However, in its true sense a committee of a gram sabha hardly has any physical existence other than a few nominated volunteers.

The Mission is completely silent about the role of beat office, the bottommost unit that connects people with the

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forest department. It also envisages range offices as mere resource centres. Third, it proposes a comprehensive approach towards implementation, especially in terms of monitoring and evaluation. The Mission has also made provision for recruiting additional human resources from local areas for this purpose. However, its plan or the budget is not explicit about the requirement of a new infrastructural support without which the ambitious monitoring plan will find it difficult to succeed. Lastly, in spite of repeated emphasis on the watershed/landscape level approach, the Mission is silent on how the present organisational set-up would be adapted for such an approach.

Central to these missing links is the fact that appears to happen in the process of drafting the Mission proposal. In spite of the boasts in the Foreword about the adaption of participatory approach for the preparation of the document there is no doubt that it was prepared in haste and took a relatively non-participatory approach. There was no consultation with the forest protection committees. Also, following the release of the draft Mission document when I conducted interviews in Bankura (in January–February 2011) it was not only the forest guards, beat or range officers but also the three divisional

forest officers that I interviewed were not aware of the details of the Mission document. One cannot blame lack of infrastructure in communication because this happened at a time when gram panchayats located in both study areas were connected with broadband facilities and there were regular online updates of information on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act activities. While providing space to the voice and choice of local communities is the essential prerequisite, it must be open to the front line forest department staff. With their experience of implementing JFM for the last three decades they could be an effective knowledge bank to educate on community politics.

The intention of this paper is not to put a list of criticism but to indicate the social, political and institutional missing links that need to be bridged during implementation of the Mission. This is especially important as the Green India Mission is an attempt to tune the forest conservation in India with the mechanism of ecosystem services and particularly REDD+. There is now a growing body of evidence that shows benefits from ecosystem services do not naturally work for the poor. There is a need to superimpose a pro-poor orientation for an effective pro-poor ecosystem services (UNEP 2011).

NOTES

- I calculated RAE or the Reference Adult Equivalent (RAE) of households following Brockington (1998), who used Grandin's (1988) and Little's (1980) estimates of adult male = 1.0 RAE and female = 0.86 RAE, children 0–5 = 0.52 RAE, children 6–10 = 0.85 RAE and 11–15 = 0.96 RAE.
- Calculation of TLU follows Brockington (1998) who used Little's (1985) measure of 1 TLU = 1 bovine and six ruminants.

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