



WOMEN'S VOICES IN THE COMMUNITY FOREST RIGHTS DEBATE IN ODISHA



NEERA M. SINGH
vasundhara

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KIIT Square, Plot No. #1731/C, Das
Mohapatra Complex, Opposite of Sai Villa
PO: KIIT Campus, Dist., Patia Station Road,
Patia, Bhubaneswar, Odisha 751024

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Neera M. Singh
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Introduction

All over Orissa, a large number of villages have taken up protection and management of forests on their own. Thousand of villages have been thus managing forests as a Common resource, for several decades now, through elaborate community management regimes. These villages have been finding state promoted Joint Forest Management (JFM) arrangement unacceptable and feel that this does not put the management powers and decision-making in the hands of local communities. There exists considerable mismatch between formal JFM system and locally evolved Community Forest Management (CFM) arrangements (Singh, 1995).

In this backdrop, there has been considerable discussion on the need for greater rights to local communities over forests and forest products over the years. To broad base this discussion and to work out principles and contours of a CFM policy in Orissa, a consultation process with village people and NGOs was facilitated by Vasundhara¹ and Sanhati, supported by Action-Aid. As a part of this process, 19 district level Workshops and several block and field level workshops and two State Level Workshop were organised.

Discussion at these workshops brought forth the intricacies involved in operational details relating to community rights over forests, and the problems in trying to accommodate the interests and priorities of different dependent groups in an alternate rights regime. This discussion brought forth the intricacies involved in operational details relating to community rights over forests, and how women's concerns and priorities tend to get marginalised in these debates. This paper tries to capture the discussion and debate on community rights over forests. It focuses on the contours and "boundaries" and community control and rights and places women's concerns and needs within the overall context of "community-rights". It reflects on how women define their relationship with forests and how that is in contradictions with property-based view of forests and rights regime emanating from property based concept. It also gets into the possible conflicts between access and rights of NTFP gatherers over NTFP and community control and rights over forests. It also looks at the processes of advocacy and forms of advocacy tools used by local people and People's Institutions and how in various networks and formations at higher levels women's voices tend to get increasingly stifled.

Community Forest Management in Orissa and Women

Many villages in Orissa responded to the situation of forest degradation by taking up forest protection through community arrangements. According to latest available estimates around 5000-6000 villages have CFM systems, some of these have been formalised as JFM. Some of the villages have been protecting forests for the past 50-60 years, while a majority of them started protecting forests in late 1970s or early 1980s.

Most of these villages witnessed rapid degradation of forests and consequent scarcity of forest produces. In response to this, villagers decided to collectively 'protect' forests. Protection entailed restricting access of outsiders to the forests as well as curtailing their own use. In most cases, in the initial years, all extractions from forests were restricted, leading to considerable hardships to direct forest dependent sections, esp. headloaders, during that period.

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Villagers evolved institutional mechanisms that included rules systems to restrict access, regulate use and impose penalties on offenders. Protection systems included a range of arrangements such as merely keeping an eye, thengapalli i.e. voluntary patrolling on rotation basis or paid watchmen. At the community level, forest protection committee or Council of Elders, Youth Clubs or in some cases, Mahila Samities handle forest management (Singhs, 1993).

Eventhough, women as a category are the single largest user of forest and forest products; their 'involvement' in the Community based forest management systems is marginal. At times, women happen to be actively involved in forest protection system; but their role is not recognised and when it comes to management decision-making they are pushed to the background. In many villages, women are actively involved in protection, for e.g in Tandamunda village in Balangir district, women kept vigilance over forests, though the village men projected that they followed a 'thengapalli' system (rotational voluntary patrolling) for protection. After several visits to the village, when we finally managed to really talk to women, we found that there was no need for 'thengapalli' or any organised patrolling system. As it is the women spend hours every day in forests, and hence kept an eye on the forests and raised an alarm or caught hold of forest offenders. Thus, 'protection' was a natural extension of women's daily chores of fuel and NTFP collection from forests.

However, despite women playing an active role in protection activity; they are relegated to background, when it comes to management of forests and decisions relating to management of forests. The male attitude that prevails at that level is summed up by a comment by a male leader of FPC in Lapanga village, "*We are not so modern that we would involve women in FPC.*"

Many a times, Community based forest management has not made any real difference for the women, since their needs and priorities have not been reflected in the management systems. Here, I would like to narrate an anecdote.

Way back in 1993, at a district level workshop on Local natural resources management, a few women participants sat silently through the workshop. Towards the end, they were urged to speak. They started narrating problems relating to CARE feed etc. Then the facilitators interrupted and urged them to speak something about natural resources, land, water, forests. One of the women then said, "*Sir, what can we speak about forests, what is there to say about forests, forests used to be guarded by the Forest Guard earlier, now it is guarded by youth club groups. For us it makes no difference*". That has been the situation for many women. For many women, CFM esp. in early stages, has been only a shift in the 'danda' from the hands of forest guard to local youths.

Thus it is not just the issue of who is managing the resource, but more importantly how is the resource being managed.

In Bolangir district of Orissa, in the early years of CFM, in many villages, Youth Clubs took the responsibility of management of forests. These youth in their over zeal and enthusiasm for forest protection in the initial years enforced rules that forbid any extractions from forests. As a result, women had to traverse longer distance to get fuel for their daily requirements. The village youth who were at the helm of affairs also resorted to the practice of annual cleaning operations to clear 'unwanted' vegetation to create space for regeneration. They imbibed and internalized the dominant male values of forest management, from their interactions with the forest department

staff. As a result, they resorted to singling out coppice and taking up multiple shoots cutting¹. The cleaning material obtained from this operation was sold as fuel, but in bulk. Fuelwood stacks of 3 feet by 10 feet dimensions were made and sold as one lot or at best as half a lot. That made it very difficult for poor households to afford a stack of fuel (almost a cartload of fuel) in one go. As a result, women from poor households had no means of accessing this fuel which was available from the cleaning operation (Singh and Kumar, 1993).

In the initial years of forest protection, women faced hardships and scarcity of fuel. As forest regenerates, access rules are relaxed and fuel availability increases and restrictions on fuel extraction are relaxed. However it is a common experience that relaxation in rules relating to fuel come in at a much later stage. Since, fuel is not so much of a male problem, the urgency for locating solutions to this problem is not felt by the male dominated management committees. In many cases, while elaborate rules are worked out for small timber extractions, rules for fuel extraction are not worked out simply because it is considered very cumbersome to work out and regulate. If women were involved in decision-making, they would have probably addressed this problem much earlier and would not have considered it too cumbersome to manage.

As the forest regenerates, fuel availability and also NTFP availability increases. In many cases, it is now being noticed that village committees are also beginning to regulate access to NTFPs. Though regulating access to NTFPs is in many ways part of the overall forest management strategies, it at times adversely impacts the livelihoods of NTFP gathering women and men from poor households.

For e.g. in Gadabanikilo Village in Nayagarh District, in 1999, there was a change in the rules relating to extraction and management of Mahua seeds from community managed forests. In the past years, Mahua seeds collected from community managed forests were to be shared 50% with the village committee. This 50% thus deposited with the village committee was distributed equally to all households in the village. In the new arrangements, the right to collect Mahua seeds is leased out by the village forest management committee to a private individual. This lease is granted to the highest bidder. The individual who takes the lease for Mahua seeds extractions, then engages 'laborers' for Mahua seeds collection. Thus collectors get 50% of the Mahua seeds collected and rest of the 50% is taken by the 'lease-holder'. The access of NTFP gatherers from other villages is restricted and adversely affected. These cases being to fore the issue of community rights vis-à-vis rights of NTFP gathers and their livelihoods.

There are also some instances where women have played active role in initiation of forest protection and some cases where women's groups, Mahila Samities are managing forests. For e.g., in Baghamunda village in Deogarh District, Mahila Samiti is protecting and managing the forest. In this small tribal village, the Mahila Samiti took over forest management responsibility after the Youth Club proved to be ineffective. Mahila Samiti deposes five women on a rotational basis for patrolling duties every day. These women combine their patrolling duties with their household responsibilities of collecting fuel and other forest products. The forest protection activity has also contributed to capacity building and empowerment of women to deal with other issues and interact with external agencies on other issues as well. One remarkable outcome of this process is that women in that area have been included in the regional unit (Shakha) of the Tribal-Panchayat (Jati-Panchayat). Traditionally women are not included in the caste-networks/ Jati-Panchayats or Kula Samaj, and it is rare for women to get an entry into these institutions. A local NGO, Sahajog has been also actively involved in capacity building of this Mahila Samiti, and this

¹ Multiple Shoot cutting is biased towards timber production, while from the perspective of bio-mass production for fuel, it is probably better to let all the multiple shoots grow.

Mahila Samiti is taking up issues of village development, drive against alcoholism and is also actively involved in advocacy on rights over forests, changes in KL Policy etc (Vasundhara, 1999).

However, in most cases women's involvement in community level decision-making is minimal. Traditionally, women have been marginalised in all community affairs and Community level decision-making. Their voices if at all, have at best been represented through their husbands / male members of the family. Community Forest Management Systems are no exceptions to this.

Thus, while acknowledging the efforts of local communities and the potential for Community based forest management systems, we also need to recognize that Community based management arrangements are embedded in a highly iniquitous socio-economic cultural context and reflect these inequities. We need to admit that there are problems, especially serious problems relating to equity within the existing CFM systems that need to be addressed. In the past few years, there has been some considerable discussion on the equity issues in Joint Forest Management or even under CFM systems. The paper "Who is gaining and Who is Losing" especially highlights how the "JFM-deal" does not actually offer much to women. In Orissa, however the inequities of the existing CFM systems have not been adequately acknowledged by most of the actors working on forestry issues. This is possibly due to the apprehension that admitting these problems could weaken the arguments and advocacy for Community rights over forests.

Federations of forest protecting villages and Women

Villagers involved in forest protection have been coming together and federating at various levels to deal with the common problems that they are facing. In many places, NGOs and at times FD staffs have facilitated this federating process. In Orissa, in several districts, there are district level federations for e.g Nayagarh Jungle Surakhya Mahasangh for Nayagarh district, District Forestry Forum for Balangir district and Zilla Jungle O` Paribesh Surakhya Sangha for Dhenkanal district. At other levels, such as block level or at a cluster of villages level also there are some formations such as Maa Maninag Jungle Surakhya Mahasangha for Ranpur Block, Nayagarh district , VSS Mandal (comprising of VSS facilitated by Bonai), Bonai Forest Division etc.

In most of these federations, women's involvement is minimal. Eventhough at places, where NGOs have been facilitating federation building process, they have encouraged women's involvement and have made efforts to bring in women, but mostly, there is institutionalized marginalisation of women and weaker sections in these federations. This process starts from the village level, but intensifies / magnifies incrementally at all the higher formations.

At the village level, while the landless are most directly dependent on forests for gathering NTFP and also at times, cutting fuel wood for sale, the initiative for forest protection comes from the landed people/ large farmers whose dependence on forests is of a different nature. Agricultural class mainly values forests as a provider of rich humus to the agricultural fields at foot hills. Thus, most of the leaders who initiate forest protection are from the agrarian caste (Chasa), mainly farmers, invariably male. All group activities and collective endeavors have a significant degree of transaction costs mainly in terms of time to be invested in group activities. This cost increases at higher orders of institutions (and with level of involvement in decision-making or key leadership roles etc, thus making it difficult for the poor and marginalised sections to participate.

The main factors that restrict involvement of women and also other weaker sections in various networks and political formations are:

1. **Transaction Costs:** Participation in networks and networking process entails transaction costs in form of time, money and efforts required to attend meetings and sustain communication within the network. Usually the poorest and the most forest dependent sections do not have the time to participate in the networking process. The grim realities of life and the struggle for day to day survival leave them with little time for these processes. The better-off or the persons who have more time at their disposal are better positioned to participate in these process. The participation of the poorest thus diminishes at the higher order organisations with transaction cost being one of the major deterrents. However, this is not always the case, and there are movements esp. Dalits and tribal uprisings where the poorest have organised and come together on issues of their survival and sustenance.
2. **Forms and channels of communication:** In higher order networks, the forms and means of communication is another inhibiting factor. With greater formalization and institutionalization, there is greater reliance on written modes of communications. Apart from communication channels, behavior mores, accepted forms of interaction etc. tend to get more elitist and 'alien'. There is also a process of cooption through which people's representatives and leaders are coopted and tend to represent the dominant values of the forces that shape these processes. Many studies have also pointed out that how even women representatives often tend to perpetuate and stand by dominant male values. In many cases, donors and NGOs bring distortions in these processes, and instead of facilitating dominate and shape the values and agenda pushed by the People's institutions.
3. **Existing Socio-cultural context:** These institutions being embedded in the larger socio-cultural context reflect and perpetuate the inequities and various gender and caste-biases that exist in the society at large. Male leadership in these forums also have deep seated gender biases acquired through socialization process.

It is a serious problem that the most direct forest dependent sections, esp. women are not very visible and articulate in various networks and formations. Incrementally, the voices of women and also men from poorer economic sections and lower social strata get fainter as we go up the ladder of political formations. Instead of direct forest dependent groups, we have the elite section having a different nature of dependence on forests taking on various roles in these political formations. This phenomenon leads to many distortions appearing as perceptions, needs and priorities get misrepresented. This is unavoidable and not necessarily undesirable, but it does lead to distortions and one needs to be conscious of these.

In the networking process, while on the one side, there is a strong possibility of women's voices getting lost, on the other hand there is also an opportunity of using these forums as a means for increasing women's participation in these processes and decision-making at various levels through systematic interventions.

For e.g., in the block level federation in Ranapur block, Maa Maninag Jungle Surakhya Samiti, initially the leadership initially had a strong mental block against involvement of women in forest protection activity. In an initial planning meeting of the Parishad, when it was suggested that the federation should also work for increasing women's involvement and addressing livelihood issues of direct forest dependent sections, there was reluctant to accept this suggestion by the Executive Committee members. After considerable heated discussion on this issue, the EC members had

finally agreed to include this in their objectives for niceties sake, they decided that it would not 'look nice' if they did not include a focus on women and weaker sections. But starting from that point, the federation has come a long way in appreciating the need to involve women and also making efforts in that direction. In this case, the facilitating NGO has also had a role to play.

These networks and political formations also provide an opportunity for creating institutional space for women's involvement at various levels of decision-making/ influencing, policy advocacy and interface with external organisations. Parallel women's networks are also a useful means for bringing to fore women's concerns and demands. Himawanti, a federation of women's groups working on forest rights issues is one such example where effective women's networks can play a role in advocating for women's rights.

However, in Orissa most of the political formations, federations and advocacy processes, women and women's needs and priorities are conspicuous by their absence. It is in this background, that I would like to bring in the debate on community rights over forests.

Debate on Community Rights Regime and Women:

In Orissa, though thousands of villages are involved in forest conservation, the policy framework does not provide any space for community based forest management. Joint Forest Management framework is inadequate in Orissa context. Even some of the commitments made under JFM arrangements are blatantly dishonoured. The NTFP Policies in Orissa are amongst the most retrogressive in the entire country. Till very recently, most of the marketable NTFP items (29 items) were leased out to a private trader alias a Joint Sector Company. Eventhough, as per the JFM-deal, 100% of the intermediate produce and 50% of any major harvest is supposed to go to the Forest Protection Committee (Vana Samrakhan Samiti, VSS). Thus, VSS should get 100% of NTFPs, but VSS members and NTFP gatherers get only wages for collecting these produces. The NTFP Policies in the State are guided by the principle that all forests belong to the State and all produces growing on these forests are a State Property. Thus, even on supposedly Jointly managed forestlands, the co-managers are treated as mere labourers who are to gather NTFPs and hand them over to State appointed agents at the State fixed prices. The State fixed prices are not based on the value of the produce, but based on minimum wages principles.

A majority of the NTFP gatherers are women. Two of the main cash earners among NTFPs, Sal seeds and Tendu leaves are collected primarily by women. It is estimated that more than 350,000 tonnes of Tendu leaves are harvested annually by 600,000 women and children (Kaur, 1991). According to a study by Vasundhara in 5 sample villages in Bolangir and Nuapara districts, an average of 88% of KL gatherers are women². In one of the five study villages, 100% of KL pluckers were women. However their access to incomes from NTFPs is severely restricted due to the existing NTFP Policies. In KL trade also the share of primary gatherers is very low (varying between 17% - 22%) while the bulk of the profit is cornered by the State.

There have also been cases where the Forest Department has not honoured the commitment of sharing 50% of the produce from final/major harvest with villagers in case of bamboo harvesting. Bamboo forests have been leased out to paper industries and despite JFM arrangements, Paper industries have harvested bamboo without consulting or sharing any produces with the villagers.

² Despite the fact that almost 100% of the KL pluckers and a majority of seasonal KL workers are women, the trade-union working for the interests of KL pluckers has almost on representation of women in its decision-making bodies.

Thus, under the existing JFM framework, villagers hardly have any secure rights over forests. NGOs and People's institutions have been advocating for clear community rights over forests and forest products.

However, there are quite some gray areas and unresolved issues relating to operational details of Community based forest rights regime. To further discuss and debate on these issues, a wide-spread process of consultation was facilitated. This consultation process was spread over almost one and a half year period. The process of consultation was a collaborative process in which many NGOs and People's organisations joined in. A core-group consisting of many NGOs representatives, federation leaders and individuals provided collective leadership and direction to the process.

At these meetings, villagers discussed the problems with the exiting legal framework and articulated in various forms the alternate rights-regime visualised by them. There was considerable discussion on "right" and the form / parameters of "rights" during the various district Workshops organised during the consultation process. There was also considerable divergence of opinion on rights issue amongst participants in different workshops. While in tribal areas, many of the participants esp. women talked about ethical rights/moral rights and right to use forests and forest products; in coastal areas, for e.g. in Balasore district, villagers talked about "Patta" and "Ownership" rights.

The rights envisaged were articulated differently at different levels by different groups of people. Many representatives of People's Institutions talk about 'Ownership' rights with communities, but this was inconsistent with the concerns articulated by women.

Community Forest Rights Regime: Accommodating Multiple Stakeholders and Multiple Interests

In various district workshops, an attempt was made to discuss what forests signifies for people before proceeding on to the discussion relating to management of forests and community rights. The dependence on forests, how forests are viewed and also responses to forest degradation situation vary amongst different sections within the villages and also from village to village.

Villagers primarily view forests as a repository to meet local forestry needs. Forests are looked upon as:

- a provider of fuel wood, Small Timber, Constructions materials for housing, Wood for agricultural implements
- a source for recharging local streams
- a means for holding on to soil, checking soil erosion and for increasing soil fertility for fields at foothills of forests.
- a provider of ecological benefits – fresh air, rainfall etc.
- land for expansion of agriculture.

The perception about benefit and the relative importance of these benefits also varies amongst different sections in the village. For the poor tribal women or Harijan women forest is a source of wood for gathering headloads of fuelwood for sale or for collecting MFPs for sale in local markets. While for the farmer who has land on the foot-hills' the function of forests for checking soil erosion might be more important. Thus while forests degradation signifies loss of critical livelihood source for a head-loader, for the large farmers it means a deterioration in the precious land resource on which his family and future generations depend for survival. While men are more concerned about timber and wood for agricultural implements, women are more intrically

linked to a whole range of tubers, saags (leafy vegetables) and NTFPs that they derive from forests all through the year.

A group of head loaders might be aware of the damage their daily hacking of forests is causing to the forests and the fact that they are eroding their own livelihood source; but sheer economic compulsions provide them no scope to stop. The farmers though not directly dependent on forests in similar fashion, also have critical linkages with forests and interests in its survival. It is not surprising that the initiative to protect forests have come from this section, farming community within the village for protection of forests, in many cases.

In addition to providing various forest products, including food and nutrition; forests are also a potential source of income, especially for the poorest. There are thus conflicting needs and interests relating to forests at the village level.

Forests, further, has different connotations for surrounding/ farther away villages, for industries, for environmentalist etc. What forests signifies at the macro level for the nation has been undergoing a sea change over the years. While forest were predominantly viewed upon as a source of timber and prominence was accorded to production function of forests; this has taken a back seat over the past two decades. The environmental services and function of forests are being given priority over production functions of forests.

Forests thus has users/ consumers of the different benefits and services flowing out of it at various levels and these different stakeholders / users often have conflicting needs and demands from forests. Forests is a provider of wide-array of products and services to different users, both current and future, spread across geographically and temporally. Different sections depend on forests for different products and services and have different interests and expectation from forest management regimes.

While for local level villages in the immediate vicinity of forests, product flow and influence on soil fertility and the immediate microclimate are more important; farther away villages depend on forests for forest products, for flow of streams etc. and for the ecological services. The nation and the humanity as a whole depends on the ecological services.

The manager of forests; needs to take into account these different interests and needs to manage forests as a 'trustee', balancing and accomodating conflicting demands on forests to the best possible extent.

Forests have for the past 100 years or so been managed by the Forest Department. With the initial objectives of revenue maximization, the Forest Department was mandated to focus on production function of forests. In the process, the State overlooked the dependence of local villagers on forest and the role of forests as provider of benefits and services to the vast majority of rural population. The Forest Department, pursuing its mandate of revenue maximization, sought to protect forests from local population. In the process, alienating local people from forests and from forest management. Local population which could and should have been factored in the management regime as Co-stakeholders and Co-managers; were alienated and were forced to abet the process of degradation of forests.

The Forest Department in their over occupation with the production functions of forests, overlooked the linkage of forests with different stake-holders at different levels and thus impinged on moral and ethical rights of these stakeholders, esp. local communities. The national needs of ecological services from forests were also compromised in the process.

Last decade has the witnessed change in perceptions about forests and hence about objectives of management of forests. There has also been realization that local communities need to be involved in protection and management of forests. Thus currently there exists a greater appreciation of:

Ecological function of forests.

Symbiotic relationship between local people and forests.

Forests need to be hence managed on behalf of the larger mass of people and the nation recognizing the need to maintain a healthy flow of products and services from forests. Local communities i.e. villages in the immediate vicinity of forests have the greatest stake in sustained flow of benefits from forests and in sustainable management of forests. Local communities are also best positioned to protect and manage forests. Thus, they can be the most effective 'trustees' for managing forests.

In the discussion on Community rights over forests ownership rights are being advocated as an option. However there are problems relating to ownership rights especially given the crucial role that forests have as a provider of environmental services; and also given the inequities and dis-balanced power relationships within the local communities.

In the discussion and debate on community forestry rights, there has been greater attention on rights of forest protecting villages and the rights of forest adjacent villages; while the rights and the claims of peripheral villages are missed out. At present, there is greater appreciation and accommodation of needs of other forest dependent groups, since the current rights regime does not give clear tenurial rights to one village. In the current system, there is a lot of scope of negotiations and trade-offs. This scope for negotiations and accomodating needs and demands of different groups needs to be kept alive. The experience of well-managed community forests does strengthen the case of community based forest management regimes; but at the same time some safeguards might be needed to protect the rights of NTFP gatherers residing in the farther-away 'forest-devoid' villages.

In the discussion on community rights, one women leader from Mandibisi Mahila Mandal, Kashipur, pointed out that complete rights over forest should not vest with one community or one village; and that we need take into account 'rights' and livelihood needs of women NTFP gatherers from other neighboring village that do not have forests.

In many of CFM areas, already some checks on extractions of valuable NTFPs has started, through rules to restrict access of outsiders. For example in Baghamunda Village, the women's group involved in Forest Protection restricts the access of KL pluckers from neighboring villages especially in the beginning of the collection season when the leaves availability is at the best. In Gadbanihilo Village in Nayagarh District, Mahua flowers extraction is regulated and managed by the Village Committee.

While on one hand, regulation of access is desirable, even to check over-exploitation, on the other hand, there is a strong threat of concentration of resources in the hands of few. Ownership rights concept stems out of a property view of forests; while forests is a conglomeration of a wide variety of products and services which cannot be viewed as property. In context of forests, we could talk about "Trustee-ship" and 'trustee-ship rights' as opposed to 'ownership' rights.

Women realize that forests cannot be viewed as a 'Commodity' and hence 'ownership-right' and "ownership" as a concept that is applicable more to a "Commodity", has little relevance in

context of forests. Women have a much more holistic approach towards forests and stress more on rights to use forests and also on the need to accommodate rights of other resource dependent poor to use forests instead of 'privatization' of forests and 'ownership' with specified community.

Ownership rights could even entail rights to lease out forests, right to transfer the resource etc. and could lead to resource being appropriated by the elite sections. In the present context, villages are talking about rights of the local communities primarily because villages and within the villages many sections depend critically on forests for survival. If the very rights placed in the hands of communities (within the iniquitous set-up of village) empower/ allow some of the elite to lease out the forests for management to industries etc.; these rights would have little meaning. Safeguards thus need to be built in, to protect the interests of forest dependent sections etc.

We probably need to seek answers in a rights-regime system that has safe-guards for resource dependent poor. Such safeguards are possible in a rights-regime that recognizes and accommodates varying degrees of rights and responsibilities for multiple stake-holders. Safeguards would need to be woven in this kind of a rights-regime system. This is probably possible in the concept of 'trustee-ship' rights, where a village community as a trustee manages the forests on behalf of the various stakeholders and ensures that their interest are protected. Inbuilt into this concept is the *ethical duty* to safeguard rights of others. This would provide scope for a dynamic process of negotiations, spreads across geographically as well as temporally.

Community Forest Management can reflect and address the needs and priorities of women only when there is not just a shift in who is managing forests but how the forests are being managed. Also, a property-based view of forests and a rights-regime emanating from such a view cannot fully accommodate the rights and varied needs of multiple stakeholders.

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¹ Vasundhara is a NGO focussing primarily on Community Forestry issues in Orissa. Vasundhara has been working as a support group with main areas of work being Policy advocacy, networking, information dissemination and capacity building.