

Summary & Way Forward

Relevance of Ecosystems approach to Sustainable Development Case Studies of Mahi River Basin, Aravalis and other ecosystems of Rajasthan



12-13th September 2022

Udaipur



Viren Lobo
9460573746



Juned Khan Komal
9928910051



Mohan Dangi
9414343668

Summary & Way Forward

Relevance of Ecosystems approach to Sustainable Development Case Studies of Mahi River Basin, Aravalis and other ecosystems of Rajasthan

Summary of the Workshop

Workshop Objective: To outline methodology for addressing Climate Change through sustainable livelihood governance keeping small farmers, pastoralists, small and traditional fishers, tribals and wage workers (originating from the village) in mind.

Hypothesis: Gram Sabha is the smallest unit of governance and landscape level the smallest unit to understand issues related to Climate Change. Need for a Federation approach at landscape level capable of engaging with Block and District level functionaries on common issues and resource allocation questions. The Federation is also the method by which other Community Stake holders in the landscape can address issues related to the resource they depend upon.

Day 1 Session 1: Brief presentations on the work of SPWD and Prayatna Samiti on the twin approach of involvement of communities at gram sabha level and its build up to the level of Jaisamand Catchment area. The presentations showed how the works related to SHGs and pasturelands development were used to engage with the panchayats for sustainable development of the natural resources of the village using the provisions of MGNREGA. To start with sample villages were taken; reflective of the characteristics of the catchment area. This was combined with qualitative dialogue taking place with SHGs and farmer groups on different aspects of sustainable natural resource management. The results of the planning process facilitated at the Ward Sabha level were fed to the Gram Sabha and later taken up with Block and District level functionaries. The result has been an improvement in the quantity and quality of the work being taken up primarily dealing with improvement in soil and water conservation measures undertaken at the village level. During the course of the work, it was observed that women were the major participants in the work. As a result, it was proposed that women should be engaged as mates which was agreed to after dialogue. The presentation on the significance of the Aravalis by the technical resource team focused on the importance of the Aravalis in defining the vegetation of Rajasthan. It also highlighted how this was also responsible for the enormous diversity found in Rajasthan as also a large share of rare and endemic species.

Day 1 Session 2: Presentations by HVVS, Prayatna Samiti and JJVS highlighted different aspects of working with communities. The HVVS presentation highlighted the impact of the micro planning process in the provision of wage labour and development of the natural resources of the community. Prayatna Samiti described the role of Jaisamand Consortium in addressing agriculture, soil and migration with respect to the contextual status, interventions and achievements. The JJVS presentation talked of the work related to up-scaling this initiative in Dungarpur District by integrating GIS.

Day 1 Session 3: Presentations by Seva Mandir, FES, Aastha, Prayas and CASA. Seva Mandir presented a hierarchy pyramid related to the complex questions facing the commons and related Climate Change issues. The presentation was based on the concrete experiences of Seva Mandir in dealing with these questions in Southern Rajasthan and in relation to the implementation of community forest rights in particular. FES presentation building on this, presented larger questions related to organizations/ individuals and CBOs working in silos and the need for an approach that integrated the different perspectives. Astha talked of the limitations of civil society organizations, and NGOs in dealing with the systematic sidelining of the Forest Rights Act by the government. However, the net thrust of the three organizations dealt with the concrete steps taken by them to provide an alternative approach to deal with the issues emerging on the ground. Ashta concluded by making a call for a systematic organized approach to the Biodiversity Act 2002 and the creation of Biodiversity registers in every village. Prayas talked of its experiences in providing recognition of rights of communities living in and dependent on the forests of Sitamata Wild Life Sanctuary. It also highlighted how the rights of tribals were repeatedly undermined by blaming local communities for the cutting of the forest done by forest mafia in collusion with the forest department. It highlighted the experiences of Prayas in collection and sale of tendu patta and the nexus operating to deny sustainable returns to the Cooperative operating on behalf of the local community. CASA explained the evolution of its work to deal with common property rights and working towards a rights-based approach of local communities in relation to Forest Rights, PESA and MGNREGA. It highlighted issues related to community organization and the limitations of a facilitating organization in dealing with some of the political issues required to unite local communities.

Day 1 Session 4: Prayatana Samiti presented critical issues related to pastoral communities, impact of denial of pastoral rights of communities and the resultant fragmentation of the actual resources of which pastoral communities depend upon. Non recognition and facilitation of the key issues related to pastoralism have resulted in a severe crisis facing the community related to the traditional occupation on which they depended upon. IELA presented issues related to the fisheries sector and the condition of fishing cooperatives in the lakes of Jaisamand, Mahi and Kadana. In Jaisamand the threat of urban demand for water from Udaipur threatens the survival of fishing itself. The work of Rajas Sangh in relation to fishers was highlighted and a demand that Rajas Sangh intervene to improve the condition of fishermen was placed. The need for a serious look at the recent move of the government to promote FPOs and the relevance of this in relation to the experience of cooperatives narrated at this forum was placed for participants to think about.

Day 2 Session 1: After the recap of the first day, presentations from Jaisalmer and Bharatpur highlighted the complex issues facing these two ecosystems. While the problems in the two regions got highlighted, it also presented the multi-faceted issues that need to be taken into account while dealing with the ecosystems approach to development. The relevance of the Millennium Assessment tools in the layering of information to examine interconnections and main drivers of change was also placed before the gathering.

Day 2 Session 2: Seva Mandir presented issues related to post Community Forest Rights by drawing on the work done by them related to micro plan preparation. The detailed preparation of the micro plan however raised issues related to the multiplicity of the bodies. The detailed discussions that

followed this presentation highlighted the limitations of the facilitating organizations in dealing with the complexities faced on the ground.

The presentation by GSS highlighting a study on the impact of COVID lockdown on child migrant labour, placed serious issues facing marginalized sections in facilitating the education of children and cited economic reasons as the main factor behind the incidence of child migrant labour. The presentation also highlighted the status of crimes against children and placed the relevant laws and provisions available to parents and marginalized communities to provide them with the wherewithal to fulfill their responsibilities despite desperate economic conditions. The amount of money earned by children and repatriated home showed the folly of resorting to child labour, seriously compromising the future of these children.

Day 2 Session 3: The presentation by Dr. Satish Sharma gave a detailed historical account of the origin and development of the Aravalis, how the vegetation has changed over the years but also the source of the rich diversity prevalent in the region. The presentation called for a more serious look at the resources available and how this was being undermined by indiscriminate economic activity in the region. The presentation on mining by TarunKanti Bose showed the desperate condition of the mine workers 90% of whom had not been paid for the services rendered immediately before the lock down. The presentation highlighted that though profits of miners had increased due to lockdown as reflected in the increase in the amount available under the District Mineral Fund, the same had not been passed on to the mine workers, neither any relief provided to them from the Fund. It concluded by pointing out that a quarter of the mine workers were still not able to resume duty due to lack of resources for travel.

Day 2 Session 4: The concluding session reiterated the need for a serious examination of the Biodiversity Act 2002 as a means to providing a comprehensive approach to the question of dealing with rights of local communities and recognition of the ecosystem approach to sustainable development. The presentations from Bijolia pointed to the limitations of the CFR titles given to them. That from participants residing in the proposed Mukundra Tiger Reserve highlighted how their rights have been systematically denied. IELA also placed the work done in Sariska and the efforts made to ensure that Forest Rights in Alwar are also recognized. How communities were motivated to file RTIs to develop an evidence base on the actual functioning of FRA and as a means for communities to resist repression faced by them was also placed. Fishermen coming from Mahi and Kadana also placed their views. The meeting concluded with a call for regular engagement on the issues highlighted.

Way forward

The enforced lockdown during COVID Pandemic provided an opportunity to seriously test the efficacy of the principles of decentralized governance. SPWD, IELA and Prayatna Samiti felt the need to consolidate this fledging understanding on De-centralized ecological governance and its relevance for Sustainable livelihoods and Climate change, revisited the past experiences, issues that came-up at different points in time and they were settled and linked up with other experiences in the same region.

People shared their experiences with issues and suitable solutions. All the participants were agreed upon that more meetings are needed at regular intervals.

SPWD had shown the micro plan process under MGNREGA to address the Eco-restoration through in-depth micro plan on the basis of natural resources (water, land – Agriculture, soil, forest & Livestock) to make the durable asset and to create the employment with in villages/Panchayats. The experience during COVID lock-down has proved that the agriculture and livestock made the life-line of the rural people and people survived with locally available resources. Much more area should come under such in-depth micro-planning to make the resources at wider and at landscape level.

On the question of Forest Rights Act (FRA) a two prong strategy was envisaged -

- a. Where ever the claims have not been submitted or claims have been rejected or half claims have been accepted – a strategy have been made to document these evidences through either RTI or other means to highlight the violation with regards to preparation of filing and sanctioning of FRA clearances.
- b. Where CFRs have been granted apart from the limitations in the CFR claims recognized, the question of preparation of micro-plans has been taken up in detail, the implications of these micro-plans will be studied further and a time bound action plan will be evolved.

Two stage action plans is envisaged as

- (a) Implementation of micro-plans prepared in Talai (Jhadol)
- (b) Potential up-scaling of the process of micro-plan preparation in three stages
 - (i) The other CFRs recognized so far
 - (ii) Where CFRs have been prepared but not recognized
 - (iii) Strategic training of participants of the workshop who have similar issues but not yet filed CFR claims.

Larger implications have policy levels in other regions as well.

Pastoralist's rights under FRA – in this connection, the experiences from Himachal Pradesh in development of the frame-work for preparation of claims for pastoralist forest rights will be examined in detail in relation to its relevance for pastoralist of Rajasthan.

On Biodiversity issue – keeping in mind that forest lands in Rajasthan is around 9.47% to TGA and forest cover is even less around 4.32% and also given the fact that districts like Jaisalmer do not have forest cover as defined under FSI. It was decided by the house that there should be a systematic approach to the Biodiversity act 2002, and creation of biodiversity committees. Given the various presentations in the house, the general approach outlined above to be supplemented by taking

Agro- Ecological approach for which the case studies of Bharatpur and Jaisalmer provide a contrasting approach to the one emerging in southern tribal dominated Aravalis.

The relevance of animal-husbandry practices in its relations to the overall land use and significance for Rajasthan in particular will also be explored.

The presentations indirectly highlighted the need for more work with women and children. The presentations highlighted the relevance of local foods, medicines and other systems in the activation and mobilization of women and children the question of taking up the implantation of use of local foods in Anganwadies and mid-day meal schemes will be explored in further discussions.

In the context of the presentation on questions related to children during COVID lock-down highlighting the role of children in family labour and the limitation of the income provided by the child-labour, a programme exploring education through local biodiversity awareness will be explored.