

# Common land development

## *Strengthening institutional and physical spaces for poor livestock keepers*

**Rahul Chaturvedi and Sanjay Joshie**

*Investments in strong institutional arrangements in common property resources can contribute to better access to fodder and water for the poor livestock keepers. A strong institution and collective action has helped improve commons, thereby improving the livelihoods of poor livestock keepers in Udaipur region.*

The communities are mainly agro-pastoralists who belong to tribal and non-tribal groups. Tribal communities are mainly located in the southern district of Udaipur with a more heterogeneous caste community inhabiting the other districts. Gujjar, Balai, Meena, Bhil, Jat, Rajput are some of the major caste categories found in these locations.

Livelihoods of communities inhabiting these areas primarily depend on agriculture and livestock keeping. More than 90% of the households keep livestock, which is composed of cattle, buffalo, goat and sheep holding. Women are primarily engaged in livestock keeping with her work spread from taking the animals out for grazing, to meeting out their water requirements to regular maintenance and up-keep. They also keep around 20-30% of their farm land as *beeds* which is used for grazing and meeting out fodder requirement of their livestock. With increasing land fragmentation there has also been a conversion of the beed lands for cropping which has further increased the reliance on commons.

With depletion of common property resources, they face increasing hardships to graze their livestock and meet out the energy needs of their household. In addressing common land development their inclusion and providing them a platform for decision-making is important.

Livestock keeping in these locations is a viable option for poor households if only a significant portion of the fodder and feed resources are derived from commons. The practice strengthening collective action and improving productivity of commons aims to strengthen the resources base used by poor households for livestock keeping. With majority of the households belonging to marginal and small categories, a strong collective action with active participation of these households helps in making the initiative pro-poor.

FES, an NGO helped revive institutional mechanisms that energize collective action and help in sustainable management of the resource in 439 villages spread across 5 districts in Rajasthan benefiting around 40000 families.

### **Focus on village institutions**

Strengthening traditional mechanisms, where they are surviving, and crafting new institutional arrangements, where none exist, is an essential component of the work on common property resources.

The process of each village taking the initiative, to apply itself and create a formal body of terms and conditions to govern itself by, with regard to a common property resource, was the basis for the sustainability of local institutions and is a critical step towards the act of self-governance.

A village institution is formed. These are called by different names. It could be a Village Forest Protection Committee which can gain rights over forest, Charagah Vikas Samiti (Pasture Land Development Committee) which can work with Gram Panchayats on pasture land in the village, Tree Growers Cooperative Society (TGCS) which can apply for lease of revenue wastelands for 25 years, and also Watershed Development Committees which can, under the policy and program directives, address the village landscape comprehensively.

All the actors in a village constituted the members of the village organization. The members constitute a management committee (also sometimes referred as executive committee or functional committee). The general body chooses the members of the management committee from the different actors: farmers, livestock keepers, women, different caste groups, BPL families, deprived sections based on their location specific understanding of the differentiation they understand as a group within and also as processes facilitated by facilitating agency.

Our role was to strengthen the village institutions by capacity building. Further, we also played a role in facilitating negotiations in meetings at different levels of the government and its department making them aware of the policy provisions and measures, which can help communities gain rights to CPR resources and provide them incentive to invest their energy in it.

Together, these groups evolved a set of rules and regulations, which guided their interaction in reference to resource created. This process of drafting rules and regulation for management of CPRs was an important element as the robustness of the institution system is determined by way rules and regulations operate. We only promoted discussions against the broader set of rules and facilitate operational systems, which are mutually agreed and are sensitive to all actors. Some of the rules included providing labour opportunities to all families on a rotation basis; continuous wage opportunities for poor households payments at common place in a village meeting in the presence of all management committee members, etc.

## Ecologically sound regeneration of common lands

Natural process of regeneration was aimed at. The focus not only helps in collective search for appropriate solutions, with community knowledge of their surroundings playing an important role, but also makes the practice cost effective and relevant for the different groups of livestock keepers in a community. The focus is to develop a protected patch with suitable mix of grass and tree species which provides different products to livestock keepers from grass, leaves and pods meeting the feed and fodder needs of both the large and small ruminants. Aspects like which species are planned, what is long term objective of it, what will be its effect on other species, whom it is going to benefit etc., are looked at. Discussions around these issues are initiated among different actors in a village. A collective search on appropriate solutions, lead to sense of ownership among the village actors of the process.

## Distribution of benefits

Rules for distribution of benefits have the most important consequences for the members involved. The benefit sharing arrangements depend on many factors from the broad objective of resource distribution, to the condition and objective of resource growth, to number of households and their different demands, to the monitoring and enforcement costs of sustainable resource harvesting and the different alternative options available to complement or supplement the resource distribution.

Two main mechanisms can be seen in terms of fodder collection: Regulated and rotational grazing and cut and carry method. Different mechanisms for lopping of tree leaves and pods can be seen across villages. Some of the villages still have not allowed lopping tree based on the condition of the resource and also problems associated with monitoring of such use. For example, in Thoria, trees on plot are allotted to one or two households who distribute to all members. Trees are lopped after one month of monsoon, once in Nov-Dec and then in Apr-May.

In Saredi Kheda, trees on all commons are divided into patches, each patch allotted to different households with higher sheep/goat. Lopping is done after one month of monsoon in one plot; after 2-3 months in another plot (after Diwali). When rainfall is very low, one plot is left open for grazing, second plot is left open after 15 days of last rainfall.

In most of the villages, while drafting the rules and regulations, village takes a very holistic perspective of the overall resources and the usage patterns. Understanding the overall resource base helps the village community in making choices, which may sound complex but are location specific and take a dynamic perspective of the socio-economic and ecological interrelationship.

In the first two to five years, the plot is usually controlled for grazing by small ruminants. It's become important then that ample grazing space remains open for the small ruminants so that they are not the one who loose out. Simultaneously, it has also been learnt that the communities would like to invest in making different kind of plots. In some plots, they would like to have intensive work done, but on another plot, apart from securing the rights

over the commons, they would like a different kind of intervention (seeding of grass with some soil and moisture conservation work with no plantation). What is important in the context is, that there is high gestation period in resource growth, especially of trees, against which project interventions of 3-5 years is quite small in improving the biomass availability on all the village commons. The village community understands this important constraint and wants action on different patches in phases, regenerating one patch after another. This clearly brings out the need to have broader understanding of the space and time in which common property resources management should be placed.

FES in its initial work with TGCS learnt the lesson that motives like maximisation of revenue generation and income makes the distribution mechanism highly inequitable. This involves mechanisms like auction, which lets the highest bidder privatise a common property resource. Institutions, which aim to do so, can earn good amount of money, and there have been incidence where institutions have been offered between Rs 100000-200000 for an area of 50 ha. With clear membership boundary and primacy to needs of the villagers, these motives are usually checked, but within village also the regular efforts need to be put in to form a rule, which makes the resource available to all.

## Results

Community has gained rights on some common property resources; government acknowledges the strength of village institutions in management of commons and supports institutions in resolving conflicts. However, it still views commons as an un-productive resource and stills aims to fulfill different objectives on commons.

Forest department recognizes the community institution strength in regenerating forests. However within, still a large group feels that communities should not be allowed to manage forests.

Within the village, there is a clear understanding of land categories on commons; demarcation of boundaries and removal of encroachment (mostly those which are very prominent and new); Collective action to protect commons; less dependence of poor households on resource rich framers for fodder, leaves, pods and fuel wood; increased spaces for poor and deprived sections to participate in village decision making process; improved spaces for women in village decision making processes; reduced resource conflict - previously visible in scarcity period where the socially and economically powerful gained, with improvement in the resources base. Strengthened institutional spaces for poor households enable them to actively participate in decision making processes with its impact on social-economic-political factors.

With increased grass production and tree coverage, palatable fodder availability in terms of grasses and lopped tree leaves from protected commons increased. Increased fodder availability from different sources helped livestock keepers to meet the feed and fodder requirement of their different livestock across different time periods. Grass biomass availability increased from a low of 0.26 ton/ha to a high of 8.5 ton/ha based on the condition and location of commons. Value of standing biomass on protected commons ranged between Rs 32000 per ha to Rs 365000 per ha.

Reduced risks and vulnerability to fodder scarcity helped poor livestock keepers to invest resources for livestock development with very low input costs.

Protection and regeneration of commons with work to check runoff water significantly changed the land use and cover in the villages. This is more visible where the work was done in a contiguous patch, for example a watershed. Analysis of Thoria watershed over different time periods gives strong evidence that if biophysical interventions and institutional development is promoted on commons in a contiguous patch, there are dynamic changes in the biophysical environment. This trend was also seen in other villages where work on common property resources of land and water not only improved the overall biomass growth on common land areas but also influenced the agricultural area, through increased water availability.

The proportion of households reporting increase in milk production was 50 per cent of the sample household in the villages. The surveyed households (100% of households) attributed the increase in milk production to increased fodder availability. Discussions with different groups also highlighted the role of dairy cooperative societies in providing services and market linkage, improved water availability and improvement in cattle breed as other important factors in influencing growth in milk production, clearly reflected in Thoria village where the milk sale figures of the district co-operative societies and private dairies indicate a consistent growth rate despite low rainfall years. With improved fodder availability and institutional support of dairy, the vulnerability in livestock sector especially for the poor livestock keeper can be reduced and even in extreme low rainfall years, their livestock system remains strong-footed.

Another interesting finding gained was with improved trust of villagers on the service providers for artificial insemination, with marginal and small farmers investing in improving their non-descript breeds. This, which has been broadly argued as an important factor to improve productivity, has also improved income earnings of poor livestock keepers who with reducing vulnerability and risks invest resources for asset improvement. This trend was visible in Jodha ka Kheda and Gudha Gokalpura villages where landless and marginal families kept more than 50% of crossbreed animals.

### Lessons learnt

- Work on common property resources should address differentiation and discrimination within the village communities based on caste, class, gender, livelihood systems etc. This perspective helps in making the initiative of regeneration of common property resources pro-poor with special emphasis on the inclusion of the poor households in the institutional framework.
- Strong and dynamic institutions (ughai, hathai, bani etc.) which recognizes traditional institutional arrangements are location specific, adhere to the broad principles of common property resource management, are more likely to survive and be sensitive to the needs of poor households and livestock keepers.

- The resource growth on commons is not linear and homogeneous. A range of factors, which change at village level, influences it. Even within a village, two different plots have shown different resource growth.
- Secure tenure and assurance of benefits from commons are important to mobilize community for common property resources management.
- Strong focus on endemic species provides the livestock keepers a share in the growth from increased biomass availability
- Work on common property resources of both land and water have a greater impact on the livelihoods of poor livestock keepers: water and land are critical constraining factors in livelihood systems of households living in semi-arid areas.
- The success of common property resources management generally speaking is more possible in small villages (with total households less than 200-300).
- Improved common property resource can provide opportunities for additional livestock keeping and also result in increased income opportunities.

### Conclusion

The efforts towards protecting the commons provides immediate returns in terms of increased availability of biomass, improved soil and moisture regime, and where geo-hydrology supports recharge, an increase in the water table and an associated increase in area under cropping. With strong institutional arrangement, investments in common property resources can contribute to the improvement of the livelihoods, especially of the poor livestock keepers, with increased access to water and fodder. Besides benefiting directly from improved availability and access or palpably sensing equality in terms of low or no pricing for such produce, the restoration of commons is akin to land redistribution to the poor. This helps reduce the vulnerability of poor livestock keepers to environmental and economic uncertainties, thereby stabilizing the livestock sector. Improved commons also provide a strong collective and ecological foundation to further assist the poor livestock keepers driving the livestock growth.

An important change the practice brings is that it places a strong village institution as an important actor within the system. With a strong institutional platform and collective action the conflicting interest groups within village align for a common purpose - regeneration of commons.

### Rahul Chaturvedi

Senior Project Officer

### Sanjay Joshie

Regional Team Leader

Foundation for Ecological Security

A-160, Subhash Nagar,

Bhilwara – 311 001, Rajasthan.

E-mail: [bhilwara.fes@ecologicalsecurity.org](mailto:bhilwara.fes@ecologicalsecurity.org)