



ECO-RESTORATION AND INSTITUTION STRENGTHENING

A SLEM BEST PRACTICE

GIZ and Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change developed a sustainable land and ecosystem management (SLEM) best practice on Eco-restoration and institution strengthening which is mainly focused on strengthening of village level institutions for eco-restoration and conservation of natural resources.

The livelihoods of indigenous communities largely depend on natural resources. The village level institutions govern the actions of communities over natural resources and play an important role in management and protection of natural resources. Due to weak village institutions natural resources are degrading day by day on account of over-exploitation and poor management.

What do we mean by institution strengthening?

Institution strengthening refers to strengthening of all the Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) which is a general term applied for all institutions controlled by a community. CBOs generally fall into two broad categories: (a) institutions such as the Village Development Committees that have 'public' functions at community level and are meant to represent the interests of the entire resident population, and (b) Common Interest Groups that aim at specific activity/activities and represent the personal interests of their members.



Why to strengthen community institution?

1. It helps in the long-term success of conservation of natural resources
2. It helps to mitigate existing conflicts and empower the community to play more active roles in management of natural resources
3. It promotes equality with equal opportunity to share in decisions
4. Increases economic and technical efficiency because resource users have more clearly defined responsibilities for their actions
5. It increases stability and commitment to management of natural resources
6. Nearer to the community and understand the needs and problems of the community better
7. It helps to identify low-cost and resource friendly adaptation options
8. Involving community members and local institutions in developing guidelines on use of natural resources including forest products in a participatory manner through strengthening of local institutions in the long run
9. Efficient communication and knowledge sharing among stakeholders to spread technical know-how to carry out interventions for conservation and sustainable utilization of natural resources.



Types of institution

1. Village Development Committees are institutions of collective governance of a village with responsibility for sustainable development. Collective governance of a community implies a set of accepted rules, responsible for the application of the rules and for organizing collective action in the interest of the community.
2. Common interest groups are institutions of some members of the community that come together to achieve a common purpose.
3. User associations are common interest groups established to operate and maintain a facility constructed with public and/or private funds, with resources mobilized from the members of the association.
4. Micro-finance institutions are community-level common interest groups specialized in savings and lending. Commonly formed groups are Self-Help Groups.
5. Networks of Community Based Organizations may join together village development committees or Common Interest Groups.

Measures to strengthen community-based institutions

1. Discontent with existing conditions in the community must initiate the development of the association
2. Discontent must be focused and channeled into institution, planning and action in respect of specific problems
3. The discontent which initiates or sustains community institutions must be widely shared with the community members
4. The community institution must involve leaders (both formal and informal) identified with and accepted by major sub-groups in the community
5. The institution must have goals and methods of procedure of high acceptability
6. The program of institution should include some activities with emotional content
7. The institution should seek to utilize the manifest and latent goodwill which exists in the community
8. The institution must develop active and effective lines of communication both within the institution and between the institution and the community
9. The institution should seek to support and strengthen the groups which it brings together in cooperative work
10. The institution should be flexible in its institutional procedures without disrupting its regular decision-making routines
11. The institution should develop a pace for its work relative to existing conditions in the community
12. The institution should seek to develop effective leaders
13. The institution must develop strength, stability and prestige in the community

Formation and strengthening of Self-Help Groups

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are informal associations of people who choose to come together to find ways to improve their living conditions. It can be defined as self-governed, peer-controlled information group of people with similar socio-economic background and having a desire to collectively perform common purpose.



Adaptation interventions through institution strengthening a case study from Niwas Block of District Mandla (Madhya Pradesh)

- ▶▶ The strengthened village institutions actively manage to plant trees on forest fringes and slopes to promote agro-forestry in order to reduce forest fragmentation, increase soil moisture and decrease soil erosion
- ▶▶ Construction of stone exits and stone bunds in upland farms to counteract soil erosion and improve soil moisture levels over longer periods. Stone exits and bunds are used as barriers that slow down the velocity of surface water runoff on fields. This allows rainwater to infiltrate into the soil and thereby reduces erosion of the fertile top soil
- ▶▶ Improving the productivity of traditional crops through seed replacement (e.g. for the millet varieties Kodo and Kutki) and improving the productivity of currently widely used crops like maize and paddy through improved farming techniques such as seed drill and line sowing
- ▶▶ The strengthened village institutions actively manage and conserve over 500 hectares of forest in the project region of Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh
- ▶▶ Stone exits and stone bunds have improved soil conservation. More than half of the beneficiaries in the project area have improved their yields and managed to shift to growing two instead of only one crop within one growing season. Their annual average income increased by up to 40% as compared to farmers working without stone exits and bunds
- ▶▶ Improved farming techniques resulted in a 19% productivity increase of millet and maize, and a 30% productivity increase of paddy. This led to an average income increase of up to 20% and resulted in decreasing sensitivity to climate variability and change

Source: Foundation for Ecological Security



How to start Self-Help Group?

First Step for forming an SHG is to visit every family in the village and interacts with them. If the people are known, talk to each other. Talk to the elders in the village, explain the plan and request for their support. Whenever visit is conducted:

- ▶▶ Speak to the women folk
- ▶▶ Ask what are the important issues for the family

What type of families do we visit for forming SHG?

Ask these questions about each family:

- ▶▶ Does the family have only one earning member?
- ▶▶ Does the family bring drinking water from faraway place?
- ▶▶ Are there permanently ill members in the family?
- ▶▶ Are there children in the family who do not go to school?
- ▶▶ Is their house made of kutchha materials?
- ▶▶ Do they belong to scheduled caste or scheduled tribe?



How are groups formed?

When speaking with the families some kind of mutual liking already exists between many of them such as:

- »» Similar experience of poverty
- »» Similar living conditions
- »» Same kind of livelihood
- »» Same community or caste
- »» Same place of origin

It will be easy at this stage to find out which families are likely to get together for better involvement.



How are group meetings organized?

Before formation of SHG, hold a meeting of the community leaders and elders of the village. Explain to them the plan to form SHGs. Support has to be ensured from the villagers. This is called community participation. This will also give acceptance to work in the village.

This is the right time to tell everyone that the meeting is not for giving anything but to enable the families to come together and help each other.

How do SHGs take shape?

After the meeting with the elders and community leaders, it is now ready to call for SHG members for a meeting. One member from each family will be identified to come for a meeting on a convenient day.

Membership

During the initial meetings, following things may happen:

- ▶▶ Some members can quit
- ▶▶ Some new members can join
- ▶▶ The members slowly learn to decide subjects for meetings
- ▶▶ They learn to conduct meetings
- ▶▶ They understand the value of records and documents
- ▶▶ They want to remain together and help each other

These are normal stages of SHGs.



Leadership: One member of the group needs to take the lead. How this can be identified?

The best way is to ask the following questions within the group:

Questions	Answers
Who should decide everything for the SHG?	All members should decide
Who benefits from the SHG?	All members benefit
Who should do the work?	All should share the work
How can the work be shared?	Agree on one person to take up the work by rotation

This way, the members will understand the reason for rotation of the responsibilities. This will make it easy to choose a member to take initiative for the following main activities:

- »» Book keeping
- »» Organizing meetings

How SHGs function?

Simple rules required for SHGs to function are as follows:

- »» Common agreement on when to meet
- »» Decision on time and place of meetings
- »» Agreed penalties for non-attendance
- »» Agreement on amount of saving
- »» Giving small loans to each other
- »» Taking loan from banks, repayment habits

Training of the members on the following is needed for proper functioning of SHGs:

- »» Basic mathematics
- »» Book keeping
- »» Social aspects like women empowerment
- »» Basics of lending money, borrowing, repaying

Most effective method of training of SHG members is to conduct an exposure visit of a well established SHG for interaction and sharing their learning and experiences.



Characteristics of SHGs

- »» The ideal size of an SHG should be of 10-20 members
- »» One member per family
- »» The group consists of either men or women
- »» Women's groups are generally found to perform better
- »» Members have the same social and financial background
- »» The group should meet regularly
- »» Attendance of the members

Book keeping by the SHG

- »» Simple and clear books for all transactions to be maintained
- »» If members, unable to maintain the books than an experience person can be engaged by the SHG for the purpose
- »» Minutes of book
- »» Saving and loan register
- »» Weekly register
- »» Members pass book

Functions of SHG

- »» Saving and thrift
- »» Internal lending
- »» Discussion on problems (if any) and their solution

Linking of SHGs to Bank

- »» Opening of saving bank account
- »» Internal lending by the SHG
- »» Assessment of the SHG
- »» Checklist for assessment of SHG
- »» Repayment of loans by the SHG

SHGs are seen as drivers of rural development. Play an active role in eco-restoration, conservation of natural resources and livelihoods generation.





Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun as Ecosystem Services Improvement Project Implementing Unit (ESIP-PIU) is building the capacity of the local communities of ESIP project areas of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh for strengthening of village level institutions as a SLEM Best Practice for eco-restoration and conservation of natural resources.

Brief About ESIP

The World Bank funded Ecosystem Services Improvement Project (ESIP) supports the goals of the Green India Mission by demonstrating models for adaptation-based mitigation through sustainable land and ecosystem management and livelihood benefits. ESIP will introduce new tools and technologies for better management of natural resources, including biodiversity and carbon stocks. Main components of the project are: strengthening capacity of government institutions in forestry and land management programs, improving forest quality, and scaling up of sustainable land and ecosystem management (SLEM) best practices. ESIP is being implemented in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh by Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education, Chhattisgarh State Forest Department and Madhya Pradesh State Forest Department under the overall direction of Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India.

Brief About ICFRE

Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) is an autonomous body of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India. It is an apex body in the national forestry research system that promotes and undertakes need based research, education and extension in the forestry sector. It has a pan India presence with its 9 research institutes (Arid Forest Research Institute, Jodhpur; Forest Research Institute, Dehradun; Himalayan Forest Research Institute, Shimla; Institute of Forest Biodiversity, Hyderabad; Institute of Forest Productivity, Ranchi; Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding, Coimbatore; Institute of Wood Science and Technology, Bengaluru; Rain Forest Research Institute, Jorhat and Tropical Forest Research Institute, Jabalpur) and 5 centers located at Agartala, Aizawl, Prayagraj, Chhindwara and Visakhapatnam. Each institute are directs and manages research, extension and education in forestry sector in the states under their jurisdiction.

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