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## **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

# **COMMUNITY BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND WOMEN : AN OVERVIEW**

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### **Abstract**

In Community-Based Natural Resource Management the concept community refers to social groupings of men and women bound together so as to manage the natural resources. These communities are well aware of the importance of the available resources and are keen to preserve the same. Most of them are tribal men and women because since time immemorial, tribal habitat has been the forest, for which even today tribals are identified with forest, no matter where they live. Anthropologists have already shared with us extensive literature with the conclusion that forest is not only the living place for the tribes, but also their entire network of economic, socio-cultural and religious lives. They are responsible for the formation of tribal worldview, which is forest centric. In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the concept of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), its need and emergence. Since the 1990s the concept of CBNRM has become the prime principle of rural development policies in every developing country. For the success of any Natural Resource Management initiative, the CBNRM emphasizes on involving the local communities so as to ensure maximum justice and development. Further the paper tries to highlight the role of women in Community Based Natural Resource Management by explaining the relationship between women and nature with supportive literature. Lastly, challenges faced by CBNRM initiatives and conditions for success of the same have been explained in the chapter.

**Key words:** CBNRM, emergence, women, success, failures

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The working definition of CBNRM by Armitage (2005): CBNRM is generally viewed as a mechanism to address both environmental and social economic goals and to balance the exploitation and conservation of valued ecosystem components. It requires some degree of devolution of decision-making power and authority over natural resources to communities and community-based organizations....(Ochola et.al., 2010).<sup>1</sup> This definition is based on the role of communities in the natural resource management and participation in

the development of conservation initiatives and projects (ibid).<sup>2</sup>

Community -based natural resource management in simple terms include the use and management of resources collectively by people in the rural areas. CBNRM focuses on the collective management of ecosystems to improve human well-being. It aims to devolve authority for ecosystem management to the local (community) level, thereby empowering communities to manage their own resources without

permanently damaging, depleting or degrading them. CBNRM therefore requires strong investments in capacity development and the development of local institutions and governance structures (Fabricius & Collins, 2007).<sup>3</sup> The idea behind CBNRM not only includes proper management of natural resources but in the long run covers the development of the community, good local self governance and formation of local level institutions for management of available resources. The management of resources has no doubt financial benefits to the communities but sometimes it so happens that some high-value resources are used by only small communities with high financial benefits. Further the chances are there that the resources are over used if there is no control on CBNRM initiatives. Proper institutions with strong rules are needed so as to monitor the use of resources. The local or traditional knowledge of resource conservation can make a valuable contribution in such situations. The outsiders can help communities resolve their disputes so that the latter can continue utilizing and benefiting from the resources available.

With one of the most accepted aims i.e to find local solutions for local problems the CBNRM has following characteristics (Kellert et.al.,2000).<sup>4</sup>

- A commitment to involve community members and local institutions in the management and conservation of natural resources.
- An interest in devolving power and authority from central and/or state government to more local and often indigenous institutions and peoples.
- A desire to link and reconcile the objectives of socio economic development and environmental conservation and protection.
- A tendency to defend and legitimize local and/or indigenous resource and property rights.
- A belief in the desirability of including traditional values and ecological knowledge in modern resource management.

These characteristics also highlight the objectives CBNRM which the varied initiatives target to achieve so as to improve the social and economic standards of rural and local communities.

## 2. EMERGENCE OF CBNRM

Since the 1990s, the concept of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) has come to the forefront of rural development policy in

developing countries. Governments across South and South-East Asia, Africa and Latin America have adopted and implemented CBNRM in various ways (Menon et.al., 2007).<sup>5</sup> However, to Croll & Parkin and Berkes et.al., rather than being new, CBNRM can be viewed as a modern attempt to revive often quite established and traditional local and indigenous cultural and institutional mechanisms for managing and conserving the natural environment (Kellert et.al.,2000).<sup>6</sup> The reality for much of the world, however, is that many traditional practices for regulating nature have eroded as a consequence of expanding markets, industrialization, urbanization, state power, economic globalization, and profound alterations in property rights, life-styles, and consumption patterns (ibid).<sup>7</sup> The desire to revive, at least in modified form, traditional resource management practices often originates in the belief that it may better achieve and reconcile two persistent and rarely attained objectives: the alleviation of rural poverty and the conservation of biological diversity (ibid).<sup>8</sup> In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a variety of CBNRM experiments and initiatives emerged across South Africa that provided the inspiration for subsequent efforts. This early set emerged for various reasons and took various forms. In many cases, they came out of disillusionment with the development state (Menon et.al., 2007).<sup>9</sup> Social movements emerged which challenged the authority of the state and highlighted the need for more decentralized decision making that would give voice to local communities (ibid).<sup>10</sup>

The emergence of CBNRM can be traced back to deliberations of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1974 in Budapest. In 1975 at the WCC Assembly in Nairobi, Dr Charles Birch introduced the concept of sustainable society (Beer, 2007).<sup>11</sup> In 1980, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) put forward the concept of sustainable development, which led to the publication (in 1987) by the UN World Commission on Environment and Education (WCED) of the well-known Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (ibid).<sup>12</sup>

At the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio-de-Janeiro, Brazil, the countries unanimously supported the idea of sustainable development by endorsing Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992).<sup>13</sup> Agenda 21 acknowledged participation and the rights of indigenous people in development (Principles 10 and 22), capacity building (Principle 9), empowering the poor and women (Principle 20) and integrated

decision making (Principle 27)(ibid).<sup>14</sup>

The community forest management (CFM) policy emerged in Nepal in 1992, Social forestry emerged in Bangladesh in 1994 and India was not an exception. The Joint Forest Management (JFM) policy emerged in India in the 1990s (Menon et.al., 2007).<sup>15</sup> However this was not the first initiative of community involvement by the state. The community development programmes of the development policies of the Indian government in the 1950s and 1960s were not to be overlooked. Where in the earlier initiatives the sectors namely water, forest were state controlled but 1990s programmes showed community participation which was supported by the policies and financed by international donors.

The Johannesburg Summit of the United Nations in 2002 reaffirmed the vital role of the indigenous peoples in sustainable development (UN Report on Sustainable Development, 2002).<sup>16</sup> It recognized CBNRM and affirmed ‘... the rights of indigenous peoples and communities to participate in decision making in areas as diverse as forest management, renewable energy, disaster impact mitigation, biodiversity, mining and tourism’ (Beer, 2007).<sup>17</sup> The World Parks Congress that was held in Durban in 2003 highlighted the dependence of the indigenous people on natural resources and the participation of these communities in the conservation of the same (World Park Congress, 2003).<sup>18</sup> The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), World Conservation Congress in 2004 at Bangkok recognised the community contribution in conservation and management of ecosystems. Further, in 2008 at the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, suggestions were made to empower the local communities so as to conserve and manage the available natural resources, particularly in Africa.

The Congress in 2008 gave a call to the African governments to give some legal rights to the local people. These rights included the right to create suitable institutions for conservation and management of the local resources and also the freedom to limit its membership. A proposal was made to a) give authority to the communities to take essential measures for protection of natural resources, b) collaborate with other institutions for use of resources, c) decide on the share and distribution of income or non- monetary benefits from their management.

The outcomes of the summits and congresses helped in giving a shape to the idea of community participation in management and conservation of the local resources.

### 3. COMMUNITY BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND WOMEN

The economic condition of the poor rural women in most of the developing countries are not stable. These women for their varied economic and household needs are in daily contact with the agro-ecosystem. The survival of the latter depends on the availability of varied resources in this system. Fuel, food, fodder, medicines and other non-wood products come from nature both for consumption and income generation. It is because of this everyday interaction with the ecological system that women have developed an impact on it and they also get affected by changes in it. With only a few exceptions, women are the brains behind all environmental and development policies across the world. In most of the communities, women play a vital role to fight against poverty and bring in economic development. The rural womens’ contribution in handling agricultural and household duties together are not to be overlooked. They feed the family and domesticated animals together and while doing so in daily life come close to nature and directly or indirectly become the resource managers. So as conservation actors (i.e any individual who takes action regarding the management of resources) they must be fully involved in the decision making process regarding resource use (Menon et.al., 2007).<sup>19</sup>

The above explanation about the profound impact of women on nature is however, not so simple as it appears. There are thousand literatures highlighting varied discussions and debates about the relationship between women and nature. With the 1970s began the perspective of Women, Environment and Development (WED) when feminists tried to draw links between men's domination over both women and nature and the common reason behind this was patriarchy. The perspective is critical about the development policies which emphasized on modernisation and industrialisation at the expense of environmental health. Sherry Ortner in her famous work “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture”, challenges the belief of women’s physiology being close to nature. To the author it is the culture which places women close to nature rather than her own

physiology. All efforts to change the social institutions, namely, laws supporting reservation and equal pay for equal work are futile unless there is change in the culture. Only when society welcomes equal footing for both men and women, women will have their share of everything including the culture (Ortner, 1974).<sup>20</sup>

In the early 1980s, significant interests were made to study the relationship between women and nature which still continue till date and are making valuable impact in varied policy formulation. Carolyn Merchant (1980) wrote that in the name of culture many human beings and natural resources were exploited. Ecofeminist Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies had a different perspective on the exploitation of nature. To them the Western patriarchy in the name of science and development was killing nature. Similarly they also emphasized on giving respect and support to women for their contribution to conserving nature. In the Chipko (1973) and Appiko (1983) movements in India women have shown their resistance to the development initiatives initiated by the government. This kind of ecological struggle simultaneously liberated nature from ceaseless exploitation and women from limitless exploitation (Peet & Hartwick, 2010).<sup>21</sup>

With the 1990s came the new perspective which saw the connection and responsibility of gender towards nature not through biological spectrum but from the social construction of gender which again varied from society to society. Some schools of feminism which came to surface at this period were environmental feminism (Agrawal 1991), gender analysis (Jackson 1993) and feminist political ecology (Rocheleau 1995) (Westermann et.al, 2005).<sup>22</sup> According to Agrawal(1991), the reason behind active participation of women in environmental issues is not because of their intrinsic relation with the environment (as explained by Shiva) but because of the disastrous impact of the environmental destruction in gender specific ways. Agarwal, 1992, thus quoted "Hence, insofar as there is a gender and class – based (or also caste-, race-based) division of labor and distribution of property and power, gender and class/race structure people's interactions with nature and so structure the effects of environmental change on people and their responses to it"(Thapa,2014).<sup>23</sup>

Jackson(1993) is critical about the ecofeminist perspective and says that the latter overlooked the other relations of women with nature which she has

built herself by engaging in many economic and social structures of the society. Feminist belonging to feminist political ideology like Rocheleau regard gender as an important variable in relation to race, class and other factors while assessing the use, control over and knowledge of natural resources. Gender differences in needs and endowments may be key determinants of ways in which men and women manage natural resources (Westermann et.al., 2005).<sup>24</sup> Women in rural areas are found to be close to nature because of their dependency on the same due to poverty. Likewise the division of household duties has further strengthened the relationship between women and nature.

Though these feminist perspectives have been criticised by the main stream development theorists it can not be ignored that women were and are active managers of natural resources. Be it because of biological affinity or poverty, women have come forward to save and conserve nature which is to be acknowledged by all.

#### **4. CHALLENGES: REASONS FOR FAILURE**

As far as the success stories of CBNRM projects is concerned, one can find vast literature but this does not hide the failures of the same. Not all programmes under Community Based Natural Management are a success, unfortunately due to varied reasons the initiative lacks behind in giving the expected results. Measham & Lumbasi in their article entitled, "Success Factors for Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM): Lessons from Kenya And Australia", have identified four different reasons for failure of CBNRM projects. The reasons are : 1) Top down project initiation, 2) Lack of economic incentives, 3) Lack of autonomy and 4) Incompatible livelihood and opportunity cost ( Measham & Lumbasi (2013).<sup>25</sup>

The external initiation and imposition of any project on the local communities sometimes fail to bear better results. The communities find it hard to connect with the outsiders and motivation is blurred. The CBNRM projects often fail to provide enough economic incentives. In such cases the locals get lured by other means of income apart from the project no matter how illegal it is. With the involvement of higher authorities overseeing the projects, the local grass root authorities lose their preowned autonomy. The official decisions restrict the right of resource utilization of the locals. Some CBNRM projects fail due to incompatible livelihood and opportunity cost. Often project

opportunity costs are very high which the communities can not afford.

Further Fabricius & Collins (2007), in their joint work “Community -based Natural Resource Management : governing the commons”, have explored the reasons for the failure of CBNRM projects. To them the frequent failure of the projects are marked at the early stage when financial improvement, infrastructure development and capacity development have not taken place (Fabricius & Collins,2007).<sup>26</sup> To the authors there are varied things that have negative impact on CBNRM institutions

- Conflict: Many initiatives have been abandoned because of conflict. Koch (2004) highlighted six types of conflicts. Conflict during time of sharing benefits at the time of success; tension between traditional authorities and elected leaders; conflict between entrepreneurs and collective action, the fluidity of communities; and the hidden power of spiritualists (ibid).<sup>27</sup>
- Financial mismanagement: The inefficiency of the communities to manage project revenues results in unaccounted finances, corruption, mistrust and reluctance of private sector to engage with them.(ibid)<sup>28</sup>
- Mismanagement of natural resources: Often the over exploitation or illegal use of resources by certain sections of communities has an escalating effect, with other community members joining in illegal activities for fear of losing out their share of resources (ibid)<sup>29</sup>
- High turnover of leaders and other key players : Sometimes the key role players after enthusiastically entering the initiatives, use the experience and training to further their personal careers, and then leave. In other instances, mistrust and lack of progress cause role-players to become disillusioned, and motivating them to apply for elsewhere. Government is often to blame for transferring or prompting officials, often just as they start understanding the issues, gaining the trust of communities and showing progress (ibid).<sup>30</sup>
- Political and economic change at higher levels: Changes in national politics, policy change, civil conflict and macro-economic change can cause even the best- managed initiatives to falter (ibid).<sup>31</sup> These external drivers are beyond the control of local communities and project managers, and projects can do little to prevent them from taking place.

- Change in markets: Change in markets can have an impact on the success of any initiative. The tourism market, in particular, can be quite volatile, and is influenced by external events such as crime, customer perceptions, competition, monetary exchange rates and global economic trends. Other markets, such as those for medicinal plants, food and fuel, are more stable but their generated revenues are a lot lower than those from tourism (ibid)<sup>32</sup>
- Top-down developments: Grand schemes such as irrigation projects, infrastructure development, mega-protected areas and large-scale tourism developments often have unintended negative consequences for CBNRM (ibid).<sup>33</sup> This may lead to disempowerment, demographic shifts, competition, and environmental impacts that could have profound effects on CBNRM.

## 5. CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS OF CBNRM

According to Rajeev Kumar for successful Community Based Natural Resource Management the following conditions are to be fulfilled (Kumar 2019).<sup>34</sup>

- “Homogeneous” communities- common objectives, recognised common interests, social cohesion.
- Benefits exceed costs.
- Clearly defined boundaries to resources to be managed.
- Limited uses and users.
- Decentralized decision making.
- “Simple” administrative structures.
- Long- term engagement.
- Leadership- “champions” to lead the process.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The poor conservation outcomes that followed decades of intrusive resource management strategies and planned development have forced policy makers and scholars to reconsider the role of community in resource use and conservation (Agrawal & Gibson, 199).<sup>35</sup> The earlier writings on development used to regard communities as hindrance to social change. Unlike them, the modern work highlights the role of varied communities in giving practical meaning to decentralization, participation, management and conservation. But a focus on institutions rather than “community” is likely to be more fruitful for those

interested in community-based natural resource management (ibid).<sup>36</sup>

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