

**THE CASE OF MICROPLAN UNDER JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT
PROGRAMME: CHAKADoba, BANKURA DISTRICT**

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Introduction

Joint Forest Management (JFM) is a programme of empowering forest communities with management functions. The JFM programme received further momentum with the Government of India order on June 1,1990 which stated that the National Forest Policy of 1988 envisages peoples involvement in the development of forest.

JFM has been initiated in West Bengal. In the 1970s a Divisional Forest Officer and silviculturists in Arabari Forest Range of West Bengal motivated ten villages from Arabari, Midnapore to protect 1250 of degraded sal forest. This programme is now popularly known as the Joint Forest Management. In recent times within the framework of JFM, Microplan is prepared which uses participatory tools and is holistic in nature involving the community and other stakeholders.

Bankura district occupies a prominent place in Joint Forest Management Programme in West Bengal as it has the highest number of Forest Protection Committees. Under the National Afforestation Programme of the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Govt Of India, a Microplan was to be prepared by the villages. Three villages of the Khatra Range in Bankura District prepared it. The village Chakadoba was one of these villages and was chosen for the study.

The study area Chakadoba in Hirbundh block of Bankura represents a case of participation in preparing a village level microplan between the Santhal tribe forest dwellers and the forest authority, under Joint forest Management scheme, in which West Bengal is a pioneer. Presently torn apart by political unrest, this village presents a scenario of participation at a smaller scale where villagers with their tribal predecessors and way of living seems juxtaposed in the present political situation and the scenario of JFM schemes. This Case

study presents a case where participatory planning method is applied in a forest fringe village tribal village of 105 households.

1.1 Research methodology

1.1.1 Rationale of the research design

Joint Forest Management started as a pilot project in West Bengal. So it is imperative that while studying participation in West Bengal, this category of participation cannot be overlooked. In recent times under Joint Forest Management structure, Microplan, with a holistic approach has been prepared at the village level using participatory tools and involving the community. Both qualitative and quantitative data are collected and the nature, extent and factors affecting this participatory plan is analysed by taking the case of Chakadoba village of Hirbunth block in Bankura District, which is one of the three areas where Microplan is prepared and completed in Khatra Forest Range. Case study selection was done following a pilot study and interviewing the key informants of microplan of West Bengal Forest Department.

1.1.2 Participants of the Study

The participants of the study included 50 respondents of which 43 Community members, the 4 Forest Department Officers- the Divisional Forest Officer, Range Officer, Beat Officer, Conservator of Forest. The participants also included 3 members of IBRAD, a NGO who had worked in the area of Microplan preparation and the Block Development officer of Hirbunth who had the knowledge of administration and participatory profile of the area.

This subsection deals with collection method of the data which was both qualitative and quantitative. Both formal and nonformal techniques of enquiry were used as some of the qualitative data cannot be captured by structured questionnaires and interview.

The primary data was collected by holding **structured interviews** and **focus group interviews** among respondents from three levels:

- Policy makers: Those who were in charge of formulating and discharging the plan like the Conservator of Forest, Divisional Forest Officer were interviewed to understand the philosophy and justification of the plan.

- Field level staff: The implementing staff at the field namely the Range and Beat Officer of Khatra Forest Range as well as the NGO called IBRAD who were in charge of preparing the micro plan gave the ground reality of the plan preparation.
- Villagers representing different socio economic profiles of Chakadoba. The two FGD were conducted in presence of the Range Officer and Beat officers, the implementing authority of the participatory plan at the field level and villagers including the women to identify issues like local problems and priorities, relationship with forest department and other institutional link, transparency of information sharing and gender sensitiveness.
- Others: Block Development Officer to give an idea of the overall administrative structure and political issues of the area.

1.2 Approaches of Data Collection

A total of 8 indepth interviews were conducted with the experts of Joint Forest Management and Microplan from IBRAD, the Forest Department Officers (Conservator of Forest, Divisional Forest Officer, Range Officer) and Block Development Officers were conducted to gain an indepth analysis of the plan, the nature, the form and the background of participation. Two Focus Group Discussions were conducted –one with 12 members and other with 17 members at to understand the interest, motivation, expectation and level of participation of the villagers. 43 structured interviews with community members were done to understand the level of participation.

1.2.1 Sampling Techniques

This subsection deals with the sampling techniques used to collect the data. This being a qualitative study, care was taken to filter the information rich cases and interview those who had participated or was considerably knowledgeable of the engagement activities.

Sampling technique adopted here are purposive and stratified sampling for identifying a large number of beneficiaries. Snowball sampling technique has also been used as most beneficiaries of a single village know each other, thus adding to the sample size.

1.3 Research Background

West Bengal was the pioneer of Joint Forest Management movement and its Arabari experiment in 1970s won international acclaim (Mishra Et al, 2000). However the JFM movement has not spread evenly in all regions. Within Khatra forest Range, Joint Forest Management scheme is already operational with 140 functional Forest Protection Committees. Various other Central and State government schemes are already in operation in various villages of Khatra Range. However inspite of so many Forest Protection Committees, Microplan came to be prepare only in three villages through collaborative effort between the Forest Department and the local people. Chakadoba was one of these villages.

1.3.1 Microplan Preparation in Chakadoba: Participatory Process under Study

Chakadoba village was chosen as it was a village representing the district which had the highest concentration of Forest Protection Committee. Further Khatra Forest Range of which Chakadoba was a part had demonstrated some effort to prepare the Microplan while for other areas like Bankura (North) or Bankura (South), the fifth generation Microplan has not yet been acted upon. Further through the primary survey of the area, it was revealed that the villagers and Forest Protection Committee members had already demonstrated group binding efforts and spirit of protecting the forest so much so that since the formation of the Forest Protection Committee in 1998, the degraded forest has regenerated drastically and the practice of “jungle looting” has almost come to an end. Even during the recent forest fire the villagers have worked incessantly with the forest department to stop the fire and have not drawn any remuneration for this work. This spirit of the community seemed ripe to initiate micro planning effort and thus trigger direct action by the community. Thus Chakadoba village was taken into consideration to study the case of participatory and inclusive nature of local planning.

Below is discussed the key features of microplan, in general and how it has developed over time in West Bengal as revealed in field study.

- **The concept of Microplan**-As observed in the Microplan Manual prepared by IBRAD, Microplanning is facilitating the planning process of villagers in which local resources have been identified, confidence built, Self- Initiated Community Members groups are formed and activated, information and training is supplied and action according to villagers priorities are supported”. Microplanning thus can be used for variety of problems; in a group building context where planning is done with groups

like Self Help Groups etc to plan new activities, solve local problem. It can be used in the context of local project identification where funds are available to solve local problem or as a one off event to raise awareness and trigger direct action of the community. Thus new operational channels as micro-planning are being used to involve villagers in identifying priorities for forest protection and development. This decentralized planning technique relies on participatory diagnostic tool that enable the villagers to discuss how forest use practices changes, over time and location.

Ideally every village should have one Microplan but in reality this was not visible. Khatra forest range has 108 FPC of which 34 are under FDA¹ and 20 percent of the villages under FDA have Microplan.

- **Microplan as a policy of National Afforestation Programme**-The Microplan under examination can be termed as the “Fifth generation Microplan” which was an outcome of the National Afforestation Programme, 1988. According to the *Operational Guidelines of the Tenth Five-year Plan* published by the Ministry of Environment and Forest, the scheme titled National Afforestation Programme (NAP) has been formulated by merger of four 9th Plan centrally sponsored afforestation schemes of the Ministry of Environment & Forests, with a view to reducing multiplicity of schemes with similar objectives, ensuring uniformity in funding pattern and implementation mechanism, avoiding delays in availability of funds to the field level and institutionalising peoples participation in project formulation and its implementation. In the participatory mode, the scheme would be implemented by involving two-tier set up namely the Forest Development Agencies (FDAs) and Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs). FDA is a confederation of JFMC at that forest division. This decentralized institutional structure would allow greater participation of the community both in planning and implementation of the appropriate afforestation programmes. This would ground the people-centered approach in afforestation programmes and provide a sustainable mechanism for devolution of funds to JFMCs for afforestation and related activities.

¹ **Forest Development Authority** is a registered body and a consortium of JFMC with the Chairman of FDA being the Conservator of Forest.

Microplan is prepared for a term of 5 years. Ideally a concrete and coherent group structure is required for Microplanning. The accountability and mutual social pressure of an established social group are essential for coming to action and preparation of Microplan. It is observed that Microplanning is best combined with a tangible and binding element like savings or micro credit programme (Schaap, 2003).

In the study Microplan preparation is observed in a place where the Forest Protection Committee is already existing and who were already working as partners with the Forest Department under JFM programme.

- **Planning policies predating Microplan** - As understood from the interviews with the Conservator of Forest, Range officer and the Executive Director of IBRAD, the areas where Microplan is being produced have a Working plan. Working plan is a top down system of planning which is being prepared by the Forest department for a period of ten years. The working plan is a scientific plan as how to harvest and use the forest and its products. Micro plan is participatory and also takes into account the well-being of the forest dwellers. Additional PCCF (Principal Chief Conservator of forest –finance) monitor the FDA activities through his office in *Aranya Bhawan*. Microplan does have any precursor. The JFM started in mid 1980s and in those areas now micro plan is being implemented.
- **Difference between the top down system and micro plan** Working plan is prepared for a ten year time frame while micro plan is prepared with 2 to 5 years' time frame. But the aspects of micro plan should in keeping with the working plan aspects. There is more flexibility in planning as this is essentially a local plan but the proposals depends on the actual fund flow. A resolution from FPC can change the Microplan. Forest Development Authority (FDA) has been set up exclusively for the Microplan such that there is transfer the fund from the central government to the village level organization and it is set up to expedite this flow of fund.
- **Development of Microplan under West Bengal Forest Department**- In the state of West Bengal, microplan has been prepared over the years. However this occurred in phases, in different areas, for different reasons and used different techniques. The planning system under discussion is the fifth generation plan. In Chakadoba this was

the first microplan. However attempts of the State Forest Department towards microplan preparation is discussed below, chronologically.

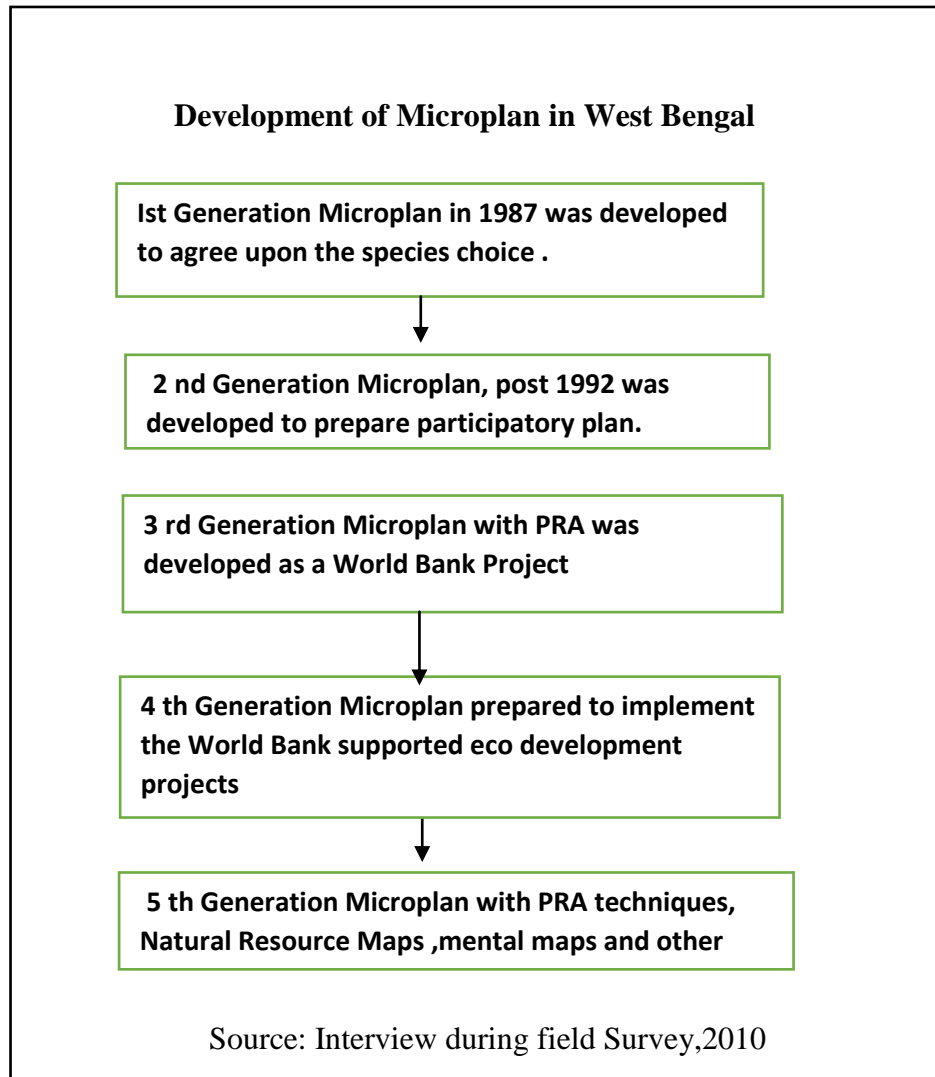
1.The history of first generation microplans begin in the 1980s. For producing the first generation Microplan, the need arose due to considerable wastage of seedlings which were raised under WBSF project. The species choice was not discussed with the potential recipient. So a workshop was held in 1987 where a format for Microplanning was developed. However only a few Microplans were developed on this basis.

2.The second generation Microplans were prepared after the issuance of government resolution on JFM for South West Bengal to prepare Microplan for Forest Protection Committees. Instructions were issued in 1991-92 to strictly adhere to participatory Microplan. The process was standardized by the in-house efforts of FD without any externally aided project. Over 100 Microplans were then prepared. However these initiatives were lost in 1993 due to administrative reasons.

3. Thus came the third generation Microplans with the intervention of World Bank and with the application of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Many FD staff of all ranks received training on PRA tools and tried to formulate Microplans. However the PRA outputs were scarcely used for Microplan preparation and the result showed poor understanding of the process.

4. The fourth generation Microplan started due to implementation of the World Bank supported eco-development project. Activity selection would be receded by narration of commitments by the villagers and FD to protect the forest from felling, grazing, fire. The villagers were required to contribute a minimum of 25 percent of the cost for each activity by labour, goods or cash. This would be paid back to the village account by taking up additional works as per the choice of the villagers.

5. Fifth generation microplan is based on the directives of Operational Guidelines of the 10 th five year plan. It is based on detailed local input and uses PRA Method.



1.4 Profile of the Study Area

This subsection deals with the profile of the study area and is expected to generate new insights on the data collected as a part of evaluation of the process.

Location

Chakadoba is a small Santhal village in Hirbandh forest Beat of Khatra Forest Range² of Bankura District with an area of 50 hectares. Chakadoba village is in the Rarh Region of

² Each Forest Division in a District is divided into Forest Range and there after forest Beat. Each Forest Beat in a Forest Range has approximately 800 -1200 Hectares. Bankura District has three forest divisions namely Bishnupur, Bankura (North) and Bankura (South). Bankura (South) in turn has 13 Forest range of which Khatra Forest range is one of them.

West Bengal and is a dry pocket of the state. Hirbandh block is in the South East corner of Bankura district and has five Gram Panchayats of which Chakadoba is one of them.

Geographical setting

Topographically, Bankura is divided into three regions- hilly region to the west, undulating tract in the middle and alluvial plain tract to the east. Chakadoba village is in the first subregion. The total area is 50 hectares which is almost covered by forest. The region is located on the eastern extension of Chotanagpur plateau and is identified as one of the Drought Prone areas of West Bengal. There are no drainage canals flowing through the area. In the neighbourhood is Mukutmanipur dam and Kasai left Bank. The nature of soil is red gravelly soil while the vegetation is tropical sal deciduous

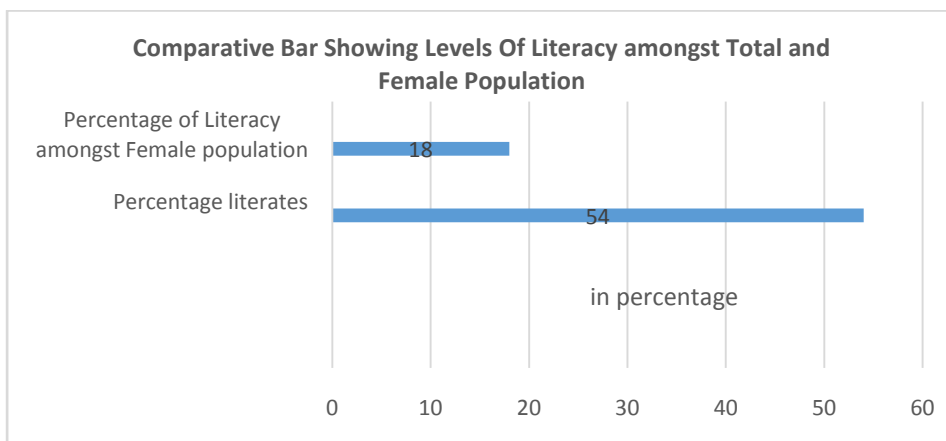
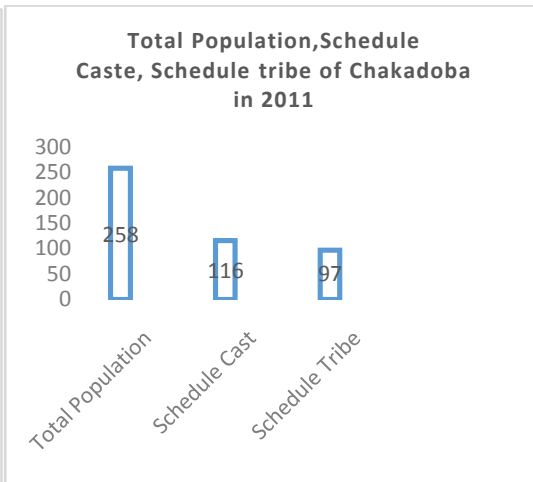
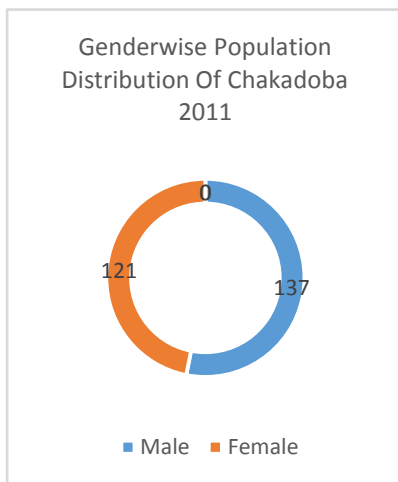
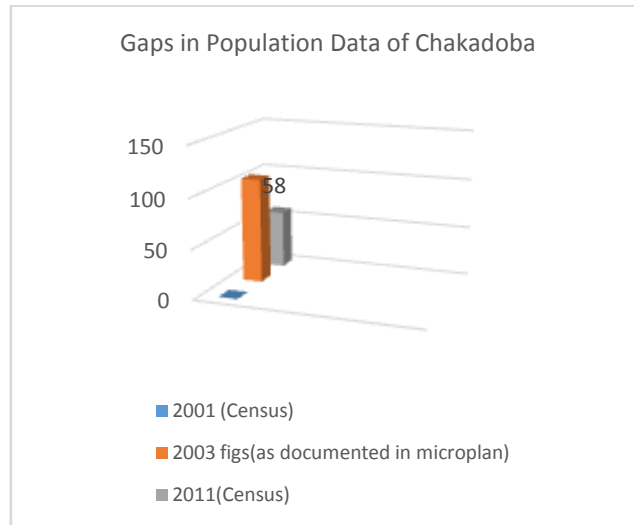
Climate

It receives an annual rainfall of 1800 mm while the maximum temperature ranges between 35 to 40 degree Celsius, the minimum rarely falls below 15 degree Celsius. However 80 percent of the rainfall is concentrated in only four months creating severe water shortage.

Demographic profile

According to 2011 census, there are 59 households with 258 people. The average literacy is 54 percent while the level of female literacy is as low as 18 percent. However doubts remain regarding the census data as in census 2001, it was published that Chakadoba was an uninhabited village. But when surveyed in 2003 to prepare the Microplan, it was found that the village had a population of 105 households of which only 20 households are from the general castes, 22 from the scheduled caste and the rest 63 are scheduled tribe i.e. Santhals. 30 percent to 40 percent of the population are children while the level of literacy is 30 percent.

Demographic and Socioeconomic profile of Chakadoba



Socio economic profile

Chakadoba village has a tribal population. According to Census 2011, the percentage of total workforce is 58 percent while the share of female is 51 percent. The primary occupation of the people is relied on gathering of forest products. Farming is also an important activity here mainly paddy cultivation. However uneven distribution of rainfall, low water retention capacity of soil, undulating land structure have made cultivation difficult here. During the lean season, the villagers collect various products from the jungle. Small scale animal husbandry is also done. During the lean season, however they collect various products from the jungle. They also keep animals like cow, goat for livelihood purpose. At the same time the dry climate is very suited to animal resource development and seed production. Besides this during lean season there is a seasonal migration of labour to the neighbouring town of Burdwan. However this tendency has reduced since the introduction of Joint Forest Management scheme which has assured some income from the forests..

Historical profile

Like history of any other Forest Fringe village, Chakadoba settlers have a history of exploitation of forest products for economic benefits. The land being undulating, lateritic and porous, results into poor subsoil moisture which becomes a potent threat to the crop. Fluctuating rainfall, with intermittent drought spell between two successive rainfalls, makes the crop, generally the Kharif crop, very vulnerable and seriously affects the yield. This made the population highly vulnerable to poverty. The tribal population also created heavy pressure on forest resources as the leaves were collected to produce sal plate, fire wood etc. However this did not eradicate poverty and most of the tribal in the village seasonally migrated elsewhere in search of better economic opportunity. Poverty led to pressure on environment degrading the forest. However it was only in 1998, with the introduction of JFM, avenues of partnership with the forest department opened up and people started using the forest in a regulated manner leading to an economic upliftment of the villagers while the forest which was extremely degraded turned out to be lush green vegetation belt. This has improved the relationship of the community with the forest department.

Infrastructural Condition:

The village suffers from severe infrastructural deficit. The village is not electrified. There are areas of where there are no roads-metalled or unmetalled. There is no supply of piped water and the region suffers during summer season as all ponds dry up. The village falls into one of

the drought prone pockets of West Bengal. Agricultural activities also suffer and collecting forest products is their only form of sustenance. There is only one primary school in the locality and no secondary schools in the village. One of the reason why the students particularly the girls drop out from secondary education is that there is no safety for girls to journey to the school at long distance. There are instances when school children are attacked by animals while they are on their way to school. During the primary field visit of this study, most of the tribals in the village migrated elsewhere in search of better economic opportunity.

Administration

Chakadoba village has a panchayat and is one of the five gram panchayats under Hirbunth block of Bankura district. However an interview with the B.D.O revealed that the panchayat over there is a ‘non-functioning entity’ and severe’ Maoist activism’ over there has led to the collapse of the lowest tier. In an interview with the B.D.O, it was found that Chakadoba serves as a corridor from Purulia district for the Maoist to move in and out. The Panchayat has become non functional with no meetings, discussion and other activities. There are no Gram Sansad planning activities or its implementation making the deprivation worsen.

In such a situation where there is an absentee local government, the forest department has become closer to the community as through the introduction of an assured wage through the JFM scheme. The forest department works in close contact with the people through Forest Protection Committee and in recent times through introducing microplan.

The JFMC executive committee of six people is formed, two of whom are representatives from the village panchayat. The forest department representative holds the position of Member Secretary.

Summarised Features of Chakadoba

Case site	Geographic region	Problem of the area	Type of economy	Name of the plan	Planning Features
Chakadoba, Bankura	Rarh region	Drought prone area with a history of forest	Mixed-Agriculture and Forestry	Microplan under Joint Forest	Authority-State Forest Department No external

		degradation which is regenerated since 1998		Mangeme nt	Funding
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1.5 Findings of the Study

This section presents the thematic categories of data put together as a result of interview and Focus group discussion. Throughout the process of data analysis the variables (responses, statement, expressed perception and thoughts) are documented for frequency determination. Thus the subsection deals with the broad findings and results of the study which have been put together after the data was collected from field.

1.5.1 Interview, Focus Group Discussion in Chakadoba

This sub section deals with the results of in-depth semi structured interview, structured interview and Focus Group Discussion which was conducted on the respondents of the study to capture the participatory exercise during the Microplan preparation at Chakadoba village of Bankura District.

Themes have generated on the basis of the variable (responses, observation, perception), documented and frequency has been determined. The data collected from the field would focus on two things,

- Data reduction-It is done to organize the data and sharpen the focus of analysis
- Data display-once the data is reduced it would be organized and displayed in a way that would allow to follow the pattern and look at the research in a different way.

1.5.1.1 Attendance level

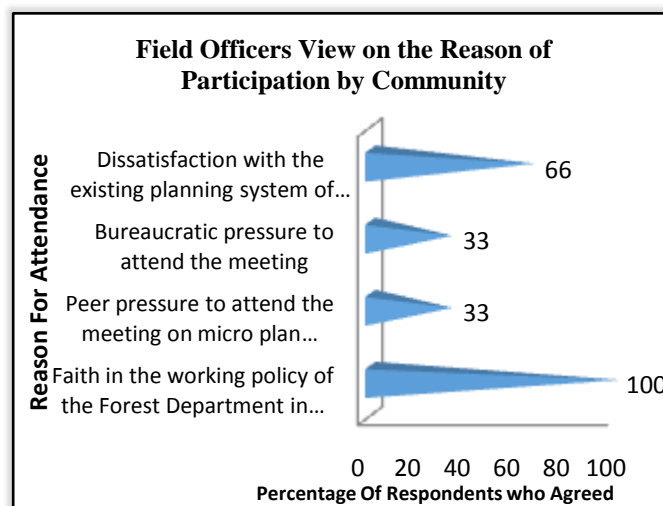
Attendance level is an important criterion of participation. During the first orientation meeting around 70 percent of the village inhabitants attended the meeting. They were also the members of Forest Protection Committee under JFM programme.

1.5.1.2 People's Participation in the Planning

The study refers to participation in planning in terms of the attendance level in the first workshop and then subsequent ones, participation in Participatory Rural Appraisal programme like PRA preparing Resource map, mental maps, Venn diagram of local resources, identify needs and planning proposal in the meeting and so on. Here the discrepancy in findings of forest dept. and community are noted.

- **Forest Department –Field Officers' perspective**

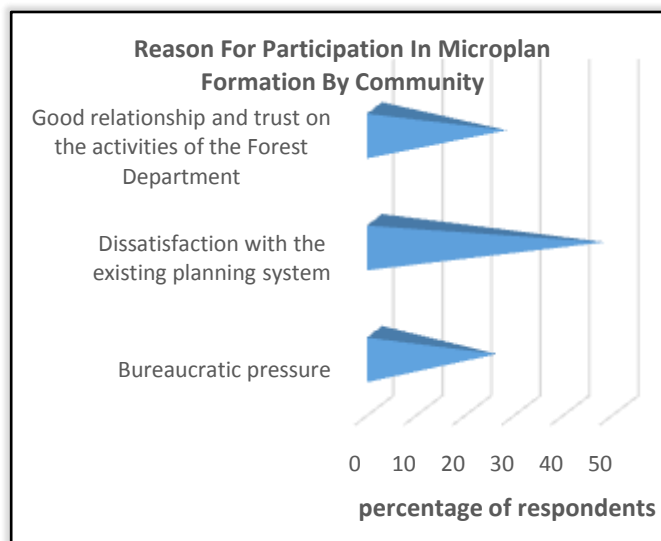
Here by forest department we mean the field officers. According to the Field officers the participation was high due to the following reasons. The possible reasons were placed before them and the frequency of the statement 'I agree'' was recorded against each reason stated.



- **Community's perspective**

Here by stakeholders we mean the community. According to community members participation was high.

There were various reasons to be involved in the plan. The community had their version of being involved in the Microplan activity under the forest department.



In this Forest Development Authority based Microplan exercise, the fund came from central government and the plan of action was conceived by the community but the bureaucrats from the forest department was present in all the Forest Protection Committee Meetings where the plan was drawn. Further the Director of IBRAD, a NGO who prepared the Microplan manual and organized training for the Forest Department officials pointed out that the Beat Officer himself is the Member Secretary of the JFMC. In that case are the Community members so powerful as not to take into account the presence of these officers and independently chart their own plan for the development of the village The answer is no. There definitely existed some bureaucratic influence but this was not opposed by the villagers as it meant some development in their standard of living which was so far neglected by the government.

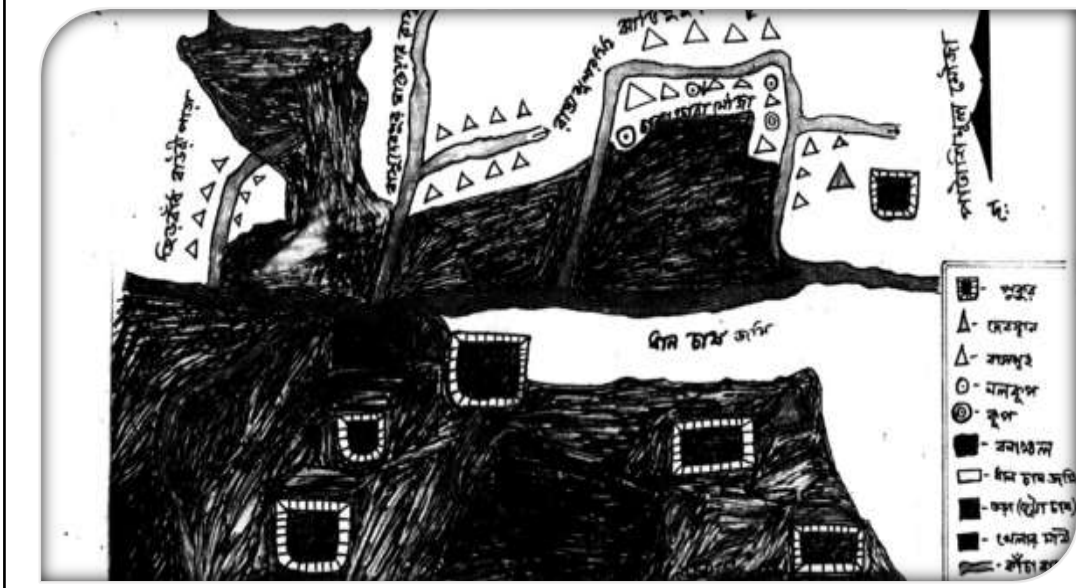
Samples of PRA activities of Microplan, Chakadoba

(1. Economic Map 2. Mental Map)

1.

क्र.सं.	संस्थांचे नाव	संस्थांचे प्रकार	विवरण	संस्थांचे कार्य	संस्थांचे स्थान
१	अनुसूचित	१००० १०००	१००००००० १०००००००	१०० १००	७० टोल
२	ग्राम, अन्निका, आयु, अन्निका	१०००००० १०००००००	१००० १०००	१०० १००	ग्राम-१० टोल अन्निका-२० टोल आयु-२० टोल
६	दीव	१००००००० १०००००००	१००००००० १०००००००	१०० १००	२० टोल
८	दुधो, आयु, अन्निका, अन्निका	१०००० १००००	१०० १००	१०० १००	१० टोल

2.



1.5.1.3 Role of Stake holders

Ideally for the preparation of Microplan, all General Body Members of JFMC, Community groups like SHG, Panchayat members, Range officers, Beat Officers should have been present at least at the introductory meeting. For this area of study, it was found out after discussion with the community members that almost every one was required to be present

attended it though 70 percent of the JFMC members attended it. However the involvement of Panchayat in this exercise was not present.

People share a very good rapport with the forest department. But Panchayat samity's presence was hardly perceived. Forest department through its JFM practice has assured extra income for the local people. Further creation of assets under Microplan has also improved the quality of living which has improved the relationship further.

Community's Perspective on the Role of Stakeholders in Preparing the Plan

Institutions	Role
Forest Department	Active
Members of JFM	Active
Self Help Group Members	Passive
Panchayat	Non functional

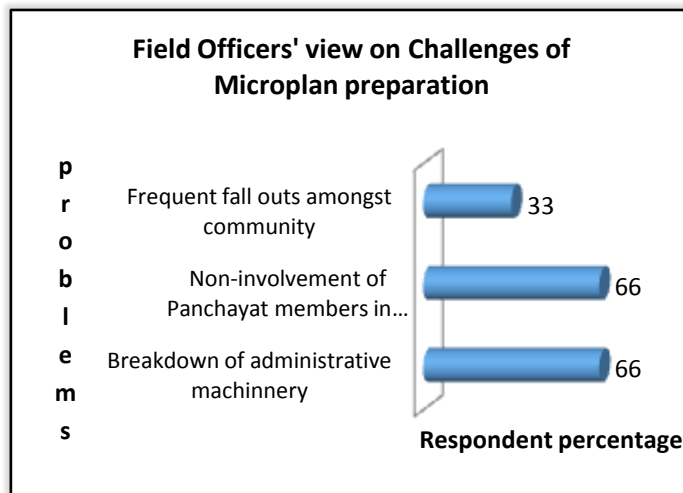
Source: Field Survey, 2010

1.5.1.4 Challenges of Microplan Preparation

A discrepancy in the view of the forest department and community members are noted. There were several problems of Microplan preparation, it being initiated for the first time.

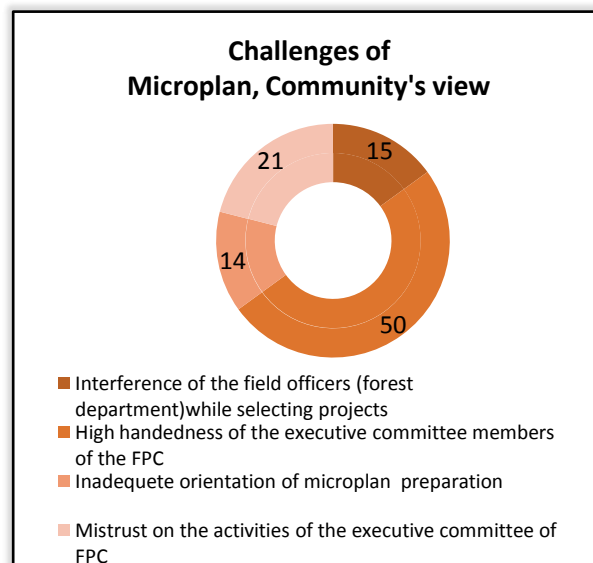
Forest Department's Perspective

The main challenges of Forest Department's perspective are as follows. In microplan preparation, Panchayat members could have played a special role by monitoring the group activities, mediate in case of conflict or form a communication link between the project and the group. This role however was played here by the Forest Department particularly the Range and the Beat Officer who addressed the problems that cannot be solved at the local level. In an interview with the DFO, it was found out that this was one of the so called Maoist hit area and administrative machinery at the local government level has virtually collapsed. But as forest department worked in close association with the villagers their influence on the villagers were more than that of the panchayat members.



Community's Perspective

According to the community, the following are the main challenges to micro plan preparation

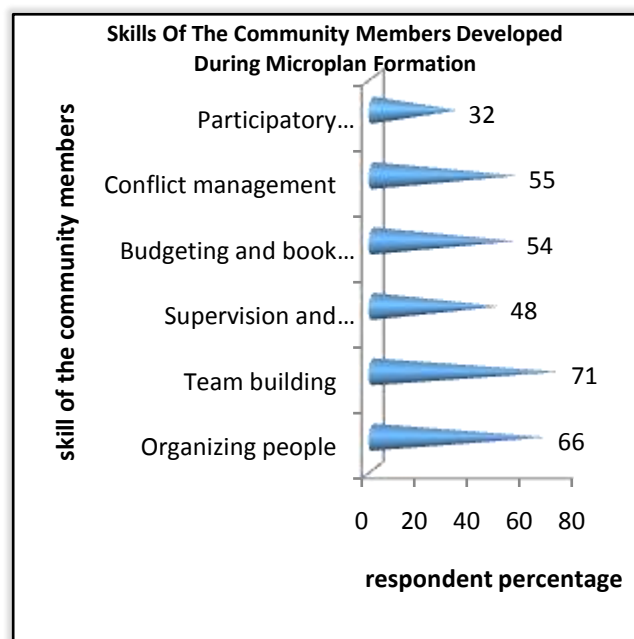


Most of the villagers attended the introductory meeting and the subsequent consultation. However for most, as reported by the villagers, the presence was ceremonial. They insisted that tokenism in participation has to be removed. Only executive body members of the Forest Protection Committee which was constituted by the members of the village or forest department officials decided the priorities for local development. Further there were mistrust among the villagers on the working of the Executive committee of FPC whose accounts,

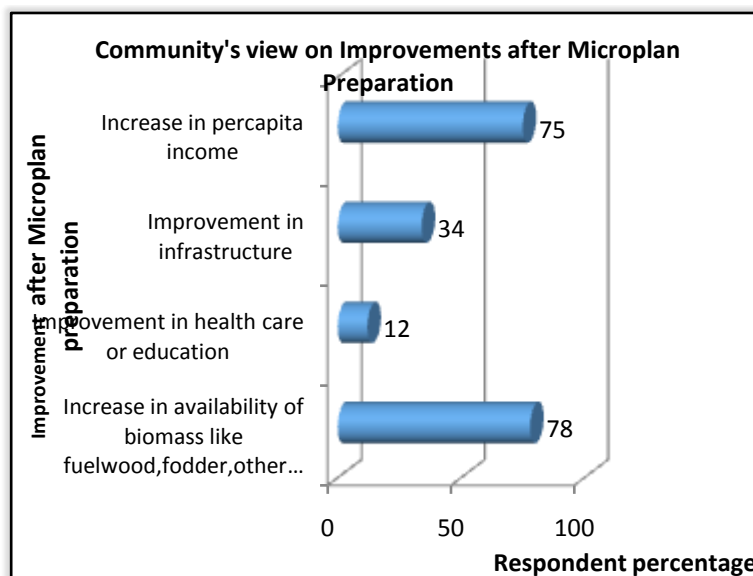
earning from forest products were non transparent. Though all the villagers are general body members of the FPC but its control rests with a few Executive body members and regarding financial accounting, there is no transparency

1.5.1.5 Impact of Participation

An important impact on being a part of the participatory project had been development of some of the skills of the community. They are voted by the community as follow



The community had also benefitted due to Microplan preparation. The improvement in the following since the implementation of the Microplan have been voted by the community as follows.



The Microplanning exercise allowed the community to get together as group to think collectively for the development of the village. Chakadoba was almost inaccessible by metalled road, had no piped water supply, no deep tubewell, irrigation canal, electricity, school, health service. Today with the fund allocated for the development activity documented in the Microplan they have a pumpset for the agricultural field, the bund has been renovated, irrigation canal has been constructed ,1 km unmetalled road has come into existence and a community centre which is their meeting place has been constructed. A very striking feature about the Microplan exercise at Chakadoba is that all the assets created after the Microplan exercise is maintained the JFMC. This maintenance criteria is a diagnostic feature of the level of the good citizenship.

1.6 Factors Affecting Microplan Preparation

There are several factors which have enhanced or constrained participation .On the basis of field survey, the factors are listed below

Positive and Negative Factors Affecting Participation, Chakadoba

Positive factors	Negative factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good relationship with the forest department who 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of effective administration.

<p>have ensured secured income under JFM scheme,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller scale of operation of plan • Use of PRA technique ensuring greater involvement of the community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difference amongst the volunteers or Forest Development Authority (FDA) and the community
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1.7 Synthesis and Analysis of the Main Findings from the Field.

The data from the authority, field officers and community are tabulated below to highlight the similarities and discrepancies of the responses obtained. It is possible to look at the qualitative data from two directions

Analysis within the categories of data- The first direction looks at the data generated by the whole unit ie authority or field officers or community. The data is analysed in terms of the multiple perspectives of each category of respondent.

Comparative Analysis- A comparative analyses look at the participant in relation to each other within each category and enable the researcher to compare the qualitative data generated within a fixed setting.

Summarized Field Output, Chakadoba

Planning Issue	Responses of the Authority	Responses of the Field Officers	Responses of the Community
Reason for participation	Government Directive	Government Directive	Dissatisfaction with the panchayat system; wanted an improvement in physical and social infrastructure Good relationship

			with the forest department as its JFM policy seeks them assured income.
Features of the plan	Public participation, Flexibility	Smaller time frame to address immediate need, extensive public participation	Gave an opportunity to be heard, gave importance to women; flexible; wide local inputs through resource map, social maps
Important role player in plan Preparation	Field officers	Executive committee of FPC	Field officers
Challenges of plan preparation	Breakdown of administrative machinery; no help from Panchayat	Absence of data; no help from Panchayat	Inadequate sensitization of people; high handedness of the executive members of FPC, non transparent accounting by FPC.
Impact of the plan	Relationship improved between the FD and people, data was now available for next planning cycle	Availability of better data base, Improved relationship between community and FD	Better conflict management, better team building, greater income

Source: Field Survey

6.8 Addressing Greater questions: Outcomes and Impact of Micro Planning Exercise

The impact of participation is a vital question of this research. This is addressed in this subsection.

1. Stakeholders' awareness level about Chakadoba has increased- As per the findings of the study, preparation of Microplan has definitely put the community of Chakadoba on a better footing. They have unanimously agreed that it has been able to sharpen their way of thinking but both the authorities and community feel that much more is to be achieved.

2. Community's expectation from the microplan and the Forest Department has increased- Microplanning exercises have raised the expectation of the community and during the Focus Group discussion, they prioritized their problems through discussion. They used their judgement to point out a need based system of planning like that of Microplanning. The participation has been accepted as a welcome approach and enhanced their skill of organized thinking. The present situation analysis brings the stakeholders on the crossroads to question which issue is to be addressed first so that those who are at margins of this rural society can be embraced into the planning process. Just as the confidence of the community on their own skills increased, their demand for translating the proposals to action also strengthened.

3. Strengthened ties between Forest department and the community- From introducing the plan to the community, scheduling meeting, preparation of Natural Resource Map, transect walk encouraged wide local input and constant collaborations between forest officers and community. This has strengthened their bonding. Later on funding the projects, identified in microplan and implementing them have strengthened the JFM structure there. Due to absentee local government, forest department was recognized by the community as their only hope and strengthened the Joint Forest Management structure there.

4. Poor record keeping and documentation of Microplan raises doubt on the quality of proposals and implementation – While content analyzing the Microplan, one can ascertain that it is a collection of handwritten tabulated records of the existing conditions and the demands for future development of the area. However there are no attendance list, attached meeting or attested copies of the community of the public validation report. This puts us on the question on the democratic approach of the plan-if it was prepared taking into consideration the participation of the entire community or a select few?

In an interview with the Director of IBRAD, it was found out that Forest Department of the State Government unlike the Tripura Forest Department has not made any effort to engage professionals to prepare a manual for Microplan. Further the absence of facilitators in preparing it has made the management poor. A bureaucrat cannot be a facilitator. The

bureaucrat which in this case is the Range Officer is the facilitator. Naturally the forest department official being a symbol of power and authority has restricted the community to draft their plan independently. Further the officer had no hands on training to undertake Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercise. It is believed that when a professional is being trained in PRA a lot of unlearning has to take place. It is believed in the absence of properly trained professional to undertake PRA, the desired result can never be achieved.

As a part of the study, other microplans were analysed to compare the quality of Chakadoba Microplan. Microplan documents prepared by the forest dwelling communities in various Indian states and can be cited as an example of a particular Microplan. The Microplan under study was Segapally village in the Bangalore Rural District in Karnataka. This was prepared by villagers with the assistance of a particular NGO called IBRAD. This was an externally funded project of the Japan Bank of International cooperation and implemented by the Karnataka Forest Department. This Microplanning project seemed a marked contrast to the Chakadoba project which did not engage any facilitator for the Microplanning exercise and was funded by the Central government through the Forest Development Authority. The village is small with only 40 households. In Segapally, during the process of Microplan preparation after an initial introductory meeting and village mapping, discussion was held about the objective of Microplan and baseline information was collected. Following this, the Self-Initiated Community Organizers (SICO) were identified from among the villagers who came forward to initiate some village development activity. Further other exercises like meeting with land less people, identifying interaction with other government department etc. were drawn, wealth ranking were done. All this exercises or even creation of SICO were absent in case of Microplan preparation activity of Chakadoba. In Segapally, there were steps taken to strengthen the village Forest Protection Committee (FPC). The Microplan further clearly laid down the mutual obligation of the Village Forest Committee (VFC) members and Forest Department and monitoring mechanism. Further all the projects were put under technical, environmental and economic feasibility analysis to assure sure success. All these activities were not followed at the Chakadoba Microplan exercise. Further creation of SICO who in Segapally came forward to patrol the forest, clean and construct road etc were not created in Chakadoba. Does that mean that external funded project or involvement of facilitators assure better result in terms of quality of plan? The answer is yes. The presence of facilitators acted to disengage the power relation in Segapally. Further with the number of

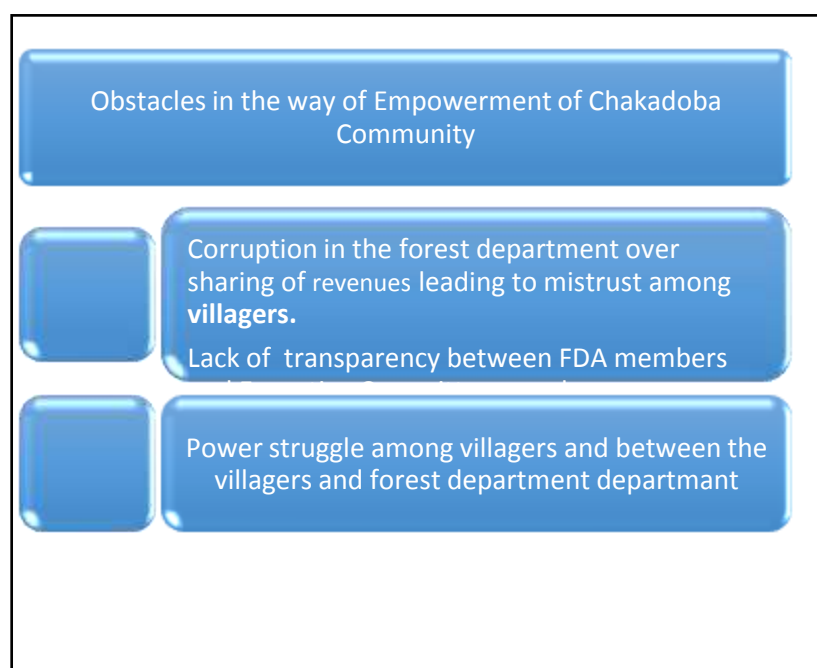
meetings being more it shows greater exchange of dialogues between participants and facilitator. The Microplan in Chakadoba took four to five days of preparation. This is too short a time for preparing of plan of such importance. Exercises such as identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the JFMC as done in Segapally could have enriched the Microplan of Chakadoba.

Did Micro Planning Create Empowerment?

If the community achieves empowerment, it may be counted upon as the ultimate indicator of good participation. This section seeks to find an answer to this question of empowerment.

In this study, to measure the success of the Microplan exercise under JFM operation qualitatively, a number of criterions have been selected. Though there are different definitions but there seem to be a general consensus about the essential dimensions of empowerment and good governance like participation of individual citizens, transparency of information sharing, efficiency of local authority in achieving their pro poor development agenda, equity or impartial treatment by the local authority and gender sensitiveness

The study revealed that if the potential of this community is to be a truly used it has to be empowered. But there are few obstacles to it which is illustrated below-



But what seems to underlie the exercise is the question of Empowerment. Has the whole Microplan exercise using PRA create empowerment? This is one of the most critical question of the study. Leave aside empowerment if one looks at the wider goals of political literacy or citizenship building, the answer is not definite. Empowerment refers to the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable those institutions that affect their lives. However aspirations of return from the JFM activity have been the main driving force in dominating the behaviour of the community more than mere emotional attachments to the forest alone. In such a context, it is difficult to assess the motivational level of the community to undertake a participatory planning exercise which will create a sense of ownership of the assets and lead to empowerment. Practioners feel that local people gain confidence in their own knowledge and articulate that knowledge during the PRA exercise. This Microplan uses PRA technique. But does an increase in knowledge and confidence by local people deserve the label of empowerment? The answer is no. Though ideologically it can lead to empowerment but even if different community members share the same interest but the ‘consensus’ that comes out of PRA can reflect the interest of more powerful people in the community. This is true for the case of Chakadoba and there is also a fear that in the absence of proper PRA, there may be an effect of disempowering the more marginalized. In general, at the national level, the pace of empowerment through JFM be it women or marginalized group is dependent on personal efforts of the individual either from the Forest Department or NGO. Empowerment needs to be institutionalized in the JFM itself. Until it is strengthened and institutionalized within the JFM committee itself, the pace of empowerment is bound to be slow. Further at present JFM committees are set up as per State Government Order. Need was felt to provide a JFM a legal back up so that these could be strengthened at the Grass root level. Indian states like Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal have framed rules of governing establishment and management of JFM committee under Indian Forest Act, 1927.³ Microplan initiative is definitely a step towards it but unless the grass root institutional structure as well as the authoritative structure is modified, the actual potential of such planning cannot be achieved.

³ Information derived from the proceedings of the National Consultative Workshop on JFM held in July 2005 in Delhi

With empowerment comes the question of existence of power relation. Chakadoba FPC members are entitled 25 percent of the proceeds of the sale of the timber products. But the maintenance of the FPC account is not a transparent affair. In the Focus Group discussion it was revealed that this FPC is controlled by a few influential people who are close to the Forest Department officials. Another interesting feature was when conducted a discussion as a part of this study between the forest department officers and the villagers, the officers sat on the chair while *madur or mat* was rolled for the villagers while the Executive body members of the JFMC sat on a Khatiya or cot. This was a remarkable example of the existing hierarchy of power and for the true participation to occur, immediate change and reversal in role, relationship and power has to take place. Further the involvement of women is also negligible in the affairs of the FPC. It is a male dominated committee. One Self Help Group has already been formed but it is not yet functional. During the Focus Group Discussions too, the women folk sat at one corner and never commented spontaneously. Many participatory projects rest on the assumption that simply identifying different stakeholders and getting them around the table will reach a consensus that is 'fair' to all. Such an assumption only holds if all actors are deemed to have equal bargaining power (which they do not). In its absence the correct procedure is to change the behaviour and attitude of those who are used to dominating and give chance to the marginalized and disempowered to voice their opinion. Thus participants face each other from unequal power positions be it material condition, class distinction or knowledge and information. This to a certain extent has taken place in Chakadoba. While preparing the Microplan, the forest department partially changed their authoritative attitude and came in contact with the community who had placed their demand. May be not all the demands were translated into action but the whole exercise has elevated the status of the villagers to become negotiators of their demands. This plan gave them increased bargaining power though as a whole power geometry exists within the community in terms of wealth, education and so on. Facilitating measures may be important in negotiations but they are not enough to grant the marginalized the bargaining power required to overcome the structural dominance enjoyed by the more powerful group. Participation requires a process of social transformation and structural change to address the inequalities which are produced. Education, provision of better services and amenities and thus a better quality of life can address inequalities

A critique of PRA put forward the argument that any participatory exercise begins by stigmatizing local community as having a ‘problem’ as opposed to seeing them as having endowed with positive. These strong forces may push people and their communities as accepting to be weak and power geometry gets reshaped as the marginalized are even pushed to margins. This too has happened in Chakadoba. One would here like to contest the term the ‘beneficiary’ which is often used by the authority which in this case is the forest department as a substitute for the word community. This was a disempowering strategy developing a dependency of these beneficiaries before the authority and hinders the tapping of the potential of the community of participation. A further imposed form of participation which in this case is the PRA also makes the role of facilitator very important. The output of the plan is more a reflection of the commitment level or efficiency of the facilitator which in this case are the officers of forest department. Consequently the facilitator settled working with those who are most receptive to this PRA Technique and not reach to the most excluded creating a local development elite.

It is also to be noted that no NGO was engaged to undertake the planning exercise. However NGOs and others could have taken a more committed approach to participatory projects and could press the government to do likewise.

Participation Status: Chakadoba, Bankura (As Perceived through FGD)

Criteria	Status at Chakadoba (High –Above 70 percent Medium-30-70 percent Poor– Less than 30 percent)	Remarks
Participation of	High	70 percent of the community members

Citizens		attended
Transparency of Information Sharing	Medium	Though citizens are aware of the activity of FPC but inadequate sharing of the financial information particularly the sale of NTFP .
Efficiency of local authority towards pro poor agenda	Poor	Panchayat System is non existent.
Gender Sensitiveness	Poor	Most of the women have not completed primary education ⁴ .The average family size is 4. In FGD the women were pointed to be the greatest ‘looters ‘ of forest products

Source: Focus Group Discussion at Chakadoba January,2009

Putting the participatory situation of Microplan preparation against this criterion, almost all the criterion has been achieved on the moderate level except accountability and gender sensitiveness where much has to be done about. The level of gender sensitiveness is poor and womens’ participation either in operation of JFM programme or in Microplan exercise has been very poor.

Conclusion

This being the first Microplan in Chakadoba, there are lot of doubts on its participatory nature but it definitely has opened way for community empowerment. Due to this exercise, the village has become more accessible, the standard of living has increased and through even attending meeting, the awareness level of the villagers has increased. All the assets created under Microplan is maintained by the FPC. The FGD participants agreed that it has increased their sense of belonging towards this asset, the village. The faith once lost of being neglected by government has been restored and they have come forward to protect the forest. They have realized that it is the forest which sustains them and if they work as collaborators, their

⁴ Information derived from Focus Group Discussion

benefit will be doubled. The JFM practise has given them an assured income and the out migration tendencies to the closest town has fallen drastically. They look at the JFM Practice as boon and their motivation towards preparing the next Microplan has jumped manifold as they have seen the result. In general they have become a community towards empowerment. Chakadoba residents, while preparing the resource map or the mental map have learnt about their place. Several incidents of voluntary labour like providing free labour for developmental work or diving together to save their forest during forest fire speaks very high of their community, but what cannot escape ones notice is a bunch of conflicting individuals struggling to take part in a collective decision making process. While some are close associates of the forest department official, others are a handful few who are highly educated as per their village standard; while some are rich landed ones who are providing water from their private tubewell to the villagers while others have exposure to city life. Without the presence of any authorised legal body it is difficult to answer the question of equity. In this case one feels the need of formal empowerment it is difficult to dive into direct political action to demand change and improvement. The potential of this community is vanished unless the tension between the state, the dominant groups and those who believe are excluded is resolved.