

Managing the Commons

Case of Papsara Tree Growers' Co-operative Society



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Background

Papsara village is situated in the Athamlilik tahasil of Angul district. With 400 households, the village has a population of about 3500. This is a heterogeneous village consisting of ten different caste groups residing in 12 hamlets, which are dispersed and also divided on caste lines. The economy of the village is mainly dependent on rainfed agriculture. Paddy being the main kharif crop, pulses, grams and groundnut are also grown in the Rabi season. Over the last one decade groundnut has become a major cash crop in the village. Tendu leaf collection and Bidi (local cigar made of tendu leaf) rolling are secondary sources of income for most of the families. About 300 families are involved in bidi rolling activities.

The forests of Papsara have been a major contributor to the economy of people here as it acts as a secondary source of food and income for them upto a period of five months a year. The benefits from the forest include Non Timber Forest Produces (NTFP) like forest fruits, tubers, mushrooms, honey, resin, herbs and medicines etc. With rapid denudation of forest over the years these products were found in smaller quantities both in the revenue as well as reserved forests nearby. This had led to people travelling long distances for collection of fuel wood, timber for household use and agricultural implements. On an average they had to spend about 6-8 hours a day for bringing one head load of fuel wood. Even now they need to buy timber from the local market for use. Many also prefer to steal timber from the reserved forests. In case they get caught the foresters are bribed either in cash or grains.

History of degradation

The village has a recent history of forest degradation. Once situated amidst the thickets of the forests with all kinds of trees, it turned into barren patches of exposed rocks in the seventies and early eighties. Most of these lands were brought under cultivation owing to the pressure of population. High pressure on the common lands and absence of proper management resulted in an open access regime further adding to the pace of degradation.

Organisation of the TGCS

In this backdrop the villagers were organised into a Tree Growers' Cooperative Society in the year 1987 to revegetate the available revenue wasteland to meet some of their forestry requirements and to establish an efficient governance

mechanism to manage such resources. The society was registered on 28.03.1988 initially with 44 members.

As the activities of the TGCS started to take roots in the village, the members took an active role in developing the resource taking vital decisions from vacating the encroachers or resolving conflicts at an appropriate time involving all villagers (members or non-members) in this common cause. There is a continued effort towards 100% membership, which has resulted in the rise of membership to 291 today.

In order to make the society representative in nature emphasis was put on encouraging women to become members in the society. In this context, the initiative of the TGCS in organising regular women meetings in the village provided an opportunity for the women to participate in the larger societal processes.

Another important aspect pertaining to membership relates to the inclusion of the poorer section, especially the daily wage earners. Such groups, though willing, could not become members due to lack of money to contribute towards membership fee. The management committee, therefore, decided to provide them wage labour during the TGCS operations on preferential basis so that they could pay their share capital and the membership fees from their wages. A few who did not become members then are now willing to participate in the institution as the resource has grown abundantly in the last 15 years and now ready to be selectively used. On this issue, the TGCS has decided to charge an additional sum, to be decided by the institution, as membership fees for these late members.

Decision making Process

The general body of the TGCS takes almost all the important decisions and the management committee executes the TGCS work and monitors the financial as well as the protection aspects of the society. In general body meetings the presence of majority of the general members and in the management committee meetings the presence of majority of the committee members including women is emphasized. The decisions taken by the society in 1992 and 1993 to serve a notice seeking explanation from the committee members failing to attend the meeting and imposition sanctions in case of absence without adequate reasons were important moves to ensure participation of members in the meetings. Though the cooperative act suggests for holding the management committee meetings once in a month and the general body meeting once in a year, it is observed that both the management committee and the general body meets quite frequently based on the need. Generally, such frequent meetings are held in order to discuss important issues concerning the TGCS management including conflict resolution.

Papsara TGCS has witnessed a series of conflicts right from its initiation till today. The communities through their own innovative approaches have resolved a number of conflicts. Some cases are resolved on a day to day basis either by the managing committee or by the general body. Based on the resolutions made over a period of time, the trespassers are punished and such regular resolutions have come to be accepted as rules in the management of the forest. The revenue department, forest department and police officials have also been supporting the system in cases of conflicts. Following are some of such incidents which have taken place at different period of time.

Cases of Conflict

1. On the 7th September 1996, one of the members Mr. Narahari Rana was found grazing his cattle and felling trees in the TGCS plot negating the society's decision. With the imposition of fine on him by the general body, he refused to pay and challenged the authority to punish him. The villagers then lodged an F.I.R. at the local police station. The offender bribed the policemen to his advantage. The committee members were accused of falsely alleging him in the case due to earlier conflicts by the police and were retained at the Police station till late in the night. Disturbed by the events they approached the Spearhead Team for help. The case was resolved after the police were furnished the details regarding the rights of the members on the resources created. The forest officials however have done the field verification and registered a case for which the decision is yet to be taken.

2. The Pradhan sahi and the people from the other castes are in the constant conflict on account of transfer power & authority in the village from the Pradhan Sahi people to others. In the year 2000 it took an ugly turn when the Pradhan sahi rejected the existing village management and the village divided into two groups. Even the traditional village festival Chandan Yatra was organised by the Pradhan sahi people only. This too had an impact over the TGCS.

Management and Leadership in the TGCS

As far as the leadership is concerned, over the years, the TGCS has gone through several tests of time. At different stages of their functioning, the members have selected appropriate leaders on the basis of the envisaged role which is most important for that particular period of time. During the initial stages of organizing the responsibilities of the society was left to an experienced old person in the village who was capable and respected by all in the village. However, the responsibility was transferred to a youth leader once the plantation and land development activities began with the idea that the younger generation could take the strain of physical labour and manage field activities in a more effective manner. But, the results of such changes in leadership did to yield the desired result as the autocratic functioning of the youth leaders invited much criticism.

Once the physical work was complete there was another change in leadership which reinstated the earlier old person as chairman of the society in 1993. This change was, to some extent, influenced by the emerging issues in the management of resources. He remained the chairman till his death on 21.05.1996. The leadership came back to the previous youth leader due to his long association with the project.

Personal ego of various individuals at times is creating problem in the village. Mr. Aditya Behera's leadership, who is the youth leader, has also been questioned time and again by some members though he has been performing his duty efficiently. In the year 1997 a section of people opposed him but the women of the village came out in support of Mr. Behera and nullified the vindictive intention of the other groups. Later on once again his leadership was questioned in the year 2000 on account of some financial and accounting irregularities as he was keeping the books of accounts with him. This was resolved in the general body meeting with the handing over of financial responsibilities to another person. Nevertheless, all conflicts relating to leadership have successfully been resolved in the village.

Development of the resource

Prior to the initiation of work, the land was barren, encroached and was being used for cultivation of red gram, horse gram, sesame etc. In this one decade, the same land has grown into a thick forest. In the initial years, the bushes were cleared and they were burnt before taking up new plantations. The species chosen were on the basis of their commercial value and marketability. Block plantations were undertaken so that better silvicultural operations could be followed. Immediately after the TGCS took possession over the plot the whole plot was brought under protection and plantation was done in phases. After protection, profuse natural regeneration from the existing rootstocks was observed. Seeing this the villagers opposed the earlier practice of clearing bushes and burning to take up plantation.

A letter written by the TGCS to TGCP, Angul in this regard, reads,

" According to our earlier plan we need to go for bush clearing and pitting in the remaining areas for the purpose of plantations. Only 7500 pits could be dug. The only remaining area is Jhar Rugdi which has plenty of naturally regenerated trees, if we need to clear these trees, it would be a great loss to us. So, the TGCP staff are requested to look into the matter."

-Translated from a letter to TGCP in May'91

The letter establishes the importance of the endemic species to the local people. This was a good learning for the team which helped us to change our approach from block plantations to enrichment plantations and natural regeneration. As a

result, the valuable endemic species were left untouched and only enrichment plantations were taken up during 1991 & 1992.

Dealing with encroachments

Before the start of TGCS activities the area was encroached by 12 people of the village. They had sown the dry land crops even after plantation permission was issued and land demarcated in favour of the TGCS. In June'1989, the TGCS members decided to lodge a complaint in the police station against the encroachers but later the issue was resolved in the village meeting. As per the decision of the village the encroachers vacated the land and subsequently enrolled themselves as members of the TGCS. Such problems kept occurring at various points of time which the villagers had been able to resolve through their own initiatives.

Arrangements for forest protection

Initially, the TGCS was supported for protection of the plot through a watchperson. Later on, when the watchperson support was stopped, the TGCS decided to go for *thengapali* (rotational patrolling or a system stick rotation for voluntary patrolling) thus implying sharing the protection responsibility by each household in the village. This system worked for few months, but afterwards it broke down due to irregularities in protection by few members belonging to the well off group which also prompted others to stop going on rotational patrolling. Again the TGCS resorted for employing a regular paid watcher. It was decided that like the barber or washerperson, the watchperson too would be paid on a yearly basis. Each family would pay the watchperson either Rs.12 or 12 mana of paddy. (1 Mana is 375 grams approx.). This system is still prevalent in the village.

With these persistent efforts, the barren hillocks of 80's have turned into a dense mixed miscellaneous forest with a good diversity of species. 38 tree species have been identified in the TGCS plot of Papsara.

Development of appropriation and distribution system

As a result of continuous protection the forest has attained a stage where the community can use it now. The whole resource in the village has been divided into five blocks, each of which would be used for extraction in a cycle and coming back to the first plot/block again after five years. For the first time in the month of February 1996, a period of 15 days was allowed for extraction of small timber and fuel wood from *Mohanty rugdi* (1st plot). The extraction carried on in a cyclical manner henceforth. The village committee started the following modalities for extraction:

- The people in need of small timber and fuel wood would give a requisition to the forest committee indicating the amount and size of timber they need.

Each person however would not get more than 3 cartloads of fuel wood in a year.

- The committee then issues a token on payment of the price (price is fixed by the general body from time to time as per the size of the wood), on getting the token from the committee the person can collect fuelwood / timber within the specified time frame.
- The watchperson sees the token and shows them the trees that are to be cut. Valuable trees / shoots are prohibited from cutting. In case of any extra felling or felling of valuable trees the matter is immediately brought to the notice of the village / forest committee. The members of TGCS committee also inspect the operations from time to time.
- After extraction the area would be sealed from biotic interference in order to facilitate regeneration. It was decided that in the gaps seeding would be done and the boundaries would be marked with chalk and bamboo would be planted along the boundaries. However, this has not been taken up yet.

The village also has the provision for providing timber and fuel wood at the time of immediate need and casualties. In case of marriage fuelwood is given freely anytime during the year on requests. In case of casualties like deaths or burning of houses, small timber and fuelwood are supplied free of cost. Since 1996 this practice has been continuing in the TGCS.

Benefits during fire incidents in the village

In one such incident on 25th march 1996, a major fire completely destroyed 35 huts in the village. The villagers of Papsara as well as people from the surrounding villages offered help to the affected houses in way of contributing rice, pulses and money. A common kitchen was opened in the village for supplying food to the victims. The TGCS took a decision to provide 20 poles and bamboo to each household whose houses were destroyed. Similarly in the 2000, the TGCS provided poles and fencing material to the people affected by fire.

The management committee makes an assessment every year for extraction of forest produce after consideration of the available resources and presenting it before the general body. The general body fixes the rates & maximum limit of extraction per household according and the TGCS adheres to the decision. Earlier in October 1996, they harvested about 9 tones of eucalyptus from the TGCS plot which was sold to the Orient Paper Mills, Brajrjnagar.

Valuation of ecosystem services and functions from Secure Commons- findings from Papsara-

A study on 'Impact assessment of common land' by using NRAS framework were undertaken in Papsara, Angul. The village has secure tenurial rights on 108 acres of common land and about 450 households of the village have access rights on common land. The villagers organised a Tree Growers' Cooperative Society in the year 1987 to revegetate the revenue wasteland to meet their biomass and water requirements. Over a period of twenty-seven years the investment on the common land was around INR 0.69 million and against this investment the total direct and indirect gain including standing biomass is INR 51.11 million which is almost 75 times the investment. Total standing green biomass (above ground level) of trees and shrubs has increased from 1.22 MT/ha. to 91.31 MT/ha which leads to increase in the total value of standing biomass in INR. 42.5 million over a period of twenty-seven years. As compared to a total of 2 trees' species in 1987, around 21 species of trees were recorded in 2014, showing an increase in floral diversity. This leads to a reduction in diversity index from 0.45 to 0.29 (lower the diversity index more is the diversity). Increase in the density of trees has lead to an increase in Carbon Sequestration from 0.33 MT/ha to 33.97 MT/ha. NTFP availability has significantly increased and TGCS members have got benefits to the tune of INR. 6.6 million from the NTFP collection. The major NTFP available from the TGCS plot are Tendu leaves, Mushroom and tuber crops. Including the value of bamboo and fuel wood derived from the protected common land the total monetary value to the community has been of INR 8.5 million. The case highlight the value of secure tenure rights and local institutional arrangements in achieving better ecological and economic outcomes. The case also highlight the potential of these lands in reducing carbon emissions and the need for enabling policies and programmes for improving property rights of local communities to address issues of climate mitigation and adaptation.

Spread of collective action to other spheres - Reflections

After about a year of intervention on TGCS plot the people realised that 43.72ha. of plantation would not be sufficient for meeting their needs. Consequently, they thought that the protection of other nearby areas was equally important in order to reduce the potential pressure on the TGCS in future. The villagers then started protecting the other common lands around the village. Later on TGCS was given responsibility of the protection & management of all the forest resources of the village when the village management collapsed for a period of time due to internal conflict. These lands have regenerated into very good forests from the existing rootstocks after the biotic interference was stopped

The village has retained the traditional institutions like the community hall, village fund and *Chandan Yatra* which are as old as about two and half centuries. In the

process they have lost the *grain gola* - a village fund in form of grains. The main source of income for the village fund has been from auction of village ponds, cultivation of *debottar* (temple) land, sale of wood from the forest and fines on offences. The funds thus generated are used in the *chandan yatra* (a local festival). In most of the years they have a deficit fund and therefore the people have to contribute to the village fund. As mentioned by the villagers, they spend above Rs 60,000- 70,000 each year on various activities. *Discussions on reducing expenditure on the Yatra and diverting the funds to some village development work* have influenced the villagers and they have accepted the proposal. The surplus amount is now being spent on common activities like construction of the *Kotha Ghara* (community hall).

Water is scarce in summer. Especially for bathing and cattle drinking the villagers used to face a lot of problems. Realising this the TGCS, with partial financial support from the TGCP, constructed a water harvesting structure in the village. Construction of the water body also helped in pulling the interest of various sections of people thereby strengthening the management all natural resources in the village.

TGCS vis-a-vis the Village

As stated earlier the village is having about two and half century old management mechanisms. It has some set patterns of all encompassing guiding principles to manage the village. Though the operational rules and management has changed according the need of the time, the villagers have always respected the village committee as a body. The TGCS since its inception has been working as a subsystem of the larger village system though it has got its own identity focusing on natural resources of the village. The village committee is always working as an advisory body and helping in resolving the conflict which is cropping at different points of time.

The TGCS has also established a good relationship with the neighbouring villages and helping them in situations of calamities like fire. The nearby villages are also respecting the norms of Papsara TGCS by not allowing their cattle into the Papsara forests, punishing the offenders of their villages if he/she is found violating the TGCS's norms. Moreover, Papsara TGCS is inspiring others to initiate protection & management of their resources.



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