PARTICIPATION IN FORESTRY: THE ROLE OF BUREAUCRATS IN ENSURING PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION IN THE SOCIAL FORESTRY POLICY OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract: ‘People’s Participation’ in community development is a much discussed issue. The high and rapidly growing population in Bangladesh is placing great strain on all resources. Increasing people’s voice and influence in the social forestry policy in Bangladesh is believed to be an effective way of improving the condition of the forest sector by increasing access to services of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Bureaucracy has an important role primarily in ensuring people’s participation because it is the arm of government intervention in the rural areas. It is the responsibility of bureaucrats to aware local people about the programme especially about the importance of people’s participation and help the SF farmers in arranging the project meetings and it is also their duty to make sure that proper participation of farmers is ensured. This article tries to map the role of bureaucrats in ensuring people’s participation. It identifies whether the rule-oriented or programme-oriented bureaucrats are required to ensure people’s participation in this policy.

Introduction

‘People’s Participation’ in community development is a much discussed and debated issue. This is because participation enhances democracy and at the same time allows people to decide their own fate. Across the world, as new democratic experiments meet and transform older forms of governance, public engagement in governance is widening. In this regard, a renewed concern with rights, power and difference in debates about participation in development has focused greater attention on the institutions at the interface between publics, providers and policy makers (Cornwall, 2004: 1). Increasing people’s voice and influence in the Social Forestry (SF) policy in Bangladesh is believed to be an effective way of improving the condition of the forest sector by increasing access to services of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

The high and rapidly growing population in Bangladesh is placing great strain on all resources. The legal government forest is only 16 percent of the total area of the country. It has been suffering from various problems for more than two decades. About half of that has been deforested. Government was not able to check the process of deforestation. It was difficult to save the forest resources from the over exploitation by local people. In order to stop further deforestation, a project was designed in which local people were involved in planning and managing of the forest resources, and whatever project being approved by the people, must be implemented. It focuses on people rather than on trees. It was assumed that local people will give full support to what they have approved and if the local people were encouraged to protect and nurture forest through some benefit sharing agreement then the level of deforestation would diminish substantially.

The biggest challenge to effective participation is usually bureaucratic behaviour, which tends to conflict with participatory norm. But bureaucracy has an important role primarily in ensuring people’s participation because it is the arm of government intervention in the rural areas (Wallis, 1989: 78). Most government policies relating to the poor must eventually be translated into action through bureaucracies. In too few instances in the past have such efforts reached the poor and induced changes in distributions of power and wealth. The failures should not be surprising because decisions regarding development programming in most developing countries used to made centrally and far removed from the people and their needs and implemented through structures intended to be more responsive to central direction than local reality (Korten & Alfonso, 1983: 1).

The officials of the Forest Department are one of the main stakeholders in the SF project and it is their responsibility to aware local people about the programme especially about the importance
of people’s participation. In this project people’s participation is to be adopted and practiced by the people as a whole as a new idea and a programme activity. This is the responsibility of the bureaucrats to help the SF farmers in arranging the project meetings and it is also their duty to make sure that proper participation of farmers is ensured. Other benefits of the project are also carried out to the farmers through the bureaucrats. To attain the objectives of the project, three basic reorientations of bureaucrats are necessary. There is a need for a different kind and form of knowledge, for promoting creative abilities and innovative attitudes, and for promoting motivation and commitment for changing.

This article is guided by Putnam’s (1975: 87) discussion on classical versus political bureaucrats and the purpose of this article is to explore the role of the bureaucrats in ensuring people’s participation in the SF policy. It identifies whether the rule-oriented bureaucrats or the programme-oriented bureaucrats are required to ensure people’s participation in this policy.

**Research Method and Strategy**

In this article, I use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. I used qualitative data to get data from my main target group (the farmers) because I did not know what I would find in the field and also because the study does not intend to test theory. This type of data would help me in understanding the already existing theories. It is inductive in nature and focuses on specific situations or people. It starts from the research context and develops as the events unfold. I also used quantitative data because it can also be used for exploring an area and for generating hypotheses and theory. I also conducted some unstructured qualitative interviews of the farmers to get more in-depth views of them. For getting data from the bureaucrats I used the qualitative method namely interview.

The study employs a case study approach. Case study provides an opportunity for relating facts and concepts, reality and hypothesis (Roberts, 2001: 9). It helped me to learn more about the phenomenon and general condition. The reason for the choice of case study is related to the difficulty of this study, which is a complex social issue. This study makes use of two cases. I took two cases not for a comparative study. The main reason is that I wanted to ensure the validity of my data. One case is “Zathila Union” and another is “Betaga Union”. Zathila Union is situated in the Gazipur District that is approximately 120 km north of the capital city Dhaka. The locality where it is located forms a significant part of the central Sal (Shorea robusta) and lies in Kaliakair Upazila. This project was launched in 1997. In this locality a huge number of landless people took shelter in government lands and the government could not save the forests from them. It was thought that if the landless were involved in the SF project then it would decrease the extent of deforestation. The population of this union is about 13000 and most of the farmers are landless or small farmers. Near about 563 farmers are involved in the project.

The Betaga Union is situated in the Fakirhat Upazila under the Bagerhat District that is approximately 360 km Dhaka. It is in the Coastal Green Belt project of the Forest Department. This project was launched in 1998-’99. The project was started in both sides of 5 km long roads. The population of this union is about 15000 and most of the farmers are landless or small farmers.

The selection of two cases for the study, from various projects was not an easy task. The selection was based on the following:

1. The projects in these unions are in operation and the time of operation has not been less than three years.
2. The experts’ (in the forest department and in academic fields) opinion helped me to find out two projects in two unions in which I expected interesting variations in terms of people’s participation.

To collect the primary data for the study I followed several methods such as questionnaire, interview and observation. A manageable sample size, which might be treated as “good enough” was targeted. But due to time limit the sample size was curtailed down. All together 52 farmers responded to the questionnaire. I used the simple random sampling method to choose the respondents from a list founded in the local bit office of the Forest Department. In
addition, 40 interview respondents of the open-end questionnaire are as follows:

Table 1: Interview respondents of the Structured Open-End Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization/Position</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zathila Betaga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Forestry cooperative (Farmer)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School (Headmaster)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School (School Teacher)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs Personnel</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Parishad (Chairman)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Parishad (Member)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forester</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range Officers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Conservator of Forest</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisional Conservator of Forest</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Conservator of Forest</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher (BFRI)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework Participation

“Participation” is a splendid word, which means different things to different people and there seems to be little consensus as to the meaning of people’s participation (Karim, 2000:5). Oakley (1988: 4-5) identified two broad but different interpretations of participation, i.e., a) participation as a means and b) participation as an end. As a means participation is seen as the means to achieve some established objective or goal. In this form of participation, the results of the participation in terms of the predetermined targets are important than the act of participation. Participation as ends sees participation as an end in itself. In this view the emphasis is upon participation as a process in which confidence and solidarity between people are built up. As a process, participation is seen as a permanent feature of development and a technique to facilitate people to have a more direct involvement in development.

Participation can be better understood in terms of its practical use. A study undertaken for the UN Panel on People’s Participation in 1982 (cited in Oakley, 1988:6) reviewed the practice of participation in rural development and suggested four different, but not mutually exclusive, forms of participation:

1. Participation as Collaboration: Whereby rural people are involved in rural development programs and projects and their collaboration is sought, but they have no direct control over the project activities.

2. Participation through Organization: Whereby organizations are set up which ostensibly have the objective of facilitating participation.

3. Participation in Community Development Activities: Whereby the direct and active involvement of local people is sought to undertake and complete a whole range of physical improvements at the community level. Local people have a meaningful say in their planning and execution, but the dynamic of participation is limited to the task at hand and does not extended beyond the completion period of the physical improvements.

4. Participation as a process of Empowering: Whereby a group of people who previously had no basis from which to intervene in or influence rural development activities, achieve this basis and use it for their continued involvement in these activities. The approach of this process is educational and the building up of the basis for participation is the objective of the process.
Norman Uphoff (cited in Khan 1993:111) identified four main kinds of participation, which are distinct but interrelated. They are as follows:

- Participation in decision making in identifying problems, formulating alternative planning activities, allocating resources etc.;
- Participation in implementation in carrying out activities, managing and operating programs;
- Participation in economic, social, political or other benefits individually or collectively; and
- Participation in evaluation of the activity and its outcomes for feedback purposes.

In this study, participation has been taken as an end as well as means. It is understood as a process of empowerment. Using Uphoff’s classification of participation, the focus of this study has been on the following stages of participation i.e., 1) in decision-making, 2) implementation of the SF activities 3) participation in social and economic benefit sharing.

Classical and Political Bureaucrats

To map the role of bureaucrats in ensuring people’s participation, Putnam’s (1975: 87) discussion on classical versus political bureaucrats is employed here. This discussion is based on two polar syndromes of attitudes of bureaucrats toward politics and political actors.

The main arguments of Putnam have been that bureaucrats vary markedly in their orientation to the world of politics and hence in their responsiveness to social needs and public demands. Political bureaucrats as described here are likely to be more responsive to citizen’s need than classical bureaucrats. They act on the basis of citizens' responsiveness. The “classical bureaucrat” operates with a monistic conception of the public interest- the “national interest” or the “interest of the State”. He distrusts or rejects the institutions of politics, such as parliaments, parties, and pressure groups. The opposite polar type, the political bureaucrat operates with a much more pluralistic conception of the public interest. He assumes that there can be legitimately differing interpretations of the public interest, and even genuinely conflicting interests among different groups in society. Political bureaucrat is therefore, more aware of “political realities” and more willing to treat political influences on policy-making as legitimate. He recognizes the need to bargain and compromise, yet at the same time he does not necessarily shrink from advocating and even fighting for his own preferred policies.

Whereas the classical bureaucrat is “procedure-oriented” or “rule-oriented”, the political bureaucrat is “problem-oriented” or “program-oriented”. Whereas the classical bureaucrat views the politician as a troublesome or even dangerous antagonist, interfering with the efficiency and objectivity of government, the political bureaucrat sees the politician instead as a participant in a common game, one whose skills and immediate concerns may differ from his own but whose ultimate values and objectives are similar. Classical bureaucrats are, more likely than political bureaucrats to agree with the misanthropic view that “basically no one cares much what happens to the next fellow,” while political bureaucrats are more likely than classical bureaucrats to endorse the view that “it is social conflicts which brings about progress in modern society”. Political bureaucrats are more likely than classical bureaucrats to agree with the proposition that “citizens have a perfect right to exert pressure for legislation which would benefit them personally.”

Political bureaucrats are more programmatic in their orientation to policy-making, less legalist and more activists in their interpretation of their own role, more sympathetic to an open, “political” public service, more relaxed about human relations and social conflict, more committed to the values of pluralist democracy. They maintain more frequent contacts with ministers, the office of the prime minister, members of parliament, party leaders, interest group leaders, and ordinary citizens than the classical bureaucrats. While classical bureaucrat depends on the depth of their alienation from pluralistic democracy, political bureaucrat depends on the extent of their rejection of administrative neutrality.
In the study, political bureaucrats are considered to be “problem-oriented” or “program-oriented”, and classical bureaucrats to be “procedure-oriented” or “rule-oriented”. Political bureaucrats are more responsive in ensuring people’s participation than the classical bureaucrats. They have more contact with the political leaders and local people and give more importance to the public interest than the classical bureaucrats. For that cause they understand the local socio-economic and political situation and problems of the local people well than the classical bureaucrats. So the role of political bureaucrats will be more helpful in ensuring people’s participation than the bureaucrats of their opposite pole.

Participants’ Participation in the Project Meetings

Mahmud viewed that (2004:14) institutions and systems that implement policy view the people they are supposed to serve more as passive recipients and unquestioning beneficiaries, and at best clients and users, instead of as citizens with rights to claim and dissent. Thus the dominant policy view regarding people’s participation is that participation is unnecessary and even viewed with suspicion and hostility. This view is very much similar in the case of SF policy of the study areas.

In the SF projects farmers are gathered in meetings on a weekly or fortnightly basis to discuss their problems in the project, to gather new information from the bureaucrats or to give their suggestions about the project. Bureaucrats, SF farmers and sometimes local Union Parishad Chairman are attending those meetings. Bureaucrats are responsible to help the participants in forming groups and give them necessary direction about how to conduct meetings. But in the field level it was found that they were not playing this role properly. Bureaucrats were classical in nature and had less contact with the local SF farmers. They were less responsive to the demands of the farmers. It was also found that local communities were complex and heterogeneous; the weaker sections virtually had no voice in the committees; and such committees tended to be biased towards the powerful and reflected the local power structure.

Moreover, in the meetings participants’ opinion and suggestions are not getting proper attention. From the field data it was founded that, 54% of the respondents viewed that their opinion was not at all important and 44% viewed that their opinion was quite unimportant and 2% viewed that their opinion was less important. It means that most of the respondents viewed what they said about the project got no attention. In the meetings participants were mostly listener. Bureaucrats were classical and gave less importance to the voice of the farmers. In this regard, one participant from the Betaga Union said, “In the meetings Chairman Shab (Sir) and the Shorkari(Government) Sir usually told us what was necessary in the project and what to do”.

Here it needs to be mentioned that 85% of the respondents viewed that they participated in the discussion and decision of the project meeting regularly and 15% of them participated often. But when asked about their nature of participation, they told that it was mostly superficial participation. In fact their opinion was given very little importance in the decision making of the project.

Bureaucrats’ Role in Forming SF Farmers Groups

The central element in SF policy is the formation of self-help groups of the participants as the first step in a long-term institution building process. One of the main responsibilities of field staff of the Forest Department is to help SF farmers in forming groups. Groups are formed around activities designed to satisfy the priority needs of the intended participants. In the study areas it was found that bureaucrats could help the SF farmers in various ways for its diversified advantages. First, groups are the main bases for development activities. By organizing the SF farmers, they are able to carry out self-help activities. Second, groups are efficient receiving mechanisms. Well-trained and motivated groups offer government and NGO development agencies cost savings in the delivery of inputs, services and facilities. Third, groups are learning laboratories. Members learn from their group promoter, and from each other, such skills as managing group enterprises, articulating, discussing and solving problems. Fourth, groups help empower the rural poor. Groups provide the poor with an effective instrument for
participation in local decision-making, helping them to cooperate more fully in the development of their communities.

But bureaucrats in the study areas are not able to play their role effectively in the formation and functioning of SF farmers groups. Group formation is the base of practicing democracy as well as people’s participation. But most of the bureaucrats’ classical attitude directs them as less responsive to the demand of the SF farmers. The ultimate outcome of this is to manage community groupings in a top-down fashion and it may provide limited opportunities for participatory learning and decision-making. Moreover, bureaucrats in the study areas are more enthusiastic in the activities related to group formation and functioning only in the preliminary level of the project. In one study titled “Social Forestry for the Poor: Proshika’s Experience” it was also found that the local administration co-operated at the initial stage of their programme but they remained silent to the appeal of the SF farmers’ group to combat social opposition (BCAS, 1989: 7).

**Participation of Bureaucrats**

Bureaucrats’ role to help the SF farmers in organizing project meetings is significant. For that cause their presence in the project meetings have special importance. In this regard, when asked about the extent of attending meetings by the bureaucrats they viewed that 48% of them attended regularly, 4% viewed often and 48% viewed sometimes. It means that bureaucrats mostly attended the project meetings. They took it seriously. But their presence were guided less to organize the farmers and to ensure the proper functioning of the project and they tried to manipulate the decisions in the project meetings. It means, bureaucrats were classical in nature and for that cause with the intention to only follow the rules, they regularly attended the project meetings but their lack of program-orientation intended them to manipulate the decisions in those meetings.

In the Zathila Union there was a field office of the forest department near to the project area, so field officers had to visit from the town. For that reason they visited the project seldom. In this area bureaucrats had less contact with the local people.

It was found that the SF workers faced difficulties in living up to the demands of their new role. They perceived their task as the “guardians of plantations” rather than as “extension workers” and it is the responsibility of the bureaucrats to help the SF farmers to cope with their new role. One of the participant’s leaders from the Betaga Union viewed that this project was comparatively a new idea to us. So it would be better if the bureaucrats explained all related terms and condition to us in the very beginning of the programmes. He also viewed that modules of the programme should be discussed with us and should be remodeled on the basis of our opinion. But bureaucrats’ who were classical in nature respond to such views rarely.

**Higher Level and Lower Level of Bureaucrats in Emphasizing People’s Participation**

Ahmed (1980) in his analysis of bureaucratic elites in Bangladesh and Pakistan identified that bureaucrats were elitist and were isolated from people in terms of their origin, power and life-style. Even the comparatively lower level officials also tended to be elitist in their outlook.

**Table 2 : Extent of Emphasis for People’s Participation by Bureaucrats**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent of Emphasis for People’s Participation by Bureaucrats</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower Level Bureaucrats</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Level Bureaucrats</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Question: Are Higher Level Bureaucrats giving more emphasis for people’s participation? Are Lower Level Bureaucrats giving more emphasis for people’s participation? To what extent would you answer them? Please rate them on a scale from 1 to 4 where 4 represent “Agree completely” and 1 “Disagree completely”.*
When asked about extent of emphasis for people’s participation by bureaucrats, 52% agreed for higher level bureaucrats and 52% agreed for lower level bureaucrats. Here there is no significant difference between the respondents’ views on higher level or lower level bureaucrats in emphasizing people’s participation.

Lower level bureaucrats have direct and close contact with the participants than the higher-level bureaucrats. So, for a great extent of people’s participation the role of the lower level bureaucrats is more important than the higher-level bureaucrats. But the lower level bureaucrats are classical in attitude and only reflecting the view of their superior. The significance of the success of the project received less response from them. They are just carrying the orders of the superior and do what their superior asked them to do. Individual role of bureaucrats for ensuring people’s participation are mostly hampered in this regard.

Participants’ Perception about the Nature of Bureaucrats in the Project

The role of the foresters hardly changed and they continued to follow the traditional policing mode of resource management. The project document (ADP, 1989) recognized the need for training to reorient foresters towards their “social role of community developer”. But it was observed that, field foresters were not specialists in the areas which they had been given responsibility for, and had difficulties in coming to terms with their new roles through their traditional professionalism. Besides, the forest department suffered from shortage of manpower, logistics and funds to execute their responsibilities. There is no regular incentive and reward system within the department to motivate field staff. The mechanisms for building up communication between the forest department and local communities were ineffective. The group meetings, for example, had been very poorly attended by people. The male forest staffs could hardly communicate with women’s groups. We have already mentioned that official’s attitude and aptitude towards development programme of the government are important pre-requisites for successful implementation of that programme. It was considered necessary to know from the villagers and their leaders as to how they felt about the aptitude of the officials for development work (Morshed, 1997: 170).

In the hypothesis, it was assumed that the more the bureaucrats are rule-oriented the lower will be the degree of people’s participation. It means that the role of the political bureaucrats is more appropriate than the role of the classical bureaucrats in ensuring people’s participation. In this regard, it seems necessary to know the perception of respondents about the nature of bureaucrats in the SF project.

Table: 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion of Farmers about Bureaucrats are</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afraid of in expressing their views to the bureaucrats</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting as a friend</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible to accommodate other ideas</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasizing on rules than the success of the project</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bending the rules</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question : We would like to ask you some questions about the opinion of SF farmers regarding the nature of bureaucrats in the project. Below we have listed some questions in relevance to this. To what extent would you answer them? Please rate them on a scale from 1 to 4 where 4 represent “Agree completely” and 1 “Disagree completely”.

Participants’ perception about the nature of bureaucrats’ in the project is presented in the table given above. Variables are arranged in such a manner that it will reflect participants’ perception about the nature of bureaucrats-political or classical, in the project.

100% respondents viewed that they were not afraid of in expressing their views to the bureaucrats. Participants of a rural
development programme were feeling free in expressing their views to them. It seems that bureaucrats are closer to the rural people. But a NGOs member from the Zathila Union viewed differently. He said that the situation was not totally like that. Still farmers were hesitating in expressing their views to the bureaucrats.

In responding to another question, 69% of the farmers responded that bureaucrats were acting as friend. This is a positive evaluation of the bureaucrats. It may mean that bureaucrats are slightly more program-oriented than bureaucrats in other government projects.

Further, when asked about respondents' opinion about the extent to which bureaucrats accommodate others' ideas, 73% agreed to this. It indicated that when participants provide any suggestion or ideas regarding the project, these are usually accommodated by bureaucrats.

In responding to another question, about to what extent bureaucrats were emphasizing rules than the success of the project, 98% of the respondents agreed that bureaucrats emphasize rules more than the success of the project. This indicated that bureaucrats seem to be more rule-oriented than programme-oriented. This is a different finding than the previous ones. The respondents viewed that bureaucrats accommodate the ideas of the respondents only in those cases where there are no strict guidelines in applying rules. For instance, if a farmer suggests that it is good for his land to cultivate mango trees than Jackfruit trees, bureaucrats will listen to him. Here it is also mentionable in other government projects SF farmers received that services from the bureaucrats, which was much below from their expectation level. For that cause bureaucrats' little response in SF project seemed to them a great development.

When asked about what was their opinion about bureaucrats in bending the rules, 35% respondents agreed that bureaucrats do bend rules. Here, it can be said that most of the respondents viewed that bureaucrats were not willing to bend the rules if necessary. They were very concerned in following rules than the success of the project.

From the above responses, it seems that bureaucrats can be termed both classical as well as political. On one hand, bureaucrats are friendly and flexible to accommodate new ideas. These characteristics make bureaucrats closer to the political bureaucrats. On the other hand, bureaucrats are characterized as classical because of their unwillingness to bend rules.

However, from other detailed interviews conducted in the study areas, it was found that bureaucrats were rule-oriented because they were not responding fully to the social needs and public demands.

Moreover, in interviews with the Union Parishad Chairman and members, and the members of the NGOs viewed that bureaucrats were more rule-oriented than programme-oriented. Bureaucrats always mentioned about rules when they were going to do anything in the project.

But in interviews with some of the bureaucrats they themselves characterized them differently. They viewed that it was true that they were working within the boundary of so many rules but in so many occasions they bent the rules if it was necessary for the success of the programme. They themselves wished to call them programme-oriented. For instance, one of the foresters mentioned that in the beginning of the project in his area it was difficult for them to protect the SF project from thieves, robbers etc. At that time they knew that only the involvement of the local powerful class could stop such process of robbery or theft. But it was said in the project paper that only the landless people would be involved in the project. But the bureaucrats incorporated the local elites in the project to protect the SF project from the local thieves and robbers.

From the findings, it may be ascertained that bureaucrats are perceived differently by different stakeholders. Their roles vary depending on the nature of the situation. These roles at different times may also make other stakeholders to perceive them differently.
NO INVOLVEMENT OF SF FARMERS FROM PROGRAMME PLANNING TO IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

The organization of foresters at the local level is top-down. The “catalytic, technical and advisory” roles which the forest department was supposed to play in the promotion of SF remained a distant reality. Most staff continued their policing role: trying to maintain some control over the forests, at times apprehending villagers (often the poorer) and harassing them. State officials remained classical that means “tree-oriented” and not “people-oriented”.

Some major problems in planning were observed which were unfavorable to the performance of SF. First, it was noted that local people were rarely consulted during SF project design and planning. If they were consulted, only the voices of the rich and dominant section were heard. Second, field staff was inadequately consulted during project planning. Most of the propositions were imposed from the central authority. Third, higher level officials rarely visited the project area and for that cause most of the time their propositions about the project did not reflect the expectations of the SF farmers. For instance, the Forest Department delivered Mehagani seedlings to the SF farmers of Zathila Union, but most of the farmers were interested to plant Epil-Epil varieties.

Government officials may know far more than the local people about the technology available, but the people know more about the environmental constraints of their own situation. The official is often seen as a stranger on the local seen, he may not speak the local language, and he enjoys a totally different life-style. How can he then take decisions on behalf of the local farmers, which may cause hardship and risks for them?

In discussing with one of the Divisional Forest Officers of the Forest Department, who was going to retire very soon wished to talk about the real situation of the SF project, and in the discussions some important aspects of SF policy came out in light from his views. He said that the Forest Department should change from its traditional bureaucratic attitude to more participatory one. Bureaucrats needed to change their mentality to work with local poor people and to accept and honour their suggestions and decisions. He also said, in the present bureaucratic system, all decisions were taken at the higher level of the department, without involving the participants. From the programme planning stage to implementation and evaluation, decisions must be taken in consultation with local communities. However, programme resources and the higher authority may set guidelines for implementation, but specific decisions should be made at the local levels. In brief, the views of the Divisional Forest Officer reflect that for the success of the SF project bureaucrats need to change their traditional classical attitude and have to act as political bureaucrats.

BUREAUCRATIC RIGIDITY AND POOR PERSONNEL POLICIES

The administrative history of Bangladesh reveals that people’s participation in decision-making and development activities even in a limited way were frustrated by excessive central and local bureaucratic control. In the absence of viable institutions, the implementation of SF policy has become bureaucracy dependent both for planning and execution. Moreover, bureaucratic interference sometimes hampers the natural growth of rural institutions i.e. farmers’ cooperatives (Morshed, 1997, 189). In the study it was found the organizational culture of the Forest Department was to be rigid and highly hierarchical. There was a lack of mutual trust between and across levels in the organization. Guidelines about various initiatives of SF issued from headquarters were very strict and leave little scope for discretion on the part of field personnel. Moreover, there was a lack of awareness of project goals among field personnel. Communication is uni-directional, from the top-down; and there is a punitive orientation on the part of the management towards the personnel.

Personnel policies are also poor in the Forest Department. For example, very few of the foresters in Social Forestry are fresh recruits. Most of them are promoted from very lower posts i.e. forest guards. But such kind of new initiatives like SF need fresh recruits with energy, communication skills and enthusiasm. The transfer system is also unproductive. Transfers are affected within the
Forest Department without consulting project management. Skilled and trained personnel are often transferred to territorial forestry. Training of the project staff aims to introduce them to participatory approaches and procedures and fostering motivation and team spirit. It should teach basic technical skills needed for group development, and experiment with innovative ways to successfully run the SF project.

In an interview with a high official of the Forest Department, he viewed that conventional training methods were didactic and often paternalistic: the trainer viewed the trainee as a near-empty vessel to be filled with knowledge. Participatory training on the other hand needs to be based, instead, on an active dialogue between trainer and trainee that constitutes a learning experience for both. The curriculum should be pragmatic and include work experience presentations by participants. Training topics should include group dynamics, leadership, planning of group activities, monitoring and evaluation of the SF project.

The centralized and bureaucratic planning practices and policies seemed to delimit SF’s achievements. The selection of species, for example, represented the government’s choice rather than local demand. Moreover, often there were “too ambitious” planning targets, which were far beyond the institutional capacity of the traditionally trained and oriented foresters.

One of the higher-level officers of the Forest Department informed that signing of the benefit sharing agreements between the forest department and the participating beneficiaries took a long time to be finalized. It was due to bureaucratic complications and involvement of different ministries/agencies whose consensus had to be obtained before this was approved by the ECNEC. Even after the approval at the national level, a large number of agreements still remained to be signed at the field level.

LEADERSHIP QUALITY OF THE BUREAUCRATS

Some participants especially from the Zathila union viewed that bureaucrat’s leadership quality is a very important factor for the success of the project. They mentioned the name of one forest officer, Mr. Tozammel Haque as a successful officer from the Forest Department who brought enormous development in the project to make it a successful one. He tried hard in ensuring people’s participation in the project and fought against the local elites. He was a programme-oriented leader and can be termed as apolitical bureaucrat. His leadership quality changed the total scenario of the project at that time. Still participants were mentioning his name though he was transferred 5/6 years ago.

Here, it needs to be mentioned that the frequent transfer of staffs affected SF’s performance. Skilled personnel were transferred by central authorities from SF projects to more “lucrative” territorial positions, without even consulting the project management.

Participation of Women in the Project

Palit(cited in Khan 1998) found that, women were suspicious and shy of field staff, and their role in meetings and discussions was passive. The Indian institute of Bio-Social Research and Development (IBRAD) also concluded that social constraints thwarted women’s involvement and they did not participate in decision-making in the presence of men. SF initiatives were taken up with local political Union Parishad members, a host of political problems also surfaced, including elite domination of decisions and factionalism modeled on the local pattern of rural power structure. Participation of different social groups rarely occurred.

Involvement of women in development activities are encouraged by the government and donors. It is argued that almost 50% of the population is women and real development of the society particularly in the rural area cannot really be made without their participation. In the project paper it was said that women and the disadvantaged class of the population would get special attention in this project. It was the responsibility of the bureaucrats to take care of the matter that the women can participate easily and freely in the project. In my selected field women were mostly ignored. They were very small in number in every SF project of the field area. Very few women participated in discussion in the project meetings. Proposals mainly emerge from dominant male users of the project.
Bureaucrats’ classical attitude is the main cause of the lack of participation of the women in the SF project. Bureaucrats maintained less contact with the women in the study areas and they were less responsive to the needs of the women. Moreover, local elites also were not so interested in their participation. In Zathila Union a local elite who was member of SF project viewed that we tried to involve the women in the project. But women were less interested in participating in the project. But when I interviewed some women members in that area, they viewed differently. They said that almost all the women were very interested in joining the project. But the local elites and the bureaucrats had lack of will regarding their participation in the project.

Conclusion

In order to explore the role of political and classical bureaucrats as a major variable to explain people’s participation, we have delineated different initiatives and activities of bureaucrats in the SF project. In the project paper it is said that as one of the main stakeholders bureaucrats are responsible in ensuring people’s participation. In the discussion we have tried to explain whether the program-orientation or rule-orientation of bureaucrats is helpful in the fulfillment of this objective of SF policy.

SF policy was designed in top level of the government without giving adequate consideration to the diversified social and economic problems of different local areas. Government thought that if it was possible to involve the local people in the project planning, decision making and implementation then the extent of success of the project would be higher. But due to different factors (i.e. bureaucrats’ classical attitude, patron-client relationship etc) there is a great inconsistency between the government’s will and real situation.

Despite the repeated official emphasis on “participation”, the extent of popular involvement in SF was insignificant. Following their long ingrained, orientation and experience, foresters found their new role as "community developers" at odds with their values, training and perceptions. SF policy is running under the existing institutional and organizational structures of the Forest Department. The project planning of this policy is not so difficult. The implementation however, is much more difficult. Bureaucrats are assigned to implement SF project along with the participants.

In the study areas the bureaucrats are mostly rule-oriented and classical in nature and for that cause they give less importance to the voice of the farmers. Most of the time, in their discussion with the SF farmers they give reference to governmental rules. They have also less contact with the local SF farmers and were less responsive to their demands. Moreover, most of these classical bureaucrats attend the project meetings regularly with the intention to only follow the rules but lack of program-orientation intended them to manipulate the decisions in those meetings. In the study areas, the main cause of lack of participation of the women is also classical attitude of bureaucrats.

Leadership quality of the bureaucrats is important in ensuring people’s participation. It is so important that the program-orientation of a leader changed the total scenario of a project. However, participants’ perception about the nature of bureaucrats is complex. On one hand, bureaucrats are friendly and flexible to accommodate new ideas. These characteristics make bureaucrats closer to the political bureaucrats. On the other hand, bureaucrats are characterized as classical because of their unwillingness to bend rules. But the bureaucrats wished to call them programme-oriented. From the findings of the study, it may be ascertained that bureaucrats are perceived differently by different stakeholders. Their roles vary depending on the nature of the situation. These roles at different times may also make other stakeholders to perceive them differently.

Bureaucrats in the study areas mostly maintain their traditional classical nature and their lack of program-orientation impede a lot in ensuring the participation of the participants. Bureaucratic formalities, unnecessary and lengthy reporting system, top-down mode of communication and information flow, shortage of manpower are some of the limitations of the forest department which were inimical to SF. It was found that the SF workers faced difficulties in living up to the demands of their new role. They perceived their task as “guardians of plantations” rather than as “extension workers.
The project was designed in keeping the bottom-up approach in mind. But in the implementation, a top-down approach was followed. The planning process within the government, especially in the Forest Department is essentially top-down, with little room for accommodating local and contextual demands. These included the lack of inadequacy of decentralized planning process especially at the Range and Bit levels; inadequate data bases on local demands, bureaucrats’ lack of consultation in the planning, design and implementation stage of the project. They just imposed the decision of the top. They are not willing to cope with the rural situation to ensure the success of the project. In applying rules and regulations from the top is getting importance than their program-orientation.

The existing Forest Department with its conventional and custodial approach to forestry management is proving inadequate and out of date to the needs of SF programmes and to cope with the emerging problems of protecting and expanding forest resources with the participation of the people. The positive change of attitudes of the bureaucrats is very necessary if the government intend to see their policies being successfully implementation.

Notes

1. Social Forestry can be broadly defined as a people oriented forestry programme or activity. Sometimes it is simply described as “forestry for and by the people”. Others define it as “any forestry activity aimed at providing goods and services for the benefit of rural communities” (Magno, 1986: 1).

2. A union is a rural local government unit at the tertiary level and headed by an elected people’s representative. A union consists of 10 to 15 villages on an average. At Present, there are 4451(rural) unions (Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh 1997) and about 70,000 villages in Bangladesh.

3. A bit is the lowest level office of the Forest Department.
References


