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Donor-driven Participatory Forest Management and 'Local Social Realities': Insights from Pakistan[1]

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1. Introduction

Decentralisation and devolution are the leading themes in ongoing discussions of forest policy and natural resource management throughout the world (Ribot 2002). In most developing countries, decentralised or participatory forestry policies have emerged in response to 'institutional failure' regarding sustainable management of forest resources (Dupar and Badenoch 2002; Siry et al. 2005), and Pakistan is no exception. The failure of the state's forest authorities in reducing deforestation, and conflicts between the state and local people, have brought into focus the inefficiency of the top-down system of forest management (Iqbal 2000; Khattak 2002). In response to this, various donor-funded participatory forestry projects were implemented specifically in the forest-rich North- West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan during the 1980s and 1990s. The most recent of these was the Forestry Sector Project, which was started in 1996, funded by the Asian Development Bank, and in which the participatory approach to forest management was formally institutionalised.

In the process of implementation, however, such participatory approaches encountered 'local social realities': the realities of forest use and related decision-making are shaped by local interests, customs and traditions. A whole range of actors are part of these realities, ranging from representatives of 'traditional' forest management paradigms to more recent civil society organisations and private sector entities.

This paper provides an exploratory analysis of Pakistan's model of decentralised forest management by adopting a perspective that focuses on these actors. More specifically, it addresses the following questions:

- How is participatory forest management put into practice in the NWFP?
- What is the extent of participation by various actors?
- What is the extent of the relationships and what are the levels of trust between various actors and the state?

• What lessons have been learnt and which entry points can be identified for improving the effectiveness of participatory forest management?

To answer these questions, the present article is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the dominant institutional paradigms of the forestry sector of the NWFP. Section 3 introduces the emergence of participatory approaches, and focuses on the procedures adopted in the Forestry Sector Project (FSP). The encounter of the FSP with local social realities is detailed in section 4 and discussed in section 5. Finally, section 6 draws conclusions and points out some lessons to be learnt.

2. Dominant forest management paradigms

Natural forests cover about 4.8% of the total land area of Pakistan, with about 40% of these forests located in the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) – hence the focus on this region in the present paper. The NWFP is home to approximately 18 million people. Almost two-thirds of the population trace their origins to Afghanistan and Central Asia. They speak the *Pushto* language and write in an Arabic script; *Hindko*, *Gojri* and *Kohistani* are other important languages spoken in this province (IUCN 1996).

There is a large variety of tree species because of the province's great physiographic and climatic contrasts. Besides providing a range of direct benefits to people, these forests also protect the country's fragile watersheds, which yield hydropower and water for the large agricultural economy in the rest of country. These benefits are in danger, as Pakistan has a very high rate of deforestation, with 39,000 hectares of forests vanishing annually. Between the years 1990 and 2000, the deforestation rate in Pakistan was estimated at 1.5% annually (FAO 2005).

2.1 State forest administration

According to the constitution of Pakistan, forestry is a provincial matter. The federal government is responsible for liaison with international agencies, ensuring compliance with international treaties, etc. The provincial government of the NWFP manages the forests through the Department of Forests, Wildlife and Fisheries (DFFW), headed by the Conservator of Forests and with a hierarchy of lower officials. The department's activities are guided by the legal provisions of provincial forestry laws. According to existing regulations, the forests of the NWFP are divided between public (state-owned) and private forests (non-state). These are further divided into subcategories. The main categories of public forests are "Reserved" and "Protected". The provincial government, through the DFFW, has proprietary rights to the Reserved Forests, and various activities by the local people

such as clearing land, cutting trees or harvesting forest products are prohibited. However, unregulated grazing and removal of dry fuel wood is practised by communities (Ahmed and Mahmood 1998). In the Protected Forests, local people have more rights, such as a share in timber sale proceeds, use of timber and fuel wood, grazing rights for animals, etc. The main category of private forests is made up of the *guzara* (subsistence) forests, which are either managed by communities as communal property or held privately. Usually, some village members have user rights while others do not, and the DFFW regulates the removal of timber for commercial as well as local use.

Across South Asia (including Pakistan), the concept of forest management has been heavily influenced by the British colonial administration (Iqbal 2000; Poffenberger 2000). The first forest legislation along modern lines was promulgated in 1878 (Indian Forest Act) in order to regulate logging, and the first Indian forest policy was announced in 1894. These pieces of legislation brought the major portion of the forests under government control, with limited rights given to local people, whereas the role of the Forest Department was to police the forests in addition to regulating tree felling.

In 1849, the regions covered by the present-day NWFP came under British rule, and thus forest management became a centralised state matter in this province as well – except in some of the forest-rich mountain areas to the north-west of the Indus River, where princely states continued in power until 1969. In the other areas of present-day Pakistan, the Indian Forest Policy of 1894 was adopted and implementation was continued by the Government of Pakistan after independence in 1947, until 1955. Subsequently, various forest policies were announced and adopted by the Government of Pakistan.

2.2 Customary regulations

Prior to British colonial rule, the forests of the NWFP were managed by locally developed indigenous institutions. Decision-taking regarding access to resources and distribution of benefits, management of resources, and responsibilities were deeply rooted in *rivaj* (customary law) and its enforcement mechanism, i.e. the *jirga* system – the council of tribal elders (Ahmad 2000; Sultan-i-Rome 2005). Details of this regulatory framework varied from region to region, however.

While the forests to the east of the Indus River (Hazara Division) came under direct colonial rule in 1849 and were soon declared Reserved Forests, the areas to the west of the Indus River retained a considerable measure of independence until 1969.[4] In many areas, forests, according to *rivaj*, were owned by the owners of the agricultural lands concerned. The other segments of society (non-owners, landless people, etc.) had some forest use privileges; for example, they had free

access to forests within the boundaries of the village or tract concerned for grazing their livestock, cutting timber and collecting fuel wood for household purposes, cutting grass, lopping trees to feed cattle, and collecting minor forest products such as mushrooms, honey and medicinal plants (Sultan- i-Rome 2005). Today, such customary rules and regulations continue to structure local forest use and management, despite the enactment of state laws.

3. Participatory forest management

3.1 The inevitability of participatory forest management

Until recently, forest laws in Pakistan dated back to the 19th century and represented a narration of offences and corresponding punishment. However, these laws had not been able to protect and conserve mountain forests. The policing efforts of the DFFW seldom succeeded in protecting the forests; rather, they earned mistrust and provoked confrontation with local communities and defamation of the department staff (Iqbal 2000; Shahbaz et al. 2006). According to Khan and Naqvi (2000, page No. 19), "the top down, non-participatory approach drove a wedge between communities and their birthright by denying them a say in management and subjecting them to a legal process that was often arbitrary. The unprecedented levels of degradation the country is witnessing currently are partly rooted in this." The conflict between customary regulations and the top-down state system made policy- makers – and specifically donors – realise the need for a change of paradigm towards more participatory procedures.

Initially in the NWFP, participatory forest management and extension programmes have been implemented at the regional project level on communal and state forest lands in Pakistan since the late 1980s.[5] These donor-supported projects established village-level organisations for natural resource management, extension and infrastructure development activities. They were not in a position to halt pressure on forests, but they opened the doors for institutional change on a larger scale (Suleri 2002; Geiser and Steimann 2004).

This was reflected first in the National Forest Policy of 2001 and the NWFP Forest Policy of 2001; both emphasise the need for a participatory approach to forest management. However, these policies are under criticism from some civil society organisations that claim they are 'donor-driven' and thus ignore the realities and needs of the local population. In terms of institutionalising participatory approaches in these policies, the Forestry Sector Project (FSP) plays a crucial role, and it is therefore taken as a case study here below.

3.2 The Forestry Sector Project (FSP)

The FSP commenced in 1996 under a loan agreement between the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of Pakistan,[6] and has been working mainly on enhancing the DFFW's institutional capacity by following these principles and objectives (Heering 2002):

- Institutionalisation of the participatory forestry approach in the working of the department,
- Social organisation and capacity building of local community organisations,
- Increasing coordination and cooperation and promotion of team-based management in the department,
- Decentralisation of planning and authority,
- Re-definition and re-orientation of the role of the DFFW in advisory functions,
- Addressing gender concerns in the department,
- Improving the training and education system of the department.

Within the DFFW, a new structure was developed with the intention of decentralising planning and authority and increasing coordination and cooperation within the department.

As a principal tool for initiating participatory forest management at the local level, the FSP institutionalised land use planning at the village level – known as the Village Land Use Plan (VLUP) (Khattak 2002). The village plan accentuated the empowerment of residents in decision-making to improve natural resources. The VLUP involves a set of guided steps in a planning process with the intention of involving (in collaboration with the Forest Department) the local community, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and outside landowners in the protection and management of forests, in addition to undertaking development activities at the village level (Samyn and Nibbering 2002). As a platform for the VLUP and its subsequent implementation, Village Development Committees (VDCs) and Women's Organisations (WOs) were established. These committees and organisations were to be elected democratically, representing all the different social groups in a village. Thus they were expected to play a role beyond only forest-related issues. Improvement of the village infrastructure was also an objective of ADB-led participatory forestry in the NWFP, in addition to the core objective of forest management (ADB 1995). It is stated in VLUP procedures that if local people contribute 30% either in

cash or in kind, or in the form of labour for development schemes, then the project will contribute 70% (Government of NWFP 2001).

The FSP started the participatory system through the VLUP in a few selected pilot villages, and the reformed DFFW was expected to apply the concept in the whole province. The following section describes some experiences in pilot villages.

4. Confronting local social realities: An analysis of 'decentralised' forest management

The following analysis of the FSP's participatory forest management is based on the realisation that many actors are involved in its operationalisation.[7] Many of these actors have their own reasons for becoming involved (or not becoming involved) in a specific participation venture (Geiser 2001). Hence this section explores the characteristics, roles, extent of participation, and interactions by the main stakeholders in the FSP. Key stakeholders include the local people, their traditional forms of organisation, the Forest Department, timber dealers and, more recently, local governments, civil society and the donors.

4.1 The local people

The people living in and around the forests are important stakeholders and users of forest resources. The term 'local people' refers to heterogeneous social groups stratified according to income, caste, gender, religion and land ownership. Thus in the context of forestry, we find land owners, landless tenants, holders of rights to protected forests,[8] non-right-holders, *gujjars* (nomads), etc. Their interaction with the FSP is discussed below while addressing some of the key issues that were identified in the course of our research.

Different expectations from the project: In general, local people use forests in a variety of ways (Figure 1).

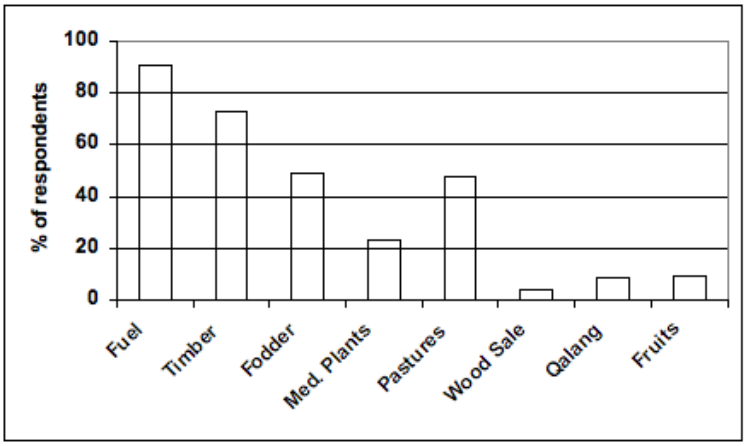

Fig. 1 Forest use patterns in the NWFP.[9]

Intensive use of forest resources such as gathering firewood and fuel wood, harvesting timber for the construction of new houses or repair of old houses, and use of forest pastures and fodder for livestock is mainly for subsistence purposes. Very few (local) people use forests for commercial purposes, such as collecting *qalang*[10] and selling wood.[11] Thus, local people are not dependent on natural resources (forest and land) for cash income, as the main livelihood strategy is income received in the form of remittances (domestic and foreign),[12] followed by labour (daily wages), salaries and farming (Figure 2).

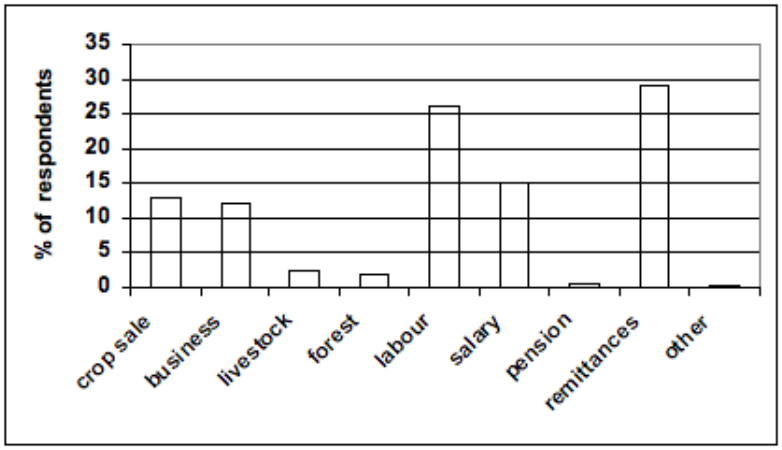

Fig. 2 Primary (main) sources of cash income.[13]

Small land holdings (see Figure 3) and low agricultural productivity in the mountainous areas of the NWFP are among the reasons for migration by the local communities.

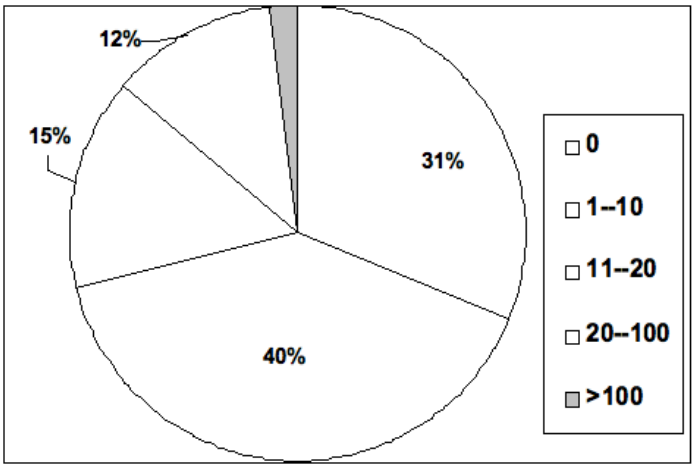

Fig. 3 Area of arable land.[14]

When asked about their priorities regarding livelihood outcomes, most people cited income or food security; very few people gave priority to better forest cover over income and food security (Shahbaz 2007).

Thus, we find a mismatch in expectations regarding the objectives and priorities of decentralised forest management. While the FSP emphasises forest protection and regeneration, these are not priorities for local people, whose main concerns include higher income, enhanced food security and improvement of village infrastructure (roads, provision of drinking water, and electricity) – issues that are actually also addressed by the FSP at least in principle, even if not in practice. Though improvement of forests would increase natural capital, the dearth of immediate incentives was a barrier in motivating local people to protect forests.

Regulating access: Construction timber is a precious commodity for local people because wood is the main component of their houses. Due to severe weather, houses need frequent repair and renovation but it is difficult for most people to gain access to timber. Usually the right-holders or *guzara* owners have to apply for a 'timber permit' for domestic needs. The permit procedure is quite complicated and a great deal of red tape is involved, including an application to be channelled through a hierarchy of forest officials– from forest guards to the Divisional Forest

Officer (DFO). The final decision is taken either by a range officer or the DFO, and then the application has to be routed back through the same channels. Field studies (Steimann 2004; Shahbaz 2007) revealed that in some of the project villages the permit procedure had been simplified, as the Forest Department had authorised the VDC to recommend the applications, which were then sent directly to the range officer. The respondents argued that if the local people had easier access to construction timber (as an outcome of participatory forest management), they would better protect/conserve their forests in collaboration with state forest officials.

Trust: The punitive laws and restrictions imposed by previous forest management strategies created a huge gap between local people and the state. The recent shift towards a participatory paradigm was expected to bridge this gap. However, research has shown that most of the people still perceive the DFFW as solely responsible for the depletion of forests. Moreover, the general perception of the people is that the Forest Department collaborates with the timber mafia[15] and sells their precious forests to outsiders. On the other hand, the DFFW officials often blame local people for exploitative use of forest resources. However, the decentralised forest management model introduced by the FSP has the potential to bridge this gap, as a slight improvement in the quality of relationships and the level of trust was recorded in the project villages[16] as compared to other (non- project) villages (Shahbaz 2007). During the VLUP process, the DFFW staff frequently visited the villages concerned and the villagers had more opportunities to meet the foresters and even higher officials in their areas. Although residents of the project villages showed some resentment towards the DFFW, the situation was worse in the non- project villages.

Involvement of marginal groups: Research has shown that poor and marginalised people were ignored in the VLUP process and the activities of the VDCs/WOs. The DFFW selected villages for FSP interventions and VLUP processes that were comparatively accessible by road, while far-flung and remote villages were not considered. Similarly, within the project villages, the residents of remote hamlets in one of these villages participated less in the activities of the VDC than people living in the central hamlets of that village.

4.2 Civil society

In this paper, the term 'civil society' refers to organised institutions in the context of the rural mountainous area of the NWFP – excluding family, government and business – aiming at societal change. We found organisations that are of a customary (e.g. the *jirga*) or religious nature, as well as more recent institutions such

as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and project-induced community-based organisations (CBOs).

Community-based organisations (CBOs): The FSP has created new village-level institutions in the selected project villages. During the preparation of the VLUP, the villagers were urged to constitute Village Development Committees (VDCs) composed of 12–15 males, and Women's Organisations (WOs) consisting of 10–12 females. The male social organiser in the Forest Department assisted in the establishment of the VDCs, while the female social organiser (usually a female forestry extensionist) helped in the formation of the WOs. The residents of various hamlets in a village selected their respective members, and in turn these members elected (or selected) the president, secretary, treasurer, etc. of their VDC and WO. These new institutions are to implement the VLUP, to make the community aware of the importance and proper management of their natural resources, to "bring the community towards a collective and self-help vision for their general development", and to "bring harmony and decrease social disparity by giving equal opportunity to everyone through human resource development".[17]

In principle, these institutions represent new social capital for many households. Our studies (Awais 2005; Shahbaz and Ali 2006) revealed, though, that, by and large, the common villagers did not participate in the meetings and activities of the VDCs and that usually only elected members of these institutions participated in the monthly committee meetings. Many were unhappy with the performance of the VDC, because ambitious commitments, such as improvement of physical infrastructure, income generation and ease of access to timber, had been made by FSP representatives during the VLUP process and initial meetings of the VDCs. But with the passage of time, the villagers became frustrated and disappointed due to the very low pace of the VDC developmental activities, and the non-cooperative behaviour of the DFFW staff. In some areas where the VDC had undertaken plantations by employing local labourers, the Forest Department had not paid their wages for many months.

Women are the main stakeholders and users of forests in the subsistence domain. They collect water, fuel wood and fodder, raise small livestock as well as processing food, cooking and caring for children; however, their participation in the planning process of the VLUP was negligible. Women's organisations (WOs) exist in most of the project villages, but only on paper, with practically no activity being undertaken. The main cause for this is male dominance and the influence of religious groups in the rural areas of the NWFP. Another factor in the disappointing performance of the WOs is the lack of capacity and leadership among the fe-

male population in rural areas of NWFP. Female literacy in the rural NWFP is only 21.7% as compared to 59.2% for the males.[18]

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 'social movements': Several NGOs are working in the forest-rich districts of the NWFP,[19] the most prominent among which is the Sungi Development Foundation, established in 1989 as a non-profit and non- governmental public interest organisation. It resulted from an initiative taken by a group of socially and politically active individuals from the mountainous regions of NWFP (mainly Hazara Division). Sungi has remained critical of state institutions, particularly the DFFW. It also helped in the establishment of the Sarhad Awami Forestry Ittehad (SAFI, People's Alliance on Forestry in the NWFP) in 1997, an alliance of various forest stakeholders who are challenging the state forest reform process. The common aim is to protect the forest and people's forest rights. SAFI argues that these rights are not properly observed in the FSP-led initiative concerned with participatory forest management (SAFI 2000).

SAFI is one of the very few examples in the NWFP where people have organised to engage in the policy debate for their rights in resource management. It has an established membership (currently 3,000) and staff, a constitution, a formal charter of demands and a forest protection manifesto. The mission of SAFI is:

> "to motivate stakeholders, especially deprived and ignored sections (women, tenants); to bring changes in the policy, laws and forest related institutions, which are based on the environmental principles for a wise, sustainable, and participatory management of forests; and to promote social justice for all segments of the local population by demarcating and protecting their needs and rights in relation to forests on a mutual basis." (SAFI 2000, page 2)

However, according to Khan et al. (2006, page-24) "SAFI is not yet a fully evolved people's movement and continues to draw extensively upon Sungi's support". Nevertheless, with no means of financial self-reliance and in a relatively short time, it has developed a distinctive pulse. For example, it established forest protection societies and community checkposts to prevent illegal timber movements. SAFI organised an intensive campaign against the promulgation of NWFP Forest Ordinance 2002, which provided legal cover to institutional change, at different levels (province, districts and *tehsils*). It also translated the new Forest Ordinance into the Urdu language.

However, the protests made little headway, as the DFFW claimed sacrosanct status for the ordinance under the Legal Framework Order (LFO)[20] of the

military government (Khan et al. 2006). Initially, the FSP process provided considerable space for the involvement of NGOs in planning, implementing and monitoring the process. Some NGOs (Sungi, Sustainable Development Policy Institute [SDPI]) were invited during the planning stage of the FSP. But the involvement of NGOs was reduced once the project had been started and the DFFW received funding from donors. Thus, most civil society organisations are quite critical of the approach adopted by the DFFW, and accuse the Forest Department of not being willing to decentralise forest resources in the true letter and spirit of the law. Many local people, though, have mixed perceptions of these NGOs. Many (especially religious groups) believe that these NGOs have some hidden (Western) agenda and want to spread Western culture in the area.

***Jirga* – the assembly of elders:** *Jirga* means council, assembly or meeting in the Pushto language. A *jirga* is normally composed of elderly males most of whom belong to the dominant tribes of a village. The youth, women, minorities and (sometimes) less powerful or small tribes in the village have no representation in the *jirga*. The main role of the *jirga* is that of conflict resolution, but it is also important in reproducing and continuing traditional regulations governing access to forests according to *rivaj*.

Analysis of the data collected (Shahbaz 2007) regarding the collective action undertaken by local people in development, such as construction/repair of roads, water supply schemes and plantations, revealed that significantly more people in the project villages contributed to such activities than in the non-project villages. Those respondents (or their family members) who contributed to such activities were asked as to who motivated them. In the project villages, the VDC provided the main stimulus for motivating people to undertake such collective actions, whereas in the non-project villages, the *jirga* and the mosque were the major motivational forces.

From this discussion it can be concluded that the new (democratic) institutions (VDCs) created as an outcome of the participatory approach to development have the potential to replace traditional (orthodox) institutions such as *jirga* and mosques in some cases.[21]

Religious groups and movements: A majority of the rural population of Pakistan in general, and of the NWFP in particular, is Muslim and religion has deep roots in the culture and traditions of society. The religious leaders, who belong to different schools of thought (or sections of Islam), are widely respected by their respective followers. Most of these people are trained and educated in the confined atmosphere of a *Madrassah* (religious school). Religious leaders such as the *Imam Masjid* (the

one who leads prayers in a mosque), the *Pir* (the spiritual leader) and the *Tablighee* (one belonging to a particular preaching sect/group of Islam) act as initiators of religious and related social change movements. The *Imam Masjid* motivates people (particularly in Friday prayers) to engage in activities and tasks for the betterment (according to their own vision) of society in traditional ways. They rarely rely on innovative and strategic measures to change society.[22]

In implementing participatory forest management, although the mosque was used (in some study villages) by the FSP for announcements regarding meetings of the VDCs, involvement of the *Imam Masjid* in the activities of the VDCs, awareness-raising campaigns, tree plantation activities, etc. were not considered.[23] Besides being a potential entry point for forest-related matters, religious practices are one of the obstacles to gender mainstreaming and thus add to the ineffectiveness of WOs. According to Sattar and Baig (2001, page 15),

> "throughout 2000, NGOs were subjected to repeated verbal assaults by religious leaders. The attacks came despite the support extended by the government ministers to NGOs calling for their inclusion in advisory panels and in undertaking work at the grassroots level. Religious extremists continue to accuse development and advocacy-oriented NGOs of working against 'national ideology' by spreading liberal and secular values."

4.3 Local governments

In October 1999, the politically elected government of Pakistan was overthrown by the army and General Parvaiz Musharraf took power. The military government instantaneously announced a Seven Point Agenda to deal with the so-called institutional crisis in the country. One of the main components of this agenda was the introduction of the Devolution of Power Plan in 2000. The new system provides a three-tier local government structure within each province: District, *Tehsil* and Union Council. Each is comprised of a *nazim* (mayor) and *naib nazim* (or deputy), an elected body and administrative structures. The elections at the Union Council (UC) level constitute the backbone of the entire system. It is the only level where elections are direct and citizens elect their representatives by vote, while the district and *tehsil* assemblies consist of *nazims* and *naib nazims* of the UC respectively.

The most prominent point of departure from previous local government schemes in Pakistan was this plan's proposal to place the elected *Nazim* (Mayor) at the top of the district administration. Previously, control had been with the provincial state through the post of the Deputy Commissioner (DC); this was now abolished and the provincial bureaucracy represented through a District Coordination Officer (DCO) – a civil servant who now works under the direction of the elected *Nazim*. The DCO heads the district administration and is supported by Executive

District Officers (EDOs) working in different provincial departments such as agriculture, education, finance, planning, health, information technology, law, literacy and revenue.

However, the forestry sector was among the few sectors not included in the devolution plan. The provincial Forest Department remained the main 'custodian' of the forests; only the farm forestry component was devolved and handed over to the district administration. Therefore, regarding natural forests, there is no formal link between the local governments and the DFFW. Nor do the VDCs and WOs have any formal interaction with the local governments. This reality does not foster coordination and trust. The representatives of local governments (e.g. councillors) are very critical of the DFFW and blamed it for working against the interests of the communities.

On the other hand, as a DFO remarked:

> "The local governments and the ministers are pressurising us regarding timber permits, transfer of staff, etc. They are least interested in forestry matters. The permits [for timber] were issued by the DFO but now the DFO issues the permits with the recommendation of the *Nazim*. But in each and every case the *Nazims* recommend the permit; they never deny anybody. They have to do this for political reasons; they have to please their voters and contest the election again."

Another DFO stated that "forestry is the least priority for the local governments; they don't even bother to reply to our letters".

4.4 Timber merchants

Very high timber prices in Pakistan (10,000 to 12,500 Rupees (130 – 160 USD) per pine tree; Khan et al. 2007) make the timber business a lucrative one, and thus illegal timber harvesting has become widespread throughout the highlands of the NWFP. Commercial timber harvesting in the NWFP has been banned since 1992, but illegal harvesting has continued at an even higher pace. During the same period (around 1995), the notion of a 'timber mafia' became common in northern Pakistan. This refers to a network of various actors (political leaders, some state forest officials, influential locals and outsiders, businessmen, transporters, police, etc.) established with the single purpose of making money from cutting and selling timber illegally. This nexus emerged through certain practices such as networking, bribing, blackmailing, buying royalties, as well as exporting local timber and importing 'foreignised' timber (Geiser 2000).

The DFFW is blamed by civil society, local people and journalists for being involved in illegal timber cutting and facilitating the timber mafia. Some politicians and even members of the national and provincial assemblies are also believed to be

supporters of or even part of the timber mafia (Shahbaz 2007). This makes it quite difficult for honest foresters to catch the real offenders. In a field interview, a forest officer stated that he once stopped a truck fully loaded with wood logs and handed over the offenders to the police, but the very next day when he was standing on the roadside a car struck him and his leg was broken as a result. According to him, the car belonged to timber smugglers taking revenge. Another DFO stated that "whenever we catch a big criminal, my telephone and personal mobile phone start ringing with calls from influential persons who want the release of the offenders". According to the local people, most of the forest officials receive bribes from the timber smugglers and allow them to cut precious trees.

Interestingly, in the context of participatory forest management in the selected pilot projects, a significant reduction of illicit tree cutting as compared to the non-project villages was recorded, which indicates that strengthening the sense of ownership and responsibility at the local level might be of use.

4.5 The Forest Department

The FSP has worked mainly on enhancement of the Forest Department's institutional capacity and has effected some changes in its administrative structure, with the intention of decentralising planning and authority (i.e. to backstop the VDCs and WOs), and to increase coordination and cooperation within the department. In practice, however, many lower-level staff of the DFFW have not accepted the new (participatory) approach and feel that their authority and 'source of income' are threatened. According to a Divisional Forest Officer (DFO),

> "the Forest Department has taken the lead among all other departments to involve/empower the communities in the management of forest resources. But a quick change in attitude in people [lower-level foresters] who have been working in the department for a long time is very difficult and it is not easy for them to adjust in the new setup. However, we are learning slowly and moving towards the joint forest management system (...)".

5. Discussion

The results of research presented in this paper refer to efforts by state authorities in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) to decentralise the planning and implementation of forest management. It has been argued that decentralisation is unavoidable, considering past experiences with the top-down, colonially based procedures. We have also pointed out that the efforts made by the FSP show interesting initial outcomes, such as a reduction of illegal timber harvesting in project villages. However, the insights gained show that the actual practice of designing and imple-

menting such decentralised resource management is a contested field in itself, an arena that determines whether such intentions are successful or whether they fail. Our research underlines the importance – in the context of Pakistan – of several issues. Among these are:

- a donor-driven process,
- the importance of (divergent) expectations in the process,
- ignoring customary forest management procedures,
- timber market incentives for non-participation,
- the limited devolution of power,
- the historically rooted mistrust between the state and local people,
- overlapping and non-coordinated institutions,
- the difficulties of non-state actors in such a sensitive context.

Donor-driven process: The participatory approach to forest management was initiated through donor-assisted projects, specifically the FSP, which was launched in 1996. The donors also pushed heavily for the formulation of the Forest Policy of 2001. A mechanism intended to 'broad-base' the institutionalisation of participatory forest management failed. This meant that no reforms came from local collective action. One reason for this is said to be prevailing power relations: the actors with the most bargaining power profited greatly from the local open access constellation regarding forests (as a consequence of competing state and customary regulations); hence there was no need for them to change the institutional setting. But as participation has become mainstream in the global development arena, forestry projects were donor-funded only when village-level committees were established. This raises questions about the ownership of the reform process.

Divergent expectations: The stated objectives indicate that the mandates of the VDCs and the WOs went beyond forest-related activities, but in practice the DFFW emphasised forest protection activities, ignoring the developmental component of the project. The DFFW has a mandate to manage forests specifically for supplying timber to the nation, and to secure the forests' ecological functions. In decentralising forest management, the department maintains these priorities. On the other hand, local people use forests in a variety of ways, among which meeting subsistence needs (e.g. firewood, soil, timber for house construction) has priority. Financial livelihood concerns are not met by forests (e.g. by selling timber), but by selling labour in the context of migration. Local people's top priorities are to secure the financial means required for a living and related basic needs such as physical infrastructure, schooling and health. Thus, their expectations of VDCs lie in these

areas. Our results show that this divergence of expectations is addressed by the FSP in theory but not in practice.

Ignoring customary forest management procedures: Our research shows that state- initiated decentralisation of forest management, on the one hand, does not consider traditional practices (*rivaj*) of forest use but maintains the state's authority, and on the other hand is unable to overcome traditional access discrimination among local people.

This paper highlights, for example, that the VDCs are controlled by influential people and that poor people are given less representation and thus fewer opportunities for participation in these committees.

Timber market incentives for non-participation: Timber is a highly priced good locally, and the most powerful actors in the state as well as in the communities are not interested in changing informal institutions based on weak formal institutions, because they would be on the losing side. For actors with less bargaining power, participatory approaches might be of interest if developed together with them. Otherwise, it is of no use for them to be engaged if they have nothing to gain and only very limited power to redress the institutional setting. Participatory forest management can be an effective strategy to deal with the timber mafia by developing a sense of awareness and ownership among forest residents. Participation in decision-making (e.g. the VLUP process) has created a sense of ownership among local communities (witnessed, for example, in the reduction of illegal cutting by villagers and their protection of forests from outsiders in the project villages, as well as new plantations). But there is another weakness in the new institutions. The responsibility (as delegated by the state) of these newly created institutions concerns protection of the forests rather than management, meaning again that no sense of local ownership can evolve. There are very few incentives for the committees regarding forest protection, while a change in the status quo would mean that the most powerful actors would cease to profit from timber. As a result, the members of the committees as well as other actors are losing interest. The village committees are tightly controlled by the Forest Department, too, and therefore not able to act independently. Under these conditions neither trust and friendly relationships nor good governance can be expected.

Limited devolution of power: One of the main problems with the decentralised forest management system in the NWFP is that the state still holds the key decision-making powers. Decentralisation is not about the downsizing or dismantling of central government; rather, it calls for mutually supportive democratic central and

local governance (Ribot 2002). Despite continued emphasis on devolving forest management authorities to local communities, in practice genuine devolution of authority and power over forests has occurred only to a limited extent. However, strong political will is needed for effective decentralised forest management; otherwise, state control over resources will just be reinforced.

Lack of trust: The historical background of the colonial and postcolonial state, with its ineffective top-down policies, has led local actors to conclude that existing institutional structures will not be changed easily. Mistrust and insecurity have therefore given way to a kind of prisoner's dilemma in which each side behaves as if there were no participatory approaches. Neither state actors nor local government or local-level actors are willing to cooperate. The consequences are high deforestation rates and institutional instability, which make it difficult to establish robust institutions.

Underlying the above-mentioned divergence of interests is a historically rooted mistrust between local people and the state on the one hand and the unwillingness of actors with great bargaining power, such as officers from the Forest Department, to devolve power on the other hand. For such officials, devolution of power would mean more insecurity and vulnerability, while local governments, villagers and households do not really have a say in the matter. Therefore the new institutions and organisations created for the participatory forest management process are not stable, nor is the department really willing to fulfil this demand for devolution of power. On the other hand, local people experience every day that the forestry staff is not trustworthy.

The (limited) role of civil society and 'social movements': Various non-state, non- business groups are trying to operate within this contested political space. They include more modern types of NGOs (implementing donor-funded local development schemes), the traditionally powerful *jirga*, and groups working to foster traditional values (e.g. religious organisations). This paper specifically discusses the intentions and activities of a movement (SAFI) that challenges the state's approach to decentralising forest management. It shows that, on the one hand, the FSP does not really engage in a dialogue with these social entities, and that, on the other hand, these entities themselves are not in a position to effect a change in local resource use.

Overlapping organisations and lack of coordination: A general lack of integration in efforts and coordination among various NGOs working in the forest areas of the NWFP was found during the field surveys. During field studies, two or three,

sometimes even more CBOs formed by the FSP, Sungi, Sarhad Rural Support Programme (SRSP), etc. were found working in the same village without any formal interaction and collaboration. Similarly, there was no formal coordination of these CBOs (particularly the VDCs and the WOs) with the local governments (UC) in the context of forest-related and other developmental activities.[24]

There is potential, though: The links between UCs and VDC/sWOs exist only informally, i.e. in cases where a member of the UC is also a member of the VDC or the WO. In such cases, the efficiency of these institutions was higher than in cases where members of the UC are not also members of the VDC or the WO. Similarly, a higher level of trust and stronger relationships in the UC were recorded in project villages where the members of the UC were also 'active' members of the VDC. This is due to the fact that the villagers then had more chances for interaction with their councillors (members of the UC), and the developmental activities carried out by the VDC were supported by the councillors. As a result, relationships and trust between the local community and the UC were better than between state institution (DFFW).

6. Conclusions

A participatory approach to forest management must first analyse the power and interests of involved stakeholders before actual implementation. The difficulty is that one has to deal with both formal legal instruments and informal rules (customary practices, etc.), where unequal power relations and social conflicts are quite common. Confidence can only be built up between state actors and local people/governments if real devolution of power takes place. This means that local, clearly defined institutions are given the right to manage forests in locally defined by-laws. There must be proof that state actors help local stakeholders to enforce these regulations against the timber mafia, because in view of the influence of powerful traders and outsiders, this cannot always be done by local people alone, not even within communities, as there is an asymmetry of power. However, this would in turn necessitate that forest officials are properly paid for carrying out such difficult jobs, so that they would earn more money from doing their job than they might get from the timber mafia. In the same way, the gains for local communities, partly directly at the household level, have to be tangible in order to provide an incentive to protect the forest.

Therefore, halting the degradation of forests and improving livelihoods in these areas not only requires more decentralisation and participation on paper but also in reality, with benefits being more than the losses and mechanisms being established to punish freeloaders on all sides. Trust between state authorities and local

actors can only be built if local institutions are accorded full empowerment in the context of a participatory forest management system; building trust must also take into account the contextual considerations of local stakeholders.

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Notes:

[1] The paper was first published in Geiser U, Rist S, editors. 2009. Decentralisation Meets Local Complexity: Local Struggles, State Decentralisation and Access to Natural Resources in South Asia and Latin America. Perspectives of the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) North-South, University of Bern, Vol. 4. Bern: Geographica Bernensia, 310 pp. Available at http://www.north-south.unibe.ch/content.php/publication/id/2390

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[3] Professor of Agricultural Extension, University of Agriculture, Faisalabad, Pakistan. His research interests include rural development policies, decentralisation and gender issues.

[4] In 1969, these princely states were merged with Pakistan, and around 1973, forests were declared to be protected.

[5] Eight extension projects implemented various models of participatory forest management in upland areas of Pakistan: the Malakand/Dir Social Forestry Project (MDSFP), the Kalam Integrated Development Project (KIDP), the Siran Forest Development Project (SFDP), the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in the Northern Areas, the Suketar Watershed Management Project, the Himalayan

Wildlife Project, the Himalayan Jungle Project and the Khunjerab Village Organisation.

[6] The government of the Netherlands, the German GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) also contributed to the project.

[7] The empirical context of this analysis is based on a literature review and specifically on findings from research done by Shahbaz (2007) for a PhD degree and from the M.Sc. thesis by Awais (2005).

[8] The right-holders as recognised by forest laws are those entitled to share in timber revenues.

[9] Source: data collected by Shahbaz (2007), derived from 400 randomly selected households in Mansehra and Swat districts of the NWFP.

[10] The fee that right-holders receive from the *gujars* (nomads) for grazing their cattle is called *qalang*.

[11] The general assumption that most forest resources are destroyed by local residents can thus not be supported. In fact, local people do not cut trees for economic reasons; however, they have to use a minor part of the forest resources for their survival/subsistence. This includes fuel wood, timber (for household use), pastures and fodder. Intensive use of wood as fuel for cooking and heating houses during harsh winters was essentially due to the non-availability of alternate sources of energy (Ali et al. 2006). Natural gas is not available in the mountain villages of the NWFP and the higher cost of electricity is a constraint on using it for cooking and heating. Similarly, local people cannot afford kerosene oil and liquid petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders. The winter season is very harsh, with heavy snowfall, and people have no other option except to use forest wood for cooking and heating.

[12] In most cases the adult male family members had migrated to big cities in Pakistan (mainly Karachi) or to foreign countries (mostly Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states) to earn a living; most of these migrants have low-paying jobs such as bus conductors/drivers, labourers, etc.

[13] Source: data collected by Shahbaz (2007), derived from 400 randomly selected households in Mansehra and Swat districts of the NWFP.

[14] Source: data collected by Shahbaz (2007), derived from 400 randomly selected households in Mansehra and Swat districts of the NWFP.

[15] This refers to a network of people established with the single purpose of making money from cutting and selling timber illegally. This nexus emerged through the use of certain practices such as networking, bribing, blackmailing, buying royalties, as well as exporting local timber and importing 'foreignised' timber (Geiser 2000).

[16] The villages where the Forestry Sector Project (FSP) intervened and the decentralised (or participatory) forest management system was implemented.

[17] Source: Govt. of NWFP 2001.

[18] Insignificant efforts have been made so far regarding women's rights and gender mainstreaming in the province. In the context of the FSP, there is a lack of female social organisers. Even in some areas where the Department of Forests, Wildlife and Fisheries (DFFW) had acquired the services of female social organisers or female forestry extensionists, these members rarely visited remote mountainous villages.

[19] There are also some district-level non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (e.g. Hujrah in Swat district and Haasshar in Mansehra district) working for capacity building and community organisation regarding natural resource management in the upland areas of the NWFP with the support of international donor agencies.

[20] On 24 August 2002, General Musharraf issued the Legal Framework Order, announcing general elections to be held in October 2002. Various constitutional provisions were amended through this ordinance.

[21] This confirms Steimann's hypothesis (2004) that community-based organisations are gradually replacing the practical use of *jirga*.

[22] Similarly *Tablighees* (preachers) go from home to home, knock on doors and invite people to listen to them. They use both punishment and reward techniques, including the fear of hell and punishment after death and the incentives of going to heaven and reaping otherworldly rewards. They motivate people to join them in their task of inviting other people to obey God by doing good deeds and avoiding bad deeds. Their approach is mainly religious and does not cover overall societal development. The *Pirs* (spiritual leaders) belong to the sufi school of thought in Islam and address the spiritual problems of the people. Their followers include mainly poor, illiterate and orthodox people. These followers obey the orders of the *Pirs* in order to please them.

[23] Despite the facts that the religious groups have deep roots in the socio-cultural setting of the rural NWFP and that the then provincial government was also composed of an alliance of various religious parties and groups, there was not much deliberation regarding the involvement of such groups in institutional reform processes.

[24] According to the devolution plan, the local governments have modest influence on forestry-related activities.