

Linkages, Conflicts and Dynamics

Institutional Spaces and Participation in Local Forest Management in Uttarakhand

Study Report No.

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Foreword

Development Research Centre (DRC) on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability is a research partnership based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex, U.K, which brings together research institutions and practice based civil society groups from India, Brazil, South Africa, Mexico and Nigeria from the South and the U.K from the North. DRC project explores the issues of poverty, exclusion and marginalization within the framework of rights and citizenship. 'Making rights real for poor people' is what DRC project aims at and it seeks to contribute to this goal through research, dissemination, policy influence and capacity building.

PRIA entered into this partnership in 2001. As part of DRC, PRIA continues to conduct research studies relating to various aspects of citizenship, participation and accountability.

We are happy to bring out this publication as part of DRC study report series and we do hope that the readers will find this exercise beneficial.

March, 2004

Rajesh Tandon
President, PRIA
New Delhi



Preface & Acknowledgments

Recent times witness many new ways through which people's engagement in development is sought by the state. Of these, the most important is the creation of participatory spaces in the form of local institutions for representation, deliberation, and decision making at the village level. However, these local developmental institutions seldom exist in isolation. They intersect, interact, and at times overlap, with other local institutions. What shape participation eventually takes within these developmental spaces is thus contingent not only on the dynamics taking place within them, but also to a large extent on their relationship with co-existing local institutional spaces. Shaped by power dynamics between institutions and institutional procedures, by actors with affiliations and interests across other spaces, by competing perspectives on forest management, and by a variety of forms of participation ranging from formal representation to employment to inclusion in deliberation and decision making, the dynamics of participation within spaces such as Uttaranchal's Village Forest Protection Committees (VFCs) is complex. The study suggests that creating and institutionalising spaces such as these provide necessary, but not sufficient conditions to ensure the democratisation of participation. Whilst these institutional spaces have the potential to create certain conditions for participation and democracy at the local level, they can also restrict its possibilities and therefore, must not be conflated either with participation or with democracy.

Many people helped in this research endeavour .

I am thankful to Rajesh Tandon, Andrea Cornwall and John Gaventa for their ideas, insights and comments. Many thanks to Melissa Leach who took time off to read the paper and comment on it. The collective reflections at the Write Shop in October 2003 proved helpful in revisiting some of our earlier thoughts on “ participatory spaces” and in that sense instrumental in sharpening them. For this I thank Andrea Cornwall, Vera Coelho, Bettina Von Lieres, Alex Shankland, Joanna Wheeler, Carols Coertez and John Williams.

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culture and *pahadi* ways of life. I immensely benefited from her insights, her professional contacts and her social ties. Thanks Ganga for all your help to complete the study.

Uttranchal's Forest Department officials were extremely helpful in not only sharing their views but they also provided support in accessing various reports and documents. In this regard I am particularly thankful to Mr.A.R. Sinha, Mr. S.S. Rasaili and Mr. I.D. Pandey who took a keen interest in the study and later joined me at the workshop held in Nainital to share the study findings.

I extend my gratitude to people in the study villages for unhesitatingly giving their time and expressing their views. Lack of space does not allow mentioning all the names. I am most thankful to Hansa Joshi from Saladi and Anand Prakash from Deeni.

The views expressed in this report are mine and I am responsible for the interpretations and omissions or shortcomings, if any.

Ranjita Mohanty

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Introduction

Talking about participation, now a clichéd term, poses its own set of problems. It remains a challenge as to how this over used and abused concept can be rescued and invested with something meaningful. This challenge gets intensified as new ways of participation are thought through, planned and operationalised, particularly by the state, which remains the central actor in creating, regulating and determining the nature and direction of participation, both in the socio-economic processes of development and in the political processes of governance. In the context of participation in development, recent times are witness to many new ways through which people's engagement is sought by the state. Of these, the most important is the creation of participatory spaces in the form of local institutions for representation, deliberation, and decision making at the village level. However, these local developmental institutions seldom exist in isolation. They intersect, interact, and at times overlap, with other local institutions. What shape participation eventually takes within these developmental spaces is thus contingent not only on the dynamics taking place within them, but also to a large extent on their relationship with co-existing local institutional spaces.

Situated in this context, the study focuses on the linkages, conflicts and dynamics between the traditional, developmental and statutory institutions to explore participation of people in their local forest management. The study focuses on the developmental institution specifically created by the state for the management of local forests and explores its interaction with the traditional institution - which also in various ways is created and regulated by the state, albeit incorporating the traditional ways of forest management as they evolved historically - on the one hand and the constitutionally mandated statutory institutions of local governance on the other, to depict the nature of participation as it actually takes place. Shaped by power dynamics between institutions and institutional procedures, by actors with affiliations and interests across other spaces, by competing perspectives on forest management, and by a variety of forms of participation ranging from formal representation to employment to inclusion in deliberation and decision making, the dynamics of participation within spaces such as Uttaranchal's Village Forest Protection Committees (VFCs) is complex. Let me suggest at the outset that creating and institutionalising spaces such as these provide necessary, but not sufficient conditions to ensure the democratisation of participation. Whilst these institutional spaces have the potential to create certain conditions for participation and democracy at the local level, they can also restrict its possibilities and therefore, must not be conflated either with participation or with democracy.

Forests have been an integral part of the lives of people in the Kumaon region of Uttaranchal. People are dependent on forests for a variety of reasons fuel - for cooking, fodder for the animals, timber for house construction, medicinal herbs to cure ailments and forest products such as resin have traditionally been a source of income for the people. Currently, forest resources are managed by three types of local institutions which are formed, supervised and regulated by the higher order government institutions to function as a participatory fora. The focal institution at the village level is the *van panchayat* (forest panchayat) which was created by the colonial administration to provide people with some autonomy to manage their local forests. People in the hills call *van panchayats* their traditional system of forest management. Whether a system introduced by the colonial administration can be called traditional is a matter of doubt and debate. In this study *van panchayats* are considered traditional institutions because of two essential elements of the organising principles of the *van panchayat* system - the nature of seeking representation from each hamlet called *tok* and the contribution of a household towards the protection of forests in the form of *mawasa*, a small monetary contribution which have been retained from earlier practices. This system still continues. However, in recent times, under the World Bank aided Joint Forest Management (JFM) the *van panchayats* have been converted into Village Forest Protection Committee (VFCs) for a period of four years. The third institutional arrangement which is marginal to the forest management, but central as a unit of local self-governance is the *gram panchayat* (village panchayat) and forms the third tier of the three-tier system of governance mandated by the Constitution of India. All these local institutions have a body of elected representatives who constitute the executive committee and are responsible for the administrative management of funds, records and meetings. The executive committees are also the centers for decision-making and implementation of forest related projects in the village. The general body of the institutions comprises of the village as a whole and all the households are members of the local institutions. Both the executive committee as well as the general body of the village therefore, have to be the focus of analysis in any understanding of the nature of participatory spaces.

This report is divided into seven sections. Section I provides the conceptual framework and methodology adopted for the study. Section II talks about the history of forest management and the related institutional arrangement, which came into existence with it. It touches three broad phases in the history of forest management - forests under the colonial period, state management of forests after independence and imbibing of participatory approaches to forest management in recent times. Section III talks about how the discourse on rights, which formed the foundation of institutions during the colonial

administration, has now been expanded to include the normative elements of democracy, thus changing and broadening the constituting base of the institutional spaces. Section IV discusses the power dynamics both between and within institutions and their consequent influence on the local institutional spaces. Section V explores the dynamics of participation which takes place within the VFC. Section VI provides a succinct account of the participation and voice of the marginalised section, particularly women in JFM. Section VII analyses the local contextual factors that shape the nature of local institutional spaces and participation. The conclusion sums up the arguments provided in the main body of the text.

I. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The concepts of *space* and *invited space* are central to the DRC project. The project coordinators at IDS (Cornwall, 2002; Gaventa, 2002) drawing from (Lefebvre, 1991; Bourdieu, 1977 ; Foucault, 1975) have suggested *power* as central to the understanding of spaces for participation. Building on that understanding, I use institutional space as a contested terrain. There are three planks of argument, which I suggest are central to any understanding of spaces and the consequent nature and dynamics of participation that takes place within these spaces. First, since institutions are the embodiment of power, the spaces created by them are political in nature. This makes spaces vulnerable to contestations and conflicts of various kinds, which means participation does not remain a virtuous normative phenomena, though the normative desirability of participation remains unquestioned.

Second, spaces are never created in a vacuum- they react upon already existing spaces, on spaces which are simultaneous and overlapping and on the wider social-economic-cultural setting in which they are embedded. This means that spaces remain transformatory-they are constantly being created, altered,- defined and redefined, with positive promises and possibilities amidst manipulation, misuse and abuse. Third, given the political and transformatory character of the spaces, spaces can emerge as arenas of solidarity as well as contestation. That is, they can be visible, public, open, intimate and inclusive; they can also emerge as arenas of contestation and can be invisible, private, closed and exclusive.

If this is how we look at spaces, then how must we conceptualise *invited spaces*? Cornwall's (Cornwall, 2002) notion of invited spaces suggests a couple of things: invited spaces are created by exterior agencies into which people are invited to participate and can be contrasted with *created spaces* which people create for themselves through the mobilisation of their own

agencies. Invited spaces, she suggests, are *domesticated sites* when seen vis-a-vis the *radical possibilities* of created spaces¹. Gaventa (Gaventa, 2002) views invited spaces as *open spaces* for deliberation and decision making when contrasted with the *closed spaces* and *provided spaces* where "decisions are made by a set of actors behind closed doors, without any pretence of broadening the boundaries of inclusion" (Gaventa, 2002: 3). These definitions are useful ways of looking at invited spaces. However, this study suggests that a revisiting of these definitions is required to enable us to put our finger on the pulse of invited spaces and the kind of participation that does take place within these spaces. I suggest a couple of ways in which we need to look at invited spaces. First, invited spaces, even when created by exterior agencies (in our study by the state), cannot be seen purely as an external or state creation. A certain amount of interest articulation, through overt or covert protest or through deliberation and negotiation, has gone in to the shaping of what later comes as invited fora. Second, invited spaces seldom remain as they were originally designed. They interact on already existing spaces, with spaces which are simultaneous, with spaces which are outside them and in this process get transformed in a myriad ways. Third, the domesticated sites of invited spaces may not offer radical possibilities, but they do open up possibilities for learning the skills and arts of governance, which people can use in other spaces. Lastly, invited spaces can be closed at times when decisions are made behind closed doors. There is nothing inherent in invited spaces that saves them from getting closed sometimes, if not all the times. What I mean to say is that invited spaces, while retaining some of their dominant characteristics, acquire characteristics of the setting in which they are located.

The DRC project at IDS locates participation within a *right based approach* and argues that this new approach locates citizens and their rights at the center of any discussion on participation (Gaventa, Shankland and Howard, 2002). This, they argue represents a shift in the way people were looked at during the different phases of development discourse and practice. From being treated as beneficiaries / recipients, client / consumers, finally people are now seen as citizens with rights to participate in policies and programmes which affect their lives (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2000). How these rights are actualised or not-actualised, are therefore, of central importance in current times.

Again drawing from empirical insights, I suggest that the beneficiary-consumer- citizen classification, instead of being looked upon as mutually exclusive progressive positions, needs to be looked at as a simultaneous

¹ Similar views are expressed by Rahnema, 1997, who sees insertion of an element of participation within the existing models of development does not lead to the questioning of the wrongs of development, whereas when people mobilise themselves to question development and provide their own versions of development, participation assumes its real meaning.

experience for people about whose participation this study speaks. In the spaces created by a single developmental project, in this case JFM, there are practices which treat people as beneficiaries, there are also practices which treat them as users/ consumers who need to pay for the services and there are practices which make them citizens with the right to elect their representatives, demand transparency and accountability. Thus, it is not the neat classification of positions, but their simultaneousness and overlapping and complex intersection of normative ideals and pragmatic practices which influences participation as we encounter it in the villages of Uttaranchal². A second related point is, it is not always rights which determine and influence participation. It is also, what I call *beyond rights*, the normative desirability of democracy and development, which influences participation.

With this understanding of spaces, invited spaces and participation as rights and beyond rights, the findings of this study are discussed in the sections that follow.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted in six villages- Deeni, Saldi, Jungaliya Gaon, Soan Gaon, Bannan, Parwada - in Nainital Division, Uttaranchal. A number of criteria guided the selection of villages. These were: the history of solidarity or conflict between the institutions, the history of participation of lower castes and women in local forest management, women's membership and participation and the lack of it in the current VFCs, the homogeneity / heterogeneity of population both caste and class wise, the supportive/ non-supportive role of the Forest Department, local institutional spaces which are either open and closed and spaces which present varying degrees of a combination of openness and closedness.

While I formulated the broad framework of the study following the guidelines provided by the DRC coordinators at IDS, the precise details were worked out only after I visited the villages, met the people and consulted with Central Himalayan Rural Action Group (CHIRAG)³, our local partner organisation for the study. Spaces, more precisely invited spaces, provided the conceptual and analytical framework for the study. However, once I scanned the secondary literature, went to the villages and talked to the

2 Instrumental rationality vs. normative desirability of participation has been an old debate. It is not my intention to enter into that debate. All I want to say is that while participation earlier was considered as a means to implement projects successfully, with the passage of time it became a value to be promoted because including the voice of the marginalised and excluded people in development was thought of as a way to bring them to the centre of development. However, an acceptance of the normative view of participation does not necessarily mean that the instrumentality of participation is abandoned. There is a tacit understanding that it is far easier to achieve the targets of development with participation than without it. This mixing and matching of instrumental rationality of participation and the values associated with it, as we will encounter in this report, has given rise to ambiguity and has affected participation in many ways.

3 CHIRAG is a grassroots organisation working in the Kumaon region of Uttaranchal. Among its various activities, a significant one is engaging people in the management of their local natural resources.

people, a few things became clear. For instance, and I have already stated this earlier in this report, my existing understanding of invited spaces created by JFM changed. I could understand the way a whole range of factors shape this space and when that happens, it no longer remains exclusively a state created space. This aspect became particularly important in framing the research questions and analysing people's agency.

The second insight which influenced research questions is the participation of women in the traditional institutions of the *van panchayat*. Inherent in our understanding of the traditional institutions is the belief that since people create it, it is beneficial to them. Yet, the exclusionary aspects of traditional institutions were revealed when women said that they seldom participated in the *van panchayat* either as voters or members.

Another important revelation which influenced the research is the role of the local organisations. Our local partner organisation CHIRAG incidentally was a part of the spearhead team constituted by the JFM and therefore, played a significant role in building awareness and mobilising people. An added aspect was that CHIRAG also has its own afforestation projects which forms women's collectives known as the *Van Suraksha Samitis* in some of the villages where the study was conducted. The way people perceive CHIRAG and the role they want it to play in the affairs of forest management thus seemed an important aspect to explore. In our understanding of institutional spaces the emphasis is always, and almost exclusively on state created institutions. The local organisations, which play an important role in building awareness, mobilising people, working as a link, sometimes the missing link as one may call it, between the people and the state are important factors in influencing the state created participatory spaces at the village level. These were the three important insights, which guided the formulation of research agenda.

During subsequent visits to the village I could explore the possibilities of the modes of conducting research. Village meetings became absolute entry points. Ganga Joshi from CHIRAG was remarkable in organising these meetings. The *van panchayat* / VFC *sarpanch*, *gram panchayat pradhan*⁴ as well as other members and village residents attended these meetings. The second step was to talk to the women separately, visit the households or take a walk with them when they went to collect fuel and fodder from the village. I realised that I was able to collect a whole range of information from the meetings which were attended by a large number of people, the focused group meetings which were with select people, individual discussions and

⁴ In kumaon region where this study was conducted *van panchayat* head is called *sarpanch* and *gram panchayat* head is called *pradhan*.

the more informal late evening talks. The next step was to contact the forest officials. I had long drawn-out discussions with the forest officials responsible at each level for the implementation of JFM. In consonance with participatory ways, before finalising the report, it was shared in a workshop held at Nainital. It was attended by VFC members, as well representatives of a cross section of people from each study village. The forest officials also joined the meeting.

II. Changing Perspectives on Forest Management and Institutional Changes

In earlier times, much before the establishment of the colonial regime, forests were managed as a common property resource by the people. Through a variety of social and cultural sanctions the hill people were made to combine their subsistence related dependency on nature with its conservation in a balanced way. By dedicating the hill tops to the local deities people were made to venerate forests. Informal institutions of management were also in place to protect the forest - for instance in the Oak forests there were informal rules which prohibited the lopping off of the leaves during summer months. These rules also specified, according to the need of each household, the amount of grass to be cut by each family. People who violated these rules were subjected to social sanctions and were often denied entry into the forest. People were required to pay the king for medicinal herbs and other forest produce which was commercially exploited, but as far as the access to and use of the forests was concerned, there were hardly any restrictions imposed by the kings (Guha, 1991).

All this changed with the establishment of colonial administration in Kumaon. The forest management and institutional arrangements in British Kumaon not only restricted people's access to and use of the forest, it also brought formal institutions to regulate them. The British administration's interest in the forests was guided by two factors - supply of timber to build railway tracks and war ships, and supply of fuel to the administrative centers in Nainital, Almora and the cantonment town of Ranikhet. Between 1815 and 1917, through a variety of measures, the British administration brought forests under state control and large patches of forests were declared 'reserved' under the 1878 Indian Forest Act. State control of the forest regulated and restricted the access to and use of the forests by people and there was severe resistance against the measures taken up by the British administration (Guha, 1991). As a result, the British administration decided to grant some control to the local people on the less commercially viable patches, albeit according to rules and regulation made by the state. Thus the *van panchayats*⁵

were created in 1931 under the Kumaon Panchayat forest rules of 1931 (amended in 1976 and further amended in 2001). The Revenue Department was given the responsibility of forming a *van panchayat* in a village if one third of its residents put in an application for its formation. The Forest Department was given the responsibility of providing technical guidance to the *van panchayat*. This practice continues till date in Kumaon. The Revenue Department is responsible for selecting a date for the election of the *van panchayat* members, informing the villagers about it and conducting the elections. The *van panchayat* members are elected in an open meeting, which is attended by all the adult residents of the village they then select the *sarpanch*, who is the head of the *van panchayat*. Each hamlet called *tok* has at least one representative in the *van panchayat*. A *van panchayat* usually has five to nine members and is given the responsibility of the plantation and regeneration of the forest, regulation of access to and management of the panchayati forest, the appointment of a watch man for the protection of the forest and levying of fines on offenders. The *van panchayat* fund built out of the sale of forest produce such as, timber, resin etc. is deposited with the Deputy Commissioner at Nainital and can be spent only with his / her permission.

Until 1947, the chief motive of the state's control over the forests and granting limited rights to people was guided by the commercial exploitation of forests to serve the British administration. After independence, the motive became revenue generation for the state. The state thus continued its control and a cadre of scientific foresters carrying on the legacy of British ways of managing the forest continued to administer the forests. The path to economic development planned by Indian leaders had made the forests a prime target for scientific management and control.⁶ Thus a well-developed bureaucratic model adopted from the British administration took control of the forests.

Things began to change in the late 1980's, when state control over the forests came under criticism, when it was realised that the alienation of people from the forest had significantly damaged the forests and that the people need to be brought into the management of forests in a more active way. These shifts in forest management reflected the shift in the development discourse towards participatory ways of delivering development. This shift required changes in the institutional arrangement for forest management as well as changes in the orientation of the forest bureaucracy. Instead of concentrating on the commercial worth of forests, they are now required to emphasise on the subsistence needs of the people and ecological considerations, and instead of taking on the entire responsibility for the management of the

5 For government rules and regulation by which *van panchayats* are guided, see Forest Department, Government of Uttar Pradesh (GoUP), 1976 and Forest Department, Government of Uttaranchal (GoU), 2001.

6 Gadgil and Guha, 1992, argue that commercial industrial sector is the prime actor influencing the state forest policy in independent India

forest, they are required to share it with the people. This change was introduced with the World Bank aided Joint Forest Management (JFM) project in the Kumoan region in 1997 (GoUP, 1998). JFM reflected the element of community participation through the creation of VFCs, which are mandated to implement the project at the village level together with the Forest Department. Under JFM, the existing *van panchayats* were converted into VFCs for a period of four years during which the project was to be implemented. The *van panchayats* (turned into VFCs) are thus given the responsibility of preparing the micro-plan for the work done under the project, take steps to protect the forests, distribute the forest products equitably, undertake plantation and regeneration work. While the *van panchayat* fund is still with the Deputy Commissioner, the financial resources coming under JFM are to be utilised directly by the VFC. The *sarpanch* of the VFC and the forest guard from the Forest Department are given the joint responsibility to utilise the financial resources. Besides, the VFC also has to build a village development fund (VDF), which would be utilised for both village development as well as forest development. While JFM gives VFCs financial resources to implement the project, it also demands that people contribute to the cost of the project. It thus becomes the responsibility of the VFCs to seek contributions from the people. Part of this contribution comes in the form of labour whereby people either contribute free labour and the wages are deposited in the VDF, or they contribute part of their wage to the fund. Under JFM, the VFCs, in addition to the *panchayati* forests, are given the responsibility to manage patches of the reserved forest close to the village, thus bringing, for the first time in the history of forest management, state-controlled reserved forests under the joint management of the people and the Forest Department.

III. Rights and Beyond Rights: Changing Nature of Institutional Spaces

The British administration by extending state control over the forests affected people's participation in forest management in two significant ways: one, it restricted people's access to and the use of large areas of the forests which were brought under the category of reserved forests and therefore, under the exclusive control of the state. Second, it replaced the earlier informal ways of managing the forest with the formal institutions of *van panchayat*. These changes were significant in laying the foundation for 'rights' to govern local institutional spaces for participation. Through a whole range of changes such as

- marking the boundaries of the villages,
- demarcating the forest patch from which people of a village would take

- their fuel, fodder, timber and fruits,
- dividing forests into categories of protected and reserved,
- assigning the Forest Department the charge of managing the more precious reserved forests and putting the Revenue Department in charge of the less productive protected forests which would be managed by the people from the village,
- restricting the access of people to the reserved forest,
- specifying the items and situations in which people would use the reserved forest,
- specifying the kind of trees not to be touched by people,
- specifying the forest produce for which people were to take permission from the Forest Department and Revenue Department.
- The specific rights of people over the forest were established (Guha, 1991).

These rights were made enforceable by bringing them under the legal system and therefore, their violation became punishable under law. A close look at the Grievance Committee Report, 1921 (Wyndham, 1921), which documented the resentment of people against state control over the forests and on the basis of which the British administration created the *van panchayats*, reveals that people made these claims on the state even when the language of rights was unfamiliar to them. The specifications for the management of the forests in the language of rights on the one hand, *recognised* certain ways of managing the forest and on the other, by specifying these rights it delineated the *content and boundaries of local action*- what people were granted and were allowed to claim and what they were not granted and therefore, were barred from. This not only restricted the local institutional management of forests to the civil / protected forests and limited access to reserved forests; it also specified what kind of actions were to be allowed in the institutional spaces created by the state for local participation.

These have significant implications for subsequent people's management of local forests. First, while informal management systems did continue in a few places, the formal institutionalised way was considered *state approved* and therefore, in line with what the government wants us to do. This attitude was in a way derivative and symbolic of the post-independence nationalistic fervor. Being connected to the state in one way or another was thought of as a privilege and even in the instances of the *van panchayats* becoming defunct either due to the lack of funds or due to the negligence of the Revenue Department or village conflicts, no alternative method of managing the local forests was ever considered. Second, when the formal-institutional-public space inhibited, if not purposefully restricted, certain people, for instance,

women, as voters, members, or even as participants in the village meetings, it was considered natural. Third, the rights, as a basis for the formation of and participation in the institutional spaces, created differences between the people and the state in many ways: the state institutions as the givers of rights and the local institutions as the receivers, the state as the owner of the forest and the people as managers of only those areas which the state allowed, the state as the creator of spaces for participation and the people as participants in these state created spaces. This, as we will see in the next section, laid the foundation for vertical relationships of power between the state and people and made the institutional space for participation vulnerable to power dynamics.

National Forest Policy of India, 1988, Uttar Pradesh State Forest Policy 1996 (the state of Uttaranchal earlier was part of the state of Uttar Pradesh) and the very recent Uttaranchal Forest Policy 2001, which laid emphasis on participatory forest management have attempted, at least theoretically, to subvert the relationships of power between the state and local institutions in favour of the latter. These policy resolutions have also tried to constitute the local institutions on the principles of democracy, rather than on the colonial conception of rights. Participatory democracy and development require that the people who are dependent on the forest for their subsistence, get a stake in its management, not because the state is pleased to grant them that stake, but because that is the way democracy and development must operate. In this normative version of participation, participation is sought not to fulfill some ulterior motives of the state i.e., minimise the voice of resistance or prevent encroachment on commercially viable forests, but to integrate the marginalised and excluded into the process of governance. The new meanings with which the local institutional spaces are filled, thus privilege a version of participation which is an attempt to enable the marginalised people to influence resource distribution and control the forces which impact on their lives⁷. Let us see what is distinctive about the new institutional spaces created by the new policy resolutions and operationalised through JFM.

Among the various objectives of the 1988 policy, two objectives are important for our purpose: first, afforestation and plantation to meet the requirement of the rural and tribal population as well as the essential national needs and second, creating a people's movement with the involvement of women, tribals and other marginalised groups for the protection and joint management of forests. For the incorporation of the needs of people dependent on forests, the policy calls for a radical change in the approaches to forest and

⁷ Nevertheless, an undertone of power and restrictions associated with state given rights can be discerned in the functioning of the institutions and in the language of the foresters.

land management. The Uttar Pradesh State Forestry Action Plan (SFAP) 1996, is by and large, consistent with National Forest Policy. The SFAP emphasises the promotion of JFM as a new approach to afforestation of wasteland and degraded forestland through the involvement of villagers and NGOs; it also emphasises the need for empowering and giving more power to the *van panchayats* in the hilly regions of Uttaranchal to play this role. The objectives of supporting the JFM and participatory forestry are to give the bonafide users a direct stake in the forest benefits and a role in the planning and management of the forests to improve its conditions and productivity and to support the increased and equitable distribution of income to the users and managers of forests. The new policy is based on a process change approach and calls for the Forest Department to change from a controlling authority to becoming a provider of technical advice and support services in the development of JFM. To strengthen the local institutions, the policy speaks of developing the institutional, managerial and technical capacity of people so that they can manage forests and related natural resources. It asks the Forest Department to develop a new role based on the spirit of partnership with the users of the forests. There are a few things which are new in this policy. First, it expands the local institutional space by broadening its activities, invigorating it with new responsibilities and substantial financial resources, giving it the autonomy to prepare micro-plans for the village, utilise its resources in operationalising the plan and create new resources. Second, it makes provisions for the representation of the weaker sections like women, tribals and lower castes in the *van panchayat*. Third, it alters the power relations between people and the state institutions by turning the Forest Department into supervisor / facilitator rather than controller / police of forests. Fourth, it gives the *van panchayats* the responsibility of managing patches of reserved forest which were earlier owned exclusively by the state. Fifth, it gives the *van panchayats* a share in the revenue and the people a share in the products of the reserved forest. Sixth, it vests people with the technical and managerial skills to manage the forests. Last, but not the least, it in an indirect and subtle way equips people with the art of governance - to decide what is good for them, to manage their resources, deal with the power blocks, negotiate their terms, raise their voices and make themselves heard. The limited space of the *van panchayats* when turned into VFCs under JFM, thus gets expanded, altered and filled with new activities, new skills and new ways of participation. However, beneath these normative considerations of participatory democracy, we can find a certain amount of instrumentality, which accompanied the changes in forest management. The Forest Department was alarmed at the fast deterioration of the reserved forests, which were close to the village boundaries and suspected that people saved their panchayati forests and destroyed the

Forest Department's reserved forests. Thus, the Forest Department felt that there was no better way than involving the people themselves in the management of these degraded reserved forests. It appears as a sophisticated exchange system - the Forest Department treats the benefits which goes to the *van panchayat* and to the people as a concession, a privilege and some forest officials would even say reward, for their taking an interest in managing the reserved forests.

IV. Institutions, Power and Spaces

A complex web of power relationships fills the institutional spaces for participation. These relations of power can be broadly categorised into three types:

1. Between the state institutions that form, supervise and regulate the local institutions
2. Between the local institutions and the state institutions
3. Between local institutions with overlapping membership

1. The British administration for the first time established horizontal relations of power between the Revenue Department and Forest Department in matters related to local forest management by giving the former the power to form, supervise and regulate the *van panchayats* and the latter the power to provide the *van panchayats* with technical guidance. During the colonial period, the relationship between the Revenue Department and Forest Department, both serving primarily the colonial interest, did not become adversarial. After independence as each of them tried to gain more power, their interests clashed. The dimensions of power each department displayed in controlling local institutions became a point of contention between them. While the Forest Department was and is, in principle, in command of the forest, it sees the Revenue Department's powers relating to the *van panchayat* as merely an intrusion in its domain of responsibility and authority. Since in the history of state bureaucracy the civil administration is considered superior to the forest administration, the Revenue Department implicitly claims to be more powerful than the Forest Department in regulating the *van panchayats*. For instance, while the Forest Department may advice people to plant a particular species or tell them about particular ways of protecting them, the *van panchayats* cannot utilise the fund unless the Deputy Commissioner gives permission for the same. The horizontal clash (with an undertone of vertical power) then transmits to the local level and the local institutional spaces do get influenced and affected by this.

With the coming of JFM, the institutional landscape for forest management is

altered in a significant way. At the higher level, the Forest Department, which earlier controlled only the reserved forests and provided only technical guidance to the *van panchayats*, now has a bigger role to play in the local forest management. As implementers of JFM, it not only has the power to distribute funds for the project, it also has to supervise the work done by the *van panchayats* turned VFCs. Entrusting the responsibility of the management of the funds to the forest guard along with the *sarpanch* has also allowed the Forest Department to intervene in matters of local management of the forests. This has tilted the relations of power towards the Forest Department. This shift is not resented so much at the higher levels of bureaucracy. But is resented particularly by the Forest Panchayat Inspector, who is part of the Revenue Department and previously yielded a lot of power at the local level and whose power has been substantially reduced under the new institutional arrangements. Whenever a suitable situation arises for the Revenue Department to exercise its power, it does take advantage of that. An incident of this nature took place in the village Parwada, where the levying of penalty on the illegal encroachment by the VFC invited the wrath of the encroachers. In Parwada, the VFC excelled in the protection of forests. Ironically, it is the strict impositions by the VFC on the defaulters and encroachers that disturbed the established practices and upset a group of powerful people who could lobby with the Revenue Department to hold fresh elections on the ground that the VFC had become corrupt. The election however, took place very secretly with only a handful of people attending it. Later, this newly elected VFC was declared illegal on the grounds that the election was held two days before the date specified by the Deputy Commissioner. The old VFC thus continued working but with stiff opposition from this group of powerful people.

2. Under the colonial administration, local forest management institutions were directly, and in a relationship of power, linked with the higher order state bureaucracy, which formed them, supervised their work and controlled the finances. The institutional space, which was earlier created by the people in response to their needs, was replaced by an institutional space which the state created for the people, partly in response to their need and partly to avoid confrontation with them. The British administration also laid the foundation for a legal framework for participation in local forest management. The ownership of the land, which the *van panchayats* were given to manage, remained with the Revenue Department. The people were merely to manage that land in order to fulfill their needs from these forest patches and not demand any further concessions to use the reserved forests. The space available for people to participate in the local forest thus became at once formal, legal and state-controlled and therefore, subservient to the state. This continued unaltered even after the country gained independence

and over the years the state institutions became more and more commanding in their attitude and repressive in their dealings with the people, of course with the exception of a few bureaucrats who could relate well with the local populace. The new approaches to participatory forest management and the Joint Forest Management are attempts precisely to undo this relationship between the state and the people through a process-change approach, which requires the forest bureaucracy to change its institutional arrangement and attitude in favour of a partnership with the people. The policy resolutions notwithstanding, not much change is visible at the local level. The foresters at the higher end of the forest bureaucracy have adopted the rhetoric of participation quite successfully, but when it comes to resolving any dispute between the forest officials and the people, they find it difficult to remain unbiased and their response tilts in favour of their own department people. The village Soan Gaon is a case in point. Here, what communication took place between the forest guard and the higher forest officials is still not known, but JFM project was stalled in the village on the grounds that the VFC members were not active and could not mobilise the people to resolve their personal rivalries. The VFC members, on the other hand, blame the Forest Department accusing it of hiding the forest guard's faults who taking advantage of the *sarpanch's* trust embezzled huge sums of money from the project account.

3. The spaces available to people for participation in forest management gets further affected by the presence of other institutions at the local level. Following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1993, presently there is a lot of emphasis to make the *gram panchayat* an effective unit of local governance. The *gram panchayat*, which is a body of elected representatives entrusted with the responsibility of local governance, is the lowest level of a three-tier system of governance. In this three tier system, at the village level there is *gram panchayat*, at the block level there is *panchayat samiti*, and at the district level there is *zilla panchayat*. In the current system of management of forests the *pradhan*, as the head of the *gram panchayat*, is entitled to distribute the forest produce, which people in each village are traditionally entitled to from the reserved forest. While at the village level no administrative or functional relationship is established between the *van panchayat* and *gram panchayat*, at the block level, the range level spearhead team constituted under JFM has two representatives from the *gram panchayat*. Similarly the district level spearhead team has the representation of the *zilla panchayat*. The Block *Pramukh*, who is the head of the second tier of the three-tier system of governance, has the supervisory power to approve the work of the VFCs as satisfactory, for them to get further funds from the Forest Department. In reality however, these administrative linkages do not result in any func-

tional synchronisation of the institutions' activities at the local level. Though the *pradhan* is considered as a higher authority in comparison to the *sarpanch* in matters related to the development of the village, when it comes to forest related issues, the *sarpanch* has a larger role. Earlier however, there was an attitude of neutrality between the *gram panchayat* and the *van panchayat*, but JFM has altered that and filled it with rivalry, competition and conflict. It was found that particularly after JFM was introduced in the villages and huge amounts of money came to the *van panchayats* through the project, an antipathy developed between the *van panchayat* and the *gram panchayat*. The *sarpanch*, who was a non-entity in the village before JFM, is now perceived as being very powerful by the people. This has given rise to a lot of jealousy, competition and even malice in some places. The members of *gram panchayat* in the villages opine that they should have been given the responsibility of implementing the project. This rivalry has created factionalism in the village and that gets transported to the spaces created for participation. This has happened in the village Bannan, where the *pradhan* felt inferior to the *sarpanch* who began handling huge amounts of money coming through the JFM and thus getting all the attention and respect in the village. The *pradhan* lodged a complaint with the block administration against the *sarpanch* whom she accused of misappropriating funds. Following this, the Forest Department stopped funding the project activities for a while and renewed it only after it was found that the complaint was more a result of malice than of any real misappropriation of the fund. Another serious consequence of rivalry between the *gram panchayat* and the VFC is the growth of factionalism in the village. This manifests in the form of giving wrong information, suspicion and attempts to subvert work, thus obstructing any meaningful participation by the people in forest management.

V. Dynamics of Participation within the VFCs

The dynamics of participation taking place within the VFCs can be helpfully analysed through four variables: actors occupying the institutional space of VFC and their influence; competing knowledge/ perspectives on forest management; varieties of participation and the nature of engagement taking place within the VFC; and institutional procedures guiding the VFC and the management of resources, particularly financial resources and their allocation for forest management. For the purposes of this report, I focus in more depth on the first and third of these categories, in order to shed further light on the dynamics of voice, inclusion and influence in JFM.

Actors and Influence

Of all the actors, the state⁸ is the most influential in the arena of forest management. Comprised as it is of heterogeneous, sometimes competing, institutions, the state nonetheless has a central character, which is more overpowering and pervasive than the fragmentations and conflicts among those who represent it. As codified power, ultimate decision maker, resource mobiliser, the state impinges on the lives of people more than any other force, and determines how the affairs in society are to be managed. The role the state has played in the history of forest management has vested it with immense power. To understand people's subservience, it is important to understand the nature of the post-colonial state and the depth of people's relationships of dependence and patronage with the state. It is important to capture how the state features in the imagination of people since it is their relationship with the state - ranging from disillusionment and despair to seeing it as a patron and a benefit - which reflect in their relationship with the state created institutions. We find them unhappy with the way the Forest Department and the Revenue Department manage JFM, but with a strong belief that JFM project as well as the VFC as an institution are inherently beneficial and that, where good officers are in charge, the project can deliver the desired good. Thus state mismanagement and authoritarianism are considered merely an anomaly, a reflection of the idiosyncrasies of specific officers.

Though JFM is said to be based on the principles of participation and shared responsibilities, in reality the Forest Department has simply carved out a bigger role for itself and made the VFC dependent on it for planning and inflow of finances; the forest guard is the member secretary of the VFC and has the power to operate the JFM bank account jointly with the *sarpanch*. The control therefore, still rests with the Forest Department. In the village of Soan Gaon, financial embezzlement by the forest guard led to distrust in the VFC, which eventually became the victim of apathy of the Forest Department, who stalled the project in order to hide their own fault. Soan Gaon may be an extreme example, but the lack of autonomy in planning and financial matters has made many VFCs disinterested in taking responsibilities for forest management.

The local institutional space is the locus of power and can patronise those who enjoy the decision-making powers in these institutions. As they are the

⁸ The reader will note that in the previous section the state came across as heterogeneous, comprising of competing institutions, and in this section the state appears as a homogenous actor. Both the characteristics of the state are true. The state is not a monolith and there are fragmentations within the state; but the state also has a central character, which is more overpowering and pervasive than the fragmentations and conflicts among its various wings. And it is precisely in this sense that I have used "the state" in the actor section. The state as codified power, the ultimate decision maker, the resource mobiliser, the central actor impinging on the lives of people more than any other force, determines how the affairs in society are to be managed. Hence the issue here is not homogeneity of the state as an actor Vs. heterogeneity among its various institutions, but the overpowering character of the state despite the fact that it is constituted by fragmented actors.

close allies of the state, the power of the state is transmitted to them and through them to the institutional space. This power is manifested in being able to manage finances, write reports, maintain accounts, organise meetings and distribute work. Decisions are often taken in closed-door meetings, or they are taken with the forest guard and the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) and later approved in village meetings. The *sarpanch* or the influential *panchas* try to do maximum work related to plantation in their own *toks* so that people there can benefit. Below this layer come people who hold other forms of status, whether from their social standing such as teachers or the *ex-sarpanch*, or from their economic position, or as a result of political lobbying. The influence these actors exert is both positive and negative. They give direction to decision makers and can counterbalance state interference; but they also have the potential to exercise their own influence to exploit forests and alienate those in most need from forest management.

At the end of the spectrum come people who are the most dependent on forests economically. They hold the least political power, may not have any social standing particularly if they belong to lower castes, and would be alienated from the public space if they are women. This category is the most vulnerable to external influence, whether by the state or by others in the village. However, they are not completely powerless. While others exercise a lot of visible power, this category has its own ways of resistance and dealing with the powerful. One of the potent methods of resistance is refusal to provide labour. Since most of these people are wage labourers, their refusal sends a signal of resistance. This refusal does not paralyse the employer so much economically as it does politically, because the opponent either voluntarily seeks patronage of the rival fraction or is invited to join it. Gossip remains another form of resistance. Gossip often centres on the misappropriation of funds by the *sarpanch* or other members of the *panchayat*. These 'weapons of the weak' and 'hidden transcripts', as Scott refers to them (Scott, 1986, 1990), turn spaces for participation into arenas of contestation rather than solidarity and warmth. The more people remain outside the space, the more exclusive the space becomes.

Competing Knowledge / Perspectives

It may sound paradoxical that people could also resent control by the same state that they otherwise venerate. But historical evidence reveals resentment of the extension of state control over forests in different periods.⁹ As mentioned earlier, the colonial period saw violent protests against the British

⁹ I have already cited the protest during the British administration. After independence, the Chipko Movement, the movement by people, particularly women, in the hills, who resisted the commercial felling of trees by hugging them, revealed the tenuous relationship between the people and the state in matters related to the use and control of forests. See Guha, 1991; Bhatt, 1991; Shiva, 1988.

administration when it tried to alienate people from the forests. Subsequently, resentment centred on the overwhelming presence of the Revenue Department in local village forest management, its strict control over *van panchayat* funds, and the high-handedness of the forest guard, who created perpetual fear of him lodging false complaints. With JFM, part of the reserved forest has come within the purview of the VFC. But people know that once the project period is over, it will return to the control of the Forest Department. Even the ownership and control over local forest, with the management of which the *van panchayat* is entrusted, lies with the Revenue Department. This turns people into mere managers of forests owned by the state. Thus deep down resentment against the state simmers.

Negation of the *willingness to manage* forests in favour of the *technical expertise to manage* has become more pervasive under JFM. Fund management, accounts-keeping and, above all, understanding the technicalities and complexities of the project favours people who are literate. Hence, despite all the supposedly good principles of participation which JFM promotes, in reality it discriminates those who are illiterate. There is hardly any scope within the project frame to accommodate people who may not understand the technicalities of the project, but are bestowed with local wisdom, willingness, commitment and spontaneity to look after their forest resources.

Dimensions of Participation

In the pre-colonial period, abundant forest and low population pressure left access to forest resources relatively unfettered. By turning the forest into a commercially viable resource, the colonial state restricted people's engagement with the management of forest resources. The constitution of *van panchayats* and the recognition of certain rights over the forest, as mentioned earlier, gave participation a formal, legal and institutional shape. Participation of the people thereafter was confined to voting in the elections of the *van panchayat*, and abiding by the rules which governed the *panchayati* forest. In this system of forest management, women seldom participated either as voters or as members of the *van panchayat* committee; they seldom attended the *panchayat* meetings. Many *van panchayats* became defunct over the years due to lack of funds, lack of interest by the Revenue and Forest Departments, and unresolved village conflicts. JFM gave the *van panchayats* a new lease of life, as VFCs, and activated and empowered them in a variety of ways. One encounters a variety of dimensions of participation within VFC ranging from employment to formal representation to attempts to include people in deliberation and decision making.

Poor people's participation in forest management under JFM has been synonymous with employment. JFM, following the general pattern of development projects, emphasises people's contributions in the form of labour. A certain percentage of their wage goes to the VDF, supposedly to promote a sense of ownership. In an economic setting with few employment opportunities, project work, such as plantation, check-dam construction etc., is sought after by poor people. In all villages studied, people cited the period of project-related employment as the time when meeting attendance is larger and more regular than at any other time.

Given economic realities, project work does help poor people, but their sense of involvement like their employment in the project remains temporary. Hence, once the project is completed, there is little further involvement. Their consciousness regarding conservation of forest resources does not translate into action. Since their involvement in the project and their understanding of the role of the VFC remains inadequate, their sense of ownership of the project lasts till the project ends. This is evident in their thin presence in meetings after the project work is completed and disagreements with the VFC regarding the nature of proposed VDF expenditure. In fact, and ironically so, a large number of people whose contribution has gone to build the village fund are not even aware that a portion of their wage is kept in the fund.

As a representative body of people the VFC itself stands for and signifies people's participation. But alongside that, it is required to seek wider participation and engagement of the people. The provision for reservation of seats for the lower castes and women has given them a formal place in the decisions making forum of the VFC. In practice, however, the inclusion of women often becomes dependent on government officials and the *sarpanch*. In Deeni and Saladi, women have got membership in the VFC because forest officials as well as the *sarpanch* were keen on including them. Parwarda was the only exception where the *sarpanch* was a woman and therefore, could take a lead role in the VFC. In a village setting, which has never been inclusive of people low in social and economic position, the public space remains restrictive.

With JFM participation has been projectised to a large extent. There are predetermined objectives, standardised procedures, ways to involve people and a lot more emphasis on output which makes the institutions both at the government and the local level speed up the process without giving much consideration to the consequences. If we treat participation as a process we can not limit it to a specific time period. Nonetheless the project has a time

cycle, and participation does get influenced by that. While the process of getting people to organise, participate, build institutions and enhance the quality of the space for participation takes time, the project does need to be implemented in its due course. This incongruence between social process and project duration reflects in the lopsided development of the space. Though representation is sought, the capacity of the weaker sections are not build to participate in the meetings, there is inadequate understanding among people regarding the role of the local institutions, people's involvement does not go beyond employment in the project and conflicts are not resolved because it is more important for the project to achieve the target than meddle in village conflicts. Another consequence of project driven forest management is that the accountability of both, the state as well as the local institutions formed under the project, remains towards the project rather than towards the people. Meeting project targets per force becomes more important than seeking meaningful participation.

Institutional Procedures

The supervisory and regulatory procedures of the state affect participation in many ways. Under JFM, the VFCs have been superimposed on *van panchayats* and the lack of coordination between the two government departments responsible for the formation of these institutions and their supervision has filled the space with conflicts. Though existing *van panchayats* are converted into VFCs, the VFCs are not allowed to utilise the *van panchayat* fund during the JFM period. This has restricted their activities, because JFM project funds can only be spent on activities mentioned in the micro-plan. While the VFCs largely have to work with the Forest Department, the responsibility of VFC elections still lies with the Revenue Department. The lack of departmental co-ordination has implications for VFC functioning. *Van panchayats* have five-year duration whereas the VFCs have four-year duration. Some VFCs, if they go by *van panchayat* directives, would need fresh election even during the implementation of JFM. There is no understanding among the two departments as to the conditions for fresh elections. All this makes long term planning for the VFCs difficult, and at the village level VFC members also lack interest in sustaining the committee beyond JFM.

VI. Presence, Influence and Voice: Women in JFM

To what extent, then, does JFM actually extend the new opportunities for involvement and voice of more marginalised actors that it promises? What does participation actually come to mean? And how do less vocal people, such as women, engage with the spaces for participation that JFM makes available? Taking the case of women's participation, some of the paradoxes of participation in JFM become evident.

In earlier times, there was little participation by women either as voters or decision-makers in the *van panchayats*. With the advent of JFM, there was an emphasis on bringing women, the primary users of the forest, into the centre of forest management. The critical question, however, remains 'how'? How will women, who have hitherto remained confined to the private spaces of household, enter public space? How will their wisdom find a place in decision-making? Will they be able to raise their voice in a meeting where they relate to male members as fathers, husbands, fathers-in-law - relations they are expected to revere and not question?

Talking to women in the hilly villages of Uttarakhand revealed the tension that underlies their trying to break with the status quo. One woman from Jungaliya Gaon spoke for many when she said, 'it is like a risky walk on the rope. We do not want to displease the male members, but at the same time we do not want to lose out on the opportunity of coming out of the house and being part of the processes taking place in the village.' Is there any backlash they face? 'Yes, sometimes, but gradually and also due to the constant encouragement of the DFO *saab*, things have improved.' While the project makes it mandatory that certain percentage of women must be present in the VFC executive committee, a great deal is left to the good will of the VFC head, who is usually a male, to the forest bureaucracy, also usually male, and of course to the goodwill of male members of her family. Without any effective institutional mechanism to ensure participation of women, their involvement remains piecemeal and subject to the mercy of men, whether of husbands, forest bureaucrats or committee members.

Even when women do find place in the decision making body, they seldom speak. The mere presence of women in decision-making spaces does not guarantee that their voices will be raised, heard or have an impact. It is naïve to expect that spaces which have hitherto remained exclusive will open up and become inclusive by merely giving women a formal place. The reason for women not being able to speak or their voices not getting heard are many - cultural barriers of not speaking in front of elderly male members of the

family or the village and the patriarchal system in which women seldom occupy public space or are even recognised as capable of taking a public decision.¹⁰ As Ganga Joshi reflected, "it is much easier to organise women's collectives where they can speak uninhibited. But then that is not what women's participation in the long run should look like. If they have to be integrated into the wider process, we have to face the challenge of enabling them to speak in a forum which is not exclusively for women."¹¹ Women tend to be complacent, arguing that whatever decision their fathers, husbands or other male members in the family or village ask them to take will eventually prove beneficial. This hides the critical and dangerous consequence that their mere presence without voice can be used to legitimise decisions taken by the male members.

Without much of a presence or voice in decision-making arenas, village women are expected to participate in public meetings related to local forest management. Due to usual household work, which includes among other things collection of fuel and fodder and assisting men with farm activities, women's time is scarce. The arena in which women are most active is implementation, yet their predominance here raises concerns about issues of equity and about the relationship between the spaces of participation of implementation and those in which management decisions are taken. Women are often employed as members of the safety squad to guard the forest against illegal logging or encroachment. This helps them earn extra income for the family, but also burdens them. They have to patrol the forest at night, which means there is hardly any time left for them to rest. While the entire household benefits from the forest resources, men take all the important decisions regarding forests and women continue to take the burden of their protection. And while women face daily harassment from the forest officials, and find many ways to negotiate with them, when it comes to decision-making regarding forest management issues, they are systematically pushed to the margins (Agarwal, 1997; Sarin, 1998).

Other spaces outside the public sphere in which women can gain confidence, skills and a sense of their own capabilities prove significant in enabling women to engage in forest management activities (Agarwal, 1997). Women's participation has been enhanced in those villages where there is an already existent forum and space for women created either by voluntary organisation such as CHIRAG in the form of *Van Suraksha Samiti* (VSS), women's collectives formed for afforestation activities, or by government in the form of *Mahila Mangal Dal* (MMD) women's collectives formed to inte-

10 Citing the case of women's participation in the VFC in Gonduru village in Uttar Kannada, Sunder, Jeffery and Thin write, 'as a "daughter of the village" she could voice her opinion, but once she became a "daughter-in-law of the village", moreover, one married into the chairperson's household, her freedom to speak in front of family and village elders was severely curtailed'. (Sunder, Jeffery and Thin, 2001:114)

11 Personal communication with Ganga Joshi

grate them with various state-led developmental interventions. This has helped in spreading awareness and fostering a spirit of engagement amongst women. Before JFM was introduced in the villages, there was an effort to organise and mobilise women towards common management of forest resources. This created space for social and participatory engagement, making it easier for VFCs to seek wider participation in the village. It is interesting to note that these spaces always remained outside the spaces created by the government exclusively for the purpose of forest management. Where women (limited though such cases are) have been linked in a sustained and integrated manner with the project as in the villages of Saladi and Deeni, new leadership has emerged. With it has come new-found confidence that is visible in many ways in meetings, in articulating issues, in dealing with the project authorities. The involvement of women has enhanced the quality of participation. The space that had hitherto been denied to women has become more open and participatory, though it also remains restrictive given women's existing workload.

VII. Local Contexts and Nature of Participatory Spaces

What shape participation takes depends as much on the current local contexts as on the history of institutional development and the relationship of power between institutions. In this section micro contexts are provided in detail to show how they shape the nature of space and the participation that takes place within them. I have attempted to provide a village-by-village account so as to make a comparative account of the nature of participation. Let me state at the outset that it is not possible or even desirable to single out a particular factor as a determinant of participation. A combination of these factors operating together create the kind of participation one encounters in these hilly villages of Uttaranchal (Annexure-1 presents these in tabular form).

Village Deeni is predominantly inhabited by lower castes with no sharp distinction in terms of class. In terms of their economic standing, the majority of people have small landholdings. There are also a few households, which do not possess any land. A few families who were better off have migrated to the cities and nearby towns. Agriculture is the main livelihood of the village. The village also has many people earning their livelihood as skilled labour. Deeni residents are highly dependent on the forest for their fuel and fodder needs. Despite being closer to the town and connected by roads, they cannot afford to use LPG fuel for cooking. As a result, women travel long distances everyday to get wood for fuel from the forests.

Deeni has no history of women participating in the *van panchayats*. It is only when the VFC was introduced that they entered into the public spaces of deliberation and decision-making. Instrumental in opening up the space for them, besides the policy resolutions, was the active interest taken by the VFC *sarpanch* and the DFO. Backed and supported by the DFO and other members of the VFC, the *sarpanch* not only recruited women to the VFC, but also mobilised them to take part in the deliberations of the VFCs, entrusted them with the task of protecting the forests so that they can also earn some extra income. I could feel that women feel comfortable in expressing their views openly. There is no overt aggression or intolerance shown by the male members.

In Deeni I also found people happy with the way the *sarpanch* and the VFC members have taken care to divide the project related employment opportunities equitably among the people. There are no allegations of favouring particular families or a particular *tok*. The VFC has also earned the respect and trust of people because the accounts are kept open and there is transparency in managing the JFM as well as the VFC fund. Coming to the institutional relationship, the VFC shares a cordial relationship with the *gram panchayat*. All this makes the nature of space open, visible, inclusive and there is trust and solidarity.

Contrast this with the village Bannan, which is predominantly inhabited by upper castes with a very sharp class division. There are a few affluent families and there are a sizable number of families either without any landholdings or with very tiny landholdings who work as labourers to earn their livelihood. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood. For the landless families working as labourers, agriculture provides the main form of employment except when occasionally a school or road is constructed. People, particularly the economically needy, are highly dependent on the forest for fodder and wood for fuel. Needless to say it is women who travel long distances to collect these from the forests. As in most villages, in Bannan too there was no history of women participation in *van panchayats*. This exclusionary aspect still persists and we find that the VFC lacks any female membership. While talking to women it becomes apparent that they do not have much information about the JFM. The only event most of them remember was when they attended a village meeting called to discuss the micro planning. After that they were seldom called for any meeting except for those that were called to provide them temporary employment in the JFM project. It is not surprising then that they associate JFM with the work that it provided them. The larger purpose of the project does not have any meaning for

them, simply because they lack the information and no effort was taken either by the VFC or by the forest officials to include them in the process. Not only do women in the village accuse the *sarpanch* and VFC members of favouring people from their own *tok* in matters of distribution of project related work, there is a manifest distrust among the people regarding the management of the JFM fund and the VDF. In people's perception, the Forest Department appears as a disinterested actor, seldom visiting the village and not taking any interest in settling the conflicts, distrust and disagreement which has affected the VFC.

The VFC and the *gram panchayats* are at loggerheads and as a consequence the entire village is divided into factions. The *pradhan*, who is wife of the previous *pradhan* and comes from a relatively affluent family, has been instrumental in alienating the VFC. Before JFM was introduced in Bannan, the Swajal project which is water and sanitation project of the World Bank, was implemented in the village. The *pradhan* is the chief functionary in the village entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the project. That gave her enormous power within the village as well as the opportunity to gain the support and trust of the people. She felt left out and also somewhat threatened when JFM was introduced in the village and the *van panchayat sarpanch* became powerful. She lodged a false complaint against the *sarpanch* of misappropriating funds. As a result the project was stalled in Bannan for a while.

A variant of the conflict-ridden spaces is the village Soan Gaon, where the conflict is largely fueled by the factionalism in the village and the biased Forest Department. Soan Gaon is inhabited by upper castes with only a few families from the lower castes, who live in a separate hamlet quite far away from the village. Soan Gaon is close to the road and to the tourist town Bhimatal. A large number of people in the village are employed in nearby towns. As a result the dependency on the forest is relatively less. Before JFM was introduced in the village, the *van panchayat* was an inactive entity. Some powerful people from the village were known to be engaged in illegal encroachment of the forestland, but the *van panchayat* was indifferent to it. The members were either employed in government jobs or were running their own private business, too busy to devote any time to the management of the forests. When JFM was introduced, some members continued with their usual indifferent attitude. Yet, with huge sums of money coming from JFM, things could not remain the same as before. The powerful groups in the village lobbied against the VFC and got a good enough reason when the VFC could not show them the exact expenditure incurred by it. The story one

hears in the village is that the forest guard, taking advantage of the trust of the *sarpanch*, who is a government employee and therefore, can not devote much time to the VFC, misappropriated the funds. The Forest Department did not try to investigate the matter further displaying favouritism towards its own department personnel and withdrew the project from Soan Gaon. The people, who had lobbied against the VFC, formed a new VFC with the *ex-gram pradhan* as its head. The general opinion of the villagers was that the group, rather than having any real interest in the forests, was more interested in managing the fund. However, the Forest Department by that time had already decided to withdraw the project and the new VFC remained only a transient formation. Talking to people in Soan Gaon, I found that they were hardly interested in forest management. Forests seemed important to a few lower income group people and the low caste families, as they are dependent on it. Yet, the conflicts that ensued in the village among the high and mighty, fueled by the biased Forest Department, have left these forest dependent families out side the periphery of any decision-making. As a result, we find the space created for participation closed and almost non-existent.

From the instance of a village, where the space for participation is open and visible, and two instances where it is closed and conflict ridden, I can now provide instances where the spaces are a mix of both open and closed, are visible and inclusive as well as sites of occasional conflict and contestation.

Saladi is a village, which is inhabited by the upper castes. People earn their livelihood through agriculture and employment in government and private jobs in nearby towns. A few families also survive as labourers. It is a village which is close to the road and therefore, people can easily get LPG fuel for cooking. However, since many families are not in an economically sound position to afford LPG on a continuous basis, they have to collect wood for fuel from the forest. They are also dependent on the forest for fodder for the cattle. Like Deeni, the women are given a chance to be in the VFC due to the efforts of the *sarpanch* and the forest officials. The *sarpanch* has also recruited women in the safety squads for the protection of the forest. Women in the village are vocal and articulate. The women VFC members are quite active. They are aware of forest related issues and about the project and are not inhibited about talking in public. The relationship between the VFC and *gram panchayat* is not entirely conflict ridden as in Bannan - it is of occasional solidarity, but beneath this solidarity one encounters a sense of rivalry. People trust the VFC for its openness in dealing with JFM fund and VDF. But one finds competition, which occasionally turns into conflict, among women for employment in the project activities. The *sarpanch* tries to employ women

on a rotational basis, but unlike Deeni where women are comfortable with this arrangement, in Saladi women at times accuse the VFC of favouring certain families. It is not easy to know how much truth there is in this, but this sense of being discriminated against results in occasional distrust and anomaly.

Parwada is a village, which is predominantly inhabited by the upper castes with a few low caste families living in a separate hamlet. It is a village where class differences are sharp and apparent. A few families in the village own large land holdings and are engaged in cash cropping. The rest either hold small land holdings or are landless. The village has a history of illegal encroachment by the affluent families on the forestland. There is a high dependency of the poor families on the forest for fodder and fuel. Parwada has a history of active involvement of the women in the public sphere as members of the Mahila Mangal Dal. The *van panchayat*, which was later converted into the VFC, also had a woman *sarpanch*. This made participation quite open until conflict ensued between the people who are influential and illegal encroachers on the forest land and the VFC. This began when the VFC took strict measures against the encroachers. One hears various accounts of this - that the influential group resented the VFC due to its strict measures, and that the *sarpanch* being a woman further added to their resentment. This group lodged a complaint against the VFC that it had become too high handed and that fresh elections should be held to settle the conflict. The nexus between the Revenue Department and the powerful people in Parwada and the rivalry between the Revenue Department and the Forest Department and how that resulted in the formation of an interim VFC is described earlier in this report. All these factors in various measures have contributed in shaping the space- it is open but also fragmented and filled with distrust and conflict.

In Junglia Gaon, the space for participation is largely open, visible, but insufficiently inclusive and one of occasional distrust. It is a village inhabited by the upper castes. The class differences are not as sharp as in Parwada. There is high dependency on the forest for fodder and fuel. Like Parwada, in Junglia Gaon too, women have been quite active in forestry related issues due to the efforts of a local organisation CHIRAG which mobilised women to form the *Van Suraksha Samiti* through an afforestation programme. As a result, women began raising saplings and protecting the forests. However, despite this active engagement, the VFC does not have any women members. The VFC does not discriminate against them, but does not take an active interest in integrating them either. Women, nonetheless, attend VFC meetings. There is also comparison between the way CHIRAG deals with them

and the way they are neglected by the VFC. The VFC is open in its decision-making, but occasionally it lacks transparency in dealing with JFM fund and the VDF. That has given rise to suspicion among the people, which gets accentuated due to the late payment of wages to those employed in the project. While the VFC members say that they have not received funds from the Forest Department, people suspect misappropriation of the funds by the members. The VFC in Junglia Gaon enjoys the support of the *gram panchayat*. As a result, it does not face any opposition in the village. Since the *pradhan* is a woman, women are also encouraged to take interest in the JFM related activities, but feel frustrated that they are not offered any membership in the VFC.

Conclusions

Currently available spaces for people to participate in the management of their local forests in Kumaon are the result of a series of transformations that earlier spaces have gone through, from informal practices of forest management to *van panchayats*, and from *van panchayats* to VFCs. In the process of superimposition of one institutional space over another, some bits of the previous space were always carried into the new space. So what we find at the local level today is a combination, in varying degrees, of traditional practices, state-given conceptions of rights, the principles of normative and participatory democracy, as well as the instrumentalities behind the promotion of participation. The spaces therefore, are spaces for negotiating rights and claiming entitlement; they are also spaces for influencing governance and connecting with the state as citizens. JFM has projectised participation, and turned it into employment. The state still holds regulatory power over the VFCs. The instrumentalities of participation have not been abandoned completely. But limited as these spaces are, there is also no denying that they have created opportunities for marginalised groups to play a part in decision-making. So even if the landscape of marginalisation is not completely altered, new leadership is emerging from marginalised sectors of society, from women, from lower castes. By acquainting people with the language of the state and through engagement with state-led rules, JFM has taught people the art of governance, however rudimentary that may appear.

Spaces created for participation in forest management are influenced as they intersect with other institutional spaces, both those created by civil society organisations and other more informal arenas. When they intersect with supportive spaces, they become open, intimate, and inclusive and when they intersect with conflicting spaces they become closed and exclusive. The

dynamic interplay of power which links various institutions and institutions with wider society turns spaces into negotiating fields and participation into an essentially political act. Who comes into the space, who takes decisions, whose voice counts, who is left at the margins then depends not only on how power operates in that particular space, but also how it operates between different state institutions, between the state and people, among various groups in the village having differential positioning in the society and among groups having different institutional affiliations. In this process of negotiation, there is always the possibility of the marginalised, vulnerable sections being excluded from decision making. Given their transformatory nature, the conflicts and contestations which fill them and the power dynamics which influence them, these spaces remain complex and contested. Necessary, but not sufficient to foster participation, however open these spaces may be, they need to be constantly guarded, particularly by those who are most vulnerable and are more likely than others to be left at the margin.

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Annexure 1

| Village | Local Contexts | Nature of Space |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| <p>1. Deeni</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominantly lower caste • No sharp class division • High dependency on forest for fodder and fuel • Cordial relationship between VFC and gram panchayat • Women representation in VFC • Equitable distribution of project work • Open decision-making • Transparency in accounts keeping • Support from forest officials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open • Visible • Inclusive • Solidarity • Trust |
| <p>2. Bannan</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominantly upper caste • Sharp class divisions • High dependency on forest for fodder and fuel • Conflictual relationship between VFC and gram panchayat • No women representation in VFC • Inequitable distribution of project work • Closed decision-making • No transparency in accounts keeping • No active interest from forest department | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closed • Largely private • Exclusive • Conflict and contestation |

| Village | Local Contexts | Nature of Space |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| <p>3. Saon Gaon</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominantly upper caste • Not highly dependent on forests • History of illegal encroachment on forest • VFC members employed in government services or private business and therefore cannot give time • No women representation in VFC • Women's participation is virtually non-existent • Misappropriation of JFM fund by the forest guard • Government stopped financial support to VFC • Project is stalled • A few people under leadership of ex-Gram Pradhan formed a new VFC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closed • Almost non- existent |
| <p>4. Saladi</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhabited by upper castes • Dependency on forest is not very high • VFC and gram panchayat at relationship is of occasional solidarity • Women representation on VFC • Active participation by Women • Open decision-making • Competition among women for employment in the project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open • Visible • Inclusive • Competition and conflict |

| Village | Local Contexts | Nature of Space |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| <p>5. Parvada</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominantly upper caste • Sharp class divisions • History of illegal encroachment on forests • High dependency on forests for fodder and fuel • Woman sarpanch in VFC • Involvement of women in Mahila Mangal Dal • Conflict due to imposition of strict measures by VFC • Nexus between power blocks in the village and government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatively open • Fragmented • Distrust • Conflictive |
| <p>6. Jungaliya Gaon</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inhabited by upper caste • High dependency on forests • Active van Panchayat and VFC • No representation of women in VFC • Other forms of women's organisation such as van suraksha samiti exist • Women attend VFC meetings, but VFC does not take an active interest to integrate them • Relationship between VFC and gram panchayat is of occasional support, no obvious conflict • Dissatisfaction among people employed in the project due to late payment of wages • Decision-making is largely open • Transparency regarding funds is occasionally lacking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely open • Visible • Non-discriminatory but insufficiently inclusive • Occasional distrust |

About PRIA

PRIA is a civil society organization, that undertakes development initiatives to positively impact the lives of the poor, marginalized and excluded sections of the society, by encouraging and enabling their participation in the processes of their governance. It strives for achievement of equity and justice, through a people centered approach, focusing on 'Citizens'- 'their participation and inclusion', 'awareness and empowerment' and 'their democratic rights'.

PRIA recognizes the value of people's knowledge, challenges traditional myths and concepts, raises awareness of people's rights and promotes experiential learning. It applies a multi-dimensional strategic approach to creating knowledge, training and capacity building of stakeholders, public education and policy advocacy and intervenes at various levels of the demand and the supply segments, to reach out locally, nationally and globally.

Operating under two broad themes 'Reforming Governing Institutions and Civil Society Building', PRIA's people centred interventions aim at promoting active participation of the poor and marginalized in the effective utilization of resources through local governance. It engages itself in strengthening of Panchayati- Raj Institutions and municipalities, promoting environmental and occupational health, facilitating a strong network of civil society organizations, promoting citizen leadership, monitoring policies and programmes of bilateral, multilateral and government agencies, to achieve an agenda of 'Governance where People Matter.'

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PRIA is an International Centre for learning and promotion of participation and democratic governance.



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