

Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India)

Study to Understand the Factors Responsible for Sustainability of Natural Resources Management based Village Institutions/ Organisations Promoted by NGOs

Participative Study involving Several NGOs

Working Paper on Conceptual Framework

/Draft for Discussion/

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/Draft for Discussion/
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1 Background

1.1 The Context

Many NGO's promote Village Level Organisations¹ (VLO) as a key part of their strategy for empowering communities to manage natural resources and improve livelihoods. Sustainability of these VLO's is an issue, which has received considerable attention from development thinkers and researchers. AKRSPI with support from the Aga Khan Foundation has set up a task force to enhance the understanding on sustainability of Village Institutions (VI) and Community Based Organisations (CBO). Several NGOs have been party to the

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¹ Village Level Organisation in this study signifies any organisation includes all or part of a village community and is equivalent to any Community Based Organisation (CBO) having members from within a village. However, this is not being used in a very strict sense and could include different forms of CBO, some of which may have even representatives of an NGO or a promoter agency in its committees.

discussions in the Task Force. Based on these discussions, a study partnering several organisations with a track record of about a decade or more has been planned. This study will attempt to examine the sustainability question using empirical data, experiences and perceptions. The study team will have a mandate to keep each organisation fully informed of the outputs from the study at different stages.

Much of relevant research is in the realm of institutional sustainability (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 1992, Carpenter 1993) and many studies are available on the role of collective action in crafting institutions (Olson 1971, Ostrom 1990, Platteau 2004). Wade's (1988) research deals primarily with the collective action in common property resource management in villages in South India, and touches upon factors affecting their sustainability. However, after a preliminary search, not much research has been found on the NGO interventions and the sustainability of village institutions crafted in response to development needs by NGO's, often catalysed by time-bound project funds. This research, thus, hopes to fill a gap in the understanding by drawing upon empirical evidence to analyse the processes operating around the sustainability of village institutions and organisations promoted by NGO's.

1.2 Dilemmas of Definition & Measurement

Sustainability has emerged as a major concern in shaping strategies in development action at different levels – donors, multi-lateral agencies, Non-Government Organisations, policy makers, etc. (see Chambers, 1983; Ostrom, 2000, 2001; Shah, 2003; Uphoff, 1983, 1985; Wade, 1988). However, there is no universally agreed definition or widely accepted working guideline or evaluation framework for this. The concept itself has one connotation when it occurs in the environment and development discourse, and various interpretations in the context of alleviating poverty, regenerating natural resources and ensuring livelihoods. Despite the lack of agreement on what is, in fact, entailed or implied by sustainability in operational terms, there is an overriding emphasis on the need for achieving sustainability as a normative

This study recognizes fundamental dilemmas in defining and measuring sustainability. It also recognizes the existence of certain diversity of views within the NGO sector in defining sustainability and deems it necessary to incorporate such pluralism into the study by keeping the door open to different visions of sustainability.

principle in development action, particularly in the planning and implementation of medium to long-term projects. Often this is seen in terms of the capacity to ensure a continuing stream of benefits (Honadle and VanSant, 1985) and/or the increase in social welfare (Eckman 1993).

Measurement of sustainability, however, is widely recognised as an immensely difficult problem, as conventional monitoring and evaluation methods, mostly using economic analysis, are considered insufficient to detect or quantify sustainability (Brown et al., 1987; Carpenter, 1993; Chopra, 1998; Landell-Mills, 1998). Eckman (1993) takes an alternate approach by positing that as a matter of practicality, *un-sustainability* is easier to identify, measure, and address at the project level. The sustainability question, therefore, poses a huge dilemma on one hand of whether a particular definition ought to be adopted and used in a normative sense and, on the other, having adopted one definition or another, whether adequate and agreed measures or evaluation frameworks are, indeed, available to test it. However, despite these difficulties, the empirical evidence presented in some of the studies by agencies such as the World Bank show that only a very small portion of projects have been able to attain sustainability, based on the economic analysis used in such studies (Kean et al, 1988). Another World Bank review of its projects (Paul, 1987) found a strong, positive association between the strengthening of indigenous organizations, on the one hand, and the continuation of benefits beyond the project period, on the other. Such evidence also raises several questions such as:

- i) Is the limited success on account of some inherent structural limitations and, if so, is sustainability, defined in a particular way, valid as a normative principle? Or,
- ii) Is it reasonable and valid to presume a diversity of visions to converge on a single definition and adopt it as a normative principle? Or,
- iii) If sustainability is not used in a normative sense, as prescribed by donors or external agencies, is it not to be expected that given the diversity of visions in the development sector, a definition that conforms to a particular vision is more likely to be preferred over others?

This study recognises these dilemmas and the existence of certain pluralism within the NGO sector in defining and measuring sustainability and deems it necessary to incorporate such pluralism into the study by keeping the door open to examine different visions of sustainability.

1.3 Institutional Issues

The importance of institutions in sustainable development has led NGO's and donor agencies to make institutional sustainability itself a consideration in the projects they design. For example, the concept of watershed development hinges on the need for enhancing the productivity of resources in ways that are *ecologically and institutionally* sustainable (Farrington et al, 1999). At the same time, watershed rehabilitation is also viewed as “essentially a resource-based approach to livelihood enhancement” particularly of the poorer sections in ways that are “institutionally sustainable” (Farrington et al, 1999). Thus, in the NGO sector, the challenge of sustainability is often perceived more as a challenge of perpetuating appropriate institutional arrangements.

Theorists have long recognised the importance of sustainability and the critical role of institutions in achieving it. According to an official task force on aid efficacy (Cassen et al., in Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 1992): “A subject requiring much more attention is the life of projects beyond the time of the donors’ involvement.... Perhaps one question above all deserves asking more often about most aid: will this help in the long run to increase the recipients’ self-reliance?”. Development projects translate growth into development through a conduit of either existing or newly constituted institutional structures and the failure of translation of growth into development rests on the fulcrum of institutions (Deshpande & Narayanamoorthy, 2004). In the literature, there is an overall agreement that institutions strengthen the transformation process towards overall development. Ostrom (1990) strongly argues that through collective action, institutional analysis demonstrates the economic rationality of co-operation (i.e., focusing on costs and benefits, incentives and penalties, to

individual actors) and possibility of co-operative equilibrium outcomes from competitive games.

2 Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- Prepare a status report on the interventions and institutional issues in the cases taken up in this study
- Analyse and critically review the sustainability question and necessary support systems
- Examine the capabilities of VIs for adapting to new challenges under changing development scenarios
- Examine the merits of community-based institutional approaches in natural resource management to effect livelihoods enhancement

In light of the dilemmas stated in the earlier sections, it must be understood that these objectives are not subject to a pre-defined definition or measure of sustainability. On the contrary, these research objectives are to be met using an agreed set of criteria that is deemed most appropriate to the vision of sustainability adopted by the NGO. Despite many variations, institutional approaches being a common thread will be the focal theme and the sustainability or the constraints, if any, will be examined.

3 Understanding Institutional Change

3.1 Institutions & Organisations

The fundamental difficulties in the sound management of natural resources (NR) are rooted in the social, economic, institutional and/or political conditions. The sustainability question is embedded in the ownership and property rights (rights of access, control and management) over the resources and to a great degree the challenge of organisational models and institutional frameworks are associated with the resources perceived as common or considered as “local commons” or required to be managed as some form of common property, be it pastures, forest, water harvesting structures or canal irrigation systems. Therefore, successful institutions for governing them have emerged as crucial to solving the sustainability puzzle. Institution, in this context, is defined as a set of rules, eligibility criteria, decision-making arrangements, punishment structures, and action assignments (see Ostrom, 1990).

The term *organization* will be used to refer to an organized body of people that work together for a particular purpose with goals, members and an organizational structure.

Institutions, in the real sense, occupy a different kind of social space, as mechanisms or arrangements that bring into vogue rules governing or regulating the behavior or relations among individuals or interest groups within and between communities.

The different players involved in NRM act within some institutional framework, where the institutional framework is a prevalent set of norms or rules, which by convention or law mediates the nature of relationship between people and resources. It creates the system within which economic transactions take place in the short run and resource management takes place in the medium to long terms (Chopra & Gulati, 2001). The sustainability of resources is strongly related to capacity of stakeholders to design and share institutions that are maintained and continuously adapted in the face of changing conditions. Authors like Tushaar Shah has argued that certain ‘design concepts’ are central to the success and ‘robustness’ of organisations such as that of farmer’s cooperatives.

Institutional arrangements operate and change in given organisational and socio-economic settings, often leading to the confusing synonymous use of the terms institution and organisation (Dangbégnon, 2000). North (1990) takes the help of certain metaphors and parables to differentiate between these two concepts. He defines institutions (formal or informal) as the ‘rules of the game in a society, the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction’. He adds that like institutions, organisations provide a structure to these interactions, and conceptually what must be clearly differentiated are the rules from the players. Institutions can be visualised as rules within which organisations work.

3.2 Neither the State nor the Market!

Different natural resources over which people have more or less unrestricted access are often at the centre of interventions focussed on NRM by NGOs. The approaches adopted by NGO are diverse and these differences could be merely one of nuance to those that are fundamental. The NGO interventions are caught between two poles of an inconclusive discourse based on the “tragedy of the commons”: One viewpoint strongly favours control of resources by the state while others are centred on privatisation. Taking note of this controversy, Ostrom points out that in the real world neither state nor the market is uniformly successful in enabling individuals to sustain long-term, productive use of natural resource systems (Ostrom 1990). Ostrom’s observation is borne out by many empirical studies from different parts of the world. She points out that there is plenty of historical evidence of communities relying upon institutions resembling neither the state nor the market to govern resources with substantial success rate. And, there is no dearth of such historical evidence from India on managing a variety of resources such as traditional tanks, canal systems, pastures and forests (Gadgil & Guha, 1992; Chakravarty-Kaul, 1996).

In the real world neither state nor the market is uniformly successful in enabling individuals to sustain long-term, productive use of natural resource systems (Ostrom 1990).
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The traditional institutional arrangements that governed common resources of all kinds through intricate web of norms, conventions, rules and sanctions, however, tended to breakdown with the enforced structural changes in ownership and rights regimes. They have witnessed systematic breakdown in recent history, particularly after the changes in land rights

introduced in the colonial period. Some scholars go to the extent of stating that the central challenge of NRM is to make the CPR management work (Shah, 2003), where CPR covers also resources that are currently under open access. He points out that considerable social research has concentrated on the problem of “how to make communities make a reverse transition from open access to common property management”.

The discourse on the role of institutional arrangements has led to the emergence of an entire discipline of New Institutional Economics (NIE), rooted in neo-classical economics, underlined by the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1991 to Ronald Coase (Harriss et al, 1998). Notable in the emergence of this interesting discourse are the contributions of scholars such as Coase (1937, 1960), Ostrom (1990), North (1990) and Bromley (1992). Practical insights have emerged from these studies on ‘non-market institutions’ as well as on ‘market failures’ and collective action has emerged as a major theme in the growing body of literature on institutional design, particularly in the writings of Wade (1988), Ostrom (1990, 1993).

4 Village Institutions & NGO Interventions

NGOs working in the rural areas have often catalysed institutional innovation or have been prime movers for putting in place new institutional arrangements in NRM. Much of the NGO efforts have attempted to bring about greater people’s involvement and participation in the NRM. Promoting village-based organizations is one among many ways of involving people in developmental activity and eliciting their participation. Village Level Organizations (VLOs), as representative bodies of people residing in the same village, are often initiated as part of project implementation or as part of the entry-level activity (ELA) by NGOs. In some cases, the ‘representative’ character of such VLOs are ensured through a people’s mandate, obtained through a resolution passed by the local body such as the Gram Panchayat (GP) or through a village general body (Gram Sabha).

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The NGO interventions in the last two decades has been played out over a terrain on which the slow pace of change in rural communities have been punctuated by sharp changes in the functioning, approaches, strategies, thematic priorities, degree of professionalism and the role of the state. While in the past there was little space for the NGOs in the scheme of things as the state saw it, at present civil society organisations are seen as integral to development initiatives. The NGO sector itself has witnessed a near invasion by development professionals in contrast to the early period where the NGOs were run almost exclusively by non-conformist individuals or those with little professional training, but deep commitment to rural transformation, often inspired by Gandhian principles or philanthropic attitudes. This period has also seen an intricate play of changing 'rules of the game' and 'shifting goal posts', wherein at different levels of organisation and community mobilization, each NGO, its volunteers and field workers had to come to terms with the paradigm shifts in developmental discourse and the 'mainstreaming' of many ideas such as equity, gender concerns, ecological sustainability, human rights, etc into the day-to-day work. Thus, over these two decades the criteria for measuring the 'success' of VLO have undergone dramatic changes, which is an important aspect that must be taken note of while mapping the changes in institutional and organisational models promoted by NGOs.

The purpose of forming VLOs, as expressed in project documents, is to provide people ownership of the project by making them an integral part of decision-making, giving them control over their resources, autonomy to implement the project, take over the assets created through the project, and carry on the process in common interest even after the completion of the project. The institutional innovations and organisational models used in these efforts have tried to address complex issues of property rights or promote alternative property rights regimes over natural resources, especially on land and water. An important point of departure while examining the institutional or organisational sustainability question is how a shift is brought about from ownership over the project to defining rights over the use and management of resources.

5 Scope of the Study

5.1 NRM Sectors & Terrain Shifts

This study is an attempt to understand the factors responsible for sustainability of village institutions and organisations relevant to NRM promoted by NGOs. The NRM sectors covered by the study are:

- Water Resource Management and Watershed Development
- Small Farming
- Common Property Land Resources²
- Forest Resources

In each of these sectors, depending on the perspective of the partner NGO, the sustainability question could be linked to:

- a) Maintaining a dynamic balance between demand and supply of resources for livelihood security (resource conservation/ sustainability)
- b) Existence of accepted institutional arrangements that allow stakeholders to arbitrate over differing claims on the resource (institutionalising norms)
- c) Functioning of Village Level or Community-Based Organisations that can support the institutional and resource management needs (NRM organisation building)
- d) Guaranteeing rights (property, user and other) over resources and management

² CPLR in the context of this study will cover land resources used mostly as pastures and also land owned by the revenue department, but used, *de facto*, as a common property or as open access resource.

As explained in the introductory note, circulated as a prelude to the initiation of this work, this study partners NGOs with a credible and proven track record of working with rural communities for more than 15 years. This study proposes to examine how over such a long period, the institutional and organisational models have functioned with little or no support from the NGO that promoted or nurtured them. The study also takes specific note of certain ‘turning points’ in this period occasioned by the change in the legal or policy environment, in particular:

- i) Absence of formal decentralised bodies for village governance in the early period or at the start of nearly two-decade old initiatives
- ii) The 73rd (1993) and 74th constitutional amendments conferring formal governance status to village *panchayats* and the consequent conformity acts enacted by various states
- iii) The changes in the forest management policies, particularly the Forest Act 1988, signifying the shift to conservation forestry from production approach
- iv) The JFM resolution of 1990 & guidelines of 2000 and the corresponding changes introduced in different states as a consequence
- v) The centre staging of watershed development (WSD) in many of the rain-fed areas rural development and the shifts associated with its guidelines

The study would examine, the implications, if any, of these ‘terrain’ changes on the functioning of VI/VLO and on the evolution of organisational models.

5.2 Exploring the Diversity of Visions

This study, from its very outset, recognizes the need to acknowledge a diversity of views within the NGO sector and the need to locate analytic approaches that can accommodate certain pluralism in strategic thinking on the part of partner NGOs as one of its defining characteristics.

The study recognizes that the approaches and visions of different partner NGOs could be different and, therefore, there may not exist a

common or shared interpretation of sustainability. This study assumes that, in general, there are multiple interpretations of the term sustainability each of which could be internally

consistent. For some, sustainability question is rooted in the discourse on ecological sustainability and relates to resources, while for many others the question may be of sustainable rural livelihoods. For some it could be the challenge of sustaining community-based organisations. And, yet another point of view could focus on sustainability of the institutional arrangements. There may also be also approaches centered on sustaining the human and civic rights of the marginalized communities rooted in an empowerment framework of institutional arrangements and organizations.

This study, from its very outset, recognizes as one of its defining characteristics the need to recognize the diversity of views and adopt analytic approaches that can accommodate such pluralism in strategic thinking on the part of partner NGOs. Therefore, it does not begin with a single rigid definition of sustainability or with a normative view stating that a certain kind of sustainability is necessary and desirable. On the other hand, it will adopt the approach the partner NGO has and, then attempt to locate the sustainability question within a logical framework that must be internally consistent with the goals set for sustainability within that framework. Therefore, if a partner NGO works on the premise that sustainability is about institutionalizing alternative rights regimes to access natural resources, then, this study will examine the path traversed to reach that and the external and internal factors that have positively or negatively influenced the progress towards this goal. Similarly, the questions pertinent to irrigation management would be approached by keeping in mind the sustainability goals appropriate to the context, which may be confined to examining the sustainability of the management systems by a user group, rather than a larger village community beyond the membership of the users group. It is also possible that a partner NGO views sustainability as one of putting in place necessary arrangements to ensure harmony, cohesion and necessary value systems, rather than define it in terms of a set of measurable physical or economic indicators.

5.3 Institutional & Organization Building Approaches

The study recognizes that within the NGO sector, there are clearly two points of reference for the sustainability discourse: one focused on alternate *institutional* arrangements and the other on *organizational* development. Almost all of the diverse approaches in the sustainability of

VIs and VLOs differ, more or less, on the relative emphasis or priority accorded to either of these. The former attempts to perpetuate new or modified institutional arrangements, going beyond the membership of the VBOs and CBOs, while the latter attempts to ensure the functioning of membership based organizational models as a tool for sustainable resource management. In a broader theoretical framework, these approaches can assume fundamentally divergent paths where the former gravitate gradually to collective action of stakeholders with the organizations promoted by the NGO acting only as a facilitators, while the latter tends to be increasingly overtly pre-occupied with providing organizational support for economic activities of its members. In this study, given the dominance of one of these approaches in the strategic thinking of the partner NGO, we will examine the models that are considered successful within the vision set by the NGO and the related strategy for limiting the role of the NGO.

6 Analytical Framework

6.1 The Problematic

One of the few in-depth studies that have examined the impacts of institutional changes ‘induced’ by NGOs in increasing the possibilities for obtaining sustained levels of income from common resources is that by Chopra & Gulati (2001). The authors used an econometric approach relying on baseline data and household surveys to critically examine the impacts of micro-level ‘alternative’ interventions by NGOs in the arid and semi-arid regions of the country. The authors used certain ‘environmental improvement’ as well as socio-economic indicators to understand the impacts. Despite the advantages of using such a rigorous quantitative approach, there are limitations in adopting such an analytical framework to understand institutional change, because conventional economic analysis has tended to ignore the institutional aspects such as norms and conventions of society that explicitly allocates resources, or establishes processes for making such decisions (Ray, 2000). Since these are issues central to or at the very ‘core’ of the sustainability of VLO/VI in NRM, it is necessary

Conventional economic analysis has tended to ignore the institutional aspects such as norms and conventions of society that explicitly allocates resources, or establishes processes for making such decisions (Ray, 2000).

to adopt an approach that is more appropriate to understanding institutional change, which accords centrality to these questions. Also, importantly, even while measuring many tangible effects, it is also necessary to incorporate an approach that examines the sustainability question within the framework that the NGO itself has tried to promote or is committed to promote, beyond the time-bound project or donor-driven guidelines.

The approach of institutional analysis, and particularly the general framework for analysis of self-governing and self-organising CPRs contributed by authors such as Ostrom, Wade, Bromley and others provides a framework for inquiry that is appropriate for this study. As Ostrom (1990) puts it very succinctly, the central question is:

“ ... how a group of principals who are in an interdependent situation can organise and govern themselves to obtain continuing joint benefits when all face temptations to free-ride, shirk, or otherwise act opportunistically. Parallel questions have to do with the combination of variables that will (1) increase the initial likelihood of self-organisation, (2) enhance the capabilities of individuals to continue the self-organised efforts over time, or (3) exceed the capacity of self-organisation to solve CPR problems without external assistance of some form.”

The study will focus on the following aspects of institutional change: 1) Expected Benefits, 2) Expected Costs (transformation and monitoring/ enforcement costs), 3) Shared Norms & Other Opportunities 4) Process of institutional change. Although, in a short study, it may not be possible to examine all these ‘summary variables’ rigorously, an attempt will be made to capture these aspects in as much detail as could be possible. In particular, for certain aspects such as costs it would be difficult to marshal the requisite data. The study, also anticipates some difficulties in compiling quantitative baseline data.

6.2 Three Puzzles of Self-Organising

The institutional analysis must address what Ostrom calls the “three puzzles” of “self-organising”, which are the problems of:

- 1) Supply of new institutions (new norms or institutional arrangements)

- 2) Making credible commitments (agreements on long-term collective benefits) and
- 3) Mutual monitoring (overseeing adherence to the commitments)

The first puzzle is that despite the great demand for new institutional arrangements, they are not supplied. It refers to the situation where although nearly everyone wants a change in institutional arrangements to one that is more mutually beneficial, it is more likely that disagreements will hinder the decision-making in favour an alternative. According to Bates (1988), establishing trust and cohesion are the mechanisms for solving this puzzle. The solution of the second puzzle is that of finding out how a set of principals are able to organise themselves to obtain long-term collective benefits, or define credible commitments. Inquiry into this aspect will have to examine the processes that facilitate or motivate a self-organised group to accomplish such decision-making. The third puzzle is a nested dilemma, because, without credible monitoring there can be no credible commitment and vice versa. The key challenge of this inquiry is of documenting how or to what degree has this been accomplished by different NGO in the diverse settings through contrasting approaches.

Key challenge of this inquiry is to document how or to what degree has different NGOs tackled the three puzzles of self-organizing in the diverse settings through contrasting approaches

6.3 Design Principles

Ostrom argues that while long enduring self-governing CPR institutions may exhibit substantial differences even as they share fundamental similarities, the particular rules that are used within these various settings *cannot* provide the basis for an explanation of the institutional robustness and sustainability. On the contrary, it is these very differences in rules reflecting the specific physical, cultural, social, economic and political features that constitute a part of the explanation. Therefore, she suggests a set of seven “design principles”, plus an eighth one relevant for larger, more complex cases, that characterise the robust CPR institutions (Table 1). Notwithstanding what she calls the “speculative” nature of these principles, she suggests that these “constitute a credible explanation” for institutional sustainability.

The degree of conformity with these design principles will be examined based on the empirical data, experience and perceptions relating to the nature of the institutional need, nature of stakeholders, motivation and incentive for collective action, NGO's role, operations in times of shortage/ stress and evolution of norms. The capability of institutional arrangements to change in response to internal and external factors will also be probed across different identifiable periods. The inquiry will also look at continuity (or the break) of new institutional arrangements with the old as well the role of NGO as facilitators or suppliers of institutional change and its role in perpetuating these. The study will also consider whether any systemic or fundamental constraints exist that could impede the institutional sustainability.

Table 1: Design Principles illustrated by long-enduring CPR institutions

Principle	Description
1. Clearly defined boundaries	Individuals or households who have rights to withdraw resource units from the CPR must be clearly defined, as must be the boundaries of the CPR itself
2. Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local conditions	Appropriation rules restricting time, place, technology, and/or quantity of resource units are related to local conditions and to provision rules requiring labour, material, and/or money
3. Collective-choice arrangements	Most individuals affected by the operational rules can participate in modifying the operational rules
4. Monitoring	Monitors, who actively monitor audit CPR conditions and appropriate behaviour, are accountable to the appropriators or are the appropriators.
5. Graduated sanctions	Appropriators who violate operational rules are likely to be assessed graduated sanctions (depending on the seriousness and context of the offence) by other appropriators, by officials accountable to these appropriators or by both.
6. Conflict resolution mechanisms	Appropriators and their officials have rapid access to low-cost local arenas to resolve conflicts among appropriators or between appropriators and officials.
7. Minimal recognition of rights to organise	Rights of appropriators to devise their own institutions are not challenged by external government authorities
8. Nested enterprises (for CPRs that are part of larger system)	Appropriation, provision, monitoring, enforcement, conflict resolutions, and governance activities are organised in multiple layers of nested enterprises

Ref: Ostrom (1990, p.90)

The institutional analysis approach will examine the following aspects to structure the study:

- NGO's vision of sustainability & role in institution building (conceptualising, organising, managing, negotiating with external agents, etc)
- Perceived need for institutional change

- Institutional model: incentive structures, evolution (growth and maturity), perpetuation of norms, etc.
- Organisational model used for facilitating the changes
- Relationship with older and/ or existing institutional arrangements
- Capability to intervene or mediate in conflict situations
- NGO's perspective on "withdrawal" or "exit" process versus community's perception
- Operational issues in withdrawal or exit, particularly in respect to the "principal agent" problems or the likelihood of a divergence of interests between NGO and principal stakeholders
- Organisational challenges: hierarchy, leadership, financial management, coordination across multiple villages and scaling up
- Coping with stress or crisis situations (instances, ways of managing these, VI capability, NGO role)
- Stakeholders, attitudes, relationships among them and with external agents/ agencies
- Relationship with informal, formal and governance institutions and powerful interest groups
- Alternative arrangements post exit of NGO
- Structural or inherent constraints, if any, to the particular vision of sustainability, as articulated by the NGO

7 Case Studies of Partner NGO

7.1 Multi-Track, Participatory Approach

The analytical framework proposed is this firmly grounded in the institutional analysis, drawing heavily upon the work of Ostrom and other scholars. As mentioned earlier, we do anticipate difficulties in compiling detailed quantitative data, since sufficient documentation may not be available for the older periods. In this regard, it may be noted that case studies,

review reports, and internal reports will be able provide significant insights. The secondary information gathered from such documentation will be supplemented by group discussions with the leadership and field workers of the NGO. Additionally, Focussed Group Discussions with the village communities will also be conducted. The group discussions will be based on systematic checklists that will cover the complex terrain of institutional change and organisational models that facilitate collective action. The approach will use a case study format for each partner NGO, envisaged as a *right mix* of documentation and critical understanding of success stories in order to abstract the lessons.

The study will follow a multi-track, participatory approach by raising the relevant questions at three key levels of shaping development action (schematic diagram Fig.1):

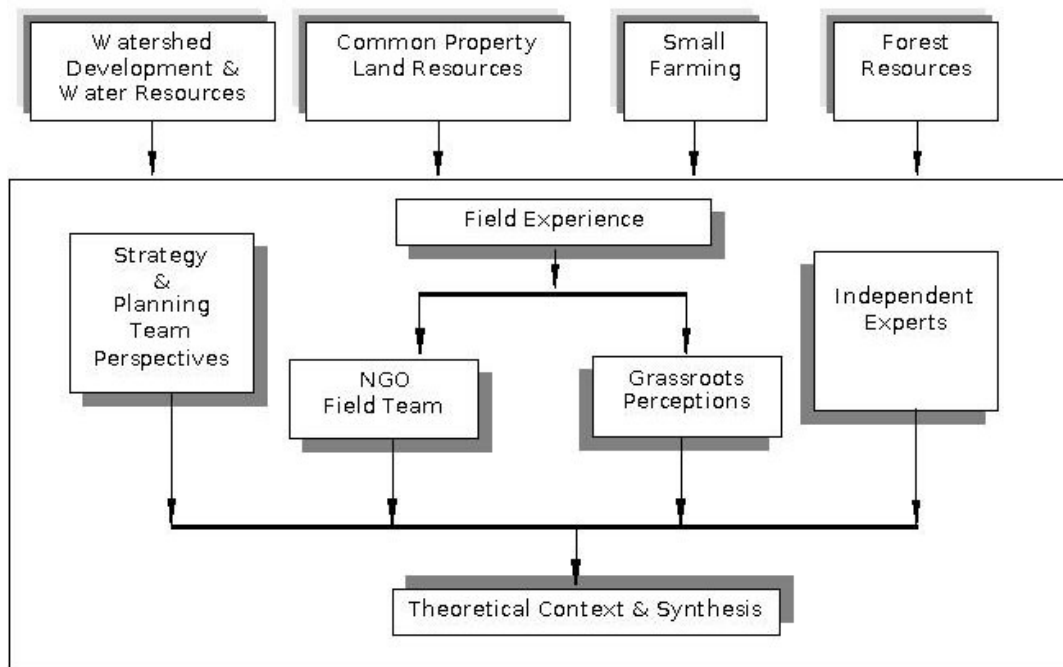


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of the approach

- 1) Strategy & planning team or the senior/executive leadership of the NGO (strategic view)
- 2) Field experiences drawn from field units of the NGO and village communities associated with the intervention (grassroots view)
- 3) Independent experts involved in monitoring and evaluation of the particular case, i.e., those associated with the partner organisation's reviews (expert view)

7.2 The Study Process

The discussions at these different levels would be separately summarised and become working papers of the study, as a prelude to the preparation of the final synthesis document. The process involved in the study and the nature of probing envisaged is described below:

- Review of literature on the analysis of sustainability of institutions
- Preliminary discussions with the NGO top leadership for properly bounding the study
- Sessions with each partner NGO to bound the study, identify NRM sectors, discuss *appropriate* VLOs or organisational models, select villages or sites where the NGO has largely reduced its role
- Structured group discussions with the NGO's middle/ intermediate leadership
- Discussions/ interviews with the field workers, cluster level team leaders, etc
- FDG with village communities, user groups, etc
- Discussions with members and/or leaders local bodies/ other VLOs (*panchayat* members, *sarpanch*, heads of traditional VI, etc)
- Interviews with village leaders
- Discussions with government departments (forest department, DRDA officials, etc)
- Feedback sessions with the NGO
- Preparation of case studies based on villages selected by the partner NGO

7.3 Structuring the Discussions

The study examines institutional change and functioning of VLO/VI promoted by the NGO, after the so-called 'exit' or 'withdrawal' of the NGO from active involvement in the day-to-day functioning of the village organisations. The study can be visualised as a mapping of institutional change across the following periods:

1. Long before project or NGO intervention (LBP)
2. At start of project/ intervention (SOP)
3. At the end of project/ intervention (EOP)
4. Present, i.e., after exit or withdrawal (NOW)

The discussions will be based on prepared checklists dealing with different aspects of the NRM issues, property rights regime, institutional changes, organisational development, changes in organisational models, consensus building around norms, functioning of committees, user groups, benefits sharing, costs of monitoring/ enforcement of norms, role of and NGO across different periods. Detailed (generic) checklists designed for the study will be 'customised' for each NGO incorporating the organisation's vision, field situations and type of NRM activities. The generic checklists prepared for the study cover the following themes:

1. Institution building effort by the NGO, its role in the functioning of the VLO/VI during different phases
2. Functioning of the VLO/VI, particularly the committees, leadership, user groups, etc in different periods and its adaptability to changes
3. Village level indicators of benefits and adherence to norms, perceptions of change, etc
4. Coping with difficult or crisis situations (management & preparedness)
5. Sector-specific issues in NRM (water resources, forest resources, pastureland, watershed, farmland, etc.) centred on norms and the role of VLO/VI

7.4 Proactive Partnership

The study is envisaged as a pro-active partnership with the partner NGO playing an active role in the study, so that the outputs are helpful to shaping the sustainability strategy of the organisation. The study, as mentioned earlier, is based on a case study format and will not involve anything resembling an evaluation exercise. The salient features of this partnership are enunciated below:

- Approach and the study process will be shaped through a consultative process in which each partner can play a proactive role in refining the methods
- Study team will work in the spirit of partnership, actively avoiding anything even bordering on evaluation or monitoring
- Study team will be open to suggestions and views from partner organisations and the nodal person deputed by the partner organisation to facilitate the study
- At each stage, the study team will share views and summaries with the partner organisation through briefings, notes, summaries, etc.
- Study process will have a large inter-active component giving chance to different layers of the partner organisation to put across and discuss views, experiences, etc.
- The partner organisations will depute the one nodal person each at the top and field level
- The location and NRM sector to be covered by the study would be decided in consultation with the partner organisation

8 Report/ Synthesis

The outputs from each of the different levels will be juxtaposed with the contemporary theoretical discourse on village institutions and their sustainability, which has been discussed under different theoretical perspectives. The synthesis will integrate different perspectives and examine the relevance of various constructs against the backdrop of diverse field experiences. There are also several distinct approaches to the very goals of natural resources management such as optimising harvests at one end and ensuring the co-sustainability of both ecological systems and livelihoods at the other end, with many areas of overlapping concerns across the different schools of thought. The synthesis of varied experiences in intervention and the working of diverse village institutions will help to arrive at defining sustainability challenge in practical, operational terms in a manner that can re-shape the strategies in development interventions. The study will attempt an in-depth analysis of the problems, constraints, prospects and opportunities ingrained in village institutions. Analysis of both empirical evidence as well as perceptions at different levels will be undertaken to achieve this.

8.1 Tentative table of contents

The final report will, tentatively, have the following contents:

1. Introduction conceptualising the study
2. Overview of the contemporary theoretical discourse on sustainability of village institutions
3. Thematic summary on institutional mechanisms (convergences & divergences)
4. Thematic summary on organisational models (convergences & divergences)
5. NRM sector-wise summaries on resource management models emerging from the case studies
6. Discussion on the sustainability challenge (changing terrain, emerging models)

In addition to the final report, there will be independent case studies on each partner NGO. Each of these case studies will capture the diversity of visions and differences of approaches in the NGO sector. It will also highlight the new challenges and emerging thinking within each NGO.

8.2 Outputs:

The outputs from the study would be:

1. Seven case studies on each partner NGO
2. Thematic working papers that will become chapters in final report
3. Final Report summarising case studies and thematic findings

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