

Ananya Behera

BUILDING BRIDGES, FORGING LINKAGES AND FORMING SOCIAL CAPITAL: COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT IN ODISHA

Abstract

It is widely acknowledged now that forest conservation is more effective when local communities get involved in it. Forest protection by a village community creates mutual trust, cooperation and reciprocity, all of which are essential components of bonding social capital. The efforts to protect larger and contiguous tracts of forest become more successful when more than one village cooperate with each other. This helps in building bridging capital. When external agencies such as government and non-government organisations extend their support and help to the village communities and the communities in turn show their willingness to work with them, linking capital is formed.

On the basis of two case studies from one of the districts of Odisha, this paper probes how self-initiated community management of forests is not only effective in protecting forests but also contributes to the creation and strengthening of bridging and linking social capital.

Keywords: *community forest management, bridging social capital, linking social capital, networks, common-pool resources*

Introduction

Forests are one of the most important common-pool resources of the world which have undergone precipitous decline with increasing biotic pressure on them due to rising population and processes of mining, infrastructure development, industrialization and urbanisation. Degeneration of this vital natural resource has to be arrested to prevent an environmental catastrophe, to mitigate the effects of climate change and protect the livelihoods of a sizeable rural population. India also has to grapple with the issue of forest conservation from the perspective of sequestration of atmospheric carbon, protection of livelihoods of forest-dependent communities and meeting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Experience shows that many communities living in proximity to forests have been protecting forests successfully without legal or administrative

ANANYA BEHERA, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Rama Devi Women's University, Bhubaneswar, E-mail id: ananyabehera49@gmail.com

structures imposed from above. Self-initiated CFM fosters mutual cooperation among the members of a community. People form voluntary associations and frame their own rules and norms based on local conditions. They meet and interact frequently; apportion responsibilities among themselves to protect forests and use their usufructs. They coordinate their activities and commit themselves to take actions for common good. Such interactions and task-sharing promote trust and solidarity among members of the community. People trusting each other are more likely to form a more cohesive society. Trust lubricates cooperation (Putnam, 1993: 171). It reduces transaction costs between people, thus saving money and time; prompts people to take active roles in their community, behave morally, compromise if necessary and do not easily dismiss ideas they disagree with. Communities with civic activism and ethical behavior, where people give others their due, have been found to be more prosperous (Uslaner, 1999: 122). Endowed with a diverse stock of social network and civic associations, they are in a stronger position to resolve conflicts (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000), fight poverty and many kinds of vulnerabilities.

Study of Community Forest Management (CFM) provides an ideal context not only to understand forest conservation as a people's campaign, but also help gain insight into the important sociological concept of social capital. This is because CFM requires existence of voluntary associations, rules governing use of forest resources, mutual trust among people, their cooperation in engaging in collaborative activities, all of which are important components of social capital.

Forest resources are directly linked to a vast majority of poor people's lives and livelihoods in Odisha. For the rural poor, tribals, *dalits* and other marginalized communities, forests are not only a source of livelihood, but have a deep linkage with their culture, customs and traditions. As the state witnessed massive deforestation and over-exploitation of forests in the first few decades after independence for various reasons including launching of hydro-electricity and irrigation projects, road construction, resettlement of refugees, expansion of agriculture and development of urban areas etc., spontaneous community-based forest protection and management systems came into existence to improve the situation.

The history of forest conservation and management in Odisha is replete with success stories of CFM. During the 1970s and 1980s, self-initiated community forest protection initiatives emerged in several districts of Odisha without any government support or incentive. The 1988 Forest Policy of the central government emphasized involvement of local people in forest conservation and management. The government came up with the Joint Forest management (JFM) model which was different from the CFM model to the extent that the former was not purely community-driven. There are thousands of forest fringe villages in Odisha where CFM is practised. NGOs like Vasundhara and FES have been playing a role in promoting CFM. It has been

mentioned earlier that CFM fosters social capital formation.

The idea of social capital

Several scholars have attempted to explain social capital and underline its importance in contemporary times. Woolcock and Narayan (2000: 226) define social capital in terms of norms and networks that enable people to act collectively for mutual benefit. Putnam refers to social capital as connections among individuals, social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Portes, 1998). Bourdieu (1986:248) views social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition”. His analysis focuses on the benefits accruing to individuals because of their participation in groups and on the deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating this resource. Social groupings and networks are always not endowed with social capital but they can be formed through investment strategies oriented towards the institutionalization of group relations, and can be used as a reliable source for securing other collateral benefits. He says “social capital can be decomposed into two elements: first, the social relationship itself that allows individuals to claim access to resources possessed by their associates, and second, the amount and quality of those resources” (*ibid*). Bourdieu emphasizes that the outcomes of possession of social capital can be reduced to financial capital, but social capital, unlike the latter, is intangible and less amenable to measurement. Bridging social capital is that which enables individuals to forge links with others in society regardless of ascriptive affiliations. Linking social capital describes the ties between members of a community on the one hand, and a variety of influential people, government agencies and the like, on the other (Harriss 2001:87).

Sociologists have tried to deconstruct the idea of social capital for a clearer understanding of the concept and to facilitate its application in different contexts. This deconstruction can be seen in the form of differentiation of bonding and other types of social capital and further refining them. Michael Woolcock, a social scientist with the World Bank, distinguished between bonding, bridging and linking social capital. In his opinion, important contributions to the literature on social capital prior to Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* failed to make a proper distinction between different types of social capital. According to Woolcock, bonding social capital reflects ties between people in similar situations, such as family, close friends and immediate neighbors. Bridging social capital, as per his definition, encompasses relatively distant ties and loose friendships. Linking social capital relates to the connections with ‘unlike people in dissimilar situations’, such as those who are, not strictly speaking, an integral part of a community, but exist entirely outside of the community. Such connections enable members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available in the community, affirms Woolcock (Woolcock, 2001).

It is pertinent here to discuss briefly the concepts of bridging and linking capital. Bridging social capital can be seen to be the result of networking outside normal social groupings. According to Claridge (2018) this can happen when different groups attend social events or join associations. Claridge refers to the work of Szter and Woolcock (2004), where they discuss linking social capital as a type of social capital that describes norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society. These relationships are described as vertical and the key feature is differences in social position and power. Scholars at the World Bank played an important role for bringing in the concept of linking social capital to describe relationships among people or institutions at different levels of societal power hierarchy. Claridge, in his article cites Schneider (2006) according to whom linking social capital involves classic patron-client or mentor-mentee relationship. The above formulations of scholars were discerned while trying to dig out the elements of linking capital in the case studies.

According to Claridge (2018) NGOs working with communities to implement donor or government projects become brokers of linking social capital. Often funders recognize the importance of linking capital and continue to fund NGOs that enjoy good rapport with the wider community. This is what was noticed in the context of NGO's involvement with CFM in the villages concerned.

In the aforementioned paragraph it was mentioned that in a way all forms of social capital are important. But in this paper, the focus will be on bridging and linking social capital in the context of CFM in Odisha.

Community Forest Management in Odisha

The history of CFM in Odisha dates back to 1936, when the villagers of Lapanga in Sambalpur district started protecting the nearby forest without any assistance from the forest department. Subsequently, this mode of management made considerable progress in the districts of Angul, Bolangir, Boudh, Deogarh, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Nayagarh, Kandhamal and Sambalpur. In many parts of the state, local communities have had a feeling that any involvement of the forest department, especially in terms of financial incentives and so-called methods of scientific management would sabotage local initiatives, compromising long-term forest conservation. They also believe that the JFM framework creates an asymmetrical power relationship between the communities and the forest department, with the latter holding real power (Human and Pattanaik, 2000:35). Often the attitude of the forest department to community forest management seems to be marked by ambivalence. There has been a tendency on the part of the government machinery to either underestimate or underreport the community initiatives or, worse still, not to have any record of such voluntary efforts. In any case,

both JFM and CFM models have been running in parallel in Odisha.

As per a rough estimate, there were more than 10,000 CFM village groups, protecting about 2mha of forest in Odisha (but as per a survey conducted by the Forest Department in 1995, there were 2691 villages which were actively involved in it). These groups are not only protecting forests, but they have developed their own networks for solidarity and exchange of information. These operate at village-cluster level, at district level, and in some places at a regional level. As the forest resources grow and mature, conflicts within and between villages are on the increase. Therefore, an important function of these networks has been to resolve conflicts and to fight together for greater rights over forests and their produce (*ibid*).

The 1970s witnessed sporadic people's forest conservation initiatives in various parts of the state. In Nayagarh, ecologically conscious teachers of a few primary schools initiated environmental education which soon spread to other villages in the area. This resulted in the launch of an effort to protect a large hillock with sparse vegetation by a cluster of nine villages. Elsewhere in the state, a few enthusiastic forest officials were mobilizing people in the villages to protect nearby forests. In Bolangir, there were frequent conflicts among villages on issues relating to forests. Forest officials and local leaders tried to resolve these conflicts through conciliation. Later school teachers and other groups joined the process. Long before the government's realization of the people's positive role in the local natural resource management, villagers of Nabra in the Kaptipada sub-division of Mayurbhanj District of Odisha under the leadership of Narottam Das, a school teacher had started protecting a part of a denuded *sal* jungle known as Nabra Reserve Forest. In 1985, Vanasathia, a voluntary organization, mobilized people for taking up plantation in this completely denuded area. After the issue of the JFM resolution by the state government, this community protection group was converted into a Van Suraksha Samiti (VSS). Situated in the foothills of Similipal National Park, Nabra which is characterized by preponderance of ST and SC population provides a unique example of conservation and management of natural resources (Campese et al., 2009).

The history of CFM in Nayagarh district can be traced to 1976 when people of Buddhagram (Kesharpur) situated at Buddhagiri foothills took a tentative decision to protect the forest that covers the hills. Some college and school teachers had made the move after observing the severe degradation that Buddhagiri forest had undergone in the previous decades. The volunteers of the National Service Scheme (NSS) of the nearby town of Nayagarh held a camp at Buddhagram in 1978 and gave a boost to the morale of the people. From that year onwards villagers resolved to protect the forest at any cost. They launched a system called 'Thengapali' (turn of the stick), a roster arrangement through which the responsibility guarding the forest was passed from one household to another. They also regulated grazing of cattle in the

Buddhagiri forest. At some point the senior officials of forest department started taking interest in the work of the people. Slowly people of other villages living close to forest started similar initiatives to protect the nearby forests. An organization called “Brikshya o Jibara Bandhu Parishad” (friends of trees and living beings) was set up with 22 villages participating in it. Slowly people from outside the district came to know about the experiments in Nayagarh. The people’s movement spread to other parts of the district in course of the next few years while the Environment Department of the state government, Senior Forest Department officials and civil society leaders lauded the effort. Narayan Hazary and Subas Chandra Hazary in their article published in the book *Environment management in India* attribute the success of the CFM movement in Nayagarh to the cooperation among six categories of actors i.e. common people, institutional leaders rooted in villages, social leaders, voluntary agencies, governmental agencies and political functionaries (Hazary and Hazary, 1987:258).

Significance of the study

Generally, it is assumed that forests can be effectively managed if only strong bonding capital exists among members of a community. If this assumption holds true, bridging and linking capital would not seem to hold much significance. One would tend to think that if bonding capital is being created through CFM, it is immaterial whether other forms of social capital are also being formed as a result of CFM. My attempt here will be to show how important bridging and linking capital are and how they are formed in the process of this community initiative. Bonding capital no doubt enjoys a central position when there is a discussion on social capital. But when it comes to forest management creation of bridging capital is also worth studying. This is so primarily because forests are open access CPRs and mostly they cannot be protected by some kind of impenetrable fencing. Forest products are needed by people living in neighboring rural areas and even by urban populations. If the nearby village communities share the concern and goal of the village in question, the efforts of forest protection yield better results. Then it becomes a joint responsibility of not only one village community but of several communities of people living in the vicinity. Similarly, linking capital is important because it is an index of the rapport that a village community enjoys with government, self-government and non-government institutions. Such rapport makes management of a forest easier. Existence of bridging and linking capital has the potential of expanding CFM over larger forest areas and turn forest protection into a mass movement.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During literature review it was revealed that relatively more work has been done to study the effects of social capital rather than factors leading

up to formation of social capital. For example, Glaeser et al. (2000) points out that more theoretical and empirical work have been done on the effects of social capital and the real weakness is the lack of both theory and empirical work focusing on the causes of social capital. According to him, factors that induce individuals to internalize the welfare of the community will increase investment in community-enhancing social capital. In this context we can refer to what has been called as the meso-approach in the study of social capital.

The meso-approach is geared towards the instrumental value of social capital. As such, it is akin to the resource mobilization theory, as far as it links the concept to the potential of social networks to produce resources such as information and support (Burt, 1984; Lin, 2001; Portes, 1998). This analytical approach is referred to as 'meso' because it looks at the structures that may enable co-operation. The World Bank refers to this approach as structural social capital. This approach is based on the premise that social capital is neither an individual nor a collective property, but rather a property arising from the interdependence between individuals and between groups within a community. Consequently, social capital is viewed as a resource that emerges from social ties and is then used by members (individuals or groups) of networks. Institutions like block and district-level federations of CFM resemble the structures referred to in the above literature.

The communication and interaction between subgroups are often referred to as bridging ties. These can be contrasted with bonding ties, which refer to relations within subgroups, which are usually strong, frequent, and important for trust building (Gitell and Vidal, 1998; Newman and Dale, 2005). Bridging ties, on the other hand, are not only important for inter-group communication, they are also considered to be important for a community's potential for collective action (Granovetter, 1973) and conflict resolution (Carlsson and Berkes, 2005). A forest boundary dispute was resolved between the two villages under study through repeated negotiations which helped create social capital.

Conflicts of various kinds, both intra-village and inter-village, are found in the forest areas. Sarap (2007:261) has found several types of conflicts present in his study villages located in Bolangir, Sambalpur and Phulbani (Kandhamal) districts of Orissa. These conflicts arise over products, sharing benefits, usufruct rights, illegal felling, forest boundaries and forest mafias (Sarap and Sarangi, 2009). Bridging capital plays an important role in resolving conflicts between neighboring villages. Whether a conflict will fester for a longer period or it will be resolved early depends on the bridging capital that exists between the villages.

In the context of linking capital, reference can be made to the suggestion made by a researcher who studied resolution of conflicts between the state government agencies of Odisha and CFM groups. He feels that the forest

department needs to analyze traditional sustainability practices of the communities and compare them with similar experiences in other parts of the world. With this information, it can create a roadmap for blending traditional practices with scientific inputs of the department, clearly recognizing the fact that primary ownership of forests should lie with local communities (Ghosh, n.d.).

Several other authors have underlined the importance of linking capital in conservation of natural resources in general and forest management in particular. Ostrom (1990) spoke about institutional frameworks that promote participatory governance enabling communities to build fruitful links with external institutions. Success of community forest management depends on how well local communities interact with entities which are relatively remote from them (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). Mahanty et al. (2009) emphasize that linking capital enables to secure grants and technical assistance for forest governance which facilitate sustainable management practices and conservation initiatives. Pandit and Bevilacqua (2011) elaborate further the importance of linking capital by stating that communities which depend excessively on forest resources for livelihood and other needs are more proactive in interacting and building relationships with external institutions to receive the required support from the latter. Ultimately linking capital should help the communities to influence state policy for forest conservation. This is what Cronkleton et al. (2013) have also found. According to them communities with strong linking capital influence forest policies and ensure that their needs are recognized when regional and national frameworks on forest policies are formulated.

Methodology

Qualitative technique has been used for the present paper with reliance on case study method. This method has been used in this study to understand the complex dynamics of social capital around the management of forests from the standpoint of the participants. It reflects an interpretive research philosophy that is not geared to identifying causes but provides a different way to explain social phenomena. The case studies of two villages, Kesiapalli and Kotapokhari in Ranpur block of Nayagarh district were conducted. Nayagarh has often been cited as a district where CFM is a notable success. Nearly fifty percent of its land area has forest cover. Some of the earliest initiatives in CFM had become noticeable here. While selecting villages, care was taken to include such villages which have around 50 households and a population of about 200 to 250. Though CFM groups lie dispersed all over Nayagarh district, Ranpur is one of the blocks where these groups have made their strong presence felt. Besides, the block-level federation of village-level FPCs for Ranpur block has been proactive in creating a strong CFM network, the likes of which is not seen in other areas.

Data were collected from various sources, both primary and secondary. Primary data were collected from members of various village-level committees

and community forest management groups, field officers of forest department, block officers and community leaders. These data were collected mostly through face-to-face interviews. This was supplemented by telephonic conversations, Focus-Group Discussions (FGDs), key-informant interviews. For secondary data, documents of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, India and Government of Odisha, records of the block office and those maintained by NGOs as well as block-level federation of FPCs were referred to. Participatory tools like transect walks, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques and social mapping were also used to enrich data. Data was analyzed keeping in mind Woolcock's understanding of different types of social capital, especially bridging and linking capital. The case studies which have been analyzed using this framework are described below:

Case study of village Kesiapalli

To a casual visitor, Kesiapalli is like any other village of the region, nestled among tree-clad hills and valleys dotted with agricultural fields. A continuous patch of forest, known as Sulia Reserve Forest (SRF) encircles a group of villages, including Kesiapalli. The SRF extends over 6,324 hectares and is one of the three important reserve forests in Nayagarh. The majority of villagers living on the forest fringes are dependent on it for fuelwood, timber for house construction, etc. A few decades ago, this forest had dense tree cover. The process of degradation began when the demand for timber started increasing with growth of nearby towns coupled with unrestricted cutting of trees by people living in surrounding villages. Thus, a need to protect forests was felt by the villagers. For protection purposes, this reserve forest has been divided into four segments. While Kesiapalli protects one segment of it, Kotapokhari and Arakhapalli jointly protect another. Kulasara manages the third segment and the fourth one is jointly guarded by the people of Kulasara and Kesiapalli.

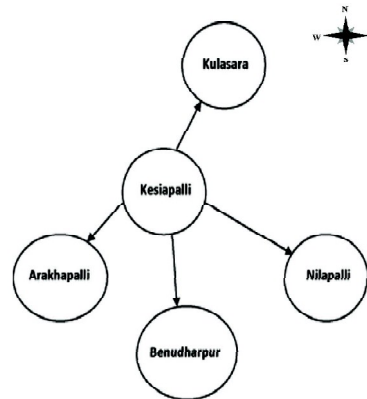
The village of Kesiapalli has 65-67 households with a population of about 400. Except two families who belong to the Mali caste all the remaining families belong to khandayat caste (cultivators). Most of the families continue to be joint families excepting a few who have nuclear family units. The first family is said to have migrated from Banki (Baideswar) area and set up the village. In later times more families came from the neighbouring villages and settled here. The people of Kesiapalli are mostly small-holding farmers. The family with the largest holding owns 7 acres of land and the size of the smallest landholding is 16 decimals. Paddy is the main crop cultivated by the people. The second most important crop is a pulse, *mung*. Most of the land is irrigated by a minor irrigation project. The ayacut of the project covers two villages, Kesiapalli and Arakhapalli. Majority of them preserve seeds for subsequent planting. Exchange of seeds among the villagers is a regular phenomenon. Similarly, borrowing and lending of money take place among the families at

regular intervals. But when money is borrowed, no interest is charged. Besides, what is remarkable is that all these transactions take place without any documentation. This reflects the trust that exists among the members of the community. These practices help in building bonding capital. Strengthening of bonding capital through CFM takes place because of the enhanced levels of trust and cooperation that are required for its operation. My focus in this paper is not on bonding capital, but bridging and linking capital which are created as an offshoot of CFM. The reciprocal exchanges helps build bridging capital when they take place across village boundaries. The next section deals with bridging and linking capital of Kesiapalli.

Bridging capital of Kesiapalli

Bridging capital holds critical importance for forest protection because these open-access resources cannot be protected in a fool-proof manner by one village or institution functioning in isolation. The cooperation of nearby communities is an imperative for the success of CFM. Efforts are required to involve them as stakeholders in a joint endeavor. Thus, it is important to analyze the relationship of Kesiapalli with its neighboring villages with respect to forest protection in particular and other spheres of activities in general. These relationships can be taken as a proxy indicator of bridging social capital. The locations of these villages vis-à-vis Kesiapalli are depicted in the following diagram.

Figure 1.1 Kesiapalli and its neighbouring villages



The relationship of villagers of Kesiapalli with its neighboring villages -Arakhapalli, Kotapokhari and Kulasara has been harmonious except for occasional conflicts which do arise on different issues. For example, conflicts sometimes arise over delineation of forest boundaries, construction of a road, or over different uses of a water body among the villages. In the following paragraph one such case has been narrated.

In the year 1980, people of Kesiapalli decided to protect a part of the reserve forest (Sulia Reserve forest). After a few years, they had a dispute with villagers of Kotapokhari over the issue of construction of a village road. Kesiapalli and Kulasara were also involved in a long-drawn-out conflict when there was no agreement between the two villages regarding the alignment of a road, that is, whether a road would be constructed at the expense of a pond. It has been observed that such frictions among the villages have been eventually sorted out. The collaborative management of forests has suffered temporary setbacks on account of such conflicts. But invariably, these disputes have been resolved and conservation efforts have resumed at the end of the conflicts. The protection initiatives have acted as a cementing force in the long run.

By the year 1985, the entire reserve forest had been divided and apportioned among four villages, Kesiapalli, Kotapokhari, Arakhapalli and Kulasara. This required sustained cooperation and mutual understanding among people of these villages. In fact, all the activities associated with the protection and management of forests has brought communities together cutting across village boundaries. Through these processes, bridging capital got built up in each of these villages including Kesiapalli.

Here it will be worth mentioning about cluster committees consisting of forest protecting groups guarding a contiguous patch of forests. These intermediate institutions between village-level and block-level committees are constituted through a democratic process. The existence of these intermediate institutions is symptomatic of flourishing bridging capital among village communities.

Linking capital in Kesiapalli

Focusing on linking capital in Kesiapalli necessitates, among other aspects, an assessment of frequency and ease of interactions the villagers of Kesiapalli have with the GP functionaries, the forest officials, the block personnel and NGO workers. Discussion with them brings out the nuances of exchanges between them and the village in question.

As far as the GP is concerned, Kesiapalli is a village where people take active part in implementing a variety of programmes which requires unity and solidarity among the people. Many such programmes are implemented through village committees and not through professional contractors. The more cohesive the village community is smoother is the implementation of development projects. The VDC in which the youth are enthusiastic participants facilitates timely execution of these projects. The GP accords due priority to the needs of the village and it provides a forum for conflict resolution. Employment generation projects under MNREGS are taken up through the agency of the GP and the village community. Occasionally, funds from this programme are used for plantation and afforestation activities. The persons

who champion the cause of forest protection are also those who participate in the local-self-government. Some of them get elected as ward members and even the Sarpanch of the G.P. This is not the case in many places where elections to the decentralized institutions of local governance are fought on party lines and have become expensive affairs. Clearly, there is trust and goodwill between the GP and the village despite loyalties of individuals to diverse political parties. What is however significant is that people go above political differences when it comes to matters relating to forests and use their links with party leaders to get their co-villagers out of harm's way from alleged harassment by forest officials.

Lower frequency of contact between police personnel and the villagers reflects low rate of crime, including offences relating to forests like unauthorized felling of trees, intra-village and inter-village conflicts centering on forests and the like. Since the villagers resolve most of their disputes amicably among them, the need for seeking police intervention for settling those disputes does not arise and litigations are avoided as far as possible.

The forest department officials do not acknowledge the local people's initiative to protect and manage forest because they do not conform to the department-approved JFM framework. Unusual as it might seem there are even some sporadic cases of foresters and forest guards paying penalties to village-level or cluster-level committees for violation of rules like felling of trees for commercial purposes, undertaking silvicultural operations without the consent of villagers, formulated by the latter. These are reflective of the influence that CFM committees in Nayagarh wield.

A few NGOs have been playing a critical and pro-active advocacy role in promoting CFM groups. Vasundhara, a well-known NGO working on issues of forest conservation and rights of local people on forests, has been working with the FPC of Kesiapalli for the last few years. It has played a key role in mobilizing people around the issue of forest conservation, and more recently, in the matter of securing rights of the local communities envisaged in the Forest Rights Act, 2006 by helping them file their claims for community forest rights over the forest (Sangita, 2008). The NGO assists village communities in mapping their village natural resources including forests. It is involved in conducting awareness campaigns and meetings both at the village and the landscape level for forest conservation and formulating restoration plans for degraded forest areas. It has also been acting as a catalyst for federating the village-level committees at the block, district and state levels.

We have looked at the rapport between the forest-protecting village community and three external agencies in order to assess the strength and quality of linking social capital. From the discussions above, inference can be drawn that linking capital of the villagers is stronger with the GP and NGOs. The villagers get more support from these agencies. The relationship between

villagers and forest officials sometimes become adversarial. Interface between police authorities and villagers is minimal as disputes are mostly resolved peacefully at the local level when they arise within or between villages.

Case study of village Kotapokhari

Kotapokhari is a revenue village coming under Talabani GP of Ranpur block in Nayagarh. It is located at a distance of about 14 kms from the block headquarters and about 3 kms from the GP headquarters. The village is more than 200 years old and is well connected by roads. The villages which are situated in the immediate neighbourhood of Kotapokhari are Arakhapalli, Talabani, Gobardhanpur and Kesiapalli. Sulia B Reserve Forest and *Gramya Jungle* (village forest) lie to the west. There are 48 households in the village with a population of 240. It is a multi-caste village which includes 14 households belonging to *khandayat* community and 13 households belonging to *gopal* (milkman) community. Out of the remaining households 3 belong to the *dhoba* (washerman) caste, 6 to *mali* caste (gardener), 6 to *mahanayaksudra* community, 2 to *тели* (oil-man) caste, 2 to *kumbhar* (potter) caste and 2 to *keuta* (fisherman) caste.

Village Kotapokhari is one of the villages hemmed in by the Sulia Reserve Forest. As described earlier, four villages have apportioned the total forest area among themselves for protection and management. Kotapokhari is one of them. Residents of this village consider the forest as a livelihood and environmental resource. The poorest of families who hardly own any cultivable land also eke out a subsistence level income from the forest. Other families fall back on the forests in times of crop failures caused by drought. There is a village forest within the village revenue boundary. People have been making use of this area by planting commercial and other useful species of trees which are periodically harvested. The sale proceeds are split into two parts. The village assembly decides unanimously how much would go to the village common fund and how much would be distributed among the families. In the recent past, it was decided that each family would get Rs 3000 out of the sale proceeds and the rest would be used for the construction of a temple and observance of community festivals. Incidentally once there is a temple it attracts people from nearby villages. In a way the temple assumes an instrumental role in building bridging social capital by creating another forum for social interactions within and across villages. This form of social capital is further strengthened when there is joint and collaborative effort to protect and preserve a common pool resource like forest. Sometimes forest protection committee meetings are also held in the temple premises.

A number of informal institutions operate in this village. They include committees for health, general development of the village, school management, etc. *MaaBanaDurga Jungle Surakshya Committee*, relating to forest protection, the oldest of all informal institutions, is entrusted with the task of keeping a

vigil on the forest. It is led by three persons. Rather than holding periodic elections to choose the office bearers of this committee the villagers have been choosing them through consensus. Spontaneous adherence to clear and commonly understood rules and norms relating to protection, conservation, access to forest resources and sharing of benefits of the forest produces etc. are marked features of CFM. All these features reflect and strengthen mutual trust among the people. That these rules and norms have remained unwritten validates the notion that tradition and customs hold considerable sway over the villagers. Rural communities are still mostly guided by verbal commitments rather than written agreements. Similarly, participation of women in forest management happens not in compliance with rules imposed from outside but as a customary social practice. It is worth noting that with increasing participation of women in local self-government institutions, their voices are growing stronger at the village level also.

Bridging Social Capital in Kotapokhari

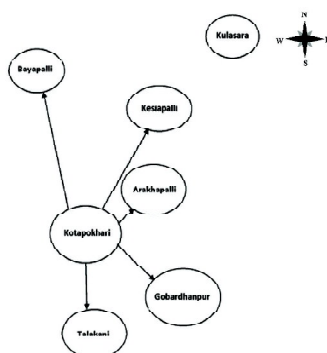
Having analyzed bridging and linking capital in Kesiapalli, we will now see the dynamics of these two forms of social capital in Kotapokhari. I have mentioned earlier how in certain situations more than one village jointly protect a patch of forest. In case of Kotapokhari it has been jointly working with one of its neighboring villages, Arakhapalli for protection of a specific forest area. Both Kotapokhari and Arakhapalli take part in the functioning of an eight-member FPC in which there are equal number of members from both the villages. There is a dedicated forest fund in the joint bank account of two persons, one from each village. The fund is used for defraying travel expenses of FPC members when they undertake any tour for block and district-level federation meetings relating to forest protection. The fund is also used for conducting silvicultural operations, plantation works and drawing fire lines to prevent fires. These kinds of work relating to forest conservation and regeneration are done jointly by Kotapokhari and its neighboring villages. This creates bridging capital between the participating communities and helps in the regeneration of forests.

In the initial years of the community protection initiative, the FPC used to meet every month which strengthened the relationship between the two villages and consequently bridging capital existing between them continued to grow.

Mention has been made earlier that there was a forest boundary dispute between Kotapokhari and Kesiapalli. A few years ago, people of Kesiapalli used to intrude into the forest under the protection of Kotapokhari and fell trees without permission of the FPC concerned. After several rounds of negotiations between the respective FPCs of both the villages, the frequency of intrusions came down. But Kotapokhari does not have any conflict with other neighbouring villages. If there has been any sustained inter-village

cooperation centering on an issue, it is conservation of forests. Therefore, it can be said that CFM has helped build bridging social capital between Kotapokhari and villages mentioned above. The locations of the neighbouring villages vis-à-vis Kotapokhari are depicted in the following diagram.

Figure 6.2: Kotapokhari and its neighbouring villages



Linking capital of Kotapokhari

Having considered bridging capital, the focus now shifts to linking capital of Kotapokhari. Besides considering its relationship with institutions like GP, FD, NGOs; it will be worthwhile to see the role of the village FPC in the block-level federation. The rules and regulations of the block-level federation are diligently adhered to by Kotapokhari. Conversely, the federation values the work of the FPC in strengthening the federation. Thus, there is a mutuality of support between these institutions. Let us consider the GP first. Though the panchayat system existed earlier it got constitutional status after the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in the year 1992. In the three-tier panchayati raj system consisting of the Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and the Gram panchayat, the last one is closest to the people and the most effective forum for participatory democracy. At this level people have the maximum opportunity to get involved in planning and implementation of development programmes and projects. Therefore, how the rural population engages with the GP is of great importance. That is the reason why the interactions between the village community and the GP have been observed for the purpose of this work. Kotapokhari is a part of Talabani GP with headquarters at Talabani. It is also one of the neighboring villages of Kotapokhari. It is worth noting that even at the level of GP there are competing demands from constituent villages on the finite resources available to the institutions. Therefore, it matters to what extent the villages and hamlets can get their voices heard at the lowest level of the decentralized governance system. The GP has a great deal of solidarity with the villagers of Kotapokhari as was seen during the course of fieldwork. It takes into consideration the genuine requirements of the village in matters of development schemes and

projects. Among them are drinking water supply schemes and construction and repair of roads. The village has earned a reputation for protecting natural forests which helps it leverage support from government and self-government institutions. The stock of social capital existing among the people is the resource that the GP uses for successful implementation of different village –level projects.

In normal circumstances one would expect that a forest- protecting community would have a friendly relationship with the forest department officials. But in case of Kotapokhari such trusting ambience that is visible in respect of the GP is found to be absent in their interactions with the state forest personnel. This is so notwithstanding the fact that the former had actively participated in a state-sponsored social forestry programme. A social forestry project was undertaken on a piece of common land to cater to the consumption needs of the rural people relating to fuel, fodder and small timber. Without taking people into confidence such projects would not succeed. After being raised, the plantation had been handed over to the ‘Village Forest Committee’ for sustainable upkeep. The territorial division of the FD, on the other hand, with its regulatory orientation still has a tendency not to trust people and therefore does not proactively cooperate with them when it comes to dealing with outsiders inimical to the united effort of villagers to ward off harm to the forest. No wonder people complain about lack of support from the department in their effort to curb forest offences committed by trespassers. The department has remained more or less indifferent towards the activities of the villagers relating to management of the reserve forest. Yet the Range Officer reluctantly concurs when the Sarpanch of the GP makes complimentary remarks about the village with regard to their zeal in protecting the forest. Both the social forestry project and a water-harvesting structure that the state government’s Soil Conservation Department had implemented in association with people go to show that there is enough scope for the villagers to work with external agencies for reclaiming and improving the CPRs. The villagers do not have any contact with the police authorities on account of the fact that there has been no such incident which would necessitate the latter’s assistance.

A few professionally- run NGOs have been proactively providing mentorship to the CFM initiative in Odisha. Without their support and handholding, the village communities practicing CFM would have found it difficult to move to the next level of assertion of their rights such as those available to them under the Forest Rights Act. The NGO, Vasundhara, known for its steadfast advocacy for CFM has facilitated the work of the FPC and helped the villagers file their claims for CFR entitlements under the law. Apart from playing an advocacy role, on many occasions it has acted as a bridge between the local people and external organizations that helps build linking capital.

Conclusion

From the study of the two villages, it can be seen that forest protection initiatives at the community level foster not only mutual trust and intra-village solidarity but also contribute significantly to the development of broader inter-village cooperation, a hallmark of bridging social capital. These initiatives begin by cultivating bonding capital, which emphasizes trust and reciprocal relationships within a single village, enabling residents to work together effectively on forest conservation tasks. But, in some cases, like the one that has been mentioned earlier, CFM brings together more than one village. Where the forest area is large, management of the larger block goes beyond the capacity of a village. In such a situation, more than one village cooperate and help one another to form collaborative arrangements. These collaborative arrangements create shared resources and responsibilities, enhancing the collective management of extensive forest areas. Such inter-village collaborations amplify the effectiveness of forest protection efforts and enable communities to abide by shared norms and regulations that strengthen CFM. This helps build bridging capital. Even in cases where isolated villages attempt to protect specific forest patches, their efforts gain momentum and sustainability when neighboring villages support and align their efforts. This demonstrates the vital role of bridging capital in pooling diverse resources and fostering broader social cohesion across communities.

Along with the accumulation of bridging capital, it is discerned from the case studies that linking social capital—which connects forest-protecting communities with external institutions like government functionaries and NGOs is critical. Linking capital enables communities to secure resources, technical assistance, and advocacy support from institutions that operate beyond the local level. However, the success of linking capital relies heavily on the alignment of goals and approaches between communities and external stakeholders. When government and civil society organizations fail to collaborate effectively or neglect to recognize the role of communities in forest protection, linking capital is undermined, leading to fragmented efforts and diminished confidence among local groups.

To address these challenges, state and union governments can play an instrumental role in fostering a supportive environment for CFM. Recognizing and valuing the contributions of self-organized forest protection groups through formal mechanisms and policy support can boost the morale of these communities. It is seen that proactive steps by federating Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) at block, district, and state levels with the engagement of NGOs and the government provide a platform for unified action. This federated model ensures the representation of local voices in policy discussions while promoting collective action on a larger scale. Such collaboration creates a win-win scenario where communities benefit from strengthened local governance and resource sustainability, while the state meets its objectives of biodiversity

conservation and ecological restoration.

Newman and Dale (2005) argue that achieving a dynamic balance between bonding and bridging social capital is essential. Overemphasis on bonding capital may isolate communities, whereas fostering bridging and linking capital broadens networks, ensuring innovation, resilience, and external support. To further enhance the success of CFM, governments and NGOs must work towards providing technical training and resources to FPCs for sustainable forest management, recognize and reward community efforts through financial incentives and create strong institutional platforms for communities to engage with government agencies and civil society.

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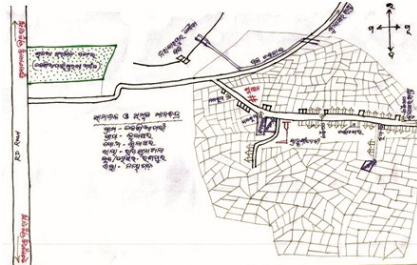
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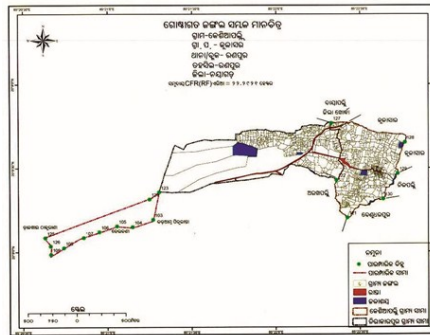
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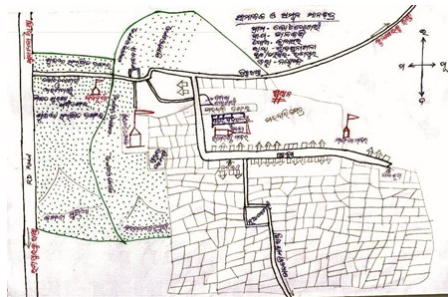
Social Map of Kesiapalli Village



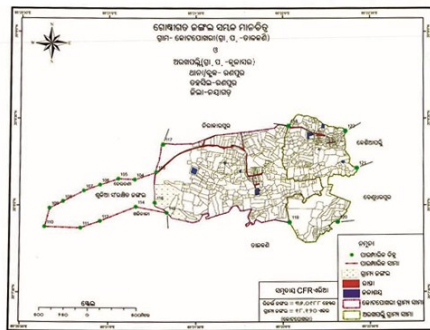
Resource Map of Kesiapalli Village



Social Map of Kotapokhari Village



Resource Map of Kotapokhari Village





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