Evaluation of good governance in a participatory forestry program: A case study in Madhupur Sal forests of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Participatory forestry programs in Bangladesh have been implemented since 1980's to ensure forest conservation along with empowerment of local people, who depend on forest resources. Despite the establishment of legal and institutional frameworks for devolving a meaningful authority to local people, participatory forestry in Bangladesh has been facing many governance challenges. Therefore local people involvement in forest governance needs to be evaluated. A quantitative and qualitative research method has been applied to investigate a forest governance framework for evaluating the efficacy of participatory forestry in Bangladesh. Field data were collected by semi-structured interview of 120 local forest participants using scoring of qualitative data on a point scale (1–5).The study was based on the proposed modified framework for evaluation of good governance in terms of participation, transparency and efficiency. Analysis of data revealed that participation in benefit sharing received the highest score (3.90), while the lowest in the management committee meeting (2.12). Transparency in decision-making process received the lowest score (2.42). Similarly efficiency in handling tree farming fund (TFF) has the lowest score (2.35). In overall governance level, participation received the highest score (3.12), while transparency received the lowest (2.72). Findings indicate that poor governance still exists in participatory forestry program because of low level of participation and lack of transparency in handling tree farming fund (TFF). Therefore pragmatic approaches like strengthening monitoring mechanism, providing incentives for rule compliances need to be adopted to harness the benefit of good governance of a participatory forestry program. The findings of this study would be useful to forest policy-makers, development official and local forest practitioners in formulating effective policies for participatory forest management programs in Bangladesh and other developing countries. Our finding has also an implication on forest governance discourse in participatory forest management regimes.

1. Introduction

Hundreds of millions of people with a great variety of culture live in and around the forests in the globe for their livelihood and ecosystem services (Miah et al., 2012; Guariguata and Balvanera, 2009; Mery et al., 2010; Davenport et al., 2010). Forests provide an important safety net for rural poor to meet emergency needs due to crop failure and economic hardship (Nath and Inoue, 2010; Mohammed et al., 2017).It is assumed that people who live close to forests for a variety of products and services have greater interest in the proper management than distant people (Pulhin et al., 2007). On the other hand, it has now been widely accepted that local people's involvement in governing the forest resources has led to more equitable benefit-sharing than those taken by central authorities (RECOFTC, 2008; Sikor et al., 2013). White

and Martin (2002) reported that local people's participation in forest management and in forest ownership is increasing. Ten to twelve percent of the world's natural forests are officially managed with some degree of popular participation through decentralization approaches (Sunderlin et al., 2008, Ribot et al., 2010; Mutune and Lund, 2016). Local participation in forest governance via decentralization is a key mechanism to use forests sustainably through enhanced local knowledge, stronger accountability and perceived legitimacy of forest rule (Agrawal et al., 2008; Persha et al., 2011; Secco et al., 2014; Andersson, 2013). Participation and legitimacy are strongly linked to each other in forestry as it improves the quality of planning and legitimacy of decisions (Rantala, 2012; Weber, 2018). Legitimacy relates to governance as it conforms to the prevailing values, norms and principles of a community – such as transparency, rule of law, participation and

fairness (Rantala and German, 2013). Its central notion is the condition of being in accord with established social values of ascertain community. It can be earned through the acceptance by the community to govern (Lockwood et al., 2010). Local participation in forest management creates a sense of ownership and hence responsibility over the resources that strongly influences sustainability of the program outcomes (Brown et al., 2002; Nath and Inoue, 2009; Kangas et al., 2010; Arts, 2014). From a sustainability perspective, local participation improves the ability of stakeholders to contribute to both the substantive and procedural quality of decisions affecting the environment (Beierle and Konisky, 2000). A shift from government to governance in the approaches to forest policy formulation and related decision-making procedures is taking place even at global level (Secco et al., 2011). Bangladesh has responded to that global zeal by involving local people in the management of country's declining forest resources (Rashid et al., 2016).

Bangladesh is a small country (147570 km^2) in South Asia that is characterized with high population density (964 km^{-2}) and low per capita area of forest land (0.009 ha person^{-1}) compared to average value in Asia (0.145 ha) and the world (0.597 ha) (Nath et al., 2016; Giessen et al., 2016). It owns diverse vegetation resources including mangrove forests, hill forests, sal forests and trees outside the forests that support the livelihood of local forest dependent people. Despite its social, economic and environmental importance forest resources of the country have been reducing day by day (Sadath and Krott, 2013; Sadath and Rahman 2016; Sarker et al., 2017). The annual rate of gross deforestation is about 0.77 % during 2006–2014 (Reddy et al., 2016). Regardless of high rate of deforestation, Bangladesh still possesses 14086 km^2 of forests (Reddy et al., 2016). The scientific management of forest in Bangladesh was initiated during colonial rule following command and control approach to earn revenue only (Jashimuddin and Inoue, 2012; Rahman, et al., 2016, Sadath and Krott, 2012). After independence from British regime Bangladesh forest administrations' activity has largely been highly influenced by its colonial heritage (Sadath and Krott, 2012; Sadath et al., 2013). This approach did not necessarily satisfy the needs and aspiration of those who are directly or indirectly depend on forests. Most deforestation in government forests has occurred due to the inadequacy of the bureaucratic custodian approach to forest management(Khan, 1998).Apart from custodian management direction, illegal felling contributed the most, towards to natural forest coverage degradation (Biswas and Choudhury, 2007). Such management largely ignores local knowledge and participation of local people (Rana and Chhare, 2017). In order to address the forest degradations issues, policy and management regimes have been revised time to time to reflect the change from centralized state management toward more participatory management approaches (Jashimuddin and Inoue, 2012; Islam et al., 2013; Sarker et al., 2017). Recognizing the importance of local people's involvement in forest management and conservation, Forest Department (FD) of Bangladesh has initiated participatory forestry programs in 1980,s with the broad aim of giving ownership to forest-dependent people and a stake in managing the forest resources (Rana et al., 2007; Salam and Noguchi, 2006; Jashimuddin and Inoue, 2012). Participatory forestry has become a standard model for forest conservation and management in the Global South by the 1990s. It is a mode of forest governance that involves people living in and around forests in their management (Lund, 2015).Through these efforts, considerable progress have been made over the last three decades (Mollick et al., 2006; Muhammed et al., 2005; Salam et al., 2005;Islam et al., 2013; BFD, 2017). Now participatory forestry program in Bangladesh has become the dominant strategy in the country's forestry sector (FMP, 1993; Salam and Noguchi, 2006; Alam et al., 2010). The Forest Act 1927 was amended in 2000 in order to consolidate the legal foundation of social forestry policy program. Subsequently Social Forestry Rule 2004 (amended 2011) was framed to operationalize the participatory forestry in Bangladesh (Sadath and Krott, 2012; Nath et al., 2015). The Forstry Master

Plan 1993, Forest Policy 1994, the Forest (Amendment) Act of 2000 and the Social Forestry (amended) Rules 2011, Participatory Benefit Sharing Agreement (PBSA) were considered the landmark policy documents in the forestry sector of Bangladesh that recognizes local forest participants as independent and self-governing institutions (Sadath and Krott, 2012; Jashimuddin and Inoue, 2012; Nath et al., 2016; Sarker et al., 2017). By the mandate of those said regulations, local forest participant tries to participate in forest management decision making and benefit sharing mechanism. As per the social forestry rule 2004 (amended 2011) "Participatory Benefit Sharing Agreement (PBSA)" between the participants and Forest Department is a key component in social forestry policy programs which reduce the uncertainty and assure some sort of ownership to the participants (Sadath and Krott, 2012). The paradigm shift from patron-client relation to participatory mechanism becomes trust worthy among the local people (Weber, 2018). Ostensibly, participatory forestry reforms seek to promote participation by forest adjacent people in forest management through devolved forest governance (Lund, 2015). Providing legal basis is believed to be a positive move toward good governance (Rashid et al., 2013a,b). It also ensures the rights of the beneficiaries to enjoy full benefits from the plantations. There is a provision of Tree Farming Fund (TFF) that was generated from 10% of the sale of the final harvest at the end of each rotation to sustain participatory forestry programs (Salam et al., 2005; Jashimuddin and Inoue, 2012; BFD, 2017). Cost of the future plantation is incurred from TFF. Ensuring good governance in participatory forestry program, three committees including management committee, advisory committee and fund management sub-committee were formed among the participants in social forestry area (Ali, 2015). At least one third of the committee members are from the women participants thus ensure gender equality. The management committee is responsible for overall management of plantation, planted trees and manage any conflicts arise during and after the implementation of the program (Ali, 2015; BFD, 2017). The formation of 'user committee' is a critical component of a decentralization process, which are believed to amplify the voice and influence of forest user at local level (Rana and Chhatre, 2017; Manor, 2004).

Three decades have already been passed after the first implementation of participatory forestry program in Bangladesh, however, it did not achieve its' sustainability in terms of conservation and livelihood improvement (Islam et al., 2013; Jashimuddin and Inoue, 2012; Nath et al., 2015). Sustainability means to increase the potential of local people to influence and control their future on a long term basis, a goal that can be achieved by strengthening capacity, supporting equity and fostering empowerment (Gow, 1988). Sustainability could be achieved through the practice of good governance in all aspects of operations and procedures. It is now widely understood that good governance in the forest sector is vital for achieving sustainable forest management. (FAO, 2012). Perspective plan of Bangladesh (2010–2021) and Bangladesh Vision 2021 have envisioned good governance as one of the strategic pillars of economic development in Bangladesh (GOB, 2012; CPD, 2007). Recently, draft forest policy 2016 of Bangladesh has set an agenda of good governance in policy statement (BFD, 2017).So far, much of the literature evaluates the impacts of participatory forestry program on species suitability (Kabir and Webb, 2005), stakeholders' capacity development (Salam and Noguchi, 2006), socio-economic development (Rana et al., 2007), forest conservation and livelihood improvement (Safa, 2004; Nath and Inoue, 2009; Islam et al., 2013). Despite many positive outcomes, however, participatory forestry program of Bangladesh has been facing many governance challenges like lack of participation in decision-making, raising and maintenance of forests, lack of willingness to join management committee meetings, low level of transparency and efficiency in fund-handling (Muhammed et al., 2008; Nath and Inoue, 2008; Nath and Inoue, 2009; Islam et al., 2013; Nath et al., 2015; Nath et al., 2016). Lack of transparency and access to information about training, decisions and decision-making processes are key obstacles to participation