

# **Understanding Participation in Large Scale Development Programs**

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by Namrata Jaitli & L. David Brown

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### **Abstract**

Development actors have been focusing on grassroots participation in development as a critical factor in solving problems of poverty and environmental degradation. The Society for Participatory Research and the Institute for Development Research wished to study grassroots participation in development projects organized by government and international agencies with regional support organizations, and to build the capacity of non-governmental agencies to monitor and evaluate development projects involving grassroots populations. This study focuses on experience with grassroots participation in a large-scale, government-sponsored forestry program in India. The intent of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) program was to foster the involvement of forest-dwelling peoples in the development, management and protection of their forests, a dramatic change from prior policies, which emphasized the role of government in managing the forests. The JFM program amounted to a significant shift away from state control which devolved responsibilities to grassroots groups.

### **Introduction**

Although the issue of grassroots participation in development activities has been a matter of intense interest to development actors and researchers for decades (e.g., Morss, Hatch, Miclewaite & Sweet, 1976; Nelson & Wright, 1997), the need to find ways to build local capacity which will mobilize local resources and sustain development improvements has become increasingly urgent during the past 10 years. Many development actors have been focusing more and more on grassroots participation in development as a critical factor in solving problems of poverty and environmental degradation. Even the World Bank, long the center of promoting development through macro-economic interventions, is now concerned with fostering grassroots participation in the definition, design, implementation and evaluation of its projects (World Bank, 1994).

In this context the New Delhi-based Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) joined forces with the Institute for Development Research (IDR) in Boston to gain information about the effectiveness of efforts to promote grassroots participation in development projects. The two organizations sought to train teams of

participatory researchers from non-governmental research and training organizations located throughout India to do the data collection and analysis for this investigation. PRIA and IDR hoped to carry out studies of grassroots participation in development projects organized by government and international agencies with these regional support organizations, and to build the capacity of non-governmental agencies to monitor and evaluate development projects that involve grassroots populations in the future.

The study reported here focuses on experience with grassroots participation in a large-scale, government-sponsored forestry program in the Indian state of West Bengal. The Joint Forest Management (JFM) program was intended to foster the involvement of forest-dwelling peoples in the development, management and protection of the forests that are not only their homes but the primary sources of their livelihoods (Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development, 1993). This program was a dramatic change from prior policies, which emphasized the role of government agencies—particularly the Forest Department—in managing the forests and their development. The JFM program amounted to a significant shift away from state control which devolved responsibilities to grassroots groups, a shift that is currently occurring in many forms around the world as more and more agencies recognize the importance of grassroots participation in sustaining improvements in the lives of poor populations.

### **Conceptual Background**

Participation as a development strategy drew considerable attention in earlier decades from development researchers and activists concerned with alternatives to the dominant technology and capital-centered paradigm (See Morss, et al., 1976; Oakley, 1991). In the 1970s social scientists, grassroots groups and non-governmental development organizations (NGOs) began promoting popular participation in the construction and use of knowledge for social transformation (e.g., Tandon, 1982). By the 1980s many international aid organizations had become aware that economic growth without active participation by grassroots populations was likely to benefit the wealthy rather than the poor (Chambers 1983). By the 1990s even government agencies—long-resistant to development strategies that posed threats to their control of resources—became concerned about the failure of development programs to provide for whom they were intended. Participatory methods of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and efforts to involve communities and grassroots groups in policy discussions and implementation, have consequently gained wide attention in the last decade (Nelson & Wright, 1995).

The definition of ‘participation’ has been hotly contested, with widely differing conceptions offered by parties with dissimilar political, ideological and economic interests and perspectives. Some have explicitly taken the vantage point of non-participants; Pearse and Stiefel, for example, argue that participation should be defined as “...the organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control” (1979: 1). Others focus primarily on the element of exchanging information and resources. For example, USAID defines participation as “...the active engagement of the partners and customers in sharing ideas, committing time and resources, making decisions, and taking action to bring about a desired development objective” (quoted in CIDA, 1997). This definition focuses on ‘engagement’ rather than the power differences among participants which may restrict the quality or outcomes of that engagement (Brown, 1982).

From the perspective of excluded parties, the elements of power and control over key decisions remain the core issue of participation. Participation necessarily raises questions about mutual influence and the control of resources and decisions. For our purposes here we use the definition of participation proposed by the World Bank. Participation is:



“...a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them”(World Bank, 1994, p. 1).

This definition emphasizes exerting influence and sharing control of key aspects of the development process. This study is particularly interested in the participation of *local* stakeholders in development initiatives—the intended beneficiaries of such initiatives, who are sometimes considered the ‘primary stakeholders’ in development activities.

Peter Oakley (1991) has drawn on the work of a variety of researchers to argue that local participation can have several results, including:

1. the contribution of new resources such as time, energy and ideas by grassroots groups to programs and projects;
2. the establishment of new organizations of grassroots groups;
3. the empowerment of local actors as participants develop skills which enable them to set goals, diagnose problems and mobilize resources.

Participation may be viewed as both an end in itself and a means of accomplishing other goals. Participation taps into the physical, economic and social resources of grassroots populations, even the poor, in order to achieve program objectives. As a result, participation contributes to the processes of democratization and collaboration over time which cause local populations to benefit more directly from development initiatives (Oakley, 1991). It can also increase project effectiveness when the mobilization of local resources, the creation of local organizations and the empowerment of local actors enhances project implementation. When the focus is on participation as a means, its relevance to the project goals may be great, as in projects that depend on local engagement and commitment, for example, or quite limited, as in projects where few relevant resources are held by local grassroots actors. When the focus is on participation as an end, the centrality of citizen empowerment becomes much greater. In this study the authors focus on project participation as a means to more effective development activities, though the process may have long term impacts on citizens as well. An initial research question to be explored here is whether there is indeed a relationship between high levels of local participation and the effectiveness of some kinds of development projects.

A number of factors can be important *preconditions* to participation in development projects, including political and structural arrangements which support participation, local organizations and traditions which enable grassroots groups to participate, and operational mechanisms which build shared understanding of the program and enable joint decision-making processes (See Oakley, 1994; Tandon, 1989). A second research question in this study focuses on the kinds of preconditions associated with high levels of participation.

The *process* of participation may involve many elements. The World Bank’s Learning Group on Participatory Development identified six mechanisms used in projects to facilitate participation:

1. information sharing mechanisms which make information widely available to local stakeholders;
2. consultative mechanisms which provide opportunities for information from stakeholders at different stages;
3. joint assessments which engage stakeholders and beneficiaries in analyzing situations and potential projects;
4. shared decision making which uses participatory planning and public reviews to enable widespread influence on project designs;

5. collaborative mechanisms such as joint committees and task forces which enable stakeholders to play key roles in program activities;
6. empowering mechanisms such as capacity-building with stakeholder organizations which increase their ability to contribute effectively to projects (World Bank, 1994: 12).

The first three mechanisms promote joint learning and stakeholder input, providing a base on which more active participation may follow. The last three mechanisms enable influence and shared control over development initiatives, decisions and resources. The first three do not in themselves fulfill the definition of participation, since information exchange is not the same as genuine 'influence and shared control' over critical decisions. This study used a definition of participation that includes all of these elements.

The *consequences* of participation have been the focus of much debate. Oakley (1994), for example, has argued that participation can enhance the efficiency of development by lowering costs, reducing time and saving other resources, while also ensuring that the project responds to authentic needs. As participation allows people to influence the definition of program objectives, it increases their commitment to those objectives and so may increase project effectiveness. The process can also increase the self-reliance of grassroots participants by giving them opportunities to move from passive dependence to active interdependence. The coverage and scope of development projects can be enhanced by mobilizing the resources of local participants, and its sustainability may be increased by the local community's heightened interest in and capacity for supporting ongoing activity. The World Bank's Learning Group on Participatory Development concluded that, in many circumstances, local participation can improve the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of projects at the same time it strengthens the commitment and ownership of local stakeholders (World Bank, 1994). A third research question of this study focuses on the relationships between participation and various program results.

## **The Joint Forest Management Project**

Prior to the advent of the British in India, the people who were largely in control of the forests also lived in symbiosis with them (Saxena, 1992; Arora; 1994; Chatterjee, 1991). The concept of 'scientific management of the forest' by the government was imposed by the British in the Indian Forest Act of 1864. Subsequent legislation strengthened government control over the forests. But government agencies were not able to protect the forests against exploitation, legal or otherwise, by farmers and others who had no stake in sustaining their quality. Accordingly, the result was severe degradation of the forests couple with growing poverty and discontentment among the forest dwellers (Arora, 1994). For years, a growing number of foresters, social scientists and social activists have argued for the involvement of the indigenous communities in forest management. The Joint Forest Management program (JFM) has grown out of innovative projects which emphasize local participation in forest management.

Joint Forest Management, as initially articulated in the New Forest Policy of 1988, promotes grassroots involvement in the development and protection of forests. In 1990, the Ministry of Environment and Forests recognized the benefits of an integrated approach to forest management in a policy designed to involve the State Forest Departments, local village communities and development NGOs in the revival, restoration and development of degraded forests (Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development, 1993).

The Government's new program grew out of many years of experimentation by concerned individuals. Nearly twenty years earlier, for example, two forest officers in the state of West Bengal created 'forest protection

committees' in response to violent confrontations between local forest dwellers and forest officers who exploited the land for their personal gain. Over the ensuing decade these committees proved quite effective in protecting forest lands in return for the right to use forest products and share in the proceeds of the commercial use of those products. The success of this initiative led to its expansion to other areas in West Bengal in the mid-1980s. A state government resolution eventually affirmed the authority of the forest protection committees and their rights to a 25 percent share of timber and produce sales from the forests throughout the state.

The national version of the JFM program has several objectives:

1. increasing forest cover (in density and area) and productivity;
2. increasing the ecological quality of the forest;
3. meeting community consumption needs;
4. enhancing community sources of income;
5. expanding supplies of forest products for commercial markets.

If the program succeeds, the forests, the local communities, the larger public and the government agencies will all benefit.

The program is organized by government Forest Officers in cooperation with local government officials and forest dwellers. Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) are the main vehicles for community participation in the JFM program. Working in collaboration with the Forest Officers, they have been delegated clear roles in the protection of forests and execution of forestry work. FPCs are formed by the District Forest Officer in consultation with local government officials from members of poor communities who live in or near the forest and who are interested in the work of protection. Each FPC has an executive committee that includes representatives of local government as well as up to six elected representatives of local communities involved in maintaining and protecting the forests. A local Forest Officer is the FPC secretary, and he convenes its meetings. Representatives of beneficiaries are elected each year at the annual general meeting of the Committee.

FPC functions include protecting forests and plantations, informing forest personnel about trespassers or damage to the forest, and preventing trespass, encroachment, grazing and fires. In collaboration with forest officials, they also help to ensure smooth and timely execution of forestry work in the area. They help harvest forest produce by the Forest Department and assist Forest Officers in distributing earmarked portions among their members. In return for their assistance FPC members with five years of service are eligible to share the benefits of forest crops. The FPCs are major actors in preserving and enhancing the productivity of the forests; in return they receive significant benefits from that productivity.

The study examined the role of grassroots participation in the development of Forest Protection Committees in preserving and enhancing forest management in this project. The study tests three sets of hypotheses that are grounded in three research questions about correlates of participation in Forest Protection Committees.

**Hypothesis 1:** *Participation and Group Effectiveness.* Participation in FPCs will be associated with effectiveness, as perceived by both Forest Officers and Committee members.

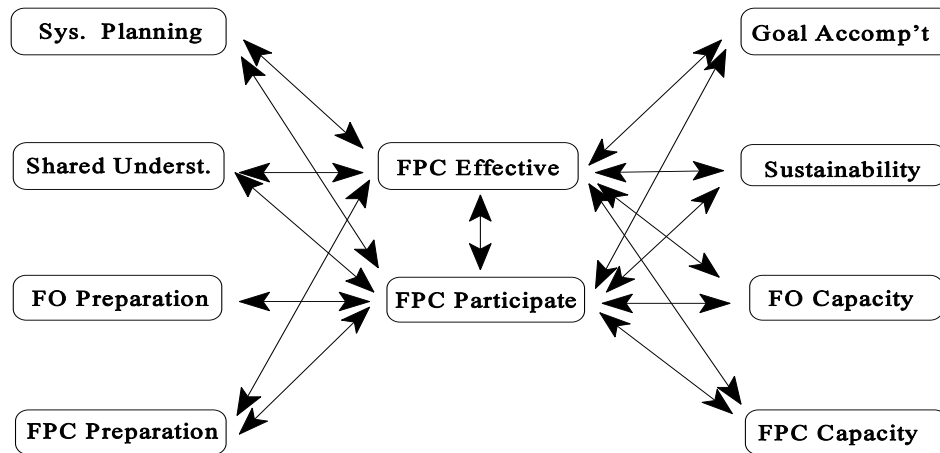
**Hypothesis 2:** *Participation and Preconditions.* FPC participation and effectiveness will be associated with preconditions that support active participation, including:

- information sharing involving many stakeholders;
- widely shared understanding of the importance of local participation;
- preparation of forest office staff for participation; and
- preparation of FPC members for participation.

**Hypothesis 3:** *Participation and Program Consequences.* FPC participation and effectiveness will be associated with performance consequences, including:

- goal attainment, such as more forest cover and productivity;
- enhanced sustainability of program improvements;
- enhanced capacity of the Forest Officers in the future; and
- enhanced capacity of the FPC to take on future activities.

Figure 1 summarizes these hypotheses. The preconditions on the left side of the figure are expected to be positively associated with the FPC effectiveness and participation in the center. FPC effectiveness and participation are expected to be associated with the consequences on the right. FPC member perceptions of effectiveness and participation at the center are expected to vary with ratings of FPC effectiveness by Forest



Officers. The arrows indicate the expected direction of causation, though for this study there is no data that permit unambiguous statements about causal directions.

**Figure 1: Expected Associations among Preconditions and Consequences of Participation**

**Methodology**

This section discusses the approach to collecting data, the sample of FPCs involved, and the variables used to test the hypotheses. The larger investigation of which this study is a part used a variety of qualitative

methods to collect background data and to gain access to Forest Officers and FPC members. For our purposes here, however, we will focus largely on data collected with semi-structured interviews of Forest Officers and members of FPCs.

The research team carried out initial *exploratory* studies in several different regions, interviewing forest department officials, local government officials and members of FPCs. The data reported here were

collected in one region chosen as representative of forest types and social characteristics in the program as a whole.

The team used interview schedules with both open-ended and semi-structured items. Respondents were asked to rate the semi-structured items on a five-point scale, ranging from ‘not at all’ to ‘completely’. The team carried out group interviews with FPC members and individual interviews with forestry officials. They also observed FPC meetings to see if respondent behavior was consistent with questionnaire responses.

**Table 1: Indices of FPC Perceptions of Participation  
Preconditions, FPC Performance and Participation Consequences**

<b>Indices and Variables</b>	<b>alpha coefficient</b>
<b>Perceived Preconditions</b>	
<i>Information Sharing:</i> To what extent has there been: (I) information sharing between forest officials and FPC members; and (ii) FPC member involvement in assessment.	.48
<i>Shared Understanding:</i> To what extent is participation recognized as important for: (I) community members; (ii) among forest officials and FPC members; and (iii) on key issues between FPC and forest officials.	.74
<i>Forest Officer Preparation</i>	
<i>FPC Member Preparation</i>	
<b>Perceived FPC Performance</b>	
<i>FPC Effectiveness:</i> To what extent do FPC members: (I) share control over decisions; (ii) take effective action on problems; (iii) have effective relations with government; (iv) have good organizational structure; and (v) work effectively.	.94
<i>FPC Participation:</i> To what extent does FPC member participation: (I) influence programme planning; (ii) influence programme implementation; (iii) involve members in forestry work; (iv) share control over benefits of the programme; and (v) ensure influence on important recent decisions.	.89
<b>Perceived Consequences of Participation</b>	
<i>Program Goal Accomplishment:</i> To what extent has the Forestry Program: (I) increased forest cover and productivity; (ii) Increased ecological benefits; (iii) met community consumption needs; and (iv) enhanced community incomes.	.68
<i>Program Sustainability:</i> To what extent will FPC members manage these activities after Forest officials withdraw: (I) protection (ii) plantation (iii) felling (iv) marketing (v) conservation of wild life (vi) development of microplans	.82
<i>Forest Staff Capacity:</i> To what extent has the Forest staff improved in: (I) management capacity; (ii) technical skills; and (iii) social skills	.85
<i>FPC Capacity:</i> To what extent has the FPC improved in: (I) Management capacity (ii) technical capacity (iii) Organizational capacity (iv) Material capacity (v) Empowerment level.	.85

The sample included twenty FPCs in three areas. In order to ensure that there was a range of participation and performance, the team asked the forest officials in charge of the three areas to include FPCs that varied in effectiveness in terms of their forestry work, attendance in FPC meetings, and quality of participation in the FPC in the sample. The final sample included twenty FPCs: six were rated high, seven were rated moderate, and seven were rated low in effectiveness by the Forest Officers involved on these dimensions.

We constructed a number of indices from FPC member responses in the interviews. Table 1 presents these indices and reliability coefficients for multi-item indices. With some exceptions the consistency among items on these indices was quite high.

To test the first hypothesis we used an analysis of variance to test the convergence of Forest Officer and FPC member assessments of FPC participation and effectiveness. We also computed correlation coefficients to assess associations among perceived preconditions, FPC performance, and participation consequences as proposed in our hypotheses.

**Results**

If participation and effectiveness vary substantially across the FPCs, as was suggested by the Forest Officer ratings and the sampling strategy, we would expect that variation to be apparent in the ratings of both Forest Officers and FPC members. We would expect that groups rated high in effectiveness by Forest Officers would give themselves higher ratings in participation and effectiveness than groups rated low. We would also expect FPC member ratings to show a strong relationship between FPC participation and effectiveness.

Table 2 reports the results of the analysis of variance of member perceptions of FPC participation and performance for groups rated high, medium, and low in performance by their Forest Officers. The differences among the groups are highly significant ( $p < .0001$ ) and in the predicted direction on both variables. Mean ratings of FPC effectiveness and participation are significantly higher for the groups rated high by Forest Officers than for the groups rated low. FPC member ratings are highly consistent with Forest Officer judgments about FPC effectiveness ( $p < .0001$  for both FPC effectiveness and participation). In addition, FPC ratings of effectiveness and participation are strongly correlated ( $r = .91, p < .001$ ), which suggests that members see a close link between their own internal participation and the external effectiveness of the committees.

**Table 2: Forest Officer and Member Perceptions of FPC Participation and Effectiveness**

<b>OF Ratings FPC Perceptions</b>	<b>High (n= 6)</b>	<b>Medium (n=7)</b>	<b>Low (n=7)</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P&lt;</b>
<b>FPC Effectiveness</b>	4.10	3.17	2.26	147.95	.0001
<b>FPC Participation</b>	3.83	3.39	2.36	43.56	.0001

The second set of hypotheses focused on the *preconditions* associated with successful participation. We suggested that FPC participation will be associated with certain preconditions, such as information sharing, widely shared understanding of the importance of local participation, preparation of forest office staff, and preparation of FPC members. Positive correlations between FPC member assessments of the precondition indices and participation were expected.



Table 3 reports the correlations among indices of participation preconditions, perceived participation and effectiveness, and participation consequences as reported by FPC members. Shared understanding of the importance of participation is significantly related to both FPC effectiveness and participation ( $r = .92$  and  $.93$ ,  $p < .001$ ). When community members and forest officials agree that participation is important in general terms and in terms of specific issues, FPC participation and effectiveness is likely to be perceived as high. FPC preparation is also significantly related to FPC effectiveness and participation ( $r = .65$  and  $.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ). When FPC members agreed they were well prepared for participation, they also reported higher levels of Committee participation and effectiveness.

It was expected that information sharing would also be positively related to participation. The information-sharing index, however, was not significantly related to either participation or effectiveness. The fact that FPC members and Forest Officers shared information or carried out joint assessments was not related to participation or effectiveness of the FPCs as perceived by FPC members.

**Table 3: Associations among FPC Perceptions of Preconditions, Participation, and Consequences**

Indices	Info-Sharing	Shared Understanding	FO Prepare	FPC-Prepare	FPC Effective	FPC Participation	Goal Accomplish	Sustainability	FO Capacity
<b>Perceived Preconditions</b>									
Systematic Planning	1.00								
Shared Understanding	.29	1.00							
Forest Officer Preparation	.05	-.43	1.00						
FPC Preparation	.48*	.68**	-.19	1.00					
<b>FPC Performance</b>									
FPC Effectiveness	.32	.92**	-.45*	.65**	1.00				
FPC Participation	.21	.93**	-.45*	.64*	.90**	1.00			
<b>Perceived Consequences</b>									
Goal Accomplishment	.31	.75**	-.10	.53*	.66**	.79**	1.00		
Program Sustainability	.63*	.57**	-.10	.34	.62*	.63*	.60*	1.00	
Forest Officer Capacity	-.41	.14	.19	.16	.15	.29	.21	-.06	1.00
FPC Capacity	.25	.81**	-.20	.41	.80**	.85**	.76**	.69**	.18

NOTE: \*  $p < .01$ , one-tailed test  
 \*\*  $p < .001$ , one-tailed test

We also expected that the Forest Officer Preparation variable, as perceived by FPC members, would be related to participation. In actuality FPC member participation was significantly *negatively* correlated with participation and effectiveness ( $r = -.45, p < .05$ ). The more Forest Officers were seen as prepared by FPC members, the less effective and participatory the FPCs were perceived.

The third set of hypotheses focused on the *consequences* associated with effective participation. We expected that high levels of participation would be associated with the accomplishment of program goals such as increasing forest cover and productivity, reducing ecological degradation, meeting community consumption needs, and enhancing community incomes. These are outcomes that FPC members are particularly well-positioned to assess, given their everyday dependence on forest productivity. We also expected that high levels of participation would be associated with high ratings of program sustainability in the form of positive expectations of continuing forest protection, plantation productivity, timber felling activities, forest product marketing, wildlife conservation and local planning activity. We also expected that high levels of participation would be associated with increases in FPC capacity in management, technical, organizational, material and political terms, and increases in Forest Staff management, technical and social skill capacities. If participation supports and enhances all these development outcomes, it is clearly an extremely important ingredient for future development projects.

Table 3 reports the correlations between the FPC performance variables—FPC effectiveness and participation—and the consequences. FPC effectiveness and participation are significantly correlated with goal accomplishment ( $r = .66$  and  $.79, p < .001$ ). The higher the perceived levels of FPC effectiveness and participation, the more the members believed the program to have met community consumption needs, enhanced community incomes and increased forest cover and productivity. This perception was shared by the Forest Officers, as indicated in their ratings of FPCs.

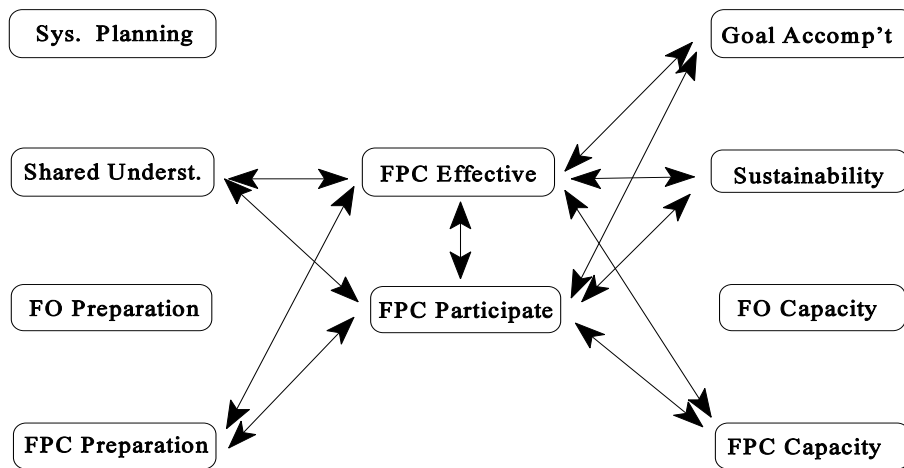
FPC effectiveness and participation were also significantly correlated with program sustainability ( $r = .62$  and  $.63, p < .01$ ). The more FPCs were perceived to be participatory and effective, the more participants expected that FPC members would be able to continue protecting the forests, managing the plantation, felling and marketing timber, protecting the wildlife and developing plans for the future.

FPC effectiveness and participation in the present were strongly related to perceived increases in FPC capacity ( $r = .80$  and  $.85, p < .001$ ). The more the FPCs were seen as effective and participatory in the present, the more they were seen to be improving in management, technical, organizational and material capacities and to be highly empowered.

### **Discussion**

These data suggest that at least some of the predicted associations among preconditions and consequences of participation were in fact operating in the Forest Protection Committees in West Bengal's Joint Forest Management program. The levels of effectiveness and participation perceived by the groups themselves were closely associated with the ratings given the groups by the Forest Officers most involved with them, and those levels were in turn closely correlated with the perceived preconditions of understanding and FPC preparation and with the perceived consequences of goal accomplishment, program sustainability, and FPC capacity for future program work. Figure 2 reports the relationships among preconditions, FPC participation and effectiveness, and consequences as perceived by FPC members. Positive relationships are represented by solid arrows; negative relationships are represented by dotted arrows.

The relationships in Figure 2 suggest that, at least in the eyes of FPC members, efforts to increase shared understanding and FPC preparation care associated with high levels of participation in FPCs; that high levels of participation in turn are associated with the effectiveness of FPCs as groups; and that participation and effectiveness are both related to program performance. In short, participation by FPC members was a significant asset to the Joint Forest Management Program.



**Figure 2: Associations among Preconditions and Consequences of Participation**

The study, of course, has significant limitations. Most of the data are self-reported perceptions of grassroots members of Committees, and they were all collected at one time. It is reassuring that FPC members and Forest Officers agreed closely on the assessment of FPC effectiveness and participation, since that convergence suggests there were real differences among the groups on those dimensions.

Since the data were collected at one time, it is difficult to make strong statements about causal relations, even though it seems reasonable to infer that indices of preparation or initial information sharing are likely to have been temporally prior to FPC participation and that project outcomes and sustainability are temporally post FPC activities. The arrows in Figure 2 all have two heads to reflect that these data do not have an unambiguous one-way sequencing. But even given these methodological questions, the strong correlations among these variables and the clear connections to program goal accomplishment and enhanced sustainability deserve attention.

That there was little correlation between the information-sharing and participation indices is quite striking. The World Bank (1994) distinguished six components of participation which might occur separately but which

also might be expected to occur together as complements in a general participation process. The information sharing index included two of the World Bank's first three elements—information sharing and joint appraisal—while the participation index included elements from the latter three elements—such as influence over planning, implementation, decision-making and program benefits. Participation, in short, referred to 'influence and shared control', while information-sharing involved consultation without any required influence. The lack of correlation here suggests that it is possible to have high levels of information sharing *without* participation in the sense of real power over decisions and benefits. The links to effectiveness and to program consequences were with participation rather than information-sharing. At least in the Joint Forest Management program the positive impacts on FPC effectiveness and program goals and sustainability required active influence and shared control by FPC members, not just sharing of information.

Second, some relations among preconditions, participation and program outcomes fit expectations. Figure 2 indicates activities which produced shared understanding of participation and prepared the FPC to participate were associated with more participation and effectiveness, and that participation and effectiveness were in turn associated with more goal accomplishment, increased sustainability and enhanced FPC capacity. If these data are generalizable, then development projects world wide may reap very substantial benefits from investments in early efforts to clarify the importance of participation and to prepare grassroots groups to participate.

It is quite striking that Forest Officer Preparation, as perceived by FPC members, was negatively associated with participation and effectiveness. It may be that FPC members began the project expecting Forest Officers to take control and tell them what to do, and interpreted as 'lack of preparation' the behavior of Forest Officers who tried to encourage participation by villagers more used to taking orders from government officials. The more Forest Officers tried to give FPC members space to participate, the more they may have been seen as incompetent and unprepared. If this speculation can be confirmed in further research, it may be very important to train Forest Officers to be 'incompetent' in this way—since it seems in the cases of these FPCs to have been associated with very desirable results.

It is worth noting that one effect of participation for FPCs was to increase their capacity for future activities. If participation increases FPC capacity, and FPC capacity is a precondition for more participation and effectiveness, the participation process of today may be creating the social and institutional capital for the development of tomorrow. Participation today prepares local stakeholders for more effective participation tomorrow, which will reinforce capacities and prepare for still more effective action in years to come. The investment in social capital today may have widening and escalating benefits in the future (Uphoff 1992; Brown & Ashman 1996).

## **Conclusion**

This study as it stands has, of course, limited generalizability. Difficulties in gaining access to FPCs made it impossible to cover a wider sample which would have allowed more powerful statistical analyses and more rigorous generalization—but the data as they stand indicate strong relationships among these variables, at least in the minds of the local stakeholders. They suggest the power of participation for the forest dwellers studied, whose lives turn in large part on decisions made in the Forest Protection Committees and by Forest Officers. To the extent that grassroots investment and involvement is central to social, political and economic development which affects the truly poor, participation can be a very important aspect of future development activity.



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