Title
Levels of Support for Community Woodlots in Kajla, West Bengal, India

Key Words
Levels of Support, India, West Bengal, Common Property Resources, Environment, Natural Resource Management

Reference and Acknowledgement
Panda, S. 2006. Levels of Support for Community Woodlots in Kajla, West Bengal, India. Social Analysis Systems\textsuperscript{2} Technique Report #17, 3 pp. Retrieved from: \url{http://idl-bnc.idrc.ca/dspace/handle/123456789/25284}. The author wishes to acknowledge the efforts of N. Panda, P. Sahoo, N. Pariali, and K. Bhattacharya of DRCSC, who helped to design and facilitate the diagnosis, and Daniel Buckles (Carleton University) who helped to write the report.

Context
Kajla is a village in the Purba Medinipur District of West Bengal, India. About 10\% of the people who live here are landless. The men from the village migrate seasonally for work in other areas, leaving their families without support for long periods of time. The Development, Research, Communication and Services Centre (DRCSC), a non-governmental organization based in Kolkata, has international funding to support the development of community woodlots in Kajla for use by landless households. DRCSC has worked jointly with a community-based organization in Kajla for 15 years (Kajla Jana Kalyan Samity, KJKS). Support from KJKS staff, from a majority of landless families, and from local authorities (known as the Panchayat), is vital for the project to succeed. Support from the irrigation department of the state government is also needed, since it controls some of the land in the village that might be used for woodlots.
To assess the level of support for community woodlots among stakeholders in the village.

KJKS and DRCSC convened a meeting at the Kajla Primary School. Those invited to the meeting were: landless households, other village households, representatives of the Panchayat, and members of the irrigation department. Some 38 people attended, including 16 landless households, 6 KJKS staff, several members of the irrigation department, and people from the village and Panchayat. A proposal to establish community woodlots was described in detail, including plans to plant trees on the roadside, canal banks, and fallow areas. The potential benefits of the plan were also described by KJKS, noting in particular improved access by landless households to fuel, food, and fodder. Participants stated their views and concerns about the proposal, which were noted on cards. Similar opinions were then piled together and the most simple phrase was chosen from among them to represent that category. Nine phrases, accompanied by pictures, were lined up on the ground, with the most positive at one end and the most negative at the other. Participants then indicated their position on the proposal by placing a piece of brick beside the opinion he or she most strongly agreed with. The level of support vital to success of the proposal, possible revisions to the proposal and the overall result were discussed. The facilitator later prepared a report. Planned use of the report was understood by the participants, who agreed to share their information.

The level of support for community woodlots is presented in Table 1. While only 4 participants gave their support to all aspects of the proposal, 15 people (almost half the group) gave full support for community woodlots on the roadside and indicated they were willing to provide their time and effort to this revised project. A few recognized the risk of loss of their time but said they would help to get it done. Two smaller groups, adding up to 8 individuals, agreed that the community woodlot was important but they would not be willing to assist directly. Very low levels of support and
opposition to the proposal was expressed by 4 individuals. The concerns they expressed were the amount of effort needed to prepare the land properly and whether or not the trees could be protected. When discussed further, it became evident that from the point of view of the people with concerns about the proposal a community woodlot might also hamper cattle grazing. These concerns were raised by villagers with land of their own and little to gain directly from the initiative.

Table 1: Levels of support for community woodlots in Kajla, West Bengal, India.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>XX</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tree planting not possible</td>
<td>Not possible until land prepared</td>
<td>Trees can’t be protected</td>
<td>All group members won’t spare time</td>
<td>No comment</td>
<td>Tree planting is necessary</td>
<td>Tree planting is essential</td>
<td>Though risk of loss, must be done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interpretation**

People without land of their own are willing to give time and effort to creating community woodlots because the project meets their needs, and outside help or resources for landless families is rare. The participants observed that the high level of support for putting woodlots on the roadside is because this land is state property and has few other uses. Those with concerns about the proposal are not directly involved in the proposed activity and are not in a position to block uses of public lands by landless groups.

**Action**

The participants, including the various organizations involved in the proposal, agreed to create community woodlots on only part of the roadside and canal bank, covering an area 2.5 km in length. Woodlots on other lands would be considered once the project could be shown to be valuable to all community members and concerns about impacts on cattle grazing were discussed further. KJKS decided to identify the steps needed to ensure that group members contribute time equally, to prepare the land properly, and to protect the trees.
The specific reasons for opposition to the project by two participants did not come out initially. The facilitators talked privately with them during a break and determined that they were concerned about the impact of a woodlot on cattle grazing on village lands. They agreed to discuss these concerns openly with the other participants, who recognized the legitimacy of the concern and need to discuss it further prior to widespread implementation of the project. The majority felt confident, however, that there was sufficient support in the village to proceed with the revised proposal focusing on the roadside and canal bank. Several participants said that they appreciated how the exercise had lead to modification of the proposal rather than a simple approval or rejection that might have resulted from a standard voting procedure.