Boundary making and social equity under Community Based Natural Resource Management
Saito, Moeko

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Introduction
Since the 1990s, there has been an increasing trend to shift from state driven to community-based approaches to managing natural resources, often referred to as Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM). In general, CBNRM entails changes in the governance structure through:

- identifying formal communities (e.g. user groups, villages, traditional councils or democratic local governments);
- making new boundaries and allocating specific parcels of the resource to included formal communities; and
- formalizing use and management rights of the formal communities.

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Policy Conclusions

- Research on Joint Forest Management in India documents adverse effects of boundary making for excluded communities and for particular groups within included communities in resource scarce areas.

- To mitigate adverse effects, prior assessments of potential social and political consequences of new use boundaries should be conducted with attention to customary use patterns of resources and with local consultations.

- To detect adverse effects of boundary making, local governments and donor agencies should ensure that appropriate monitoring and evaluation measures are in place.

- If adverse effects of the new boundaries are detected, local governments and donor agencies should make active interventions to ensure equity and fairness for instance by
  1) making adjustments to the boundaries to encompass excluded communities,
  2) facilitating inclusion of excluded communities into those communities already having management and user rights or
  3) ensuring fair distribution of costs and benefits within included communities.

It is assumed that boundary making through clearly defining who has exclusive rights to manage or use particular resources is crucial to:
- prevent resource users who do not contribute to management efforts from deriving benefits from resources;
- ensure resource users’ sense of security in relation to their use of and benefits from resources; and
- promote user’s incentive to sustainably manage resources (Ostrom, 1990).

This brief presents the main social and political consequences of boundary making both for included and excluded communities in resource scarce areas and makes policy recommendations based on a case study of Joint Forest Management (JFM) in Andhra Pradesh state in India.

General contexts of Joint Forest Management in India

Until the late 1980s, the government of India had exclusive rights to forest lands and resources. Villagers without de jure rights were defined as illegal encroachers to forests. In spite of the regulations, villagers usually had de facto access. They entered forests to collect forest resources by avoiding the patrols of forest guards employed by the government.

The introduction of the JFM policy in 1990 has brought about remarkable changes in the forest governance structure. JFM aims to effectively conserve forests while meeting the resource needs of local people by including local communities in forest management (Government of India, 1990).

Under JFM, local communities become co-managers of forests and gain de jure use rights to some forest resources. Together with the Forest Department, the local communities are expected to effectively manage and protect forests on the basis of forest management plans and rules.

Main findings

1) New forest boundaries under JFM

To facilitate JFM, the Forest Department officers parceled forests and assigned exclusive management responsibilities and use rights of parceled forests to communities nearest to the forests. The Forest Department did not involve all communities since not enough forest was available. They also ignored customary use patterns of forests. Thus, some communities did not receive management and use rights to forests on which they have traditionally depended.

2) Variable forest management rules developed and implemented by communities under JFM

Management rules varied across JFM communities. The study shows that some communities developed their own rules for forest management by specifying the allowable quantities of different kind of forest products for household collection, and by developing methods for forest protection to prevent neighboring communities from using their forests and to prohibit own community members from violating these rules. Many of JFM communities actively enforced these rules and engaged in forest protection activities to prevent neighboring communities from accessing to their forests.
3) Adverse social and economic effects on communities excluded from JFM
Due to JFM, communities that reside in forest scarce areas and were excluded from JFM faced serious economic difficulties due to loss of access to forests. Their previous access to forests became blocked by guards hired by JFM communities. Further, they faced economic losses, since they were forced to pay fines to JFM communities when caught in violating JFM rules irrespective that JFM does not formally permit communities to collect fines by themselves. These communities perceive the JFM as unfairly restricting their customary rights to procure forest products. Sixty percent of the surveyed 55 households in such community viewed the impacts of JFM as »very negative« and 40 percent saw it as »negative«.

4) Asymmetric distribution of costs and benefits within communities included in JFM
For some communities included in JFM, effective enforcement of forest protection activities led to positive outcomes such as:
- forest regeneration due to the reduction in the number of forest offences in their forests;
- increased amounts of forest resources for their subsistence use and sale; and
- a large amount of revenue generated from the collection of permission fees from own villagers and fines from own and outside villagers who violated rules.

Nevertheless, new management rules and restrictions had significantly adverse consequences for those livelihoods were most dependent on forest products including:
- lower caste groups and the landless;
- women with the primary task of collecting forest products; and
- herders of goats that are considered to be harmful for the regeneration of forests.
These groups were also those most frequently caught for rule violations and forced to pay fines.

Benefits were also asymmetrically distributed within communities. Elite groups of communities such as higher castes, men and non-goat herders dominated decision making and benefit distribution while marginalizing others.

Conclusions
The research shows that boundary-making under CBNRM created adverse social and political impacts for those communities excluded from JFM, and those groups within JFM communities most dependent on the forest. Adverse effects occurred mainly due to:
- Lack of awareness of possible adverse social and political effects of the boundary making;
- Lack of attention to customary uses of forests;
- Lack of consultation processes with local villagers prior to boundary making;
- Lack of measures to solve boundary related conflicts.
The research highlights the critical need to develop better and more flexible procedures for boundary-making and to make adjustments to the boundaries if boundary related negative consequences arise. Only if these issues are addressed can CBNRM become more joint, fair, and less exclusionary.

Author
Moeko Saito-Jensen, PhD, Research fellow (mosa@life.ku.dk), Danish Centre for Forest, Landscape and Planning, University of Copenhagen

References: