INTRODUCTION

- Total Forest Area of Pakistan
  - 4.2 Million ha.
  - 4.8% of Land Area
- Forest Degradation
  - Annual Change: -39,000 ha.
  - Annual Rate of Change: -1.5%
- Local People's Dependence on Forests
  - Timber and Firewood
  - Fodder and Medicinal Plants
  - Minor Forest Products
- Forests Management In Pakistan
  - Provincial Governments manage both state and private forests.

Forest Policies/Laws

- Punitive in Nature
- Tied to Colonial Past
- Non-Participatory
- Limited Community Rights
- View Local People as Enemies of Forests

Recent Institutional Changes

- Devolution of Power/Local Governments (2001)
- Joint Forest Management (in some areas)

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine whether devolution of power really gives marginalized forest-dependent communities greater access to power and decision-making (political capital).
2. To examine the extent of interaction of local governments with the forest department.

METHODOLOGY

- Key Informant Interviews
- Participatory Observation
- Focus Group Discussions

STUDY AREA

Mansehra & Abbottabad Districts in North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Pakistan.

ASSUMPTION

- Effective collaboration among the key stakeholders will lead to poverty reduction as well as improved forest management.

INITIAL FINDINGS

- Lack of trust and interaction between local governments and the forest department is one of the key reasons why the goals of poverty alleviation and improved forest management cannot be met.
- Stakeholders lack clarity about the roles, powers and responsibilities of local governments.
- Lack of trust between Forest Department and Local Government.
- In the study area, local elites dominate the local governments and access to local decision making is not equal for marginal groups (poorest households, women etc.)

FINAL REMARKS

- Political capital is one of the key capital assets on which people ‘draw to build their livelihood strategies’ and also one of the key constraining factors for the attainment of sustainable livelihoods.
- Devolution of political power is a brave initiative and presents Pakistan with a unique opportunity to improve forest management and livelihoods security by enhancing communities’ social and political assets.
- Livelihoods would be sustainable if policies (e.g. decentralization) worked with people in ways that are congruent with their current livelihood strategies and social environment.

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