**Determinants of Sustainable Management of Natural Resources: The Case of Joint Forest Management in India**

**Doctoral thesis at Faculty of Agriculture, University of Bonn, Germany**

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Since the mid 1980s devolution and decentralization of natural resource management has become a policy tool for many developing countries across the globe. India has been at the forefront of devolving natural resource management to local communities, particularly in the forestry sector, for more than a decade. The 1988 forest policy was a landmark in the history of Indian forest policy which for the first time recognized the importance of community involvement in forest management for improvements of livelihood systems and protection of forest resources. In a follow up document issued in 1990, Central government issued guidelines to all the state governments to implement ‘Joint Forest Management (JFM) Systems’ by devolving everyday forest use and management rights to the community. However, empirical outcomes of resource use and management under the JFM program are mixed and the reasons for differences in performance of outcomes are still not fully understood.

The proposed research intends to analyse the process and outcomes of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) program at the community level. It further aims to identify factors that are responsible for differential outcomes across communities as well as policy instruments that could contribute to the long-run sustainability of the program. Existing studies suggest that the structure of organizational and institutional arrangements of JFM is such that power is distributed unevenly among the stakeholders. Hence the study will make an attempt to critically analyze the present institutional arrangements of JFM and its imbalances of power among stakeholders.

One major challenge of this research is to identify factors that influence outcomes across the communities. A large body of literature exists on this issue. However, most of the literature is descriptive in nature and lacks comprehension. Therefore, the study will contribute to this literature by collecting quantitative information from a cross section of communities, which will allow to test the empirical relevance of hypothesized influencing factors for JFM.

The study will use both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative approaches include participatory observation and focus group discussion, and quantitative approaches include descriptive statistics (to assess economic, ecological and distributional outcomes) and inferential statistics (to identify factors that are responsible for differential outcomes both at household and community level).

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