How does local governance affect project outcomes? Experience from a Participatory Forestry (PF) project in Bangladesh

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Abstract: By sampling two contrasting villages of the Upland Settlement Project (USP), a PF project of Bangladesh, this research examines:

- the present conditions of the USP in terms of progress towards achieving targeted objectives

- issues of local-level governance that affect attaining those objectives.

Findings indicate that the project authority could not adequately attain project objectives because of low level of participation, lack of accountability and transparency in handling project money, gaps in communication and information flow and the poor response of project staff. For better project outcomes, governance situation need to be improved through the formation of social capital.

Keywords: PF; participatory forestry; agroforestry; livelihood; governance; social capital.

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1   Introduction

Governance is an arrangement that distributes power and authority among different stakeholders, and enables both societies and relevant legitimate institutions, mainly those part of government structures, to interact with each other in a responsive and accountable way for the interests of the society to ensure fairness in decision-making, benefit distribution, and a voice for each and every stakeholder. Governance involves power, relationships among actors, and a rendering of accounts that implies the existence of local representatives who are both legitimate and legally responsible, and also capable of making decisions (Dabire, 2003). The idea of governance helps communities take action in collaboration with government authorities for the interests of citizens.

Within the area of natural resource management, governance is essentially a devolutionary process, which deals with the transfer of government powers, functions, and skills in the area of natural resource management to local authorities such as local groups, organisations that are part of civil society, and local populations (Ostrom, 1990; Plumptre and Graham, 1999; Dabire, 2003; Graham et al., 2003; Andersson, 2004). Good governance is at the heart of sound environmental management, in particular the public management of natural resources. Natural resource management issues are essentially governance issues, because they address issues of collective responsibilities, distribution, and conflict management, which all imply power relationships (DFID, 2001).

The key challenge of forest management nowadays is how decisions are made and how stakeholders beyond the forest sector influence forest policies and practices (RECOFTC, 2002). There is no easy way to meet the challenge. However, it is argued that the 'forest governance' approach can be a starting point to tackle this challenge. Good forest governance achieves this by clarifying the relationships, rights, responsibilities, and incentives of key actors (RECOFTC, 2002). Local governments are increasingly important actors in forest management (Larson, 2004), and they are being asked to take over governance responsibilities related to the management of natural resources (Andersson, 2004). Local government can localise national policies, adapting the specific details to local management practices, environmental conditions, and social relations, and can play a role in conflict management, in the development of forest-based industries, and in providing technical, financial, and market information services (Dachang and Edmunds, 2003). Localisation can be a powerful influence on the lives of forest users and the starting point for more control of collaborative forest management (Dachang and Edmunds, 2003). Collaborative forest management, which involves local government agencies and local communities, are crucial to enhancing local forest governance and the sustainable management of forest resources (Mayers and Vermeulen, 2002). Effectiveness of local governance depends on the degree to which local government authorities involve forest user groups in decision-making processes and to what extent they are downwardly accountable to the user groups (Blair, 2000; Agrawal and Ostrom, 2001; Larson, 2004; Ribot, 2004).

To boost good governance, natural resource management policies are presently undergoing changes and are being oriented towards the creation of a legal basis for sustainable management (Dabire, 2003). Decentralisation and devolution hold promise for improving forest management and moving towards sustainability (Anderson, 2000). Decentralisation allows stakeholder participation in the co-management of forest resources, and devolution of forest management responsibilities to local communities facilitates the decision-making processes collectively in a fair, transparent, and prompt way, although many forest user committees lack such governance issues. Decentralisation leads to an increase in the efficiency of resource management by implementing policies and programs that reflect people's real needs and preferences, and enhances the accountability and monitoring of decision-makers (Jutting et al., 2004). Devolved management of natural resources offers a means of advancing democracy, combating poverty, and enhancing conservation (Brockington, 2007).

During the 1980s and onwards, most of the developing countries experienced somewhat decentralised management of their forests with varying degrees of success and failures. Decentralised policies provided direct benefits to, at least, some local forest users in the form of improved access to forest product income, access to subsistence products, support for alternative livelihoods, and access to outside financial support (Edmunds and Wollenberg, 2003).

Participatory Forestry (PF), to which the Bangladeshi government attached the highest priority, began in the 1980s in the form of agroforestry, woodlot plantations, and reforestation of degraded forest land. Although started initially on the plains, PF programs subsequently extended to hill tract regions of the country. Increasing population pressure due to settlement of non-ethnic groups, construction of development infrastructure (e.g., the Kaptai hydro-electric dam), indiscriminate deforestation depriving ethnic people of their income source, and other so-called development projects have had profound implications for the lives of indigenous communities in the CHT (Dasgupta and Ahmed, 1998; Khan and Khisa, 2000; Nath et al., 2005). Recognising the importance of the situation, the government of Bangladesh initiated multi-sectoral development projects for socio-economic upliftment through community empowerment and capacity building for ethnic people by strengthening the existing local institutions and creating new infrastructural facilities (Dasgupta and Ahmed, 1998). Among different components, USP ranked top, and it is considered to be a successful intervention in rehabilitating landless and marginal *jhumias* (shifting cultivators) through a number of agroforestry technologies and other social development activities such as capacity building and infrastructure development (Dasgupta and Ahmed, 1998; Khan and Khisa, 2000; Khan et al., 2003). The Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB), a local government institution under the Ministry of CHT Affairs, is implementing the program in two CHT hill districts, Khagrachari and Bandarban.

Development practitioners have long been aware that even if programs have the same level of overall assistance, results vary considerably from one location to another (Krishna, 2004). Recent studies (for example, Nath et al., 2005) mention that the USP has both successes and failures in achieving project objectives. Some project villages seemed relatively successful in achieving objectives while others failed. Based on the opinions of the project manager and other staff members, discussions with some planters, and reviews of the project's objectives, we defined relatively successful and relatively unsuccessful project villages as follows:

- relatively successful: those villages where the project's objectives are adequately achieved

- relatively unsuccessful: those villages with inadequate progress in achieving the project's objectives.

In this paper, we will examine the governance issues of the Upland Settlement Project. More specifically, we will examine:

- the present conditions of the USP in terms of progress towards achieving targeted objectives

- issues of local-level governance that affect attaining those objectives.

2   Methodology

2.1   Selection of study villages

Owing to remote location, lack of accommodation, poor communication services and civil unrest, the project manager advised against conducting a study in Khagrachari district. Therefore, the study was conducted in the second phase of the USP (project period July 1993–June 2007) in Bandarban District. It was assumed that:

- planters would not be able to recall the project history and activities of the project's first phase that ended in 1993

- the project authority applied its first phase experience[1]

- as the second phase is still in progress, planters would be able to provide recent and authentic information.[2]

To select sample villages, we began by asking the project manager to categorise all ten project villages into relatively successful and relatively unsuccessful villages based on their attainment of project objectives to date. Based on his experience and discussion with other colleagues, the manager gave us a list categorising the villages, which we informally discussed with some field-level staff members. We visited some villages and discussed this categorisation with some planters. We found similarities in the opinions of the project manager and some staff members, but our observations and our discussions with planters and one project staff member uncovered differences. For confirmation, we made quick visits to all ten villages and talked with more planters. Ultimately, we found that our observations jibed with the opinions of the project staff. Where the manager and staff members had divided villages into seven relatively successful and three relatively unsuccessful villages, our findings were that four villages were relatively successful and six villages were relatively unsuccessful. The possible reason for this discrepancy was that the manager would like to affirm that he successfully implemented the USP, even though the field reality was different. From among the four relatively successful (hereafter 'successful') and six relatively unsuccessful (hereafter 'unsuccessful') villages, we selected one project village from each category for in-depth study. The successful village and the unsuccessful village were both within authors' and manager's categorisations.

2.2 Data and methods

We conducted the study in several steps. First, we conducted household interviews, and collected most of the quantitative data by using a tested and modified questionnaire containing structured questions, and checklists for semi-structured interviews. The questions and checklists were related to project outcomes, and to governance issues including equity, accountability, transparency, information flow, responsiveness, and participation. For the assessment of participation, five ordinal scales (for example, $1 =$ disagree strongly through to $5 =$ agree strongly) were used. 24 households out of 48 from the successful village, and 19 out of 38 from the unsuccessful village were selected randomly and were interviewed over several weeks during May to September 2005. Fortunately, no sampled household refused interviews. Some households were revisited on the day following the interview to clarify confusing data. Depending on availability, both men and women household members were interviewed. One questionnaire was used for each household.

In the second step, for qualitative information, we conducted key-informant interviews, two group discussions in two villages separately, open-ended interviews with people of various ages, and informal discussions with project staff, and made personal observations. Three project staff members and eight planters (four from each village) took part in key-informant interviews. Project staff members informed us of the outcomes of the project, status and productivity of the rubber plantations, benefit sharing, and future plans about management of the rubber plantations. The interviews with planters sought information about local organisations, participation in project activities, benefits of the project and forest conditions. In group discussion, 10–12 people were present, and highlighted issues such as forest conditions and different governance issues, and local meetings. Separate semi-structured questionnaires were used to facilitate the interview and discussion. We visited homestead agroforestry sites, identified species composition, and counted the trees including saplings.

We summarised all quantitative data into averages and percentages, and conducted a one-way analysis of variance to explore statistically significant differences among means of different variables between two villages. For exploring differences among some variables in each village, we also conducted a one-sample Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. Indices of meetings were assessed based on the averages of ordinal scales used. We used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 12 for all statistical analyses.

3   Findings and analysis

In this section, first we analyse the achievement of the USP, and then relevant governance issues that affect the outcomes of the project and livelihood of the planters.

3.1 Achievement of the project

The USP in Bandarban district has been implementing its activities since FY 1993–1994. In this section, we portray its achievements and success or failure during the 12-year project period (until FY 2005–2006) based on the project's main objectives. However, we do not discuss infrastructure development in the project villages.

Objective 1: Settlement of landless and marginal tribal farmers/jhumias.

We identified three types of planters in these two sampled villages:

- *resident planters*: those presently living within the project village (48 and 15 planters in selected successful and unsuccessful villages, respectively)

- *absent planters*: those who left the project village, but are still officially recognised as planters and living in nearby villages (23 planters in the selected unsuccessful village)

- *missing planters*: those who left the project village permanently and whose whereabouts are unknown to the project authority (2 and 12 planters in selected successful and unsuccessful villages, respectively).

This indicates that even though 50 planters were supposed to be living permanently in every project village, many of them had escaped. Thus, the USP could not attain its first objective of settling nomadic ethnic people in permanent villages. Planters claimed that due to lack of employment, cultural problems, and child schooling, most of them left the project villages three or four years into the project. The successful village is located near the plain where planters get agricultural jobs round the year in addition to wage labour in timber supply to paper mills and in project activities. In the unsuccessful village, there are very limited jobs for the settlers except the original inhabitants. The majority of the planters in the unsuccessful village are Marma, whose social culture contrasts with those of the Chakma and Tonchangya groups. Although two Chakma left, six of them along with three Tonchangya planters are still living amicably with 39 Marma in the successful village. It was reported that because of regular motivation by the project staff and close contact with plain people, their culture has been changed and they can live harmoniously altogether.

Objective 2: Development of degraded unused upland through homestead agroforestry and the rubber plantations.

With material support from the project, planters developed homestead agroforestry on their allotted homestead land. Afterward, they invested their own resources in its development. There was no policy on species composition and planting design. Planters were asked to choose species from among those offered. As a result, planters claim that most of the planted saplings died after one year. However, as time passed, they planted more seedlings, and present agroforestry conditions seem quite good. We identified 43 and 26 different plant species on the homesteads of successful and unsuccessful sampled planters, respectively. The mean numbers of trees per ha were 979 and 711, respectively. Some successful village planters believe that, due to training, their trees have better growth and survival rates. We also observed many young saplings planted in the last two or three years, showing that planters have become aware of the importance of homestead agroforestry because it provides them with not only produce for household consumption but also cash. They have started to sell fruit and trees over the last two or three years.

Between 1995 and 1999, the project authority raised 81 ha of rubber plantation in one block in every project village that was intercropped during the first three years with bananas, papayas, and pineapples. The project manager reported that within the 81 ha rubber plantation, every household had a share of 1.6 ha of their total (2.1 ha) land grants.

However, we did not notice any demarcations between individual land parcels. The authority supplied all planting materials, fertilisers, and other necessities; planters only provided wage labour and protected the rubber plantation from cattle. Observations and discussions with project staff and planters revealed that the plantation in the successful village was more than 90% tree-stocked and trees were growing satisfactorily. Latex collection began in 2005 (Personal Comm., 2005).[3]

On the other hand, our observations, planters' opinions, and project staff reveal that now around 30–40% of rubber trees are in very poor condition in the unsuccessful village's plantation. After 3–4 years of planting, a large portion of the rubber plantation of this village was burnt by an accidental fire. Moreover, rats damaged roots, and ultimately young plants died. Owing to the lack of regular project money disbursements, the authority could not re-plant the damaged plantation. Even though initially project staff members visited the village frequently, plantation conditions deteriorated to a large extent because of the lack of regular monitoring and maintenance. Planters (32%) practice *jhum* (shifting cultivation) inside the plantation. The project manager reported that rubber tapping would start in 2006, but the present condition of the rubber trees fuels doubts about latex production and hence about increased income and employment for planters through rubber production. This suggests that the authority could not adequately achieve its second objective, through which it hoped to improve the long-term socio-economic circumstances of the planters.

We were able to explore different opinions about contrasting rubber conditions in the two studied villages. Some project staff members expressed thanks to interaction with plain people, as the successful village's planters become social, developed trust in the project staff, and cooperated effectively in project activities. However, another staff member said:

> "This successful village is like the drawing room of a rich family with very good decorations. All possible efforts such as regular monitoring and maintenance, budget allocation, and motivation were devoted to developing this village to demonstrate the success of the USP to higher officials. Being located near the main road, the authority always invites senior officials to visit this village."

He opined that the drawing room does not show the real situation of the family, meaning that conditions in this successful village did not represent the overall situation of all USP villages.

With the staff's inspiration and motivation, planters of the successful village pointed out that they knew the benefits of rubber from their relatives who joined the USP's first phase. Moreover, there are a few private rubber plantations near their village where some men of this village have been employed on a permanent and daily basis. It indicates that planters of the successful village are well aware of the perceived economic benefits of the rubber and hence collaborate with the project authority for the development and protection of the rubber plantation, albeit they were paid labour. Conversely, planters of the unsuccessful village told us that they are not interested in the rubber plantation because they realise no benefit from it despite wage labour in the past, and they feel that the authority would take all the benefits. This shows that the authority could not motivate planters about the importance of the rubber plantation and could not create a sense of ownership among them. Liu (2005) mentions that new resource management ideas will not succeed or sustain unless communities take ownership of the concepts and value the end results.

Objectives 3: Local participation in project implementation activities.

Even though the USP intended to build the capacity of planters through participation in project activities, planter involvement was in the form of wage labour in plantation activities only. The manager makes all decisions related to project activities in the villages. There is a three-member executive committee and a field superintendent serving as coordinator, and a field assistant and project village leader who draw up work plans and implement all activities at the village level in accordance with the manager's decisions. Other than the leader, no other planters are consulted in making work plans. The leader decides the number of workers to be engaged.

3.2   Some selected issues of governance

In Bangladesh, usually the Forest Department is the prime organisation that implements the majority of the forestry programs in the country. The project implementing agency, the CHTDB, has two branch offices in the Bandarban and Khagrachari hill districts, with the head office in Rangamati. Even though some authority for decision-making has been devolved, the regional manager of the USP must get approval for major decisions from the central project manager based in Khagrachari. Although the USP was able to achieve its stated objectives differentially in the two studied villages with its present decentralised style of management, we observed some local governance issues that demand consideration for a better program outcome. In analysing governance issues, we first shed light on the planters' organisation and planter participation in project functions, and then discuss other project-related governance issues that we observed during this study.

3.2.1   Planter's organisations and participation in project functions

In both villages, there are two social organisations[4] in addition to the project village committee. These organisations maintain linkages with other agencies, mostly with NGOs (non-government organisations) and conduct social development projects such as *Kheyang* (Buddhist temple) development and road maintenance in the village. Four to five NGOs are operating in the studied villages and work for informal education, livestock husbandry, ginger cultivation, and credit. To facilitate social development projects, planters call meetings at their villages where we found some differences in meeting indices (Figure 1) within and between the villages. For example, indices for local meeting satisfaction (Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z: 1.076; Asymp. Sig. 0.002) and deliberative quality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z: 1.712; Asymp. Sig. 0.006) were significantly different among planters of the successful village. The differences were, as planters said, due to domination by vocal rich planters who made decisions that benefited themselves. In the unsuccessful village, absent planters, who are now organised, spoke much and made decisions in support of themselves, resulting in significant differences for meeting satisfaction (Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z: 1.503; Asymp. Sig. 0.022) and deliberative quality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z: 1.561; Asymp. Sig. 0.015).

Even though local meetings are held at convenient times, we found significant differences ($P < 0.000$) in the frequency of meetings between two villages. On average, the frequency was 1.5 and 11.5 times a year in the successful and unsuccessful villages, respectively. We also found a significant difference (Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z: 1.484,

Asymp. Sig. 0.024) among planters in the unsuccessful village regarding the frequency of meeting attendance. Resident planters attended, once or twice a year, local meetings that mostly discuss religious festivals. Absent planters, who are involved with several NGOs, arrange meetings frequently, even two or three times a month in some cases.

Although most planters attended local meetings, few people play roles in making decisions. Leaders and some elite planters usually take part in making decisions. While planters do not have a say on meeting decisions, they have differing views on the responsiveness and activities of leaders. For instance, all planters in the successful village said that their leader is very responsive and that they are satisfied with his activities. On the contrary, 42% of planters (all resident planters) of the unsuccessful village mentioned their dissatisfaction with the leader's activities and responsibilities. They told us:

> "The leader does not come to our village. He does not involve us in any social development work except religious festivals. When work starts in the rubber plantation, he employs more labour from his own village. He employs rubber plantation guards from his village even though we live very near to the plantation. He does not inform us about committee funds. We don't know how much money is left in the bank account or what he is doing with this money."

Gray et al. (2005) report that leadership is an important element in community organisation that assists in developing community capacity. A good leader, with honesty and fairness, can enhance the level of social capital among villagers, thereby helping people procure rights and improve livelihoods (Dolom and Serrano, 2005).

The main task of the nine-member project village committees, which were formed by the USP authority in every project village, is to motivate planters to protect rubber plantation once grown and to be involved in day-to-day project functions (USP meeting minutes in Bengali dated 17 February 1998). We observed that the committee virtually does not have any village-level activities. The committee is not actively involved with the project authority and project planning processes. Some members of the committee sometimes attended project meetings just to listen. Schouten and Moriarty (2003 cited in Prokopy, 2005) mention that for participation to lead to the expected sustainable outcomes, people need to be involved at higher levels of decision-making. To succeed in dealing with farmers' vulnerability and environmental degradation, it is not only necessary to build active farmers' organisations (Dendi et al., 2005; Hong, 2005), but also to delegate power to make decisions at the local level. The delegation of power helps local people make timely decisions for the good of society. More importantly, devolution of power through participatory decision-making is an important process of governance (Murali et al., 2006).

Not only project village committee members, but also planters visited the project office headquarters and participated in project meetings. All planters visited the project head office frequently, four to five times every month in early stage of project. The purposes of their visit were to sign papers for land tenure, collect their salary, and to get information on job opportunities at respective project villages. During 3–4 years of the project period, 17% and 53% of planters of successful and unsuccessful villages attended project meetings 5.33 and 6.63 times, respectively, held at temporary offices near the project villages. They just listened and could not provide any input at the meetings. These were just to motivate the planters to live harmoniously together and plant trees at their homesteads. However, they need to be engaged in all project decision-making processes because full community participation and management are

increasingly recognised as important for the long-term sustainability of investment (Hettige, 2006). Pini and McKenzie (2006) also report that sustainability of natural resource management is dependent upon community engagement at the local level.

Comparing project meeting indices with past local meeting indices (Figure 1) shows a remarkable increase in the indices. It means thanks to joining the project, as planters became aware of their social organisation and the importance of local meetings where they make decisions on social development issues.

Figure 1   Indices of meetings in the past, during early project period and current local meetings in USP, Bandarban, Bangladesh (see online version for colours)
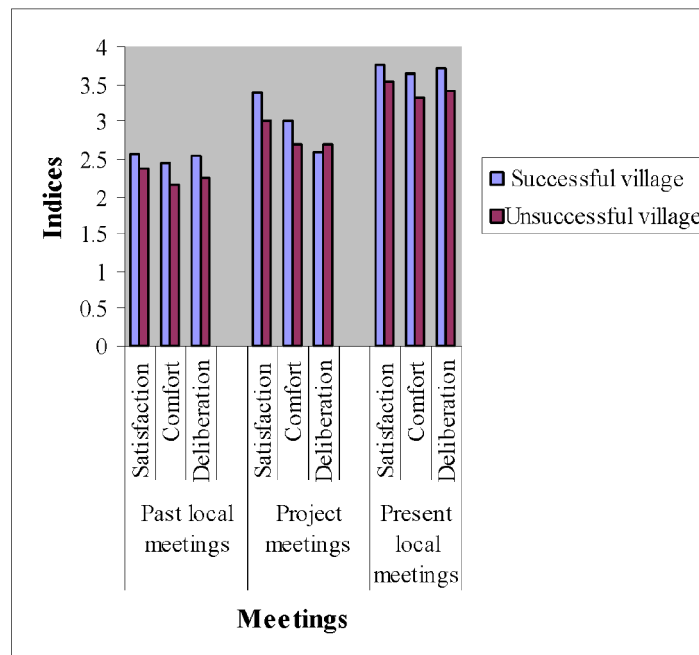
3.2.2   Equity

We observed a lack of equity in the selection of planters, the distribution of settlement money, offers of training, and current employment opportunities. According to project proposals, only landless and marginal farmers were supposed to be selected as planters by a specialised selection committee, which had been formed by executives from the project authority, a sub-district officer, a settlement officer, a local government council chairman, a headman (leader of *mouza*), and a village leader. Our findings, however, found that some better-off planters who possessed first-class agricultural land were also selected in both successful and unsuccessful villages. One project staff member told us:

> "The selection of planters was done hurriedly and hence real landless people could not be chosen. Many people were selected in such a manner that they really did not know how they had become planters. The headman and leader selected them because they [the planters] were known to them."

When we asked about speedy selection, he replied:

> "Because the project started and the budget had been released, we had to complete the work in due time. If we had judged the actual criteria, it would have taken a long time to choose the planters in the 10 project villages. Ultimately this would hamper the completion of other project activities such as infrastructure development and the rubber plantations."

The consequences of such selection are that when there were full-stream project activities, relatively better-off planters took the benefits, and then many of them (e.g., in the unsuccessful village) left the village while still holding project land. If proper selection had taken place, some real landless farmers could have gotten land and project benefits.

At the time the planters joined, the authority gave them some project money as a settlement. All planters were supposed to get the same amount of money, but we found disparities. On average, planters of successful and unsuccessful villages got Tk. 917 and Tk. 594, respectively, which was significantly different ($P < 0.011$). There were even some planters who got no money. We also found that influential planters (e.g., leaders, wealthy and vocal planters) got more money than poor planters. Even though there was no significant difference among planters of the successful village in the amount of project money received, the difference was highly significant among planters of the unsuccessful village (Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z: 1.91, Asymp. Sig. 0.001). The reason was that many planters of this village did not get settlement money.

In accordance with the project plan, the authority was supposed to provide training to all planters on seedling planting techniques. Though some planters (45%) of the successful village got two days of training, all planters of the unsuccessful village said that they had not yet participated in any training program. Apart from this, the authority trained 16 planters (both male and female) of the successful village in tapping for 15 days. Planters were paid during training sessions. Project staff members said that owing to the time limit, they could not organise training programs for all planters. However, they affirmed that when tapping starts, the project will provide training in tapping techniques to planters in all project villages.

There was also inequality in project employment opportunities. During this study, we found that 21% and 83% of sampled planters in the unsuccessful and successful villages, respectively, have current employment in project activities. The higher percentage of employment for the successful village was due to the start of rubber production in that village.

Equity affects people's genuine participation in project activities. Kessler (2007) reports that equity plays a major role in developing people's self-confidence and capacity for collaborative thinking and working.

3.2.3 Accountability and transparency

Discussion with project staff members and planters explored the lack of accountability in handling project money. They commented:

> "In most of the villages (both successful and unsuccessful), if the budget for a job was Tk. 1000, the manager allocated 60% of that money to field staff. Field staff members then gave 40% of that 60% to the village leader to perform all activities by employing planters. The leader, on the other hand, did not spend more than 20–30% of the allocated money."

Even though the situation was not the same in all villages, the above quotation implies that much of the project money had been mishandled, and that the project could not benefit the targeted poor planters to the fullest extent. The leader of the unsuccessful village said that after completion of jobs, all remaining money should be deposited into the village common fund, but planters feel that it happens in very rare cases.

Involvement of several stakeholders in addition to the CHTDB may check the mishandling of project budgets and ensure transparency and accountability. Broderick (2005) claims that if natural resource management strategies are to be successful, then a much wider and more inclusive view of community is needed that captures the different stakeholder groups beyond farmers. In the Philippines, for example, Ernesto and Aguirre (2005) observe that even though projects are initiated by local government authorities, subsequent involvement of NGOs and the formation of effective planters' organisations that manage and protect forests create the environment for long-term sustainability of mangrove restoration projects.

3.2.4 Information flow

There were gaps in the information flow. We found that even planters were not aware of the inception of the USP. This was evident from a comment by the leader of the successful village:

> "I was working on my agricultural land and some neighbours informed me that the *unnyan board* (CHTDB) was clearing our land. I went there and asked the officers to stop clearing our land... After a few days, officers again started cutting our forests and jungles. When I told them to stop, they informed me that the government had acquired the land, that the USP would be implemented there, and that 'you [the leader] will be selected as a planter and will get compensation for the land."

This shows that even the leader of the project village was not consulted before implementing the USP. Planters told us that they did not know about future project functions at their villages unless they were asked to be involved in plantation activities. They were unsure who would manage the rubber plantation after the project period. The project manager as well as other staff members said that a central management unit would be formed to look after the rubber plantation, production, and overall management. This management unit will manage the rubber until the rubber plantation is 40 years old and then hand over the land to the planters. The benefits, after deducting all costs, will be distributed to the planters in the respective villages. Planters reported that they heard about the management unit, but the project staff did not tell them anything.

3.2.5 Responsiveness

We found a lack of responsiveness in the project staff. To fulfil short-term objectives, planters who were *jhumias* and not skilled in horticulture were supposed to be encouraged to develop horticulture on their homesteads. However, they opined that project staff members visited only the rubber plantations frequently, but very seldom came to observe their homesteads' agroforestry.

The authority acquired government *khas* land for the project. However, there was some private land[5] within the project territory for which the authority was supposed to pay. Eleven years into the project, planters had gotten no compensation and they cautioned that it might create serious conflict with the project authority if no reasonable solution were reached soon.

Therefore, these governance issues disclose that due to lack of practice of good governance, the project was not able to attain its objectives adequately and planters could not benefit from the project as they had expected.

4   Conclusions and implications

This study identified some issues of local governance in the studied USP villages whose poor practices affected the inadequate achievement of the project. The project funding period has already ended in June of this year (2007) and we wonder if, under the present top-down management approach, it will be impossible to maintain the sustainability of the remaining parts of the rubber plantations. Nowadays, donor agencies and development practitioners encourage building social capital among stakeholders for the sustainability of development projects. Formation of social capital in the form of local organisations is an effective approach to mobilising local resources for the conservation of natural resources and improvement of rural livelihoods. The project village committees need to be involved truly in project activities. Where necessary, committees need to be reformed so that honest and responsive leaders lead the committees. The project authority requires ensuring proper collaboration with and motivation for planters to create a sense of ownership among them. If this truly happens, it can lend hope that planters will work together for the sustainability of project activities. However, it should be kept in mind that social capital and governance are not independent entities but are interrelated. While social capital generates a foundation for collective action, the practice of good governance ensures its continuation, which facilitates the sustainability of program outcomes.

Ultimately, it is hoped that the findings of this study may be of help to development practitioners and researchers in conducting similar types of studies to explore many other issues, along with the ones mentioned here, that make or break a program. These kinds of reports might help policymakers formulate new development programs.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

[1] For example, the project authority introduced intercrops in an early stage of the rubber plantation in the USP's second phase.

[2] This approach is consistent with recommendations given by Prokopy (2005).

[3] From May–August 2005, rubber production was 4 t of RSS (ribbed smoked sheets) from 81 ha of rubber garden. The market value was about Tk. 360,000 (1 US$ = 65 Tk. in 2005). The project manager claimed that this production was satisfactory, even though it was experimental using a hand-driven machine for preparing rubber sheets from latex. Future production is expected to be greater (Personal Comm., 2005).

[4] In the successful village, there is a social organisation with a seven-member executive committee. All planters as well as nearby villagers are also members. In the unsuccessful project village, there is a village development committee formed in 2001–2002 with planters of different USP villages that live in the village of absent planters. However, resident planters of this project village are not actively involved with this committee.

[5] For example, in the successful village the authority acquired 16 ha of private land owned by four planters (including the leader) of which 8 ha were allocated as project land. The authority still (May 2005) had not paid compensation for this land, and planters had filed suit against the project authority.