Sustainable Development Policy Institute

Working Paper Series no: W-103

Anatomy of a Peoples' Rights Movement: A Case Study of the Sarhad Awami Forestry Ittehad (SAFI)

Shaheen Rafi Khan, Moeed Yusuf
(SDPI) Riaz Ahmed (SUNGI)

01 April 2006

Anatomy of a Peoples' Rights Movement: A Case Study of the Sarhad Awami Forestry Ittehad (SAFI)

Shaheen Rafi Khan, Moeed Yusuf (SDPI)
Riaz Ahmed (SUNGI)

Working Paper Series # 103
April 2006

A publication of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI).

Sustainable Development Policy Institute is an independent, non-profit research institute on sustainable development.

Mailing Address: PO Box 2342, Islamabad, Pakistan.
Telephone ++ (92-51) 278134, 278136, 277146, 270674-76
Fax ++(92-51) 278135, URL:www.sdpi.org

Table of Contents

The Sustainable Development Policy Institute is an independent, non-profit, non-government policy research institute, meant to provide expert advice to the government (at all levels), public interest and political organizations, and the mass media. It is administered by an independent Board of Governors.

Under the Working Paper Series, the SDPI publishes research papers written either by the regular staff of the Institute or affiliated researchers. These papers present preliminary research findings either directly related to sustainable development or connected with governance, policy–making and other social science issues which affect sustainable and just development. These tentative findings are meant to stimulate discussion and critical comment.

Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AJ&K	Azad Jammu and Kashmir
CBO	Community based organization
CO	Community Organization
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
FC	Forest Commission
FCS	Forest Cooperative Societies
FD	Forest department
FDF	Forest Development Fund
FPS	Forest Protection Society
FSP	Forestry Sector Project
FWG	Forestry Working Group
ICIMOD	Internal Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
JFMC	Joint Forest Management Committee
LFO	Legal Framework Order
NTFP	Non-timber Forest Products
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
PATA	Provincially Administered Tribal Areas
PFPC	Peoples' Forest Protection Committee
SAFI	Sarhad Awami Forestry Ittehad
VDC	Village Development Committee
WWF	World Wildlife Fund
YWSPF	Youth Welfare Society for the Protection of Forest Kalkot

Glossary of Terms

Begar	Coopted labor
Durrani	A pathan tribe
Dawtar	The segments of forest, agricultural land and rangeland subject to redistribution under the garzinda wesh system (defined in the text)
Deodar	Cedrus deodara
Guzara	Privately owned forests
Kohistani	Indigenous residents of Dir-Kohistan
Nawab	Local ruler
Qalang	Tax on pastures
Rabita	Coordinator
SUNGI	Literally 'friend.' An NGO based in the Hazara region entrusted with promoting community development
Sweedon	Refers to shifting cultivation in the forests but under regulated conditions which did not degrade the forests
Tehsil	District
Ushr	Land tax
Warshoo	Oak forest
Yusufzai	A Pathan tribe which invaded Swat and Dir in the mid-17th century
Zangal	Forest

Anatomy of a Peoples' Rights Movement: A Case Study of the Sarhad Awami Forestry Ittehad (SAFI)

Shaheen Rafi Khan, Moeed Yusuf (SDPI)
Riaz Ahmed (SUNGI)

Abstract

The Sarhad Awami Forestry Ittehad (SAFI), arguably, represents the only formal attempt to engage in forestry reform advocacy and political activism. Given the importance of developing an understanding of the factors that may lead to the success of peoples' movements in Pakistan, we conduct a careful evaluation of SAFI's impact on the forestry reform process and, in general, in terms of sustainable forest management.

SAFI is active in the Malakand and Hazara divisions of NWFP, and in the Southern District and Kurram Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). The rapidly eroding capability of the State to manage its forests amicably and its consequent impact upon communities and the environment provided the backdrop for an organization like SAFI.

SAFI emerged with two broad objectives. The first was to mobilize community resistance against the excesses committed by the large forest owners, the contractors and the forest department. The second objective was to convert such mobilization into a critical mass for policy advocacy. SAFI's successes can be assessed at three levels: policy advocacy, organized resistance and management interventions. In terms of policy advocacy, SAFI has created widespread awareness about the forestry reforms, engaging with communities and other relevant stakeholders in consultations and discussions. SAFI also conducted successful organized resistance in Hazara and Dir-Kohistan to support the cause of the disempowered communities. It has also made management interventions bringing the realization among public functionaries that partnership with communities offers prospects for sustainable management of forests.

SAFI's experience provides valuable lessons for broader peoples' movements in the country. The organization's experience underscores the need for such movements to involve an extremely broad set of stakeholders in consultations. It further highlights the need for a sufficiently large, formally trained membership base, especially if a movement draws upon volunteers as SAFI does. Finally, given the nature of such efforts, the issue of financial sustainability must be addressed by diversifying income sources so that the movement is not solely dependant on donor support.

1. Introduction

In general, Pakistan's poor track record in peoples' movements echoes its lack of democratic credentials. Specifically, in the forestry sector, there are isolated instances – mostly informal -- of peoples' movements that have attempted to make headway against the entrenched heavy-handed and top-down management regimes. These regimes, whether by intent or default, have contributed to the

large-scale degradation of Pakistan's primary forests; the devastation wrought by the recent earthquake is one tragic consequence of such degradation. Therefore, any initiatives which attempt regime-reform geared towards local participation, rights-based approaches and accountability need to be documented and analyzed. In particular, it is essential to develop an understanding of the factors that may lead to the success of such movements in Pakistan. The Sarhad Awami Forestry Ittehad (SAFI), arguably, represents the only formal attempt to engage in forestry reform advocacy and political activism. A careful evaluation of SAFI's impact on the forestry reform process and, in general, in terms of sustainable forest management could be of value to other incipient and extant movements within and outside the forest sector.

The paper begins by providing an overview of the current state of forests and the forest management system in place in the NWFP. It then contextualizes SAFI's introduction and provides a brief overview of the organization. Following that, it analyzes the movement's efforts, its successes and shortcomings, and the factors contributing to this outcome. It finally presents recommendations, which have implementability for peoples' movements beyond SAFI.

2. Overview

2.1 The Status of Forests in the NWFP

The bulk of Pakistan's primary forest resources are situated in the NWFP, with over half of the total forested area within the province concentrated in the Malakand and Hazara divisions. The former covers 29.1% of NWFP's land area. The Hazara division is smaller and constitutes 17% of the province's area. Within the NWFP and FATA[1] as a whole, forests constitute 7.8% of the total land area. Malakand's forests span 360,912 hectares, about 8 % of the division's area, while 316,318 hectares of the Hazara division (5%) is covered by forests. As with most forest rich areas in Pakistan, the forest cover in Malakand and Hazara has depleted significantly over time. Data from the Provincial Forest Resource Inventory, a survey covering the forest rich areas in NWFP suggests that 11% of the existing timber volume is concentrated on forest standing on only 21% of the surveyed area. Forty-two percent of the forests contain only 16% of the standing stock. This reflects an alarming situation with respect to forest productivity. The condition of lowland forests is also precarious. Nearly 50% of these belong to open forest stratum and account for a mere 5% of overall timber volume. The only forests with relatively high forest stands are situated in the high-hill regions where accessibility is restricted.

2.2 Historical Overview of Peoples' Involvement in Forest Protection, Utilization and Management

The major changes in forest management systems in the NWFP correspond with three distinct historical stages:

- the era before the Yusufzai pathan invasions
- the period when the invaders consolidated their power
- the colonial era

A good historical overview of peoples' involvement in forest management in the pre-colonial era is provided by Mushtaq Gadi (Gadi, M., 2001). Pre-colonial Indian states did not subject the forests and

1 FATA borders NWFP and is poorly endowed in forest resources.

the forest users to the kind and scale of control that was to be attempted by the British later and which altered the land-use patterns, property rights and tenure systems of the region. The customary constraints on forest use underwent only occasional intrusions by the Indian states. Local rulers and landlords only exercised control to the extent of extracting dues on certain animals and plant species, or to maintaining hunting reserves. Substantively, the communities had control over management and utilization of forests and cultivated land. A hierarchy of user rights rather than an absolute notion of property defined the status quo. Ownership was diverse enough to allow for a variety of groups like stock-keepers, animal trappers, shifting cultivators, and itinerant communities to make use of the land. The fluid order allowed an extensive variety of land use systems to survive and flourish. Such diversity also allowed multi-species forests to exist, catering to a wide variety of ecological uses. From nomads herding livestock to the tribal people engaged in seasonal agriculture or the '*sweedon*' system, all were able to meet their subsistence needs collectively from the forests.[2]

An illustrative example of such collective resource ownership and use is that of Dir-Kohistan before the advent of the *nawabs* in the mid 18th century. Customary law governing rights to natural resources (forests, agricultural land, rangeland, pastures, and wasteland) was rooted in a system known as '*garzinda wesh'*, defined literally as moveable distribution. The invading *Yusufzai pathans* introduced this system in the mid 17th century and, in time, the *kohistanis* adopted it also. The guiding rationale was that as land differed in composition, location/accessibility, fertility and availability of water, it was necessary to ensure equal sharing of its best and worst features. The permanent aspect of this system was the allotment of all categories of land among the main tribes. Each allotment included a mix of agricultural, forest, pasture and wasteland. Tribes, in turn allotted land to sub-tribes.

During the nawabi tenure, the *garzinda wesh* system folded into more formal arrangements. The *nawabs* also laid claim to communal resources. In return for allowing them to exercise use rights, various taxes, *begar* and *ushr* were levied for the use of agricultural land and forests and *qalang* for grazing pastures.[3] The *nawab* established control over the forests and forced the communities to provide him timber and, later, to allow his designated contractors to cut the trees. Initially, the internal customary distributions *(garzinda wesh)* remained intact as long as communities paid the price.

In Hazara, the situation was similar. Before the invasions in Hazara began (18th century onwards), communities had access to communally owned forests. In the mid-18th century the Durrani rule was established. The rulers, known as *waris*, claimed rights over all land, including forest resources. As in Dir-Kohistan, their rights were determined by political power rather than by law. Rulers allowed communities access to forests, but in return for taxes and timber. In the early 19th century the Sikhs took control of Hazara and followed much the same process; forest resources could be used if full rent was paid regularly.

The British colonial government replaced collective ownership with state ownership, granted large forest tracts to individual owners and disempowered communities by taking away their ownership and access rights. For example, in a move that blatantly disregarded resource dependent communities, the British passed the Hazara Forest Act, 1936. With respect to deodar trees in the

2 The '*sweedon*' system refers to shifting cultivation in the forests but under regulated conditions which did not degrade the forests.

3 The communities paid *ushr* directly and performed *begar* on the *nawab's* behest. They collected *qalang* from the *gujjars* and paid a portion to the *nawab*.

Kaghan valley of Hazara, deodar trees were declared royalty even if they were grown in the court yards of local people. In essence, the changes in forest management systems brought about under colonial rule sowed the seeds of degradation and poverty and established a rationale for peoples' movements like SAFI.

Post-1947, the forest management system in Pakistan reinforced this rationale. The management regime remained deeply entrenched in the colonial mindset. Differences between the government and communities on the issue of property and resource rights exacerbated. While the government declared the forests as protected, communities continued to claim traditional ownership rights in forest resources according to customary law. The current system is marked by tension between regulations guided by statutory versus customary law. Lack of clearly defined property rights has made sustainable forest management impossible in the present scenario.

3. SAFI: Context and Description

3.1 The Context

The pre and post-colonial record illustrates rapid changes in the state of forest related institutions and management and their consequent impact upon communities and the environment. Among other things, the record underscores that poor communities -- small forest owners, rights holders, non-owners, women and grazers, who depend traditionally on forests for their livelihoods are being progressively marginalized.

While SAFI's activities are dispersed geographically across the NWFP, its divisional focus has been the Malakand and Hazara divisions. In the Malakand division SAFI's sphere of influence embraces the Dir-Kohistan and Swat-Kohistan valleys, as well as Matta and Shangla districts. In the Hazara division, SAFI has been active in the Mansehra district, especially in the Kaghan Valley.

The three main ethnic groups in Dir-Kohistan and Swat-Kohistan are the *kohistanis*, the *pathans* and the *gujjars*. These upper valleys, where most of the conflicts around forest resources have occurred, have a predominantly *kohistani* population. In the Kaghan valley, the dominant ethnic groups are, in numerical order of priority, *gujjars*, *swatis* and *syeds*. The *swatis* migrated from Swat during the extended Yusufzai invasion in the 17th century. In the Mata and Shangla districts, the major ethnic groups are the *pathans*, *gujjars* and *swatis* who are a distinct minority.

These upper valleys are the least developed areas of the country, in terms of their access to physical infrastructure, social services and economic opportunities. Land holdings are small and climatic conditions limit crops to one to two a year. While the districts are relatively less marginalized, poverty in these districts is still high in absolute terms. Subsistence involves making use of different ecological niches, namely agricultural land, pastures and forests. Sustainable livelihoods depend on a careful husbanding of these resources. Natural resources, especially the forests and grazing lands constitute the most important source of livelihoods in these areas. But these are areas where evidence of the poverty-environment nexus, the downward spiral of poverty and environmental degradation, is also the most visible. This nexus represents the interplay of ethnic and institutional factors. Thus, the *gujjar* communities across the board have the least rights and entitlements to grazing and forest resources, followed closely by the *kohistanis*. While this is a historically determined bias it is compounded by institutional arrangements which align themselves with large forest owners and contractors (the timber mafia), who also tend to be *pathans*. However, *pathans* also number

significantly among small owners, rights holders and non-owners who are at the receiving end of institutional biases.

These biases track over time as well. Statutory forest laws have restricted subsistence access to forest resources (fuelwood, timber, fodder and other non-timber forest products (NTFPs).[4] Similarly commercial benefits to communities have been reduced to a minimum thanks to engineered coalitions between large forest owners, the timber mafia and the provincial forest department. Community resource rights are both subsumed under statutory law, or reduced to paper rights. Thus, subsistence rights under customary law now defer to statutory law. Similarly forest royalties, to which communities are entitled, are largely appropriated by influential coalitions. The top down, non-participatory approach to forest management has driven a wedge between communities and their birthright by denying them say in its management and subjecting them to legal process, which was often arbitrary. The unprecedented levels of degradation of forest resources that the country is experiencing currently, partly has its roots in this.

The management system, designed for a specific purpose, has been unable to cope with the multiple, and often conflicting interests of commercial loggers, private developers, government and military agencies, hunters and impoverished communities which place it under relentless strain. The forest department tends to choose the path of least resistance, coming down with a heavy hand on the disempowered communities and colluding for personal gain and profit with vested interests. Rising prices of timber, fuelwood and forest products, an erosion in the standard of living of the forest custodians, fines and penalties that are selectively applied and fail to match the nature of the transgression, and royalties that are appropriated by the rich and powerful, have combined to create a complex of perverse incentives antithetical to both conservation and equity. The irony is that the key inroads into forest resources have began to be made by commercial and development groups which the management is not in a position to oppose and -- in fact, cooperates with. On the other hand, it targets communities, whose needs are of an essentially subsistence nature and who – if their rights and traditions are honored – can collaborate with the authorities in the sustainable management of forest resources.

Resultantly, the state's capabilities to manage the forests have eroded considerably, resulting in severe degradation. Independent estimates show woody biomass currently disappearing at a rate between 4% to 6% per annum, which is feared to be the second highest in the world (BAP: 1998: 11). Estimates show that if the present trend continues, Pakistan's total woody biomass could be consumed totally within the next 10 to 15 years (ibid.). In fact, Pakistan is one of the developing countries with no remaining biologically undisturbed forests (WRI: 1997). The Brandon (1995) report estimated the cost of deforestation in Pakistan between US$ 28-36 million per year. In the same vein, the cost of remediation for forests estimated by Rodgers (1997) is about US$ 157.40 million.

4 Driven by the need to protect their commercial interests, these acts, namely the Hazara Forest Conservancy Rules in 1857 and the Forest Act of 1865, followed by the 1927 Forest Act, declared all forests the property of the government. The amended Hazara Forest Regulation Act was enacted in 1873, creating a new category, the 'guzara (community)' forest. Although, ostensibly, returning large tracts of forest, grazing and wasteland back to the communities, the management of 'guzara' lands continued to reside with the forest department which, furthermore, extracted seigniorage for any proceeds generated through sales of forest products. A hybrid category, the 'protected' forest also emerged. Communities were allowed open access to resources in these forests, except for specific uses proscribed by the government. This was essentially intended to arrest the growing trend towards encroachments.

In the early 1990s, concerned donors initiated a forestry sector reform process in the NWFP in an attempt to arrest the rapid degradation.[5] A key aim of the reforms was to introduce inclusive systems, which ensured an effective voice for forest-dependant communities in forest policy and management. The explicit recognition was if forests were to be preserved and used sustainably, communities needed to be involved in their management, and their ownership and access rights defined clearly. Historically, forestry reforms since the 1970s had only catered for the interests of forest owners, excluding users (communities) from the benefits.

The above provides the back-drop and context to SAFI. SAFI emerged with two broad objectives. The first was to mobilize community resistance against the excesses committed by the large forest owners, the contractors and the forest department -- excesses which resulted in both degradation and economic disempowerment. The second objective was to convert such mobilization into a critical mass for policy advocacy. SAFI aimed to provide disadvantaged groups with a voice honed by the civil society movements and that this may evolve into a larger movement advocating issue based politics. The expectation was that a peoples' movement could neutralize the strong institutional resistance to the reforms and ensure that the process remained on track.

3.2 SAFI's Organization and Focus

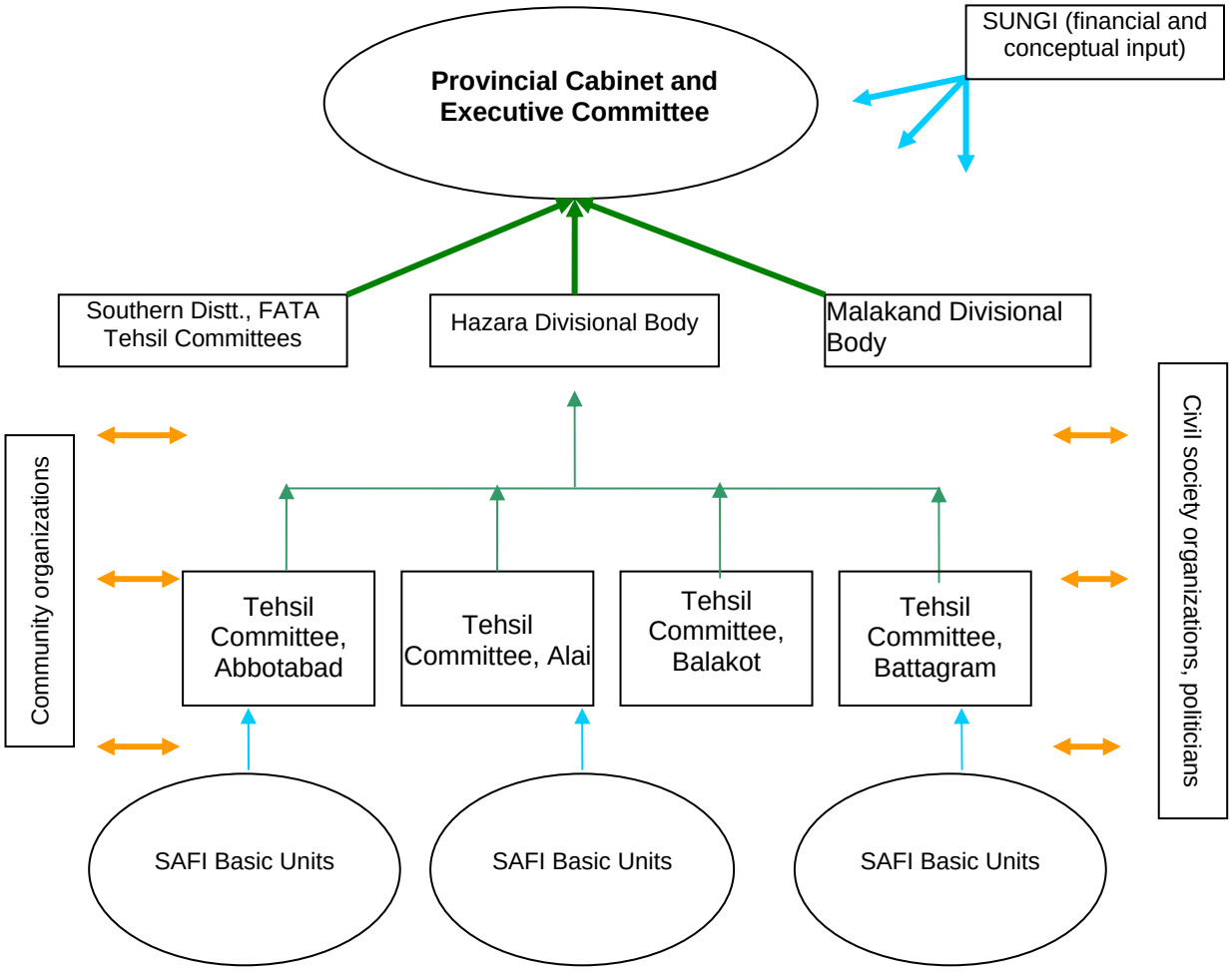
SAFI is presently active in the Malakand and Hazara divisions of NWFP, and in the Southern District and Kurram Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). SAFI acquired formal status at the Sarhad Peoples Forest Assembly in January 2000. It was after the 2000 assembly that SAFI extended its agenda at the provincial level. Earlier it was confined to the Hazara division.

Specifically the organization seeks to:

- Monitor the reforms in the forestry sector from the communities' perspective
- Ensure environmental protection and sustainable forestry
- Work for the awareness of utility of forests
- Protect needs and rights of all stakeholders on a mutual basis
- Organize stakeholders who agree with the mission and objective from local to provincial levels

The organization's structure is four-tiered, as illustrated by the following organigram.

5 Spearheaded by the Dutch, the Swiss, the Norwegian governments and by the Asian Development Bank, a multilateral aid agency.



The lowest village level of organization is the SAFI basic unit. It consists of a general body of elected members. Each basic unit elects an equal number of its members to the higher tehsil tier. The procedure for the move up to the next tier, the divisional level, is similar. Each of the tier selects an executive body from within its members. The two divisional bodies (Hazara, Malakand) send nominees to the provincial executive committee, as do the southern districts and FATA. The present organizational structure emerged out of a long process from original conception of such an organization in the early-1980s, to membership drive, to coalition building and networking and, eventually to policy advocacy and organized resistance.

SAFI's income sources are limited. The bulk of SAFI funding comes from voluntary and institutional contributions. The organization's financial structure allows the village level committee to keep 80% of the total voluntary contributions and pass on the remaining 20% to the *tehsil* committee. The *tehsil* committee in turn gives 30% of its share to the division level committee, which provides 50% of this amount to the provincial executive committee.

SAFI is not yet a fully evolved peoples' movement and continues to draw extensively upon donor support. Nonetheless, without the means for financial self-reliance and in a relatively short time, it has developed a distinctive pulse, two striking features being transparency and a strong – although

somewhat inchoate – resolve. SAFI is at an important cusp, where it now needs to develop itself in such a way so as to become more self-reliant. Therefore, the study is timely as it aims to identify strategic shifts and capacity building needs aimed at strengthening ties with the community, developing ways and means to make SAFI more self reliant, and a more focused and effective policy advocate. While providing direction for SAFI's future, such findings would also highlight key considerations for other similar movements in Pakistan.

SAFI supported two major initiatives in the past five years. It campaigned for community rights in Dir-Kohistan (reactive advocacy), and engaged in the more complex forestry reform process (proactive advocacy). In both cases, it was able to build on an ongoing momentum. However, once the military regime took over and the reform momentum stalled, the need for stock-taking became apparent. The concerns with the forestry ordinance and its related measures continue to remain. Also new issues will emerge in the future, given that the basic parameters defining oppression and exploitation will not change spontaneously. By the same token the rationale for a movement such as SAFI will continue to remain strong. The challenge now is to ensure the means by which it can perform its role effectively. The clear message is that SAFI needs to take a broad -based approach to capacity building: namely developing its leadership, technical, management and fund raising skills. Implicit in this is the need to strike balance between confrontation and accommodation. In other words it should step into existing policy spaces but without compromising its principles and objectives.

4. Analysis

4.1 Examples of Success Achieved by SAFI at Different Levels

4.1.1 Policy Advocacy Processes

SAFI's successes can be assessed at three levels: policy advocacy, organized resistance and management interventions. All three are a function of its efforts in community mobilization, coalition building and networking, where it has drawn upon SUNGI's[6] approach:

> SUNGI uses a multi-pronged strategy for field level mobilization and policy advocacy. At the field level SUNGI organizes and mobilizes the affected communities by setting up local level platforms, whereas at the policy level, it carries out interactive dialogue and policy lobbying, linking the government, political leadership, project proponents and project-affected communities (SUNGI Annual Report; 2000).

The context for success needs to be defined clearly. In other words, SAFI's process achievements can be identified more easily than the specific outcomes it was able to accomplish through these process measures. When expected outcomes are complex, as in the case of forestry reforms, the process which can realize these expectations also needs to be more intensive both in a spatial and temporal sense. Spatially, the reforms span the entire NWFP. The temporal imperative reflects the disconnect between the participatory objectives of the reforms and the insular manner in which they were formulated. Thus, the donors, the forestry department and consultants were the key players in shaping strategies, policies and legal frameworks. Civil society representatives were granted token (observer) status at best. By contrast, the marginalized forest-dependant communities were kept at arms length, even as their self-appointed representatives sought to articulate a role for them in forest

6 SUNGI is a field based civil society organization, which is also SAFI's principal source of financial support.

management. An important success of SAFI was to bridge this divide and give a coherent voice to the community in the reform process and to enable them to engage with the decision makers as an organized lobby. However, such engagement can only yield results if it is sustained over an extended period of time, especially when the decision makers have a vested interest in delaying change.

Specifically, SAFI's process achievements are in the area of community mobilization, coalition building and networking. At present SAFI has an established membership (3,000 currently) and office bearers in its program area, a constitution, a formal charter of demands and a forest protection manifesto. It has created widespread awareness about the forestry reforms, engaging with communities and other stakeholders (NGOs, donors, the FD, politicians and the media) in consultations and discussions. The discrete process milestones with respect to these consultations are:

- *Provincial, divisional level conferences, assemblies and workshops (ittehads).*[7] In conjunction with SUNGI and other civil society organizations, SAFI has used these fora for policy advocacy -- facilitating constructive policy dialogue between local forest communities and the NWFP government, with a view to articulating community concerns at a higher policy level. At the tehsil level it has held several conventions and conducted planning workshops and seminars. Translating the forest ordinance into Urdu has been a great help in the consultations.
- *Access to donors.* The SAFI meeting with the ADB Forestry Sector Mission in 2001, generated agreement on the key issues identified below.
- *Access to politicians*: Malik Amirzada, member of the NWFP Provincial Assembly, supports SAFI's position on the Forest Ordinance, participates regularly in SAFI conferences, arranges meetings interviews with ministers, and gives interviews for the papers. Thanks to his efforts, SAFI met with Siraj-ul-Haq, senior NWFP minister and shared concerns regarding the Forest Ordinance and Dir-Kohistan royalty issue.
- *Access to FD:* SAFI met with the Secretary Forest Department NWFP in Peshawar in January, 2001 and apprised him of the issues identified below.
- *Press coverage:* The leading English (Dawn, News, Nation) and Urdu (Jang, Nawa-e-Waqt) have reported SAFI's activities widely via press conferences and events reporting. (see Box 1 for events/activities related to the NWFP Forest Ordinance)

Box 1: SAFI and Role of the Media

In Pakistan, access to the media and other means of mass communication is relatively difficult for common citizens. Most citizens are unable to exercise fully their right to communicate, which is considered to be a prerequisite for genuine democracy and socio-economic development. However, in the recent past, we note that this divide is being bridged. People have begun realize the importance of the media and are learning exercise their right to access information as well as express their views and concerns. Concurrently, the media is also providing more space and support to people to articulate their concerns.

Continued…

7 These were in chronological order:
Forestry Conference, Abbotabad, 1997. The Sarhad Forestry Working Group was established at this conference, which began to lay the groundwork for SAFI. The forestry working group comprised of five members, SUNGI, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Hayyat Welfare Association, Environmental Protection Society, and Kurram Rural Development Organization.
The Second Provincial Forestry Conference, Abbotabad 1998
The Second Forestry Strategic Planning Workshop, Mingora 1999. The workshop culminated in the decision to form SAFI.
The Sarhad Peoples Forest Assembly, Pakistan Forest Institute, Peshawer, January 2000.
Malakand Divisional Forestry Convention, Mingora 2002.

SAFI is a leading example of a peoples' movement that has been involving the media effectively throughout its advocacy campaign. The *ittehad* members are skilled in involving the press. An influential journalist in the NWFP stated that SUNGI organized trip for journalists to Dir and Upper Swat was an 'eye opener' for him and many colleagues in the FAEJ (Frontier Association of Environmental Journalists).

SAFI involved media via several channels: press conferences, media seminars, press releases, involving journalists in major events, building linkages with journalists, organizing site visits for media persons. Reciprocally, the media contributed to SAFI's movement gaining momentum. It enhanced the awareness of SAFI members, elevating their zeal and participation in its activities. Its key contribution was to highlight SAFI's policy concerns and advocacy initiatives, thereby giving the movement a more prominent profile among stakeholders and communities. It also provided a vital means to SAFI to hold those in authority and power accountable to those they are meant to serve.

Key concerns expressed at these various consultations regarding the reform elements were:

- Make village development committees/joint forest management committees (VDCs/JFMC) more participatory and inclusive and empower the JFMCs legally. At present, the JFMCs are subject to the discretion of FD officials in the sense that officials can constitute and disband them at will. Thus, they need to be enshrined in law. Similarly, VDCs are a proximate continuation of the Forest Cooperative Societies (FCS) of the past. The consensus is that such societies ended up serving the interests of large forest owners and local notables. It is, therefore, imperative that the constituted VDCs have in-built checks and balances to prevent a recurrence of past practice.
- Activate the Forestry Commission (FC), a high-level forestry advisory body, as per the legal mandate (the FC Act was passed in 1999). Also, ensure an equal balance between government and civil society membership. The FC Commission, has not yet been activated despite the legal mandate. Also, the nominees to this important advisory body have consisted entirely of government officials, either in-service or retired.
- Decentralize forestry roundtables (think tanks for the FC), and ensure they are broad-based (representation of all the stakeholders) and accountable. As presently envisaged, the proposed forestry round tables are limited in number and exclude key stakeholders, such as civil society and community representatives. Thus, it is necessary to broad-base representation in the round-tables as well as decentralize them to the district level, in order to be able to capture local ecological and livelihood characteristics.
- Reduce the arbitrary punitive powers of the forestry department and institute penalties according to the gravity of the crime. In other words, illegal cutting for commercial gain is a more serious offense than forest encroachments for subsistence purposes. The NWFP Forest Ordinance, 2002, has actually increased the policing powers of the forest department; for instance, empowering them to shoot presumed malefactors on sight.
- Improve forest royalty mechanisms and include women as royalty recipients. The existing royalty system lacks transparency and excludes women by virtue of religio-cultural exclusion. Concessionists are deprived of their royalties by a coalition of large forest owners, the timber mafia and forest department staff. The system needs to be made more accountable and innovative – innovative in the sense that royalties need to be linked with forest stands rather than trees cut.
- Lift the harvesting ban and ensure marking and cutting is implemented according to the working plans. The ban on timber harvesting instituted in 1992, has many internal fault lines, the most prominent one being its almost complete lack of observance. Thus, the FD continues to mine timber resources to generate revenues; the timber mafia extracts timber on the flimsiest of pretexts, namely, that the trees are wind fallen or dry standing; in turn, this triggers infractions by the communities. However, just because the ban is more honored in the breach does not mean it should be removed

indiscriminately, which would have consequences as disastrous as the ban itself. The need is for a judicious, well-informed, institutionally supported and time-defined program for removing the harvesting ban.

In this context, the military takeover in 1999 was an unfortunate development. It led to the Forestry Act being passed as the Forestry Ordinance in 2002, which effectively stonewalled the consultation process. SAFI mobilized immediately against it, organizing a Forestry Convention in Saidu Sharif, Swat, in September 2002. Subsequently, in December 2002, it organized the Sarhad Peoples' Forest Assembly at the Press Club in Peshawar. However, the protests made little headway as the FD claimed sacrosanct status for the ordinance under the Legal Framework Order (LFO). The upshot is that SAFI will need to continue agitating until a new, genuinely representative government is elected and SAFI can re-engage on the issues. However, in a limited offset to this development SAFI has secured formal representation at the Forestry Roundtable, and the federal government removed the ban on harvesting for one year, beginning January 2001.

4.1.2 Organized Resistance

Hazara: The first instance of organized resistance around forestry issues was triggered by the devastating floods of 1992 in Hazara. These floods were caused by widespread forest degradation in which timber contractors played a key role. More generically, there was a surgical division of interests: at one end were arrayed the timber contractors, the FD and the large land owners, sometimes acting alone, more often in concert. At the other extreme were the disempowered small forest owners, non-owners, rights holders and graziers. While small owners had property rights and some sense of security, the other groups merely had entitlements and concessions and even these tended to be ignored.

SUNGI organized public meetings in a number of villages in the area to develop a strategy, centered around community based forest management, which could protect the forests, ensure their sustainable use and safeguard the rights and entitlements of poor forest dependant communities. Immediately, a consortium of large forest owners and timber contractors, with covert support from the authorities, launched an intimidation campaign against SUNGI. It became evident that SUNGI needed to organize the small *guzara* owners and other forest dependant communities as a collective advocate for preserving community livelihoods and engaging in the forestry reform process. Initially, loosely knit and Hazara specific, the movement eventually metamorphosed into SAFI, with a provincial mandate.

Dir-Kohistan: Cross-province networking was a key factor in awareness creation and exchange of information. It ensured location-specific concerns were disseminated widely which, in turn, built up into a critical mass for organized resistance. This is demonstrated in the case of the Dir-Kohistan royalty issue. Briefly, timber contractors were appropriating forest royalties, legally accruing to the local communities, through a complicated process involving collective powers of attorney (Khan, S.R. et al; 2004). The total accumulated amount was Rs. 195 million The local youth of Kalkot banded together to form the Youth Welfare Society for the Protection of Forest Kalkot (YWSPFK) to agitate against this exploitation. The society succeeded in persuading the government to form an enquiry commission to look into the matter; in addition, they blocked the movement of timber by setting up a locally manned checkpost.[8] While the commission recommendations weighed in favor of the communities they were not implemented. The YWSPFK then turned to SUNGI and SAFI for help. Subsequently, there followed a sequence of investigations and mass campaigns in which SAFI members from other divisions and districts of the NWFP participated. The outcome was encouraging; royalties are being distributed to the communities and the movement of timber down-country has resumed.

8 The Zia-ud-din Enquiry Commission, 1997

4.1.3 Management Interventions

SAFI's increasing role in forest protection and management reflects another facet of its persona, which entails utilizing existing policy spaces. During our investigation we encountered two mindsets within the forestry department. Predominantly, the respondents were still locked into colonial, anti-community attitudes and took a skeptical view of the forestry reforms -- especially those aspects pertaining to community forest management. A smaller group was more open to change. Members of the group conceded the high incidence of degradation, and that existing management systems were unable to cope with the emerging pressures on the forests -- both of a commercial and subsistence nature. Particularly in those areas where forest demarcations or land settlements had not been carried out, such as Dir, Swat and Indus Kohistan, the forest department's ability to monitor, enforce and undertake silvicultural activities was curtailed severely. Evident was the growing recognition that partnerships with communities offered prospects of protecting the forests and using them sustainably.

Attitudinal change was most evident in the Malakand division. As tangible evidence of this, the FD had responded to SAFI's requests to change forest demarcations to improve access to FD offices; community checkposts have been set up to interdict illegal timber movements, one of them (the Jery checkpost) in close proximity to the FD checkpost. Forest protection societies (FPS) have been formed to assist FD activities in the more remote areas which FD staff can not monitor easily. In fact, SAFI has produced a manifesto and constitution for the Qaumi Jungle Bachao Committee (National Forest Protection Committee), an overarching forest protection body. One of the elected members of this committee is involved in silviculture activities in the forest near his village and is a vociferous opponent of land use change. In effect, the FPCs complement the activities of the FD. The latter continues to support FPCs but prefer that their working agenda remains in line with the FD workplan. Members of SAFI have also assisted FD staff in apprehending culprits involved in illegal cutting. One constraint in this regard is the lack of integration between SAFI activities and the FD. As a specific example, the working of checkposts could be much more efficient if community checkposts and FD checkposts could be placed at the same spot so that they could work together. Such integration is lacking at present.

Additionally, in Bakote district, SAFI has received recognition through its district president. Chaha Abdul Latif received a 'conservation award' from WWF in recognition of his long-term association with forests and the related conservational work.

4.2 Possible Avenues for Improvement

4.2.1 Lack of Balance Among Organizational Objectives

SAFI conducted a forceful advocacy campaign in the forestry reform process and that has been the key thrust of its activities over the past five years. However, within the advocacy campaign one key element SAFI has not explored sufficiently and which is key to both policy and management aspects is resource rights. If community property and tenure rights to forest resources are not clearly defined, the policy and management reform agenda will make little headway. It is imperative that SAFI launches an information-based advocacy campaign promoting the traditional/customary resource rights of communities. It also needs to complement this with an information campaign demonstrating the viability of forest conservation in areas in the NWFP where such rights have been honored.

Given SAFI's focus on advocacy, support for local resistance movements and management interventions have remained of secondary importance with the result that this imbalance has created weaknesses in SAFI. Thus, as reform advocacy has abated temporarily, thanks to the present lack of constitutional recourse, SAFI finds itself out on a bit of a limb. It needs to reorient itself and gain more credibility with

the communities, as well as with the FD. Both can be accomplished by striking a more even balance between management and advocacy activities. Thus, by organizing itself around forest protection and management SAFI can strengthen linkages with the communities and establish itself as an important player, working in tandem with the FD. Management initiatives, if implemented successfully can provide important leverage for policy advocacy as well, both in terms of increased community participation and receptiveness in the FD. What is important here is to ensure that SAFI's aims in specific campaigns activities complement the realities on the ground. All initiatives must be taken after an analysis of the realistic possibility of attaining any goal.

Examples of management and related activities are the extension and consolidation of the organization's forest protection role (interdiction of illegal timber, monitoring the FD's punitive role); initiation of JFM activities on a pilot basis; and internal capacity building with a view to improving its social mobilization and technical skills. The current JFM structure in Allai in Hazara and Thal in Dir-Kohistan provides an opportunity for SAFI to hook into. One of the major constraints of the JFM structure is that it focuses only on timber harvesting. There is a need to develop an overarching JFM framework, which governs the entire forest management cycle.

4.2.2 Limited Interaction with the FD

One key shortcoming in SAFI's current approach is its limited interaction with the FD. There needs to be a clear realization that likeminded forest officials in decision-making positions provide a valuable resource for SAFI. Currently, in some areas, SAFI representatives have no personal interaction with FD officials. Their interaction is limited to formal forums, such as roundtables conferences and workshops. Interaction with forest officials on an informal basis are also essential to keep the FD sensitized to community concerns, especially in the context of the recent pro-community reform mandate. Another linkage that SAFI needs to strengthen is with the local governments. With the powers vested in the local government, it could facilitate SAFI's activities in their jurisdiction.

4.2.3 Limited Interaction with the Civil Society, Media and Politicians

Yet another avenue for SAFI to scope is formal linkages with likeminded civil society organizations with a similar mandate. A collective initiative is likely to achieve greater success than individual efforts. Potential partners should be identified and contacts made with the aim of developing a joint strategy for forest protection. By the same token, connections with donor organizations also need to be strengthened. Donors play a vital role in pressuring the government to institute pro-community reforms. SAFI should collaborate with donors to ensure such processes continue. It is also important for SAFI to continue highlighting its successes, whether tangible or not, in order to guard against donors pulling out of projects prematurely. A rapport with donor organizations is essential in this regard.

Linked to the collaboration with donors is SAFI's relationship with the media. Although an informal relationship does exist, as is evident from SAFI's press coverage, there is need to strengthen this. Currently, SAFI's media strategy is more reactive than proactive. Rather than waiting for the media to become interested, SAFI should send periodic updates to the media in order to project their successes, or even the difficulties they face. A media connection is also essential since it can be instrumental in bringing SAFI's work to donors' attention as well as putting pressure on the donors to further support the organization's efforts.

SAFI could also work to develop a pressure group focusing on the politicians. This is a complex task. Politicians have the potential of bringing about significant changes. However, many of them are also an active part of the timber mafia responsible for large-scale degradation. It might be worth considering

targeting areas with a view to linking cooperation from politicians to their electoral needs. SAFI representatives could pledge support for a particular candidate if (s)he promises to support SAFI's efforts.

4.2.4 Low Recruiting Volume

While the largely volunteer composition of SAFI's 'active' membership ensures that recruits have a personal interest in their work, it has a significant downside as well. A volunteer base means that the number recruited remains relatively low. This forces members to be spread thinly across the province. Thus only a handful of SAFI members are scattered over huge areas, which reduces their effectiveness. Devising a plan to attract a wider participation could help address this problem. Further, SAFI should selectively recruit more forest owners since they are the principal stakeholders in ensuring forest conservation.

5. Lessons Learned, Conclusions and Recommendations

SAFI's example provides reason for optimism on the effectiveness of peoples' movement in Pakistan's forestry sector. In a relatively short time the organization has managed to achieve tangible gains. Moreover, addressing its shortcomings could further enhance its impact significantly. In order for other peoples' movements to prove effective, it is important to learn from SAFI's experience. Below we highlight key recommendations from SAFI's example, which have implementability beyond SAFI.

5.1 Focusing on Organizational Objectives

As indicated, SAFI currently suffers from an imbalance between its stated objectives of conducting advocacy and impacting at the management context. SAFI's need to strengthen vertical linkages in a management context does not, in any way, suggest that SAFI's advocacy campaign should diminish. Indeed, it is SAFI's defining attribute and should remain at the core of its future activities. The key here is to realize the need to create a balance between the principal concerns of any peoples' movement. In order to remain an effective policy reform advocate, a holistic approach to forestry issues is required. In SAFI's case, both management as well as on ground advocacy are key for the movement to have a lasting impact on forest policy.

5.2 Bringing Stakeholders on Board

Perhaps the most important lesson from SAFI's experience is the need to involve relevant stakeholders from across the board. Although SAFI aims to alter the FD's functioning, given the current institutional environment, it is impossible for SAFI to function effectively by taking an antagonistic approach to the FD. Complementarities between organizational objectives and various stakeholders must be explored to make tangible progress. In SAFI's case, relevant stakeholders apart from the FD include, media, politicians, and the civil society. Every peoples' movement must analyze the institutional context it functions in. The idea is to devise a strategy to co-opt key stakeholders to gain maximum leverage.

5.3 Financial Sustainability

SAFI's case underscores the need for a peoples' movement to be financially sustainable. Due to its minimal income sources, SAFI's financial standing is weak. The organization's effectiveness and geographical spread could increase considerably if its leaders could find a way to make it financially sustainable. This concern holds for peoples' movements across the board.

With respect to financial sustainability, one major problem, that SAFI faces today, is that of donor-funding constraints. Donors are results driven and have less patience for processes, especially when such processes are politically sensitive. This has created an interesting conundrum in the case of forestry reforms. The reforms did not make much headway because the key players – the donors and the NWFP forest department – excluded communities from the consultations. The resulting dominance of form over substance is not what the donors intended in the first place. However, it did, become an unfortunate reality; one which SAFI attempted to change through grassroots consultations and policy advocacy. In other words, SAFI sought to give tangible shape to a reform agenda, which the donors had contributed to articulating. However, these donors were less willing to finance the means for achieving reform objectives. Thus, the Asian Development Bank, the SDC and the Dutch government have committed/spent upward of USD 100 million in devising reform strategies. Easily twice that amount was spent on projects, many of which inspired such strategies. This strikes a discordant note when one considers that donor funding for SAFI activities did not exceed USD 50,000. It also underscores the need for SAFI, and other peoples' movements to develop a funding mechanism that focuses on internally generated means to achieve financial sustainability.

Specifically for SAFI, one recommendation in this regard is to raise the initial membership fee and charge an annual fee from the members. Furthermore, the membership fee could be set according to a person's income level. Yet another option could be to have members pay 0.5 % (or an even lower amount) of their income, and those who get royalties to pay 0.5 % of their royalties to SAFI. However, this should be staggered commensurately with tangible results.

5.4 Establishing a Large Members' Base

While peoples' movements such as SAFI are most effective when they involve those who are genuinely interested in organizational objectives, SAFI's case also illustrates the downside to such a restriction. As already mentioned, a completely volunteer base implies limited membership and thus limits the ability of the organization to function over a vast geographical spread. Peoples' movements like SAFI must initiate proactive campaigns to seek wide membership. One way could be to hold grand scale public meetings in various areas to raise awareness about the movement's goals and convince people to join the organization. Our research on SAFI has pointed out that many people in NWFP are interested in the kind of work SAFI is doing. Most of them however, do not know of SAFIs presence. This also reiterates the need for a mass orientation of such movements across the program area.

5.5 Formal Training for Members

A weakness in SAFI's current operation is the lack of any formal training for organizational members. This has impacted SAFI's effectiveness adversely. There have been instances in SAFI's work where their members have reportedly not had comprehensive knowledge on various conservation related issues. In order to enhance the effectiveness of a peoples' movement, organization leaders must ensure that their members are well versed with the issues they are tasked to tackle. This is an imperative even if the membership base is one that is seemingly informed and interested in the principal area of focus of the movement.

5.6 A Place for Women

Specifically for peoples' movements in the forestry sector, it is essential to bring women on board as active members. Although SAFI has highlighted gender issues and involved women in SAFI's major events, due to tribal mindsets women are not formally part of SAFI. This is a major deficiency in its make-up. Considering

the dependence of tribal women on forests and impacts of deforestation on them, one way for peoples' movements in the forestry sector could be to establish a designated wing of women members so that their concerns could be addressed effectively.

6. Bibliography

Asian Development Bank, *Aide Memoire of the Forestry Sector Project Review Mission*, September 2001

Biodiversity Action Plan for Pakistan. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature, 1998

Brandon, C., *Valuing Environmental Costs in Pakistan: The Economy-Wide Impacts of Environmental Degradation*, in ed. GOP, Pakistan 2010 Report, 1995

e-mail unknown source, SAFI Meeting with the ADB on the Forestry Sector Project, September 2001

Gadi, M. and Omar, N., "Fencing Forests or Felling Forests: Dilemmas of Community Forest Management in NWFP" in *Voices of the Marginalized*, 2001

Government of Pakistan, Biodiversity Action Plan, WWF, 1998

Gadi, M. in *Voices of the Marginalized*, SUNGI, 2001

IUCN, *Biodiversity Action Plan for Pakistan*. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature, 1998.

Khan, S.R., Bokhari, S., and Cheema, M.A., *Resource Rights and Sustainable Livelihoods: A Case Study of Pakistan's Dir-Kohistan Forests*, SDPI-IUCN, October, 2004

Rogers, Peter, et al., *Measuring Environmental Quality in South Asia.* Asian Development Bank, 1997

SAFI, Charter of Demands, 2002

SUNGI, Background Note for the Sarhad Peoples Forest Assembly, Pakistan Froest Institute Peshawer, 2000

SUNGI Development Foundation, *Annual Report*, 2002

SUNGI Development Foundation, *Annual Report*, 2000

SUNGI, Funding Proposal for the Sarhad Peoples Forest Assembly, August 2001

SUNGI, Minutes of SAFI Meeting with Secretary Forests, NWFP, January 2001

SUNGI, Minutes of SAFI Tehsil Level Meeting, Bakote Hazara, December 2001

SUNGI, Minutes of the Sarhad Awami Ittehad (SAFI(Meeting, Peshawer, March 2002

SUNGI, *Office Memo*, Advocacy Support Unit, Islamabad, December 2003

SUNGI, Recommendations of the Second Provincial Forestry Conference, Abbotabad, 1998

World Resources Institute, *The Last Frontier Forests*, 1997

Khattak, Z.,Iqbal, M., Khan, J., and Yusuf, M. , Report of the Enquiry Committee on, Determination of the Right of Forest Royalty of the Inhabitants of Gawaldai, Kalkot and Lamotai of District Upper Dir, Peshawar, 1997

SDPI is an independent non-profit research Institute
on Sustainable development

Mailing Address: PO Box 2342, Islamabad Pakistan

Street Address: 3rd Floor, Taimoor Chamber, 10-D West,
Fazal-ul-Haq Road, Blue Area, Islamabad.

Telephone: +(92-51) 2277146
2278134 2278136 2270674-6

Fax: +(92-51) 2278135

URL: www.sdpi.org e-mail: main@sdpi.org