Managers not labourers

Putting forest climate investments behind the priorities of community forest stewards in Orissa and Meghalaya, India

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Context

Climate mitigation interventions in the forestry sector, such as REDD+, PES, and FLR (Forest Landscape Restoration), typically are **top-down, "techno-managerial, control-oriented approaches"** (Enqvist et. al. 2018)

While often making gestures toward "participation," **PES interventions usually entail incentives or rules** requiring changes in land use practices that would maximize forest carbon sequestration, with participants paid based on tons of carbon permanently sequestered.

Anthropogenic landscapes are actively shaped by communities over time to serve a variety of purposes; farming, forestry, livestock grazing, and biodiversity.

Interventions seeking to maximize carbon can impose changes in land use that reorder the socio-ecological system, including patterns of land use, livelihood strategies, and the management authority of local institutions. Key rights in the bundle of rights may be effectively transferred, suspended, or lost (Sikor, T. et al (2017)

Community members, once managers, can become laborers, exposed to the vagaries of global climate policy and carbon market logic. (Hajjar et al 2020)

Why is this happening?

GLOBAL NORTH DOMINATION

Voluntary carbon markets are motivated principally by Global North industries and financial institutions in search of carbon offset opportunities. Offsetting is a solution to a problem that is largely the making of the Global North.

HUBRISTIC HUMANITARIANISM

Consistent with history of development interventions historically; the Global North knows better.

MISSING CONTEXT

Dominance of Global North interests impedes attention to understanding local context

A better approach - Stewardship

UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT

Understanding local context will help ensure that “outside efforts are aligned with local efforts, realities and aspirations,” and not work against them (Bennett et al (2018).

GROWING LITERATURE ON STEWARDSHIP OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES OF NATURAL RESOURCES

ETHIC OF CARE

An important attribute of stewardship is an ethic of care, which emerges from an understanding of the relationship between social and ecological well-being.

INTRINSIC KNOWLEDGE AND AGENCY

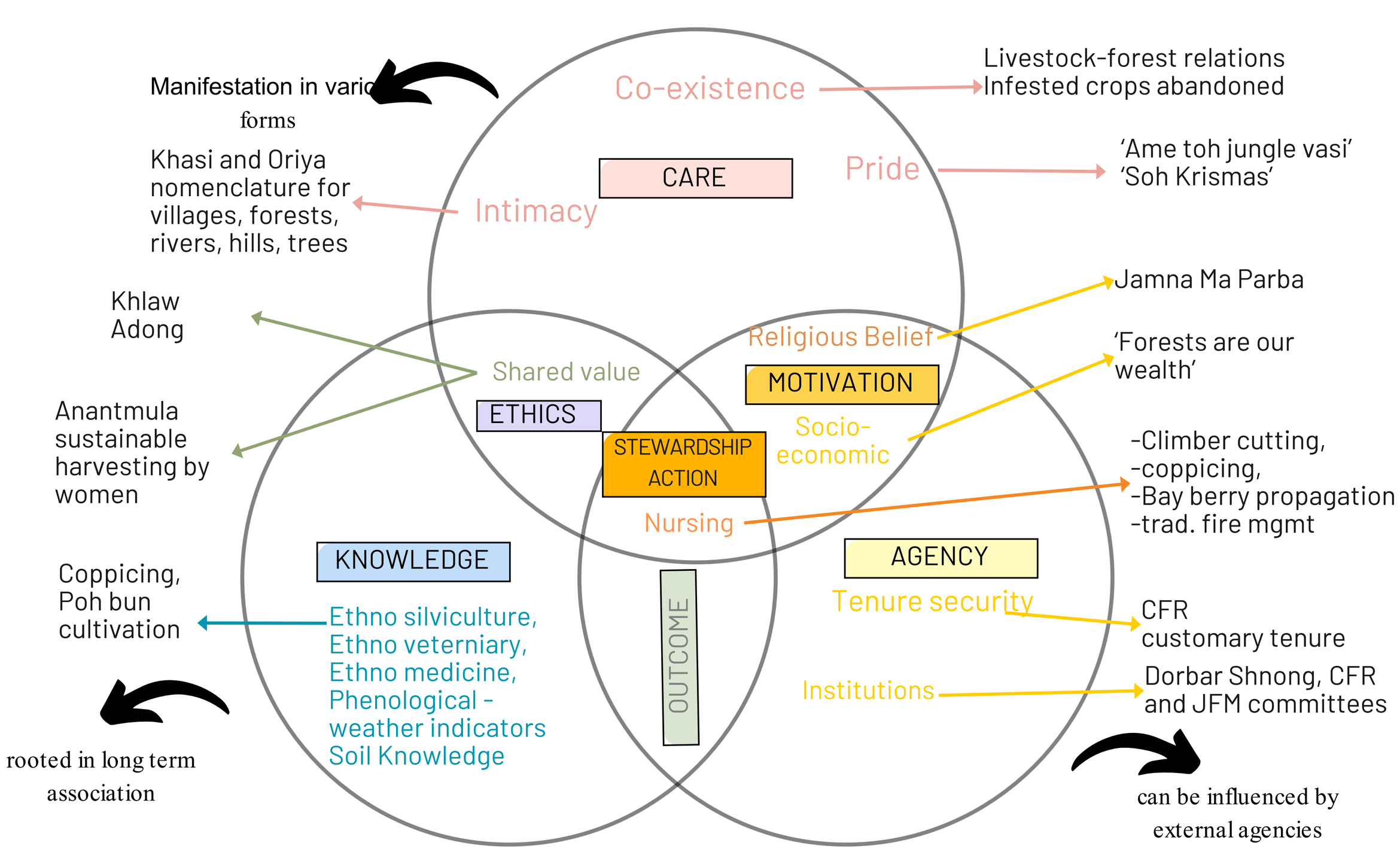
Related attributes include **intrinsic knowledge** of the workings of the socio -ecological system, and **agency**, or the ability to act freely and in a timely fashion to manage and govern land use for social and economic needs and sustainable ecological outcomes (West et al 2018, Bennett et. al. 2020, Enqvist et al. 2018).

Care, knowledge, and agency are relational values, each enabling the other.

We applied a stewardship conceptual framework (Enqvist et al. 2018) to understanding if and how stewardship values and practices were present in villages in Orissa and Meghalaya states.

Literature on Stewardship

Community Stewardship



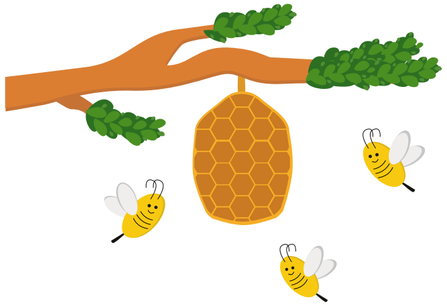
Stewardship Outcomes

What is a Healthy forest?

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

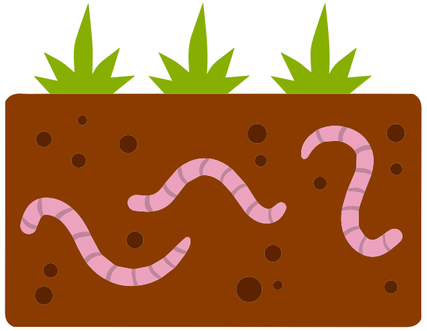
Thick and tall trees

Pine Trees



Multi storied forest

Timber



Fertile soil

Age Gradation

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Preserving Tradition : Bayberry propagation

The native fruit known as Bayberry, locally called "Sophie," thrives in two main varieties. Its fruit-bearing season spans from April to May, but due to its brief availability, locals preserve it as a pickle with oil and chili for later consumption. Renowned for its medicinal properties, the fruit's juice is utilized to treat various stomach ailments. The extraction process involves boiling the fruit in water, which is then stored and consumed as needed.

Highly valued in Mawkynrew block, this tree serves as a source of income during its season and holds significance for both its fruit and medicinal purposes. Traditional practices like coppicing are employed to stimulate new shoot growth, while saplings are transplanted into the forest to ensure the species' continued presence and growth.

CARE

Intimacy with their forests, nature: In both Odisha and Meghalaya, community members identify their forests through local names based on the physiological characteristics of the forest.

Attentiveness: On transect walks with communities, it was observed that they tend to the forest as they walk along almost instinctively without any prior planning or structured effort.

Shared values and Beliefs: In Odisha, communities' start harvesting forest produce after holding 'pujas', (rituals) offering the first harvests to the Goddesses.
In Meghalaya, communities declare the catchment areas of streams as 'Khlaw adong', Community conserved areas

Coexistence: In a village in Meghalaya, the community mentioned abandoning a part of their produce incase of pest attack, instead of using pesticide, as they believe that, 'we take our share, nature takes its share'.

KNOWLEDGE

Germination and propagation knowledge of NTFP, timber, fuelwood, fodder species.

Tree structure and growth knowledge: Community members believe that If trees are packed densely, they will be lean and long, so tending operations are needed

Silviculture knowledge: Strong knowledge systems around coppicing, pollarding and lopping. Species tended selectively in certain seasons to allow for coppice shoot growth

Livestock forest relations: Grazing cattle allows for better soil porosity, adds manure to forest soil and selectively eliminates weeds.

Ethnomedicine and Ethnoveterinary knowledge: All village communities surveyed had knowledge about medicinal uses of 8-35 species of plants. While they have shifted to western medicine for curing themselves, they still rely significantly on forest medicine for treating livestock.

Landscape linkages
Villages in Odisha and Meghalaya are both in undulating landscapes with forests on the hills. Communities strategically have their communal vegetable land (Meghalaya) and agriculture land below the forest to benefit from nutrient and water flows from the forest.

Meghalaya Catchment area of the stream is declared as Khlaw adong (Community conserved area)

AGENCY

Traditional governance: In Meghalaya, the traditional governance systems re recognized by the Indian Constitution. Every village has a *'Dorbar Shnong'*, village council which takes land governance decisions.

Tenure rights under Forest legislation: In Odisha, forest dwelling communities are being provided Community Forest Rights (CFR) titles over their customarily-managed forests. Villages now have CFR management committees which have rights to access, withdraw from, and manage their forests.

Formal and informal resource governance mechanisms
Communities have instituted a lot of formal and informal rules and sanctions to manage extraction of firewood and timber.

Grazing access is clearly defined and there is often a seasonality associated with it. Rotational grazing has also been observed in some villages.

Littering is prohibited in the forest and streams in Meghalaya

Ban on hunting is also observed in all villages in Odisha and certain patches of forest in Meghalaya

ACTION

Anthropogenic shaping of the forest: Meghalaya - Bayberry propagation by collecting, sun-drying and propagating seeds in community forest and homesteads. Chestnut and Soh-Krismas propagation too.

Sustainable harvesting: Odisha - Anantmula, a tuber which has become popular for its medicinal properties was being sourced by a private company from community members in Odisha. This led to overharvesting. Women realized this and instituted norms to ensure that some of the bulbs were left to allow for regeneration.

Annual Cleanliness and plantation drives: Communities in Meghalaya undertake annual plantation and cleanliness drives in their community forests to maintain the health of their forests.

Fire Management: In Meghalaya, communities use the branch of a specific species to extinguish fire. Controlled fire within the forest through burning of certain patches through ground clearing and boundary marking is effective in preventing large forest fires.

Invasive species management : Invasive species cleared and used as compost material. Communities have also found medicinal uses for invasive species

Forest patrolling: In Odisha, widespread deforestation by private contractors in 1970s led to a community-led movement around forest conservation which involved active patrolling of the forest to deter loggers.

OUTCOME

Humus layer: Transect walks to the forest revealed a good layer of humus in the community stewarded forest

Multistoried young forest: Community-stewarded forest were found to have more young trees as well as trees of various ages as opposed to Reserve or open access forests

Livestock and Wild animal droppings. Both livestock and wild animal droppings were higher in community stewarded forests.

Higher tree density and diversity: Community-stewarded forests had much higher tree density (300-450 trees in community-stewarded forests as compared to 150-200 trees in control plots)

Indicators of a healthy forest: According to the communities, diverse forest with good age gradation, which have multiple stories, fertile soil, many species of birds, existence of mushrooms, beehives, and butterflies are healthy.

COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO CLIMATE INTERVENTIONS

VILLAGE SYSTEM

Stewardship:
- Care
- Intrinsic Knowledge
- Agency

Socio-Ecological System Attributes:
- '*Stewards watch no clock, know no season*', bring to bear '*solicitude, foresight and skill*'
- Anthropogenic landscapes shaped by socio-ecological interactions over time
- India's "custodial forest policies" can constrain exercise of community agency

Local Institutions:
- Degree of tenure security
- Formal and traditional organizations

Response

Interventions

- Some Community forest patches fenced for carbon additionality only.
- Community management jeopardized; multiple land uses restricted.
- Loss of agency, 'from managers to labourers'.
- Unfair distribution of benefits between market players and communities.
- **Some communities may decline or withdraw from projects**

GLOBAL SYSTEM

Climate Interventions

'PES', 'REDD+', 'Carbon markets'

"Innovations" driven by:
- Scientific knowledge privileged
- Maximizing carbon sequestration (Offsetting)
- Leveraging markets
- Management ethic: Protection vs. Conservation

POLICY CHALLENGES

1. Inflated additionality claims
2. Moving beyond carbon additionality (for social investment)
3. Recognize community agency

What we've learned

- Communities know what they are doing. They want to make their own decisions
- Governments can't manage forests, (apart from creating reserves and refuges).
- Policy should be directed toward preserving and extending community agency (land and management rights)
- The conditionalities associated with payments requiring significantly additional carbon in landscapes run the risk of reducing exercise of management agency.
- Note: Communities that manage and sustain healthy forests in complex, multi-use landscapes may have little scope for adding significant carbon without sacrificing other socio-ecological system values (West, T.., et al. 2023)

As managers of socio-ecological systems, communities welcome assistance, but in the form of investments that can help them address problems they think are important, and that are social as well as ecological in character.

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