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**Governing the resource**  
**: A study of the Institutions of Decentralised Forest Resource Management**  
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**Abstract:**

*Globally governments have decentralised for a variety of political economic, social and ideological reasons. At least 60 countries now claim to be decentralising some aspect of natural resource management. India has followed this trend and decentralisation in Forest Resources has been at the forefront of the government's efforts in this direction. The Indian Forest Policy of 1988 and the subsequent government resolution on participatory forest management emphasised the need for people's participation in natural forest management. It is this policy that legitimised participation of people in forest management. This paper lays out the institutions that emerge from this strategy and their involvement in decentralised Forest Resource Management. It also traces out the inter-linkages between them in the governance of the forest resource in the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu.*

*Two levels of analysis have been undertaken, one at the institutional level and the other at the house hold level. Based on data that has been collected using quantitative and qualitative methods, it is found that the presence of civil society organisations have an effect on the functioning of government institutions and the management of the resources. The paper informs the assessment that decentralisation has a two pronged function of bringing governance closer to the people and to also bring more political will to the people. These are interrelated processes that help deepen democracy through decentralisation.*

**Introduction**

Globally governments have decentralised for a variety of political, economic, social and ideological reasons. At least 60 countries now claim to be decentralising some aspect of natural resource management. India has followed this trend and decentralisation in Forest Resources has been at the forefront of the government's efforts in this direction. The Indian Forest Policy of 1988 and the subsequent government resolution on participatory forest management emphasised the need for people's participation in natural forest management. It is this policy that legitimised participation of people in forest management. This paper lays out the institutions that emerge from this strategy, both state initiated and community initiated and their involvement in decentralised Forest Resource Management.

In order to understand and analyse the institutions involved in decentralised Forest Resource Management and the inter-linkages between them in the governance of the forest resource the research questions asked are: What decentralised institutions are present in the villages?, What are their objectives and functions?, How do they perform in terms of decentralisation? and, What are the inter-linkages between them in the governance of the forest resource?

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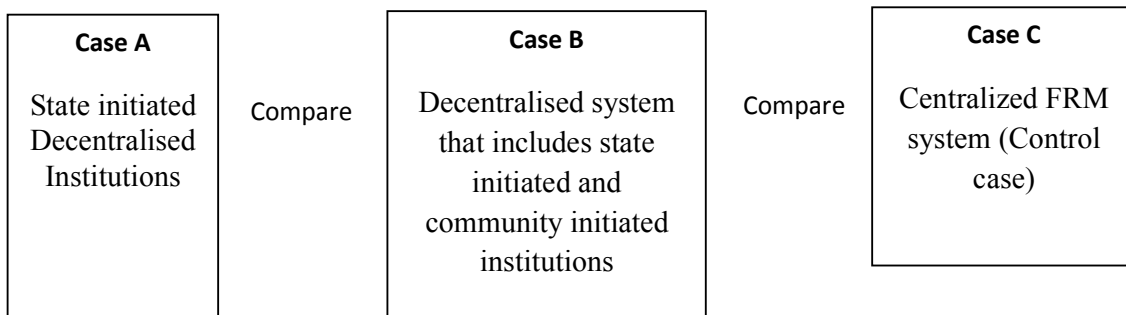
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The study has been conducted in the Nilgiris District of Tamilnadu. India’s existing forests are primarily concentrated in three regions: the Himalayan region; the central forest belt of Orissa, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh and the north-south belt of the Western Ghats (Khare 1998: 83). It is in this third section, in the South of India, where the ranges converge that the hilly plateau called the Nilgiris (Blue Mountains) or the Nilgiris Hills rises. The Nilgiris District of Tamil Nadu includes the plateau, the jungle-clad slopes of the uplands, and some adjoining lowland tracts. The peoples and the terrain of the Nilgiri plateau have unusual characteristics due to the unique development in its history (Mandelbaum 1982) that makes the region a singularly instructive area to study.

**Research Design**

For analytical purposes the research design for the case studies is as below:

Figure 1: *Research Design*



Variability between case A and case B is in terms of the institutional choice available within the decentralisation system.

**Hypothesis**

It is hypothesised that in villages that are characterised by a decentralised system which includes state initiated and community initiated institutions there will be greater decentralisation in the institutions and greater participation, empowerment and downward accountability relative to the other two cases.

**Methodology**

To study the objectives, case studies were conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods. The villages for the case studies were selected from the forest divisions. The two forest divisions are the north and south, the south forest division is centralised and the north has implemented decentralisation policies and programmes, hence providing a natural setting for comparison. All villages in the south were listed and a random selection of three villages was done. In the north, the presence or absence of the two types of institutional setups, namely state initiated decentralisation institutions alone and decentralised institutions with both state and community initiated institutions determined the creation of two lists. A random selection of three villages from each of these lists was done. This led to the selection of 9 villages from the entire district. In each of the villages the decentralised institutions were identified and a house hold survey was conducted.

The analysis of data collected has been done on two levels, i.e., the institution level and the household level.

### **Decentralised Institution's profile**

Globally governments have decentralised for a variety of political economic, social and ideological reasons, and often with the support of and pressured by aid agencies (Ribot J. , 2002). At least 60 countries now claim to be decentralising some aspect of natural resource management (Agrawal, 2001). India has followed this trend and decentralisation in Forest Resources has been at the forefront of the government's efforts in this direction. The Indian Forest Policy of 1988 (MoEF, 1988) and the subsequent government resolution on participatory forest management (MoEF, 1990) emphasised the need for people's participation in natural forest management. It is this policy that legitimised participation of people in forest management (Kolavalli, 1995). The policy document asserted that local communities should be involved in the protection of the forests from which they derive benefits. Thus, the policy envisages a process of joint management of forests by the state governments and the local people, which would share both the responsibility for managing the resource and the benefits that accrue from this management (Prasad, 1999).

### **Government initiatives initiated decentralised institutions**

#### ***Village Forest Committee (VFC)***

The Tamil Nadu government following instructions laid out by The National Forest Policy of 1988 sets the basic objectives, essentials and strategies of its forest management (Tamil Nadu Forest Department, 2007). To enable participatory forest management under the Joint Forest Management (JFM) system the state government initiated the Tamil Nadu Afforestation Project (TAP) with the financial support from Japan International Co-operation Agency. It was implemented all over the State from 1997- 1998. The center augmented this scheme by initiating the National Afforestation Programme (NAP) during the 10th Five year plan period. It is a centrally sponsored scheme with 100% Central assistance (Tamil Nadu Forest Department, 2007).

It is under these two schemes that the Village Forest Committee (VFC) was formed and is the decentralized forest resource managing institutions of Joint Forest Management at the village level in Tamil Nadu.

#### ***Eco-development Committee (EDC)***

The 1983 National Wildlife Action Plan formally recognised and mandated eco-development as a Protected Area -people supportive programme. However, the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the Planning Commission were, confronted on the one hand with pressures to lighten the regulatory regime associated with wildlife and forest conservation and, on the other, with evidence that, even with the current levels of regulation, forests and protected areas were rapidly deteriorating. It was out of such a predicament that eco-development as a strategy gained ground.

So, in the 8th Five-Year Plan (1992 to 1997) an eco-development scheme was mooted. Ever since, eco-development is a component in the Central plan wildlife schemes. The World Bank funded two eco-development projects (FREEP and IEDP) in India in the 1990s that covered nine PA sites in nine different states (Sharma, et al., 2004).

The EDC aims at providing means of alternative employment to its members and enables participation in protected areas.

### **Community initiated decentralised institutions**

#### ***Keystone Production Center (PC)***

'Keystone' is a NGO that has been working in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR) since 1995 with indigenous communities on eco-development initiatives. It has created Production Centre (PD) in the villages where it operates. These village units combine ecologically sensitive development with rural enterprise to provide skill up gradation, training and income at the village level. Non-Timber Forest products (NTFPs) like honey and bee wax are worked on in the PD and transformed through value addition in the village unit. The units are semi-independent with Keystone providing services like marketing support, packaging, account keeping and pricing.

#### ***NAWA Village Level Groups (VLG)***

The Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA) was established in 1958 by Dr. S. Narashimhan, a practicing general physician. The activities focus on three major activities directed at the betterment of the tribal population:

- Medical and health care
- Education and economic development
- Sustainable livelihood

The organisation is run by people who are tribes and its programmes aim at helping the *Todas*, *Kotas*, *Kurumbas*, *Irulas*, *Paniyas* and the *Katunayakas*. It has created village-level groups (VLGs), which serve as the primary organisation building blocks. Under these institutions SHGs are formed, that have members not only from the VLG, but also from the village at large. Each SHG undertakes different activities, as prescribed by the NGO.

#### ***Tribal Panchayats***

In Tamil Nadu, 36 Schedule Tribes have been identified by the Government of India and they are present in different districts. In the Nilgiris District, according to 2011 census, the total general population is 7.35 lakhs out of which the total schedule tribe population constituting approximately 4 per cent of the total general population.

*Todas* are found only in the Nilgiri District of Tamilnadu. They are a patrilineal community who are divided into two endogamous groups, namely: *Tharthazoll* and *Thevelioll* (Parthasarathy, 2008). The *Irular* are the second largest Schedule Tribe of Tamil Nadu. They are classified into many subgroups based on linguistic and social variation. The *Melenadu Irular* and the *Vettakkara Irular* reside in the Nilgiris District (Mohanty, 2004). The

Kurumbasthat reside in the Nilgiris are usually called the *thain* Kurumbas. They are gatherers of wild forest produce, particularly honey, to which they owe their name. All of these tribes have a form of informal group of elders who govern their social norms, that we call here as tribal panchayats.

### Functions relating to Natural Resource Management (NRM)

The institutions are involved in a number of functions of forest resource management. They are as follows:

**Table 1: NRM Functions**

Function	VFC	EDC	PC	VLG	Tribal Panchayat	Forest Department
Planting Trees	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓
Forest fire protection (digging fire lines, beating out the fire etc.)	-	✓	-	-	-	✓
Forest watcher (anti-poaching activities, anti-smuggling)	-	✓	-	-	-	✓
Water Conservation	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓
NTFP Collection	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
NTFP Marketing	-	-	✓	✓	-	✓
Spreading Knowledge about conservation and sustainability	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regular Meetings to discuss issues	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Regulating entry into the forest	✓	✓	-	-	-	✓
Address Forest Land Issues	-	-	✓	✓	✓	-
Conflict Resolution	-	-	✓	✓	-	-

Source: Survey of households in the nine villages where the institutions operates; No. of Respondents: 132

This table gives us an overview of how the institutions function. It shows how the institutions that are not directly under the government or state initiated are not allowed to directly participating in plantation or regulation. They are involved by the state as consultants to assist in participatory mapping, forming of the micro-plan, site selection, recruitment of members, but are not granted a formal role thereafter. It is a means through which the CSO is involved planning, formation stage, but is left out in the direct implementation and evaluation stage. This is one of the major complaints of the CSOs. This table therefore gives a broad overview but does not show the variety of function between similar institutions in different situations or the efficacy of their functions. The difference between *de jure* and *de facto* is also absent. To do so, we need to take the analysis further.

## **Analysis at the Institution level**

### **Index of Decentralisation**

The institutions are ranked on four indicators of decentralisation (Chhatre & Agarwal, 2012).

They are:

- Inclusion
- Representation
- Transparency
- Accountability

#### *Methodology for ranking*

Each institution is subjected to a set of questions that are used as the variables for the indicators. The answer to the questions have a range of 0 to 10, with 0 being the least score that an institution can get and 10 being the best score the institution can get. Based on the answer, values are assigned for each variable. The value of the variable is calculated using the Human Development Dimension Index formula (UNDP, 2007-2008).

$$\text{Value for Variable} = \frac{(\text{Actual Value} - \text{Minimum Value})}{(\text{Maximum Value} - \text{Minimum Value})}$$

The index for each of the indicators is calculated as a geometric mean of the variables. The reason for using geometric mean instead of arithmetic mean is the same as that given by the UNDP for the HDI, when it adopted the same in 2010. Geometric mean takes into account differences in achievement across variables. Poor performance in any one variable will directly reflect in the index, which captures how well an institution performs across the variables. That is to say, a low achievement in one variable is not anymore linearly compensated for, by high achievement in another variable (UNDP, 2011). All variables are given equal weightage<sup>2</sup>.

### **Inclusion**

Inclusion refers to the presence of diverse interests and/or participants in an institution. Inclusion that would arise from decentralisation is often sited to result in better and more sustainable management of resources (Ribot J. , 2002). Decentralised institutions are considered to be the most systematic means of broad-based inclusion (Larson & Ribot, 2004). The institutions studied were ranked based on seven questions/variables that rate inclusion (for details see annexure 1).

The Keystone Production Center (PC) ranks first on the inclusion index. The Production Center is willing to take in any person who shows an interest in the work of the organisation. No one is barred from entry into the institution. This has ensured equitable distribution of the

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<sup>2</sup>For example, to calculate the value for the first variable of inclusion for the VFC in bambalacombari, the score achieved was 3. The value of the variable was therefore calculated as 0.3. Likewise, the values of all seven variables were calculated and the geometric mean of 0.177 was arrived at for that institution, which was the base for ranking.

income and also has encouraged conflict resolution. Through this approach the PC has also been successful in gaining members from all sections of the village. Its inclusiveness has enabled the institution to gain deeper penetration into the daily working lives of the villagers.

### **Representation**

Decentralized systems are those in which political actors and issues are significant at the local level (Fox & Aranda, 1996). The best way to achieve this is to ensure representation, which refers to the way political institutions "map the multiplicity of citizen interests onto policy decisions" (Litvack, Junaid, & Bird, 2000, p. 6). The institutions studied were ranked based on five questions/variables that rate representation (for details see annexure 2).

The institution that ranks high on this index is the NAWA Village Level Group (VLG). The institution is able to mobilise, organise, and articulate the interest of the tribals in an effective manner as the main office bearers, the field officers of the NGO and finally the members of the VLG itself, are all Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) themselves. Even though this system of representation is through the operation of a civil society institution, it functions to bring the interests of the people it represents directly into the official institutional apparatus by entering into direct negotiation with the forest bureaucracy. It should be understood as this is a civil society organisation, it is bound by institutions of the state (Schneider, 2003, p. 39), which sets the rules for its functioning and thus shapes what issues it deals with. This organisation has also provided space for participation of women, which has led to a high representation of women in this institution.

### **Transparency**

Transparency means that "decisions taken and their enforcement are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. This information should be freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcement. It also means that enough information is provided and that it is provided in easily understandable forms and media" (UNESCAP, 2004). It is the lack of transparency in accounting and reporting procedures which discredits the legitimacy of any institution. The institutions studied were ranked based on five questions/variables that rate transparency (for details see annexure 3).

Keystone Production Center ranks first on the transparency index. All Production Centre's (PC) operations are subject to periodical internal audits and an annual report of the same is prepared. Further, in the PC studied the accounts books were maintained regularly and open to the scrutiny of any member. These books were also looked at on periodic bases by a member of the NGO. Information on the functioning of the PC is easily accessible by both members and non-members. The activities of the institution are publicised on their webpage and regular meetings are held to discuss the same. Each PC has information displayed on a notice boards and the NGO has held public meetings in the village in which anybody could attend to discuss its working.



## Accountability

Accountability is the “exercise of counter power to balance arbitrary action, manifested in the ability to sanction” (Larson & Soto, 2008, p. 217). The institutions studied were ranked based on seven questions/variables that rate accountability (for details see annexure 4).

In this indicator, as well, NAWA Village Level Group (VLG) ranks first. This is due to the fact that the officials, namely the President and the Treasurer, of the VLG can be replaced at any time during his or her tenure if the members are dissatisfied with their performance. Over the past five years the group has had regular elections and the President and Treasurer are held accountable for their actions. Meetings are held at regular intervals and the office bearers are questioned on all aspects, from financial working of the group as well as the future plans. There has also been an instance where an elected member has been replaced due to lack of performance. Hence, in terms of allocation of control rights in the electorate in the context of holding officials accountable for breach of trust, this institution holds up quite well.

## Decentralisation Index

This index is formed by calculating the geometric mean of the four indicators<sup>3</sup>.

$$\text{Decentralisation Index (DI)} = ((\text{II}) (\text{RI}) (\text{TI}) (\text{AI}))^{1/4}$$

Where the:

II = Inclusion Index

RI = Representation Index

TI = Accountability Index

AI = Transparency Index

**Table 2: Ranking of the Institutions on the level of decentralisation**

Categories	Village Name	Institution Name	DI	Rank
Case A: State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Bambalacombai	Village Forest Committee	0.182	12
Case A: State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Attadi	Village Forest Committee	0.246	9
Case A : State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Thepakadu	Eco development Committee	0.495	4
Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Neerkasimand and Ghadhimund	Village Forest Committee	0.233	11
		NAWA Village Level Group	0.740	1
		Toda Tribal Panchayat	0.252	8

<sup>3</sup>For example, the Decentralisation Index for the VFC in Bambalacombai is calculated as a Geometric mean of the Inclusion index, representation index, transparency index and accountability index. The score got is the bases for ranking.

Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Pudukadu	Village Forest Committee	0.359	5
		Keystone Production Center	0.703	2
		Irula Tribal Panchayat	0.243	10
Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Anakati	Eco development Committee	0.291	6
		Village Forest Committee	0.266	7
		Keystone Production Center	0.640	3
Case C: Centralized system	Thanrnadmund	Forest Department	0.004	13
Case C: Centralized system	BelhathiKombei	Forest Department	0.004	13
Case C: Centralized system	Nedungalkombei	Forest Department	0.004	13

### Analysis of the Decentralisation Index

This index hopes to capture the crux of decentralisation, in terms of it being the transfer of powers from central government to lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy (Crook & Manor, 1998). Decentralisation is seen as both a means and an end, as stated by the Ashok Mehta Committee. As a means the institution of decentralisation must discharge the obligations entrusted to it. As an end, it should act as the bases for democratic decentralisation (Raghunandan, 2012). It is the latter that is the focus of the index, as well as, the focus of the following analysis.

Decentralisation covers a broad range of transfers of the "locus of decision making" (Sayer, et al., 2004, p. 5). Two major forms, the first being, *administrative decentralisation*, also known as *de-concentration*, refers to a transfer to lower-level central government authorities, or to other local authorities who are upwardly accountable to the central government (Ribot J. , 2002). De-concentration can be defined as the shifting of workload from central and state government to bureaucratic offices located outside of the national or state capital. "This is perhaps the most innocuous of the forms of decentralization, requiring the least changes in the forms of exercising power" (Agrawal & Ostrom, 2004, p. 78).

The second form, in contrast, is *political or democratic decentralisation*, which refers to the transfer of authority to representative and downwardly accountable actors (Larson A. M., 2004). It "occurs when powers and resources are transferred to authorities representative of and downwardly accountable to local populations. Democratic decentralization aims to increase popular participation in local decision making. Democratic decentralization is an institutionalized form of the participatory approach" (Ribot J. , 2002, p. 4). The variety in the nature of this relationship results in different forms, they are:

- Devolution – It is the transfer of 'natural resource management to local individuals and institutions located within and outside of government' (Yuliani, 2004). It entails the transfer of decision-making powers from one level to another. It is the best form

of democratic decentralisation (Gregersen, Contreras-Hermosilla, White, & Phillips, 2004). Devolution is the most extensive form of decentralization (Agrawal & Ostrom, 2004).

- Delegation - “delegation transfers responsibilities and authority to semi-autonomous entities that respond to the central government but are not totally controlled by it.” (Gregersen, Contreras-Hermosilla, White, & Phillips, 2004, p. 4)
- Privatization - is the transfer of power to market entities, but Ribot (Ribot J. , 2002) has stated that this is not a form of decentralisation, which is a stance that this paper agrees with.

The institutions of Natural Resource Management (NRM) that are ranked on the decentralised Index have characteristics of decentralisation that relate to these theoretical categories. It is observed that institutions that rank four and above have characteristics of devolution. Those between five and nine display the characteristics of delegation. Those that rank lower display characteristics of de-concentration.

### ***Characteristics of institutions that rank high on the Index***

Among the top four institutions, in the case of the civil society organisations (CSOs) NAWA and Keystone, the transfer of natural resources management functions have been done to local individuals and institutions located outside the government’s organisational structure. The EDC (Eco Development Committee) ranked fourth, however, is an institution that lies within the government’s ambit as it is initiated by the state.

The institutions that the CSOs have individually set up, namely the Village level group and the Production center are not allowed to directly affect the management of the forest but play a substantial role, as it is through them that the transfer of knowledge of schemes, conflict resolution, NTFP collection and value addition takes place. These community initiated institutions give the primary tribal groups a platform through which to participate. They are also the main vehicles through which knowledge on sustainability and conservation is spread among the forest tribals. All of these processes occur within the context of laws that set the limits within which these community initiated decentralised institutions operate.

Nevertheless, even in these institutions that rank high on the index, there are significant lacunae. In terms of functions, in many cases, the operations of these local institutions affect day-to-day harvesting, planting, fire wood collection, and other forest-related activities, but they do not have *de jure* authority to determine any of the operational rules in this regard, even if they do assume *de facto* authority. The ideal case would be a scenario, where in which, the forest department determines the rules related to all timber products and the decentralised authority determines operational rules relating to non-timber forest products (NTFPs). This unfortunately does not occur as the forest department still has a tight hold on the reigns. The decentralised institutions are “rule followers and not rule makers” (Agrawal & Ostrom, 2004, p. 82).

Further, forest management functions would entail granting to these institutions the right to regulate access to the resource, as well as, the right to transform the forest. However, the institutions studied here are only granted the right to obtain or produce NTFPs such as honey,

*seevakkai, nellikai* etc. from the forest. If they wish to change the forest by planting trees, the forest department is willing to give them saplings from the forest nursery, but the locations of such plantations are highly regulated by the department. Hence, withdrawal rights are devolved to a limited extent, as it still is indirectly regulated by the department and access rights are not at all devolved. However, the case of access rights is complicated. To illustrate the point, NAWA Village Level Group that ranks first on the Index, operates in the village of Neerkasimand and Ghadhimund. The head of the VLG belongs to a *Toda* family who is very well respected in the village. It has been the traditional function of this family to look after the welfare of the *Mund* (village) and regulate the activities therein. Hence, inevitably it is they who determine who will have access to which resources and how that right may be exercised.

#### ***Characteristics of institutions whose ranks are mid-ranged***

Four of the five institutions, whose ranks are between five and nine, are funded by government forest policies. These institutions are characterised by the transfer of managerial responsibility for specified functions from the forest department to the village level, but their functioning is only semi-autonomous as they still have to report to the forest department. The treasurer of these institutions is the forester, who has overarching powers. He is empowered to change the president of the VFC, or member of the executive committee. He is the one who convenes meetings of the VFC. If the VFC identifies any individual as harming the forest, by way of illegally cutting tree for firewood, grazing cows or goats, it is to him that they report to.

Hence, even though the VFC is not totally controlled by the forest department and lies outside of its normal hierarchical organisation chart, it is still seen as merely an implementation unit for forestry projects. Further, it is donor supported; the VFCs set up under TAP are funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). To illustrate the point, during 2011-2012, maintenance of older plantations created by VFCs over an extent of 95,000 ha, buffer zone activities like community development and income generation activities in 460 villages were being carried out through the VFCs in Tamil Nadu at a cost of Rs.45.21 crore with JICA funds (Tamil Nadu Forest Department, 2007).

#### ***Characteristics of Institutions that rank low on the index***

The VFCs that rank poorly on the decentralisation index rarely hold meetings and when they do, they are never allowed to question the forester. For example, in the VFC of Bambalacombai when the evaluation committee, which evaluates the plantations created by the VFC after a year, was created, the president of the VFC was the only person from the village who was involved, and that too only in the final stages. Further, the forest official never took the time to explain the process to the VFC president. The forester demanded the president's participation in meetings and asked him to put his thumb impression on the report, after it was complete. No one bothered to either explain the details of the report or why it was being complied.

In contrast to the other institutions the 'locus of decision making' (Sayer, et al., 2004) lies with the forest department alone. The decision to plant, what shall be done with the NTFPs, even who shall collect the NTFPs is decided by the forester. In this case, the VFC essentially has no control and there is no real transfer of authority between levels of government. This lack of transfer of commensurate authority with the responsibility, leads to a problem where in which the VFC becomes the scapegoat for any failures that may occur in the implementation of schemes.

#### *Further issues that arise from the Index*

A few questions that arise from the Index are:

1. Why do some VFCs rank mid-ranged, whereas other VFCs rank very low on the Index?
2. What is the role of the tribal panchayats?
3. What characterises the top institution that allows it to score as well as it does on the index? and
4. Why is it that, the Eco development Committee in Thepakadu which is a government initiated institution, rank so well when all other government initiated institutions do not do so?

#### *One: Difference of performance among VFCs*

It was observed that in the VFC of Pudukadu, Anakati and Attadi, which are mid-ranged, the presidents of these committees were either members of the community initiated institutions or had worked as field officers for the non-government organisations. This had exposed them to the way in which a decentralised institution could run. During the interviews with these office bearers, the common theme found was that they stressed that that they now knew their rights and would make sure to demand it from the forest officials. Further, the functionaries of these VFCs were selected by the people themselves, also the fact that they had some experience working with the CSOs, benefited the members as a whole. None of these characteristics were found in either the VFC in Neerkasimand and Ghadhimund or the one in Bambalacombai which could be the reason that they rank so low.

#### *Two: Tribal Panchayats*

The tribal panchayats are unique in their functioning. They exercise authority in civil disputes between individuals, families and clans. It is only when conflict occurs between the tribals and the forest officials that they start to play a direct role. Indirectly, however, the phenomenon lends itself to elite capture and all the disadvantages that accompany it. The president and treasurers of the decentralised institutions, from the community initiated VLG of NAWA to the government initiated VFC, were inevitably from the family of the head of the tribe or his/her relative. Even when they were elected or selected by the villagers themselves, this phenomenon persisted.

#### *Three: The first - NAWA Village Level Group*

The NAWA Village Level Group in Neerkasimand and Ghadhimund ranks first in the decentralisation Index. With regard to the indicators, in the inclusion Index it ranks second, in

the representation index it ranks first, in transparency it ranks third, in accountability it ranks first. This organisation was set up by the Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association, which has been registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860 in 1958.

The unique aspect, about this organisation, is that all office bearers are from the very tribes that they aim at providing services for. Unlike the other decentralised institutions, this one is driven by the initiatives of the tribal people themselves. The organisation created a very strong base for itself by providing much needed medical assistance to the tribes, who were often isolated, for the past 50 years or so. The name of the institution is recognised by all the respondents interviewed<sup>4</sup>. Its activities include:

- Medical and health care services, including a tribal hospital and a mobile medical unit that visits nearly all the tribal villages in Coonoor, Ooty, Kundha, Gudalur and Pandalur Taluks
- Education programmes with Child Fund India
- Financial assistance to tribal families to develop tribal waste lands
- Documenting and promoting tribal traditional practices
- Representing the tribal people in any platform on a variety of subjects, of late it has been in order to push forward FRA claims
- Creation of Self-Help Groups that mainly involve tribal women

Its activities in education and health won the confidence of the tribal people as well as the forest officials themselves. One forest official can be quoted saying, “We may not agree with NAWA on a number of issues, but they have done a lot of good for the tribal people. They are well accepted by the tribes.” Along with these functions, their contributions to natural resource issues are as follows:

- Representation of tribes in discussions, meetings and even conflicts, dealing with land issues
- The SHG’s are involved in collection and sale of NTFPs. They have funding from the Union Government of India through TRIFED (The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Limited), which encourages sale of hill products including tribal embroidery, honey, eucalyptus oil, etc.
- Educating the tribes on forest law and policies, and their rights there in

#### *Fourth: The outlier*

The Eco development Committee in *Thepakadu* is the outlier that does not hold with the trend, where in the community initiated decentralised institutions rank better on the decentralised index. This particular EDC has ranked fourth on the decentralised index, with regard to the indicators, in the inclusion index, the representation index and the transparency index it ranks fourth, in the accountability index it ranks fifth.

This institution holds its own against the institutions set up by the community mainly because of two reasons - first, the nature of the policy behind the setting up of the institution and second, because of the incentives present. The policy has the following functions:

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<sup>4</sup> 135 respondents interviewed

1. The committee can form SHGs
2. They can be part of the anti-poaching and fire watchers squad
3. They can apply for loans to fund productive activities
4. They may approach the forester for training in activities like tailoring, driving etc.

Function one and three has enabled the people of this village to set up a canteen that caters to the forest department and the eco-tourists. They have set up a nursery to sell unique flora that grows in the region and they have set up a store that enables them to sell NTFPs that they are allowed to collect. Nearly every family has a member who has been in the anti-poaching or fire watchers squad. They are proud of this achievement and unlike any of the other villages, in the house hold survey, it was seen that this particular village was interested in the conservation of the forest for itself, rather than only for the economic benefits they would gain from the forest. They felt that they had a stake in its conservation. The members of the committee have also been involved in clearing of invasive species by the forest department.

### **Analysis at the household level**

#### **Inter-linkages between the institutions**

From the above analysis it is seen that there are inter-linkages between these decentralised institutions. They are:

1. The experience garnered in the CSO helps the VFC members or officials be more assertive
2. The presence of CSOs encouraged the people to elect/select members with experience in the CSOs as members of the executive committees in the government initiated decentralised institutions
3. The tribal panchayats have an indirect effect on the other decentralised institutions, in terms of who are elected/selected as functionaries
4. The CSOs are involved in the commencement of the government initiated institutions but thereafter are not given space for further participation

In order to take this analysis further, we look to the household level to examine if the inter-linkages can be observed at that level as well. We, therefore, compare the extent of deepening democratic decentralisation in each of the three cases. The three cases referred to here are - Case A: villages that have only state initiated decentralised institutions, Case B: Villages that have a decentralised system that includes state initiated and community initiated institutions and Case C: villages that are subject to centralized forest management. An enquiry into the occurrence of democratic decentralisation, leads us to examine the indicators of this phenomenon. In this paper, the indicators chosen are - participation, empowerment and downward accountability, as these are the promised outcomes in the decentralisation policies and laws of natural resource management.

#### **Comparison of cases**

The comparison will help us understand whether the presence or absence of a decentralised institution affects these indicators. It will show us if the presence of more than one decentralised institution has an effect. Hence, indicating if inter-linkages do exist when more

than one type of decentralised institution is present in a village. This analysis will be based on house hold level data collected through a survey. The number of observations is 135.

### Participation

Participation through a decentralised institution is often credited with a number of positive outcomes. Participation is assumed to encourage change, enable implementation, open up new perspectives, allow for representation of diversity and difference and bring in the local context to planning and decision making (Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2006). The levels of participation in the villages under each of the cases are examined below.

**Table 3: Comparison of Cases with participation<sup>5</sup>:**

			Participation		Total
			Yes	No	
Case	Case A: SI	Count	18	27	45
		% within Case	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
		% within Participation	35.3%	32.1%	33.3%
	Case B: SI and CI	Count	28	17	45
		% within Case	62.2%	37.8%	100.0%
		% within Participation	54.9%	20.2%	33.3%
	Case C: Centralised	Count	5	40	45
		% within Case	11.1%	88.9%	100.0%
		% within Participation	9.8%	47.6%	33.3%
Total	Count	51	84	135	
	% within Case	37.8%	62.2%	100.0%	
	% within Participation	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

It is observed that the participation rate in case A is 40%, in case B it is 62.2% and in case C it is 11.1%. Hence, case B has the highest participation rate in comparison to the other two cases. Further, 54.9% of the total participation occurs in Case B in comparison to the other cases. In case A 60% of the people do not participate, in case C this percentage is much higher at 88.9%. Through a chi-squared test it is established that the relationship between the cases and participation is significant, with a significance value of .000. This also helps us established that the difference between the participation rates are significant.

### Empowerment

Empowerment enables a mode of self-understanding that acts upon the existing power relations, by giving power to the people (Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2006). It is only this sense of self-awareness and self-esteem that truly allows for self-rule to be possible. Empowerment therefore becomes the bedrock for effective democratic decentralisation. The extent of empowerment in the villages under each of the cases is examined below.

<sup>5</sup> Based on the question - Have you participated in any of the activities of forest management? Yes/ No



**Table 4: Comparison of Cases with Empowerment<sup>6</sup>**

			Empowerment		Total
			Yes	No	
Case A: SI	Count		15	30	45
	% within Case		33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
	% within Empowerment		31.9%	34.1%	33.3%
Case B: SI and CI	Count		28	17	45
	% within Case		62.2%	37.8%	100.0%
	% within Empowerment		59.6%	19.3%	33.3%
Case C: Centralised	Count		4	41	45
	% within Case		8.9%	91.1%	100.0%
	% within Empowerment		8.5%	46.6%	33.3%
Total	Count		47	88	135
	% within Case		34.8%	65.2%	100.0%
	% within Empowerment		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The feeling of empowerment is much stronger among the people in Case B, as the rate of empowerment is 62.2% compared to only 33.3% of the villagers in Case A and 8.9% in case C. Of the total respondents surveyed, 59.6% of the people who feel empowered are in case B villages and 46.6% who feel that they do not matter to the management of the resource, live in case C villages. Even within case A 66.7% of the people feel disempowered. Through a chi-squared test it is established that the relationship between the cases and empowerment is significant, with a significance value of .000. This also helps us establish that the difference between the empowerment levels are significant.

### **Downward Accountability**

One important demand from below, of any authority, is for accountability of power to the people themselves. Democratic decentralisation reaches its fullest potential if there is downward accountability, which is a means through which the people themselves can monitor and affect officials of the institution that represents them (Bardhan, 2002). Hence, the accountability indicator used here differs from the indicator used to rate the institutions in terms of capturing only downward accountability. The institution level analysis earlier looked at all forms of accountability. The extent of accountability in the villages under each of the cases is examined below.

<sup>6</sup> Based on the question - Do you think your opinion matters in the management of the forest resource? Yes/ No

**Table 5: Comparison of Cases with Accountability<sup>7</sup>**

			Downward Accountability				Total
			Poor	Average	Good	Very Good	
Case A: SI	Count		18	22	5	0	45
	% within Case		40.0%	48.9%	11.1%	.0%	100.0%
	% within Accountability		32.1%	42.3%	33.3%	.0%	33.3%
Case B: SI and CI	Count		8	15	10	12	45
	% within Case		17.8%	33.3%	22.2%	26.7%	100.0%
	% within Accountability		14.3%	28.8%	66.7%	100.0%	33.3%
Case C: Centralised	Count		30	15	0	0	45
	% within Case		66.7%	33.3%	.0%	.0%	100.0%
	% within Accountability		53.6%	28.8%	.0%	.0%	33.3%
Total	Count		56	52	15	12	135
	% within Case		41.5%	38.5%	11.1%	8.9%	100.0%
	% within Accountability		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In the analysis, it can be seen that only Case B has any respondent saying that they thought the accountability was very good. The poorest accountability lies in Case C, where all the respondents say that the level of downward accountability was either poor or average. In case B, 48.9% of the people who live in these villages feel that the downward accountability is either good or very good. But in case A almost 90% of the respondents, rated the level of downward accountability as either poor or average. Through a chi-squared test it is established that the relationship between the cases and downward accountability is significant, with a strong significance value of .000.

A correlation run between the cases and the three indicators show the following results.

**Table 6: Correlation**

	Participation	Empowerment	Downward accountability
Case A <sup>8</sup>	.032 (.709)	-.022 (.800)	-.124 (.152)
Case B <sup>9</sup>	.357** (.000)	.407** (.000)	.535** (.000)
Case C <sup>10</sup>	-.389**	-.385**	-.411**

<sup>7</sup> Based on the question - How will you rate the organisation's help in this regard - Allowing you to question the organisations activities in your village?

<sup>8</sup> Case A is coded as If case A = 1 , if other =0

<sup>9</sup> Case B is coded as If case B = 1 , if other =0

	(.000)	(.000)	(.000)
Participation	1	.296** (.000)	.286** (.001)
Empowerment	.296** (.000)	1	.283** (.001)
Downward accountability	.286** (.001)	.283** (.001)	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: The number of observations is 135.

The table shows that Case A is positively correlated with participation, but empowerment and downward accountability are negatively correlated. However, none of the values are significant and the correlation is not strong either. Case B is positively correlated with participation, empowerment and downward accountability. The correlation value is quite strong and the values are also significant. Case C is negatively correlated with participation, empowerment and downward accountability and the values are significant.

Therefore, the data suggests that the extent of democratic decentralisation is fairly strong in Case B. This case rates well on all three of the indicators chosen - participation, empowerment and downward accountability. In the villages studied under case B there are more than one institution of natural resource management present. This case is characterised with the presence of the government initiated decentralised institutions and community initiated institutions. The presence of multiple institutions therefore seems to impact the level of democratic decentralisation as per the given indicators. It points to the existence of inter-linkages between decentralised institutions and that the institutions do affect each other in their functioning.

**There are two sets of results here:**

1. The paper demonstrates variation in the decentralisation index. It illustrates that decentralised systems that have community initiated organisations tend to fair better on the decentralisation index
2. Also, the two levels of analysis complement each other - Cases that fair higher on the decentralisation index also fair better in terms of participation, empowerment and downward accountability at the house hold level.

Therefore the question to then ask is why, do we get these two results from the analysis done.

To answer this, it can be seen that it is in case B the local people have had at least partial success in mobilising to demand greater authority over the resource. One example out of many, to illustrate this phenomenon is as follows; NAWA conducted a Tribal Rights Committee Meeting, to ensure that the claims under FRA were filed and that knowledge about the same was spread. The members of all the PTGs- Todas, Kotas, Kurumbas, Irulas,

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<sup>10</sup> Case C is coded as If case C = 1 , if other =0

Paniyas and the Katunayakas were called together and representatives chosen so as to be able to take the issue forward in further meetings.

The participation in case B is more in tune with the true sense of the word, rather than a “reproduction of indirect rule (that is, a means for managing labour and resources)” (Larson & Ribot, 2004, p. 5) that is seen in the other cases. To illustrate, in case B villages like Pudukadu and Anakati, the villagers that have been able to overcome the exclusion from the public sphere that they normally encounter as the functioning of forest resource management is something that they are inherently knowledgeable about and confident to contribute to. Like a member of the in Anakati, said “ this is the place I was born in, my father and my grandfather were all born here. I know it better than anybody else, even the forest guard. Ask me and I will show you where the bees live and where the best plant grows.” They are through this knowledge able to bring in the local context to planning and decision making in these institutions.

Also, the presence of more than one institution of decentralisation in Case B has created an environment, where empowerment and downward accountability has some success. From the focused group discussions, it was observed that the villagers in Case B had knowledge about the rights that can be demanded of the government, in terms of:

- The authority that institutions at this level may yield
- Spread of information on policy and laws
- Recognition that tribal knowledge is not inferior to that of the expertise of the forest department
- That tribal representation is essential in resource conservation and through this the increase in the tribals self-esteem as they recognise their importance to the conservation process

Further, parallel institutions, in Case B, have not weakened the institutions created by the state, but on the other hand have moderately strengthened them. It was observed that this is due to two facts,

- one, the local people are more aware of the need to conserve and
- two, they perform better as representatives of the village as they have gained experience in management, in the community initiated institutions. The people observe how the institutions of the CSOs function and then demand the same rights in the government institutions.

Hence, decentralisation has a two pronged function of bringing governance closer to the people and to also bring more political will to the people as well. These are interrelated processes that helps deepen democracy through decentralisation. It cannot be seen only as bringing change into the polity but also bringing awareness and change in society as well.

## **Conclusion**

The assumption, that institutions in Case B would fare better on a decentralised index than their counterparts in Case A or Case C and on the whole Case B villages would have greater

participation, empowerment and downward accountability and therefore deepening democracy, held true in this situation.

These are results that characterise decentralisation as an end, not a means. Decentralisation can be seen as both a means and an end, according to the Ashok Mehta Committee. As a means the institution of NRM decentralisation must discharge the obligations entrusted to it. As an end, it should act as the bases for democratic decentralisation (Raghunandan, 2012). It is the latter that is the focus of this analysis. It is now to be seen how the institutions fare in terms of the functions they are to discharge, which is forest resource management.

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**Annexure:**

**Annexure 1: Ranking of the Institutions on Inclusiveness**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Village Name</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Institution Name</b>	<b>II</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Case A: State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Bambalacombai	1	Village Forest Committee	0.177	12
Case A: State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Attadi	2	Village Forest Committee	0.368	8
Case A : State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Thepakadu	3	Ecodevelopment Committee	0.638	4
Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Neerkasimand and Ghadhimund	4	Village Forest Committee	0.257	11
		5	NAWA Village Level Group	0.907	2
		6	Toda Tribal Panchayat	0.322	9
Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Pudukadu	7	Village Forest Committee	0.633	5
		8	Keystone Production Center	0.926	1
		9	IrulaTribal Panchayat	0.304	10
Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Anakati	10	Ecodevelopment Committee	0.412	7
		11	Village Forest Committee	0.440	6
		12	Keystone Production Center	0.821	3
Case C: Centralized FRM system	Thanrnadmund	13	Forest Department	0.006	13
Case C: Centralized FRM system	BelhathiKombei	14	Forest Department	0.006	13
Case C: Centralized FRM system	Nedungalkombei	15	Forest Department	0.006	13



## Annexure 2: Ranking of the Institutions on the level of Representation

Categories	Village Name	No.	Institution Name	RI	Rank
Case A: State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Bambalacombai	1	Village Forest Committee	0.197	12
Case A: State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Attadi	2	Village Forest Committee	0.289	9
Case A : State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Thepakadu	3	Eco development Committee	0.550	4
Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Neerkasimand and Ghadhimund	4	Village Forest Committee	0.337	7
		5	NAWA Village Level Group	0.896	1
		6	Toda Tribal Panchayat	0.214	10
Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Pudukadu	7	Village Forest Committee	0.457	5
		8	Keystone Production Center	0.603	3
		9	Irula Tribal Panchayat	0.214	10
Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Anakati	10	Eco development Committee	0.368	6
		11	Village Forest Committee	0.313	8
		12	Keystone Production Center	0.775	2
Case C: Centralized FRM system	Thanrnadmund	13	Forest Department	0.003	13
Case C: Centralized FRM system	BelhathiKombei	14	Forest Department	0.003	13
Case C: Centralized FRM system	Nedungalkombei	15	Forest Department	0.003	13

### Annexure 3: Ranking of the Institutions on the level of transparency

Categories	Village Name	No.	Institution Name	TI	Rank
Case A: State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Bambalacombai	1	Village Forest Committee	0.200	10
Case A: State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Attadi	2	Village Forest Committee	0.217	8
Case A : State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Thepakadu	3	Eco development Committee	0.462	4
Case B: Decentralised system that includes State initiated+ community initiated institutions	Neerkasimand and Ghadhimund	4	Village Forest Committee	0.217	8
		5	NAWA Village Level Group	0.537	3
		6	Toda Tribal Panchayat	0.152	11
Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Pudukadu	7	Village Forest Committee	0.364	5
		8	Keystone Production Center	0.751	1
		9	Irula Tribal Panchayat	0.152	11
Case B: Decentralised system that includes state initiated+ community initiated institutions	Anakati	10	Eco development Committee	0.299	6
		11	Village Forest Committee	0.230	7
		12	Keystone Production Center	0.667	2
Case C: Centralized FRM system	Thanrnadmund	13	Forest Department	0.013	13
Case C: Centralized FRM system	BelhathiKombei	14	Forest Department	0.013	13
Case C: Centralized FRM system	Nedungalkombei	15	Forest Department	0.013	13

#### Annexure 4: Ranking of the Institutions on the level of Accountability

Categories	Village Name	No	Institution Name	AI	Rank
Case A: State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Bambalacombai	1	Village Forest Committee	0.158	7
Case A: State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Attadi	2	Village Forest Committee	0.158	7
Case A : State initiated Decentralised Institutions	Thepakadu	3	Eco development Committee	0.369	5
Case B: Decentralised system that includes State initiated+ community initiated institutions	Neerkasimand and Ghadhimund	4	Village Forest Committee	0.158	7
		5	NAWA Village Level Group	0.687	1
		6	Toda Tribal Panchayat	0.385	4
Case B: Decentralised system that includes State initiated+ community initiated institutions	Pudukadu	7	Village Forest Committee	0.158	7
		8	Keystone Production Center	0.583	2
		9	Irula Tribal Panchayat	0.356	6
Case B: Decentralised system that includes State initiated+ community initiated institutions	Anakati	10	Eco development Committee	0.158	7
		11	Village Forest Committee	0.158	7
		12	Keystone Production Center	0.395	3
Case C: Centralized FRM system	Thanrnadmund	13	Forest Department	0.001	13
Case C: Centralized FRM system	BelhathiKombei	14	Forest Department	0.001	13
Case C: Centralized FRM system	Nedungalkombei	15	Forest Department	0.001	13