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From Organisations to Roles: Rethinking Actor Classification in Bangladesh's Community-Based Forestry

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Abstract

Actor classifications in community forestry research, particularly those proposed by Schusser et al., typically assign each actor to a single societal subsystem: political, economic, or societal. However, development partners seldom limit their activities to one subsystem when designing and financing community forestry programmes. Analysis of four decades of social forestry and protected-area co-management in Bangladesh, supported by development partners, suggests that these classifications better apply to the roles an actor performs than to the actor itself. Structured interviews conducted in 2023 with 21 experts from government, development agencies, non-governmental organisations, and academia revealed that all participants identified at least one development partner as occupying two or more roles. Among those who mentioned the World Bank, 19 of 21 assigned it multiple roles, as did 15 of 17 for the United States Agency for International Development. In contrast, respondents perceived the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations almost exclusively as a provider of knowledge. Project documents corroborate the roles attributed to the four most frequently cited partners. The economic role took the form of contracted service provision or lending for return, while some government respondents described the partners' political role as a resource to be utilised rather than a constraint. Interpreting actor roles in this manner clarifies why development partners combine incentives with the provision of authoritative information, and demonstrates instances where a single organisation finances, supplies knowledge for, and benefits from a community forestry programme. The evidence presented is perceptual and exploratory; further comparative studies are necessary to test this proposition.

1. Introduction

Community-based forest management has emerged as the predominant approach to forest governance in the Global South, with documented outcomes in 643 cases across 51 countries (Hajjar et al. 2020). International organisations, development partners, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have served as the principal advocates of this model (Arts and De Koning 2017). In this context, development partners refer specifically to bilateral and multilateral agencies that provide official development assistance to recipient governments' forest sectors through grants, concessional loans, or technical cooperation; this definition excludes national NGOs, private philanthropy, and domestically funded programmes. The conditionality associated with external support has positioned communities at the centre of forest policy, particularly where state budgets have been insufficient (Schroeder 1999), resulting in a persistent state of dependence. When external support is withdrawn, participatory arrangements often collapse (Mustalahti 2009), and communities often accept restrictions on forest use in exchange for livelihood investments from development partners (Charnley 2023).

Studies employing the Actor-Centred Power (ACP) framework have demonstrated that external actors often shape community forestry to advance their own interests (Krott et al. 2014; Schusser et al. 2015). A systematic review of 55 ACP studies found that development partners and NGOs primarily exert influence by providing incentives and disseminating dominant information, whereas forest

administrations typically rely on coercion (Charmakar et al. 2024). Bangladesh has been among the most extensively studied contexts. Since the 1980s, funding from development partners has been associated with a series of shifts in community-based forest policy (Rahman et al. 2016). These partners have gained power through such policies (Sarker et al. 2017), and their aid allocation practices reflect both informal economic and political interests and formal development objectives (Rahman and Giessen 2017). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has gained access to forest policymaking by establishing alliances with non-governmental organisations (Rahman et al. 2018, 2021).

Clarifying the influence of external actors requires precise identification of the relevant actors. In comparative research on community forestry, Schusser et al. (2015, 2016) developed a theoretical classification that defines an actor as any entity possessing a specific interest and the capacity to exert influence. Political, economic, and societal actors are distinguished according to the societal subsystem in which they operate. International donor organisations, as previously defined development partners, are classified as political actors who provide funding to address problems; consultants are categorised as economic actors who operate on a contractual basis; and research institutions are identified as societal actors who contribute science-based knowledge. This classification facilitated cross-country comparisons of community forestry actors in five countries (Schusser et al. 2016).

Assigning each actor type to a single subsystem is effective for identification and comparison. However, challenges emerge when analysing a single organisation's activities over the duration of a programme. For example, a development partner may finance a social forestry project, engage experts to design benefit-sharing rules, and conduct assessments that inform subsequent policy, thereby performing roles across all three subsystems. Recent research has questioned the rigidity of actor categories within the ACP framework. Zhao et al. (2025) integrate ACP with Scharpf's actor typology to differentiate between individual and collective actors in communities, while Kimengsi et al. (2025) highlight that the framework overlooks factors such as process, time, and the alternation of dominant and subordinate positions within transactions. Schaefers et al. (2025) observe that actors employ different influence resources depending on the specific political issue. Nonetheless, these studies do not address whether a single organisation can simultaneously operate within multiple societal subsystems as defined by the actor classification.

This report proposes applying the classification to the specific roles an actor performs, rather than to the actor as an organisation. This approach preserves the subsystem logic established by Schusser et al. while enabling the documentation of role multiplicity where it occurs. The proposal is illustrated using the example of development partners in Bangladesh, where forest policy has evolved from social forestry to collaborative protected-area management (Chowdhury et al. 2009). Based on structured interviews with 21 experts from government, development agencies, NGOs, and academia, the study examines whether development partners are perceived as performing tasks across multiple subsystems and identifies which partners are associated with each subsystem.

2. Actor Classification and Role-Based Appraisal

2.1 Actor Classification in Community Forestry Research

The Actor-Centered Power (ACP) approach conceptualises power as a social relationship in which actor A alters actor B's behaviour without acknowledging B's will, distinguishing three elements of power: coercion, (dis)incentives, and dominant information (Krott et al. 2014). In empirical applications, researchers must determine which actors to observe. Schusser et al. (2015, 2016) addressed this by defining an actor as any entity with a distinct interest and the capacity to influence, encompassing both individuals and organisations such as development agencies or government bodies. In practice, identifying actors begins with mapping all stakeholders involved in or affected by community forestry initiatives. Researchers typically review project documents and legal frameworks and conduct preliminary interviews with local experts to compile a list of potential actors. Researchers then assess each actor's interests, formal or informal roles, and ability to influence decisions or outcomes. From a systems-theoretical perspective, actors are assigned to the political, economic, or societal subsystems based on their primary function in context. For example, politicians, public administrations, donor organisations, and associations are assigned to the political subsystem; entrepreneurs, consultants, and forest users to the economic subsystem; and research institutions and the media to the societal subsystem (Schusser et al. 2016). Table 1 presents the three definitions relevant to this report.

Table 1
Actor definitions of Schusser et al. (2016) and their role-based application

Subsystem	Actor type and definition (Schusser et al. 2016)	Role criterion applied to an organisation	Illustrative development-partner activity in Bangladesh
Political	International donor organisation: offers funds for solving problems	Offers funds for solving problems defined as public	Financing social forestry and co-management programmes linked to policy reform (Rahman et al. 2016)
Economic	Consultant: provides information, funds and management for another actor on a contractual basis	Provides information, funds or management on a contractual basis	Consultancy and service contracts within partner-funded projects (Rahman and Giessen 2017)
Societal	Research institution: provides science-based knowledge	Provides science-based knowledge	Sector assessments such as FAO (2011) and USAID (2016)

The classification was designed for a specific purpose: identifying comparable actors in community forestry cases across very different countries, so that their interests and power could be measured and related to outcomes (Schusser et al. 2015). For that purpose, a stable one-to-one assignment of actor type and subsystem is a strength.

2.2 A Role-based Appraisal

The challenge addressed in this section emerges when the analytical focus shifts from organisational types to individual organisations. The definitions in Table 1 encompass both activities and actors, such as offering funds for problem solving, providing services under contract, and supplying science-based knowledge. When a single organisation engages in multiple activities, the existing classification system does not capture this complexity. Therefore, the definitions apply to roles, conceptualised as sets of policy tasks an organisation performs within a specific policy domain and timeframe. Each role is classified within the subsystem that aligns with its tasks. Consequently, an organisation is characterised by the set of roles it undertakes, rather than by a single category.

Three criteria are derived directly from Table 1. An organisation assumes a political role when it offers funds to address publicly defined problems, such as by financing programmes or linking funding to policy changes. The economic role is characterised by providing information, funds, or management to another actor through contractual arrangements. The societal role involves supplying science-based knowledge, for instance, through assessments or research that subsequently inform policy. Development partners in Bangladesh exemplify all three roles: their projects preceded or accompanied community forestry reforms (Rahman et al. 2016), their implementing agencies operated via consultancy and service contracts (Rahman and Giessen 2017), and the sector assessments they commissioned provided the knowledge base for policy (FAO 2011; USAID 2016).

The role-based appraisal retains the original definitions and subsystem logic; only the classification unit changes. This approach also diverges from recent revisions of the Actor-Centered Perspective (ACP). Zhao et al. (2025) utilise Scharpf's (1997) typology to differentiate between individual and collective actors within communities, focusing on actor constitution rather than subsystem affiliation. Kimengsi et al. (2025) examine actors transitioning between dominant and subordinate positions within a single transaction, reflecting shifts in power relations rather than subsystem changes. Schaefers et al. (2025) demonstrate that the influence resources an actor uses vary across issues, supporting the view that roles are specific to particular issues and periods.

Recording roles instead of types is significant for power analysis because each role provides access to distinct sources of power. Funds allocated for problem solving serve as a basis for incentives, contracted services enable programme management, and science-based knowledge underpins dominant information (Krott et al. 2014). Charmakar et al. (2024) observed that development partners primarily rely on incentives and dominant information, a combination not readily explained by a single-subsystem classification. The relationship between role multiplicity and power is identified as a topic for future research. This report focuses on the preliminary question of whether development partners are perceived as performing roles across multiple subsystems.

3. Case and Methods

3.1. Development Partners in Bangladesh's Community-based Forestry

Bangladesh initiated social forestry in 1981 with assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Salam and Noguchi 2005). Subsequent programmes funded by development partners expanded participatory woodlot, strip, and agroforestry plantations. The Social Forestry Rules of 2004 formalised benefit-sharing arrangements with participants (GoB 2004; Muhammed et al. 2005). Beginning in 2004, USAID-supported projects introduced co-management of protected areas, which was subsequently recognised in the Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act 2012 and the Protected Area Management Rules 2017 (DPP 2004; GoB 2012; MoEF 2017; Sarker et al. 2017). More recently, the World Bank's Sustainable Forests and Livelihoods (SUFAL) project and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) have supported Sundarbans co-management, continuing this trend. Table 2 summarises the principal programmes of the four most active partners. Four decades of external financing from partners with diverse mandates position Bangladesh as a relevant case for examining whether a single partner assumes roles in multiple subsystems.

Table 2
Documented examples of the roles experts attributed to the main development partners in Bangladesh's forest sector

Partner	Political role	Economic role	Societal role
World Bank	SUFAL project (2018–2025) for collaborative forest management and benefits to forest-dependent communities; consultancies to review policy and regulatory reforms for tree growers and sawmills (World Bank 2018)	SUFAL financed through a US$175 million IDA credit with 30-year maturity and 5-year grace period (World Bank 2018)	SUFAL component on research and information systems; online wood-market information system (World Bank 2018)
USAID	CREL project (2012–2018) helped pass the Ecologically Critical Area Management Rules 2016 and the Protected Area Management Rules 2017 (Winrock International 2018; Rahman et al. 2021) USAID signed the Nishorgo grant agreements with the Economic Relations Division and stated a project objective to "develop policies conducive to improved PA management" (DPP 2004; USAID 2009).	CREL implemented by Winrock International with Tetra Tech/ARD, WorldFish and Bangladeshi NGOs, with US$36 million of USAID funding (USAID 2018)	Bangladesh Forest Inventory (from 2015), US$5.3 million, funded by USAID (GoB 2019). The Nishorgo publicity budget was about US$0.77 million and covered publications, campaigns and training (DPP 2004, Part B, pp. 31–32).
Asian Development Bank	Forestry Sector Project including policy reform; workshop with the Forest Department on the draft Social Forestry Rules (ADB 2008)	Upazila Afforestation and Nursery Development Project, Loan 956-BAN(SF), US$43.5 million (ADB 2001a)	Regional study on forest policy and institutional reforms, Bangladesh case study (ADB 2001b)
GIZ	Sundarbans Management Project feeding field experience into national policies (GIZ 2019)	Commissioned by BMZ; SMP II commission value EUR 4 million (GIZ 2022)	SMART patrol data and ecological monitoring for Forest Department decisions (GIZ 2019)
FAO (contrast)	–	–	Technical expertise for the USAID-funded Bangladesh Forest Inventory (FAO 2020)

3.2. Expert Selection

Experts were selected purposively from organisations with a formal role in financing, approving, implementing or researching community-based forestry. The sample covered five groups (Table 3): the Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD; seven respondents); other government bodies involved in aid

coordination, project approval or adjacent sectors (five); development partners active in the sector (four); a national forest conservation NGO (two); and universities with forestry programmes (three). Respondents held positions ranging from senior assistant director to chief conservator of forests, executive director and professor. Median professional experience was 27 years (range 4–45).

Table 3
Interviewed experts by group (n = 21)

Group	Organisation	Experience (years)
Forest Department	Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD)	41
	Bangladesh Forest Department	23
	Bangladesh Forest Department	22
	Bangladesh Forest Department	20
	Bangladesh Forest Department	30
	Bangladesh Forest Department	29
	Bangladesh Forest Department	31
Other government	Economic Relations Division (ERD), Ministry of Finance	4
	Planning Commission (Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Institutions Division)	4
	Department of Environment	27
	Department of Fisheries	6
	Bangladesh Forest Research Institute	30
Development partners	Food and Agriculture Organization for the United Nations (FAO)	44
	World Bank	31
	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	15
	GIZ Bangladesh	25
National NGO	Arannayk Foundation	29
	Arannayk Foundation	45
Academia	Khulna University	26
	Shahjalal University of Science and Technology	30
	University of Chittagong	24

Two authors have long professional involvement in Bangladesh's forest sector, and their networks helped identify respondents. Respondents may therefore have been drawn from a familiar circle. Covering all five groups and selecting by position was intended to limit this risk, but the authors made no independent check of the selection.

3.3. Expert Interviews

Twenty-one structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via video call between July and October 2023, with verbal consent obtained and anonymity assured. Three questions, based on the definitions in Table 1, inquired which donors or development partners had predominantly undertaken societal, economic, and political activities in the broader forestry and land-use sector over the past 20 years. Each question included examples: providing science-based knowledge and distributing information (societal); supplying information, funds, and management to another actor under contract, or utilising forest activities for economic return (economic); and providing funds to address problems or influence decision-making (political). These activities are referred to as policy tasks. Since the examples for the economic and political questions are broader than the definitions provided by Schusser et al. (2016), responses to these questions encompass a somewhat wider range of activities than the role criteria outlined in Section 2. The questions originally used the term "donors"; however, in accordance with respondents' preferences and the definition in Section 1, the term "development partners" is used throughout.

Two additional questions required respondents to assess the extent to which development partners influence forest policies and projects (none, partly, significantly, fully, or do not know). For 19 respondents, an additional question asked whether the resulting policy arrangements were beneficial or detrimental to the sector and requested justification. We documented responses and explanations in writing and, with verbal consent, audio-recorded them.

3.4. Analysis

For each role question, we recorded the organisations named by each expert. A role was considered attributed when at least one organisation was named; if none were named, no role was recorded. Organisation names were standardised, typographical errors were corrected, and repeated names within a single response were counted only once. We tabulated partner names by role, and for each partner, counted the number of experts who assigned it to two or more roles as an indicator of perceived role multiplicity. Responses to the influence question were compared with those to the political role question to assess consistency. We grouped explanations for the role and assessment questions by the activities described and used them to interpret the counts. The roles attributed to the four most frequently named partners were then compared with documented examples from project documents and published studies (Table 2). An analysis notebook reproduces every count reported below (Data availability). Claude (Anthropic) contributed to the literature search and to checking tallies against the coded data; the authors verified all outputs. Given the sample size, we applied no inferential statistics, and we interpret

the results as the perceptions of experienced practitioners rather than measures of actual partner activities.

4. Results

4.1. Roles Attributed to Development Partners

All 21 experts identified at least one development partner as participating in societal activities. Nineteen experts identified at least one partner involved in economic and political activities (Table 4). One Forest Department officer and one respondent from the Bangladesh Forest Research Institute did not identify any partner for economic activities. The two experts who did not identify a partner for political activities, one affiliated with a development partner and one from the NGO group, were also the only respondents who rated the partners' influence on forest policies and projects as none. Among the remaining experts, 12 rated this influence as partial and seven as significant. No expert selected full influence.

Table 4
Experts attributing each role to development partners, by expert group (n = 21)

Expert group	n	Societal	Economic	Political	Influence: none / partly / significantly
Forest Department	7	7	6	7	0 / 4 / 3
Other government	5	5	4	5	0 / 4 / 1
Development partners	4	4	4	3	1 / 2 / 1
NGO	2	2	2	1	1 / 1 / 0
Academia	3	3	3	3	0 / 1 / 2
Total	21	21	19	19	2 / 12 / 7

Values are numbers of experts naming at least one partner for each role. No expert chose "fully" or "don't know".

4.2. Roles Distribution among Development Partners

Experts identified 17 organisations; however, attributions concentrated on four primary partners (Table 5). The World Bank was identified by all 21 experts in at least one role, USAID by 17, the Asian Development Bank by 15, and GIZ by 13. Some organisations named, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Arannayk Foundation, do not meet the definition of development partners in Section 1, suggesting respondents applied the term with some flexibility.

All experts assigned at least one partner to two or more roles, and 16 out of 21 assigned at least one partner to all three roles. Among experts who identified a specific partner, the majority assigned it to multiple roles: 19 of 21 for the World Bank, 15 of 17 for USAID, 12 of 13 for GIZ, and 12 of 15 for the

Asian Development Bank. USAID and the World Bank were most frequently identified in all three roles, each by 11 experts. The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) was an exception; all seven experts who named FAO assigned it to the societal role, and only two assigned it to more than one role.

Table 5
Development partners named by experts, by role, and perceived role multiplicity

Partner	Named by (n = 21)	Societal	Economic	Political	Named in ≥ 2 roles	Named in all 3 roles
World Bank	21	20	15	16	19	11
USAID	17	15	14	14	15	11
ADB	15	11	10	11	12	5
GIZ	13	12	10	7	12	4
UNDP	9	9	5	4	6	3
FAO	7	7	2	1	2	1
JICA	5	4	3	2	3	1

Note: Ten further organisations were each named by one or two experts, mostly in the societal role.

USAID: United States Agency for International Development,

ADB: Asian Development Bank,

GIZ: German Agency for International Cooperation GmbH,

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme,

FAO: UN Food and Agriculture Organisation,

JICA: Japan International Cooperation Agency

Documentary evidence supports each role attributed to the four most frequently identified partners (Table 2). FAO, which experts assigned almost exclusively to the societal role, is documented primarily as a provider of technical expertise.

4.3. Expert Explanations of Roles

The data indicate that experts differentiate roles based on the activities performed rather than organisational identity. For example, a senior Forest Department officer assigned the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank to all three roles, providing distinct justifications for each: the banks have “[a] number of projects for generating and distributing science-based knowledge”; they are “doing business” because “they introduce themselves as a development partner but provide money with an interest rate”;

and “they impose their condition for providing the money”, which, according to the officer, influences policymaking (BFD).

Among the 19 respondents asked whether the resulting policy arrangements benefited the sector, 16 considered them positive, two negative, and one undecided. Explanations frequently referenced conditionality, thereby connecting these responses to the political role of development partners. Several respondents attributed specific policy outcomes to individual partners: for instance, “Social Forestry Rules 2004 is the outcome of [the Asian Development Bank]” (BFD), and “Development partners, especially [the World Bank], always impose some term conditions which the government must fulfil” (BFD). Another respondent characterised such conditions as standard practice, noting, “All development partners have some terms and conditions, but some are negotiable, and others are not.” This respondent provided an economic example: “Japan put the conditions as technology transfer, i.e., logistic material needs to be bought from Japan,” a requirement the respondent found acceptable (Economic Relations Division, ERD).

Some respondents characterised the political role of development partners as beneficial rather than coercive. One respondent noted that “Most policies have come to the board through pushing by the development partners,” who serve as “a helping hand to the BFD.” This respondent further suggested that “it could be a strategy of BFD that this push-through from the development partner helps to approve the policy process faster and more effectively,” referencing the Protected Area Rules (GIZ). Another respondent dismissed the term “influence” as inaccurate, contending that the government selects projects based on its own priorities, such as “huge foreign exchange issues and technology transfer” (BFD). A third respondent asserted that the conditions imposed by partners ultimately result in “a win-win situation” (BFD).

5. Discussion

5.1. Role Multiplicity as a Matter of Classification

The findings support the proposition that a single development partner can occupy multiple subsystems as distinguished by the actor classification of Schusser et al. (2016). All experts assigned at least one partner to two or more roles, and documentary evidence confirms each role for the four most frequently identified partners. The contrast with FAO demonstrates that experts did not assign roles indiscriminately; an agency with a technical mandate was observed and documented almost exclusively in the societal role. Societal attributions were more frequent than political ones (21 compared to 19 experts), even though the classification placed donor organisations in the political subsystem. A role-based interpretation clarifies Charmakar et al.’s (2024) finding that development partners operate through incentives and dominant information. The political role provides funding as incentive power, while the societal role supplies the knowledge underlying dominant information, as illustrated by USAID’s coalition building in Bangladesh (Rahman et al. 2018). Task-coded policy documents further support this distinction: among 177 forest-related policies published between 1990 and 2014, development partners

accounted for 18.6% of incentives, 6.3% of dominant information, and only 1.6% of coercion (Sarker and Rahman, unpublished manuscript).

5.2. Two Forms of the Economic Role

The economic role manifested in two distinct forms. GIZ operates on commission from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), aligning most closely with the contract-based definition of Schusser et al. (2016). The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank were identified as economic actors due to their practice of lending at interest, which aligns with the broader concept of economic return addressed in this study. USAID occupies an intermediate position, as it contracts implementing organisations rather than being contracted itself. Applying the classification to organisations thus necessitates a clearer criterion for the economic role, specifically one that differentiates providers of contracted services from financiers seeking a return. The informal interests in budgets and staff, as identified by Rahman and Giessen (2017), may be most apparent in the latter form.

5.3. Recipient Agency

Some respondents described the partners' political role as a resource actively utilised by the Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD), for example, to expedite approval of the Protected Area Rules. This perspective aligns with evidence that community forestry policies in Bangladesh have strengthened state agencies in conjunction with development partners (Giessen et al. 2016; Sarker et al. 2017). Consequently, role multiplicity is relational: a partner's political role may advance the interests of the recipient bureaucracy as well as its own, reflecting the alternation of dominant and subordinate positions described by Kimengsi et al. (2025). For community forestry research, this implies that the organisation financing a programme may also shape its knowledge base and benefit from its implementation.

5.4. Limitations

The evidence is based on perceptions gathered from 21 structured interviews conducted in a single country. Each development partner was represented by one respondent, whose perspective on their own organisation may differ from external viewpoints. The questions presupposed donor involvement in each activity, and the examples provided for the economic and political roles extended beyond the original definitions. Some attributions, particularly those concerning the Asian Development Bank, may pertain to programmes predating the 20-year study window. Employing process tracing of individual programmes and conducting comparative analyses with countries examined by Schusser et al. (2016) would enable a more rigorous evaluation of the proposition.

6. Conclusion

This report proposes that the actor classification of Schusser et al. (2016) is applicable to the roles an organisation performs, rather than to the organisation itself, and evidence from Bangladesh's community-based forestry supports this proposition. Experienced practitioners assigned every major

lending and bilateral partner to more than one subsystem, most frequently the World Bank and USAID, with documentary sources confirming the roles attributed to the four most frequently identified partners. The case of FAO, observed almost exclusively as a provider of knowledge, demonstrates that role multiplicity characterises specific partners rather than development partners as a whole.

The role-based interpretation preserves the original classification and introduces two refinements. First, the economic role requires a criterion that distinguishes contracted service provision from lending for return. Second, role multiplicity should be analysed relationally, as recipient agencies may leverage a partner's political role for their own objectives. In community forestry research, documenting roles rather than organisational types reveals when a single organisation finances a programme, provides its knowledge base, and benefits from its implementation. Comparative studies across the countries where the classification was developed are necessary to determine the prevalence of such role concentration and its impact on community forestry outcomes.

Declarations

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Competing Interests

The Bangladesh Forest Department funded data collection through a research grant from the Sustainable Forests and Livelihoods (SUFAL) Project, which is financed by the World Bank, one of the development partners analysed here (Table 2). The funder had no role in the design, analysis or interpretation of the study. M.S. Rahman is employed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The authors have no other competing interests to declare.

All authors confirm that the data and conclusions presented reflect the honest views of the research team and have not been influenced by any external party.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Respondents gave verbal informed consent and were assured of anonymity.

Data Availability

The anonymised coded interview data and the notebook that reproduces all counts reported in this article are openly available on GitHub after acceptance of this report. Interview recordings, transcripts and respondent details are not shared to protect the anonymity assured to respondents.

Author Contributions

P.K. Sarker: Writing– review & editing, Writing– original draft, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualisation; M.N. Sadath: Writing– review & editing, Validation; L. Giessen: Writing–review & editing; M.S. Rahman: Writing– review & editing, Funding acquisition.

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