

**Research Paper on**  
**Forestry and media- Bridging gap between policy and practice**



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**For**

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# Forestry and media- Bridging gap between policy and practice

By Shafqat Munir

## *Abstract*

*The debate of misappropriation of forests and declining forest cover in Pakistan is not new. Those who are responsible for this painful situation are not hidden as media do report such incidents. Since forestry is a serious issue for the forest communities, it is an issue of community interest for media catering to the forest communities. In part of NWFP, local newspapers do cover stories on forestry related problems. But despite sufficient media coverage of these issues, forestry remains behind in policy makers priorities.*

*This causes a concern among communities when they find that policy makers in provincial and federal capitals are not serious in combating growing deforestation, their operators at local level find it a way to earn millions at the cost of environment and livelihoods of the millions of the people living in remote parts of NWFP. In such a situation, media that too a regional ones becomes tool to raise voice too some extent.*

*This paper attempts to analyze contents of regional media with its comparison with national media on forestry issues. This paper traces whether regional media do have any impact on the policy making and if not what are the causes of this gap. This paper also suggests for introduction of community media to cater to the information needs of the forest communities in NWFP.*

## 1. Forests and perceptions

Forests are perceived differently in parts of Pakistan. A majority of people in urban low land areas see forests as product of nature governed by timber mafia for multiple purposes. A class of certain conscious people see it as an ecological and environmental issue. Only a few believe that it has to do with livelihoods and living of the communities associated with forests. However, communities particularly the mountain people feel themselves associated with forests linking their living and livelihoods to forests. Due to different perceptions of forest management, there seems to be a continued conflict among real stakeholders of forestry sector as various studies on forests in Pakistan show lack of participatory forests management and unsustainable use of forests as the bone of contention between the communities and forest managers.

One perception is that forests across the world are known for accommodating communities in terms of securing their subsistent livelihoods thus addressing the issue of poverty to some extent; and hence generate a debate whether or not the dependence of these communities over forest resources cost heavily on the environment and conservation. Forests resources directly contribute to the livelihood of 90 percent of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty and indirectly support the natural environment that nourishes agriculture and the food supplies of nearly half the population of the developing world.



In Pakistan, North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) is the poorest province with a rural poverty estimate of 44.3 percent. Fortunately it contains 40 percent of the natural forests of Pakistan. Hence the forest policies of Pakistan and especially those of

NWFP have a direct impact on local livelihoods. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. Understanding the interface between local livelihood and state policies is of vital importance for developing sustainable local natural resource management. State policies and regional and international institutions impact sustainable livelihood practices and strategies of local communities and institutions developed by them, though informally, due to national economic priorities, market forces and processes of globalisation/global changes. On the other hand, these institutionally shaped livelihood strategies have an impact on the sustainability of resource use. Taken together, policies and institutions form the context within which the individuals and households construct and adapt livelihood strategies. They determine the freedom with which the people have to transform their assets into livelihood outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Another perception is that in countries such as Pakistan, policies and institutions generally tend to discriminate against those who have few assets (social as well as economic) and are disadvantageously poor people. Forest policies and laws enacted from time to time to implement these policies are not an exception to this general rule. Such discriminatory policies and institutions not only exclude the marginalized groups such as women and children, but also lead to unsustainable natural resources management. Due to few choices available, the poor are forced to adopt short-term survival strategies and unsustainable natural resources management practices.<sup>2</sup>

All public perceptions regarding forests revolve around four fundamental functions forests play in Pakistan. They include protection of natural environment, regulation of atmospheric conditions, production of goods and to ensure a sustainable livelihood of people dependent directly or indirectly dependent on forests by means of subsistence agriculture, animal husbandry, and logging. But again various studies, while critically analysing the balance between sustainable production and consumption of forests, show that we have neither been conserving forests nor securing the livelihood of forest communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Suleri, Abid Qaiyum: Poverty alleviation and sectoral policies: Putting the people at the centre of development, SDPI

<sup>2</sup> ibd

## **2. A bird's eye view of Forest Policies Perception**

Forest policies in Pakistan date back to the British colonial rule. We have been pursuing or having reflecting upon our forest policies inherited from the British rule. First ever forest policy in Pakistan came in 1955 followed by a series of revisions and updates in 1962, 1975, 1980, and in 1988. In 1991, forestry sector was dealt with as part of the National Agricultural Policy. If we look at the consequences of the forest policies adopted till 1992, we see that the policing powers to the forest department under the Forestry Sector Master Plan (FSMP) 1993 produced far reaching results both in terms of better forests conservation due to restrictions on logging and in terms of lack of participation by the communities who felt alienated due to policing control of forest department over the indigenous communities rights over forests. This situation led to public apathy towards forests thus minimizing people's participation in plantation and management of forests by ignoring social and cultural aspects of forest management. FSMP 1993 literally shrunk space of most of the stakeholders in securing their sustainable livelihood. An institutional reform process under NWFP forest sector project, led to formation of a new forest policy in 1999 for the province.

A critical analysis of policy perceptions says almost all the forest policies in the past have viewed communities as 'prime threat' to forests and they have attempted to exclude people and communities from decision-making, thus giving this role to government alone. Researchers believe that this approach badly impacts sustainability of livelihood strategies of local people and increases vulnerability of the marginalized sections of the forest communities. They are of the view that this approach also leads to unsustainable management of natural resources and forest depletion.

If we look at this situation, we conclude that forest resources have literally been made inaccessible for the poor and marginalized sections of the communities, while allowing access to the powerful people in connivance with 'timbre mafia'. The researchers felt that this dichotomy has created the feelings of lack of ownership among the marginalized sections not only adding to their miseries but also encouraged them to adapt unfair means to meet their fair requirements of forest resources.

As per law making spirit in Pakistan the Forests Act 1927, coupled with the NWFP Hazara Forest Act 1936, starts with denial of communities' right over forests and provides no incentive for participatory management of natural resources. This Act does not even recognize that lack of stakeholders' participation leads towards their indifferent attitude and lack of interest in forest management with the feelings of exclusion. Even NWFP Forests Ordinance 2002 adopts the same approach as it allows uniformed and armed forest management staff with increased police powers. Such powers contradict the forest policy's principles of 'participatory social forestry'.

The exclusion of communities from any forestry sector project speaks of policy makers' priorities as they only consult with hand-picked consultants who design policies and frame laws that minus the communities. Thus the policies become strong on technical consideration but lack the required flexibility to make them work in real life situation presenting multiple sets of actors and factors. Consequently, the stakeholders often find themselves in a situation where state policies either do not support or have harmful effects on their livelihood strategies.

### **3. Stakeholders' perceptions of forest management policies at a roundtable**

Stakeholders at a roundtable discussion in Mingora in 2004 through a unanimous resolution gave their perception of forests conservation saying forests could be protected by eliminating political interference in forest department and by increasing the number of posts of forest guards to be appointed from within local communities.

The participants at the roundtable included officials from forest department, local government, NGOs and CBOs, forest owners and users, lawyers and researchers. The roundtable provided a chance to all stakeholders to discuss issues relating to forestry and its conservation.<sup>3</sup>

The participants of the roundtable were briefed about the research NCCR North-South has been conducting in Swat and other forests areas in NWFP. The roundtable proved to be a multi-stakeholders' place for dialogue of unique kind. The perceptions

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<sup>3</sup> The roundtable discussion on "Community Participation in Forest Management" was organized by Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights (JDHR) and NCCR North-South Zurich Switzerland at a local hotel in Mingora in 2004

expressed by the participants at the roundtable discussion necessitated the need for several such consultations and dialogues among the stakeholders so that there could be some consensus on forest conservation and better management in the interest of eco system, environment and the forests communities.

Forest officials were of the view that communities and owners of forests should fulfill their responsibilities to check smuggling of wood and timber. The DFO Swat, Hashim Khan, cleared the position of forest department. He totally denied the involvement of forest department officials in logging and wood smuggling. The deficiency of forest staff (forest guards) coupled with very less budget allocation for mobility, totally handicapped the performance of forest department. He also held local influential, district government, provincial and federal governments responsible for negatively influencing officials of forest department in performing their right duties. The antique business and presence of out numbered furniture makers in Swat are also a threat to forest resources, because their main raw material is wood. Hashim said due to lack of support and insufficient staff, they would remain ineffective in combating unsustainable use of forests. He said that there is a need to reduce reliance of the communities on wood as fuel and commercial commodity.<sup>4</sup>

The representatives from communities and NGOs complained against the officials of the forest department saying they were themselves involved with the wood smugglers and they are the one who let them continue with the cutting of trees. They said unless the communities are given alternate energy resources, their reliance on forests could not be curtailed. They demanded that local NGOs/CBOs and other organizations should be taken on board to protect forests. They called for ending bureaucratic practices in the joint forest management committee.

Dr. Inam Ur Rahim of Hujra, an NGO pointed out that right of ownership in forests is still not yet clear, due to which the sense of ownership is still very low among the community. That is why people are not generally prepared to protect and manage forests at their own. Another reason is that the dependency of people on inland and out country migration, also flared up the desires of community for only male heirs.

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<sup>4</sup> The News International

Another drawback is the stagnant role of our traditional institutions in forest conservation. Which if mobilized could play a vital role due to its pivotal position in our society. According to him the people are expecting immediate results from projects, while mostly their results appear in longer term. He said in such a situation only civil society organizations could effectively coordinate among all the stakeholders.

Jamshed Khan, vice president of Sarhad Awami Forest Ittihad (SAFI), also emphasized the need to enhance the people's sense of ownership. He criticized the process for formulation of the forest policy, and suggested that there is still a need to review the whole process for some necessary amendments. The implementation process of forest rules is very slow. He said with the passage of time the sense among the people for forest protection has been increased. He said deficiency of forest staff especially forest guards is also a reason behind poor protection of forests. He said the new concept of joint forest management (JFM), seems to be less effective and acceptable to the community as the main role in this system has been assigned to the District Forest Officers (DFOs), rather than the community. The DFOs will not be responsible only for the establishment of JFMs but they are also empowered enough to dissolve the committees without the consent of any other members.

Malik Iqbal, Nazim Union Council Utror said that the negligence on the part of the forest department officials encouraged timber Mafia to damage local resources. He said to counter this situation, the local people have established their own initiated forest protection committees, which have been helping in reducing instances of smuggling of trees. He suggested introducing fuel gas as an alternative to fire wood among forest communities. Adding to this suggestion, another participant from the community pointed out that the total estimated expenses on Mingora to Kalam gas pipeline is approximately around Rs 960 million, while only in Kalam tehsil people use fuel wood worth around Rs 300 million in one year. So if the government extends the gas pipeline to Kalam tehsil, the whole cost of installation would be covered within a time of three years.

Population explosion was cited as one of the reasons for rapid deforestation. A participant said when there would be no jobs and productive activities for the youth,



they would use forest as their source of fuel and income by unsustainable logging. Due to the inappropriate farming practices, the existing agriculture land production in mountainous areas is on decline and the people are turning rangelands and forest as well into agriculture lands. Because of the virginity of these new lands the farmers are receiving bumper crops with very little efforts, said a participant.

These perceptions of the stakeholders were expressed at the first of its kind roundtable discussion and were covered by Pakistan's leading English national daily newspaper The News. This shows that media do give important to issues of public interest but only when it is mobilized in an organized and professional manner. Since this roundtable was organized by a media think tank and research group 'Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights (JDHR), the issues raised at the roundtable and portrayed professionally in a media format got prominence in the leading newspaper that has an outreach at the highest policy level.

If we look at the perceptions expressed by the communities and experts, we can easily conclude that the forest policies and practices do not meet the expectations of the forest communities who in turn are forced to utilise the natural resources unsustainably to secure their livelihoods and meet their fuel needs.

Again The News International carried Dr Abid Qayyum Suleri's policy article suggesting the policy makers to put the people at the centre of development. Dr Suleri proposed that while formulating and implementing policies, the policy makers should:

- start with an analysis of the people's livelihood and how these have been changing over time
- involve the people and respect their views
- focus on impact of the proposed policy and institutional arrangements on the people/households and the dimensions of poverty they define
- have enough flexibility in their proposed interventions to promote the agenda of the poor (a key step is political participation by poor people themselves)
- work to support the people to achieve their own livelihood goals, though taking into account considerations regarding sustainability

Further building an argument while pinpointing gap between the policy and the practice, communities and the policy make, one would conclude that sustainable livelihood would be secured only if policies work with the people in a way that they congruent with their current livelihood strategies, social environment and ability to adapt. The policy makers must understand that income generation and employment opportunities are as important as the revenue collection so they should involve communities in any policy formulation and implementation, particularly in the forestry sector.

#### **4. Perceptions about deforestation in Pakistan- IRIN's news story**

During the past century the “Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation” has dominated mainstream views concerning natural resource management in the Himalayan region. The main tenet of this theory is that increased human population has resulted in increased demands for natural resources, leading to severe resource depletion, especially deforestation. A study using local data on fuel wood consumption and timber extraction from Basho Valley in northern Pakistan investigates whether such general perceptions regarding forest depletion can be supported by an empirical case study. The results of this study indicate that local fuel wood collection is not the main cause of deforestation. Instead, the estimated deforestation of about 30% during the last 3 decades is primarily due to commercial harvesting and mismanagement by the government. A large amount of dead fallen wood and green trees was sold by the government or was taken out by a “timber mafia” that emerged during the main period of commercial harvesting in the 1970s and 80s. Thus, it is commercial and illegal harvesting that has left the forest in such a depleted state that it can no longer withstand the pressure from local use.<sup>5</sup>

IRIN, a news service of the United Nations has also carried a cover story on deforestation in Pakistan. The indepth IRIN story talks of timber mafia that is really harming the forests in Pakistan.

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<sup>5</sup> Ali, Jawad, Benjaminsen, Tor A: Fuel wood, *Timber and Deforestation in the Himalayas*-Issn: 0276-4741 Journal: Mountain Research and Development Volume: 24 Issue: 4

IRIN in its lead story released with Swat dateline on 17 September 2002 quoted several interviews of the people from mountain communities who heavily depend on forests. These interviews show the reality of forest communities of Himalayas in Pakistan. One Halima Bibi, 60, who walks for kilometres through northern Pakistan's Himalayan foothills each day to collect firewood, says though this has been her daily chore but it is getting harder each year as forest cover in Pakistan shrinks at an alarming rate. “We have neither a job, nor a business. This jungle (forest) is all what we have,” Bibi told IRIN in her small two-roomed mud house, perched on a slope overlooking the picturesque Ayubia National Park - a government-protected forest.



Timber for construction and fuel is leading to widespread deforestation throughout Pakistan.

(Photo: [IRIN](#))

Her village, Tohidabad, nestled in between the famous hill resorts of Ayubia and Nathiagali, 50 km north of the Pakistani capital, Islamabad, is typical of hill settlements where poverty is widespread. Men travel to the plains or to the Gulf for menial jobs, and women stay behind to maintain and manage their homes, depending mostly on what the forest and its natural resources offer them.

“But the forest is disappearing fast, threatening the lives and livelihood of thousands of people,” field assistant for World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Sabiha Zaman, told IRIN. Experts and conservationists also agree.

Despite its huge potential, forest cover in Pakistan is estimated at around five percent of the surface area. This is coupled with the fact that the rate of depletion and degradation is also high. “In the last 20 years, 48 percent of the forest area in Kashmir has been reduced to 43 percent,” a WWF adviser, Ashiq Ahmed Khan, told IRIN in Saidu Sharif, a town in the historic Swat Valley, 110 km north of Islamabad. “We have also lost 44 percent of the area of coniferous zone.”

Trees, apart from being an essential natural resource for any country, are crucial also for the survival of mountain and forest communities. They provide wood - both for personal consumption and commercial use - plants, fruits, shrubs and pasture.

“It is the poorest communities which rely on forest resources,” Zabta Khan Shinwari, a leading ethno-botanist with WWF, told IRIN. “If the forest degrades, the poorest will suffer most.” Shinwari is leading a team of scientists exploring and promoting ways that will allow communities to exploit the forest resources in a sustainable way. Abdul Latif Rao, the national project manager of the Mountain Areas Conservancy Project of The World Conservation Union, told IRIN that the best strategy was first to halt deforestation and later initiate reforestation by actively involving the communities dependent on the resource. “The depletion of forests in Pakistan is quite alarming,” he said. “If the situation does not change soon they will disappear in 20 to 25 years.” He said environmentalists and conservationists were all concerned about the situation, because a vast majority of the Pakistani population was rural. Of the latter many were directly or indirectly involved with forests. “Sustainable livelihood programmes are needed. You cannot order them to stop cutting down trees, they have to survive,” Rao noted.

In Ayubia national park area, the WWF has distributed at subsidised rates special stoves, which consume only half the quantity of wood as traditional stoves, but producing the same amount of heat. The stove suffices not only for cooking but also warms dwellings during freezing winter temperatures. It was designed by another forestry project run by the Aga Khan Foundation. “My fuel wood consumption has come down by half,” Nisakat, another villager, told IRIN. Reducing wood consumption by half it means that villagers can pay more attention to exploring other livelihoods. The national park in Ayubia has an area of 8,500 acres with about 42,000 people dependent on it. According to official estimates, each household consumes 11.1 mt of fuel wood and 13.6 mt of fodder annually.<sup>6</sup>

If we analyse this news item released by IRIN based on perceptions of stakeholders, we would subscribe to what the experts point out that deforestation has been caused

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<sup>6</sup> IRIN, a news service of the United Nations news story on deforestation in Pakistan, 17 September 2002

by rapid population growth, illegal felling of trees, unsustainable use of natural resources and half-hearted efforts to effect reforestation. Communities alone can not be blamed for deforestation as forests are as important for their future generations as they are now for them. For villagers like Nisakat and Halima Bibi, each tree is precious. "If not for me, for my children, because otherwise the next generation will be in trouble," Bibi said.

This fact is also admitted by Muhammad Iqbal, the deputy secretary of the food and agriculture department of the Northern Areas of Pakistan, while talking to IRIN that the organised vested interests or commercial exploiters had done the worst damage to the forests. "For the poor people, forests are the main sources of income, and that is why they sometimes cut trees discreetly and illegally," he said, noting that such people had only a minor responsibility for the deteriorating situation. "We need social forestry, which is for the people and by the people."

It seems that inappropriate government policies had encouraged those with vested interests to fell more trees each year. Forest conservationists say that this had encouraged the 'timber mafia' to cut down even more forest believing that it could get away with it by using political clout. Newspaper report say though some timber mafia are fined by the government but after paying a little amount of fine they get away with the responsibility of unsustainable logging of forests. Now it is on their sweet will to continue with the practice of logging.

## **5. The coverage of forestry issues by leading national English dailies The News and Dawn**

The News and Dawn are two national English dailies with wider circulation and repute in the policy makers. Both appear from Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi with their special and wider editions for NWFP. They are the biggest in circulation and influence over government policies. Environmental issues do carry space in these leading newspapers. Opinion pieces, analytical views and indepth reports are published by these two dailies on environment which also include forestry sector. News coverage on forests mostly remains on tree plantation campaigns and rarely on the timber smuggling if it is really big news. So for this content analysis, articles and

pieces from both The News and Dawn have been selected. These articles base their arguments based on some research work or quote any study.

### **5.1 The News, national English Daily**

On May 16, 2004 The News published an article by Raza Rahman Khan Qazi on “The Social Shocks of Deforestation” saying dangerously increasing levels of deforestation in NWFP are a result of a combination of factors owing to the British Forest Department legacy, and the influx of Afghan refugees in the province.

According to a study, only 12% of the original tree-cover remains in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). The underlying reason for this is uncontrolled deforestation. Stress on the environment, and on forest cover in particular, is amplifying social problems and creating both an ecological and human crisis in the NWFP, observed the study conducted by Richard Matthew, professor of environmental policy and international relations at the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of California, Irvine and certain other researchers.

The focus of the study was to understand how a number of social shocks have contributed to the rapid loss of forest cover. In turn, the researchers sought to find out if these environmental problems were, in fact, a source of social instability in the region. The researchers conducted 70 one-on-one interviews over a period of one month, and also held town meetings to discuss how the people of the area experienced the changes in their environment. Then the researchers consulted government and non-government documents to correlate the information they gathered from the residents.

The article appeared in The News quoted the study as saying that influx of millions of Afghan refugees invariably placed enormous stresses on the age-old equilibrium between humans and the natural resources. Extra livestock put a strain on grazing land, and because everyone, both resident and refugee, relied on wood and biomass for heating and cooking, they began to cut down trees. In spite of a carefully conceived forest management plan, the legacy of the British colonial period has dominated since 1947. According to Matthew, forest department was set up

specifically to cut down trees as quickly as possible, and this point of view was all the people of the area knew about timber superintendence. Yet another social consequence of the catastrophic dwindling of natural resources is inevitable disputes over rights to the trees that were left, and today the ownership of about 90% of the remaining trees is in dispute. Some people are going to the courts to settle their claims, competing with an old tribal system and causing even further confusion.<sup>7</sup>

The News article quoting Mathew said logging has, in fact, been outlawed since 1993, but it seems that many trees are just ‘blow down’, bringing unwarranted ‘windfall’ profits to the unscrupulous elements. The article quoting the research suggests that despite the myth that wood keeps you warmer and food tastes better when cooked over wood, people could agree to alternative fuel sources owing to the growing depleting of forests. Exploiting the hydro power potential in the mountainous areas could generate power and employment reducing reliance of the communities on forests.

A story published in The News highlights concerns of the Sarhad Conservation Network (SCN) over cutting of trees to widen the under-construction roads in Swat and Lower Dir districts and Malakand Agency. The news report based on a press release by SCN said during a recent visit, it was found that trees were being felled to widen Chakdarra-Kalam, Malakand-Chakdarra and Chakdarra-Dir roads. A number of trees, some of which were 100 years old, have been marked for felling almost 100 yards on both sides of the alignment.

The SCN felt road building shouldn’t be done at the expense of the environment, as cutting of grand old trees would impact negatively on the natural habitat and biodiversity. It opposed the construction of a four-lane highway in Swat and Dir and said a two-lane road would be cost-effective and doable. It accused the National Highway Authority and other big companies of flouting the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act (PEPA) 1997, Environmental Impact Assessment (EPA) that is mandatory on all official or private development schemes. “It is time the

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<sup>7</sup> Raza Rahman Khan Qazi: *The Social Shocks of Deforestation* - The News, May 16, 2004

Environmental Tribunals are activated and legal notice issued to stop such activities for timely remedy,” it stressed.<sup>8</sup>

An investigative story entitled “Rs 2bn lost in illegal timber trade” by Amjad Warraich with Lahore dateline says the timber mafia in connivance with ‘corrupt officials’ of the Forest Department has allegedly chopped up green trees worth Rs 2 billion in Multan Circle, a plain in Southern Punjab province during the last one and a half years. So far the higher authorities and anti-corruption establishment have not been able to lay hand on the corrupt due to their political affiliations and successful attempt to temper with the enumeration record of the Forest Department.<sup>9</sup>

How the anti-corruption establishment is helpless before these elements is evident from the fact that its Sahiwal Circle failed to punish the forest department staff for allegedly assisting the timber mafia play havoc with the green trees despite a reference from district police officer and several reminders from chief conservator of forest, Southern Zone, Multan to stop this practice. This indifferent attitude has demoralized those who brought the timber scandal into the notice of former Secretary Forest Sajid Hussain Chattha and those who conducted an initial enquiry into the complaint and found massive irregularities in cutting of trees in Sahiwal Division of the Forest Department. According to rules only dead, dry and fallen trees on canals and roads can be auctioned and removed. The Punjab cabinet has imposed a ban on removal of green trees. In case it is necessary, it can’t be done without prior approval of the higher authorities.

The investigative story of The News reveals the modus operandi to flout these rules saying Forest Department field staff colludes with the timber contractors to let them remove green trees under the cover of auctioned dead, dry and fallen trees. After removal of the trees the department officials allegedly temper with the record of enumeration and trees girth to show minimum value of the removed trees. Then a bogus action is taken and compensation is imposed on irrelevant persons such as workers of contractors, shepherds and poor villagers. In this way, the officials prove themselves efficient and dutiful instead of accomplices of the timber mafia. They are

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<sup>8</sup> The News August 23, 2004 with Peshawar dateline

<sup>9</sup> The News on October 09, 2004



so successful that they not only save their own skin but also succeed in getting awards and appreciation certificates from the higher authorities.<sup>10</sup>

In this high-hitting story The News quoting a careful estimate, claims that the timber mafia in collusion with a 'gang of Forest Department officials' has allegedly removed around 75,000 green trees worth Rs 2 billion under the cover of removing dead, dry and fallen trees. A citizen from Sahiwal area brought these malpractices into the notice of former secretary Forest Department Punjab who appointed a four-member inquiry committee. The committee raided the site and in its initial survey found the damage of 200 green trees within one kilometre distance on one side of the Pakpatan Canal. It found that green trees were being cut ruthlessly in connivance with the staff during felling process. The committee also raided a timber store owned by a contractor, Ashiq, and found it full of green trees, the news story said.

On the recommendation of the inquiry committee, the authorities suspended DFO Sahiwal, SDFO Multan, Block Officer and Forest Guard to check this illegal business in Sahiwal division. A complete ban was also imposed on all linear felling in Punjab and the opening of felling process in selected districts was made subject to the approval of Administrative Department.

## **5.2 Dawn, national English daily**

A news story by Intikhab Amir with Peshawar dateline urged the need to formulate new forest rules. The news story quoting official sources is critical of the NWFP government's failure in notifying draft rules of the Forest Ordinance, 2002, even after two years of the promulgation of the new law that repealed four of the previous legislative pieces governing forest areas in NWFP.<sup>11</sup>

Procedural bottlenecks and apathy on the part of the official circles concerned did not let the draft rules to take effect, said the sources. "Process to underline rules of the ordinance had been on for the last five years (well before the ordinance was promulgated in June 2002), but the department has not been able to notify the draft rules even after two years of the promulgation of the new law," said Mohammed Riaz,

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<sup>10</sup> The News on October 09, 2004

<sup>11</sup> Dawn August 4, 2004

a representative of the Sungi Development Foundation - a non-governmental organization carrying out activities in the forestry sector.<sup>12</sup>

NWFP Environment Department Secretary Noorul Haq, confirming that the rules have not yet been notified, said: “Almost all of the new draft rules have been prepared but could not be notified because of procedural requirements.” Some of the new rules, he maintained, were under process with the law department, NWFP. Experts, however, believed that the non-formulation of the new rules had hindered 100 percent application of the Forest Ordinance, 2002, that repealed the Forest Act, 1927, the Hazara Forest Act, 1936, the Kohat Mazri Control Act, 1953, and the North-West Frontier Province (Sale and Sawing of Timber) Act, 1996. Though the new law covered most of the subjects that existed under the previous laws, it also contained some new provisions. “Rules provide procedures to apply a law if it is not self-explanatory, hence, such provisions and chapters that have been covered under the new ordinance cannot become applicable till relevant rules are notified,” said the expert.

Dawn in this story has raised the issue framing and implementation rules to make the law in effect. This is a serious issue and the newspaper has highlighted the importance of this issue through a news story quoting various stakeholders.

Daily Dawn in a news story on August 4, 2004 raises the issue of deforestation in NWFP . The newspaper’s story says reckless felling of trees in the NWFP has led forest conservators in the province to recently declare approximately 20 plants as threatened species. Unfortunately, the NWFP, which contains 40 percent of the country's forests, has one of the highest deforestation rates in the world.

A number of factors - high population growth rate, underdevelopment and the greed of the timber mafia - have combined to give rise to a set of circumstances which, if not reversed soon, could lead to wanton deforestation. For, not only will the indiscriminate felling of thousands of valuable trees and plants result in an environmental calamity, especially when reforestation efforts are not keeping pace

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<sup>12</sup> Intikhab Amir: NWFP yet to formulate new forest rules Dawn, August 4, 2004

with the rate at which the land is being denuded of its forest cover, the social cost, too, would be incalculable.<sup>13</sup>

The poor who live near the wooded areas and whose livelihood depends largely on forest resources would be the most affected. Deprived of their means of livelihood, they would then have to do without the many benefits of forested land. Dawn suggests that besides enforcing strict curbs on the activities of the timber mafia, what is also required is the participation of people in conservation efforts that should include reforestation drives. Moreover, the implications of long-term exploitation must be brought home to the poor, mostly uneducated people living in these areas, and sources of energy and fuel other than wood must be explored and made available to them. That would entail commitment and political will on the part of the administration as it embarks on a programme of sustainable development in these areas. A boost can be given to such efforts by encouraging research on various plants, many with medicinal properties, that are found in the north and that could generate interest in environmental conservation - a subject in need of urgent national attention.

## **6. Coverage of forestry issues in regional newspapers of NWFP**

As national newspapers generally cover broader issues of forestry sector, the regional newspapers in NWFP carry news stories ranging from the launch of plantation drive in different areas of the province and tribal areas to deforestation and timber smuggling.

### **6.1 Mashriq Urdu daily from Peshawar**

Mashriq is an Urdu language daily newspaper which appears from Peshawar. Some years back Mashriq used to be one of the biggest national dailies of Pakistan and now it serves as the biggest provincial newspaper which is considered influential both in public and private sectors. A total of 14 items were selected which cover a range of topics involving forests related issues.

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<sup>13</sup> Dawn, 4<sup>th</sup> August 2004

### **6.1.1 Timber as fuel and demand for alternate**

Forests are being widely used as fuel timber in most of the highland areas, particularly where forests are available. Incumbents of these areas use timber as fuel throughout the year. They store timber for harsh winter and snow seasons. Existing Research and the outcome of focal group discussions by various organizations and a roundtable organized by the Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights (JDHR) and the NCCR show that the inhabitants' dependence on forests for fuel wood could be largely curtailed if they are provided with alternate source of fuel and energy. These communities could switch over to new fuel options.

Media did highlight the issue of alternate source of fuel and energy. Daily Mashriq on February 12, 2004 with Barikot dateline writes that Barikot tehsil, which is called gateway to Swat and is one the most beautiful places in the picturesque Swat Valley, has ironically been neglected during all eras. A large portion of the gas pipeline for Swat town is passing through this tehsil but the area has not been supplied with gas, which is leading to excessive use of precious timber as fuel wood by locals. In this process, forests are being damaged badly and the beauty of the whole Swat Valley is at stake. Locals have urged the authorities concerned to supply gas to Barikot area to save the forest cover.<sup>14</sup>

The newspaper from Mansehra published a demand by a member of the National Assembly Sardar Shah Jahan in which he had demanded provision of gas facility to Mansehra, saying that forest was not only being destroyed by the timber mafia, but the local population was also damaging forests by using timber as firewood. He pointed out that a former prime minister, on the occasion of his visit to Mansehra on May 4, 2003, had promised provision of gas to Mansehra.<sup>15</sup>

The demand for gas supply is growing as now even the local governments are also being pressured by the people of the area. Environmentalists also argue for

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<sup>14</sup> 'Precious timber being used as fuel wood' - Daily Mashriq on February 12, 2004

<sup>15</sup> Deforestation on the rise due to non-provision of gas facility in Mansehra; Daily Mashriq July 5, 2004

environment friendly alternate fuel so that forests could be saved from unsustainable use.

### **6.1.2 Tree Plantation**

Tree plantation campaigns are covered as an annual ritual not only in highland but also in lowlands. There are certain perceptions around such campaigns and a lot of stories of corruption in tree plantation also come to the fore. Tree plantation campaigns are supported and sponsored mostly by the government and in some areas by the communities themselves on the motivation of certain groups and departments including the forest department.

Since Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) come in the jurisdiction of the federal government, so any plantation in these areas is done by the federal government. Wana is an area where the government planned to plant half a million samplings in year 2004 to give a forest cover in the barren lands in this part of the South Waziristan agency. Now Wana has a critical value due to a full fledged military operation there against what the government call the terrorists and Al-Qaeda and Taliban links. More than a year long operation cost heavily on the newly planted sapling there as fighting and even bombing in this area literally damaged environment there.

Daily Mashriq in one of its news story wrote about the tree plantation in Wana saying like other parts of the country, the spring plantation drive was going on vigorously in South Waziristan Agency and the saplings were provided to the people of the Agency, particularly farmers, free of cost or on cheap rates.<sup>16</sup> Similarly dozens of other news stories also covered tree plantation. Local and national media always takes up spring tree plantation campaign as a popular story. Right from educational institutions to the highest government departments try to take lead being environment friendly. Pro-environment messages come from bottom to top levels as rituals. But state of the affairs is that the speed with which forests are destroyed is higher than the new plantation itself.

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<sup>16</sup> Half million saplings to be planted in South Waziristan; Daily Mashriq February 23, 2004

The district governments also take interest in plantation campaigns and they do realize that forest cover is fast depleting. Daily Mashria in a news item quotes District Nazim Swat Asfandyar Amirzeb as saying that committees will be constituted at village level to protect forests and work for promotion of forestation so that target of having forest cover over 25 per cent of the country's total area is achieved. He said this while he was addressing a daylong workshop on forestry at Saidu Sharif as part of the plantation drive.<sup>17</sup>

### **6.1.3 Timber smuggling from and to Afghanistan**

Timber smuggling from and to Afghanistan has been another issue concerning forest management in Pakistan. Reports were published in media regarding smuggling of timber to and from Afghanistan. It is both way. This researcher while in Kabul tried to trace linkage of timber smuggling which confirmed that Afghan traders deals in both illegal export and import of timber to and from Pakistan and also Russia and other central Asian states.

Some timber mafia cuts trees on the pretext of trading the Afghan timber. Since on the long border there is no formal check against timber smuggling, the Afghans and Pushtoon tribes along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan continue this trade which causes deforestation in northern parts of Pakistan. The Budhber police in Peshawar foiled an attempt to smuggle animals and timber to Afghanistan and arrested eight persons. The police also impounded eight trucks carrying timber and animals.<sup>18</sup>

When Afghan timber smuggling on at its peak and it provided pretext to Pakistani timber mafia, which exploited the situation and cut forests inside Pakistan and sold them as Afghan timber, the government of NWFP imposed a ban on such transportation of such timber to lowland areas across the country. But later the government lifted the ban which was welcomed for quite certain reasons.

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<sup>17</sup> Village committees to be constituted to increase forest cover up to 25 per cent; Daily Mashriq March 10, 2004

<sup>18</sup> Bid to smuggle timber, animals to Afghanistan foiled; Daily Mashriq February 28, 2004

According to Daily Mashriq, District Nazim Dir, Ehsanul Haq, welcomed the decision of the NWFP government to lift ban on transportation of Afghan timber to other parts of the country. He stressed upon the government officials to remove all hurdles in the way of implementation of this decision because besides creation of job opportunities for local people, it would also help in improving the provincial economy and protecting the local forests. He was chairing a meeting at the district government secretariat. The meeting was informed that a huge quantity of precious timber was lying in Afghanistan and locals were using that as firewood. He opined that the government would earn billions due to this step. He stressed the need for close coordination among all the concerned departments so that the new policy could be implemented forthwith.<sup>19</sup>

Some other groups may have criticized lifting of ban dubbing that it may benefit timber mafia and their protectors in the government departments. However, no such reaction could have been found in the newspaper coverage of the meeting welcoming the decision. A report from Wana said timber mafia is badly damaging the forests as huge quantities of precious timber as well as firewood was being smuggled to Afghanistan in large quantities due to differences in prices, whereas prices in the local market have also risen to the mark where it has become unaffordable for the local population.<sup>20</sup> Media covered stories on Afghan timber links both ways, smuggling from and to Afghanistan.

#### **6.1.4 Corruption and Irregularities**

Corruption and irregularities on the part of the officials of forest department and line ministries are reported time and again in the media. Certain media reports suggest that timber mafia in collaboration with forest guards and other officials cause heavy damage to forests. Some times charges of corruption and irregularities are hurled just to score political gains by certain groups and most of the times charges seem to be true.

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<sup>19</sup> Lifting of ban on transportation of Afghan timber welcomed; Daily Mashriq March 1, 2004

<sup>20</sup> Smuggling of timber from South Waziristan to Afghanistan on the rise; October 15, 2004

A report from Mardan carries a statement of President Sheesham Timber Association Askar Khan who alleged that gross irregularities in auction of trees had taken place at the hands of the forest department officials in Mardan division. He accused that the district forest officer pasted notice for auction of trees after office hours on one Saturday, while the next day (Sunday) was public holiday and bidding was held on Monday. He said the district forest officer informed the contractors of his choice on telephone about the bidding. He said no call deposit was sought for participation in the bidding process, while a huge sum of Rs 6.7 million was received from some contractors but no receipt was issued. He said instead of the National Bank of Pakistan, the amount was deposited in another bank on daily profit basis. He said according to the law, bidding to auction trees should be held twice a month, but no bidding had been held in Mardan for the past six months.<sup>21</sup>

Another news report from Mardan quoted Provincial Secretary Information of Sheesham Timber Association Iqbal Bacha as demanding a probe into auction of trees in Mardan forest division, as an auction was held nine months ago and successful bidders had deposited 25 percent of bid amount as earnest money but the rest of the amount has not been deposited in the national exchequer in accordance with the rules that bind a contractor to deposit the bid amount within a fortnight to avoid confiscation of the earnest money. He alleged that the officials concerned were not depositing the amount to facilitate illegal cutting of trees so that they could make money.<sup>22</sup>

These kinds of charges of corruption and irregularities are raised and published in media. Some times, these report become basis for investigation and inquiry while most of the times, they go unheard.

#### **6.1.5 Disposal of windfall timber**

Another back door channel rather a pretext for stealing timber is windfall timber. Timber mafia reportedly in collaboration with the forests department or forcibly raise

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<sup>21</sup> Gross irregularities in sale of trees detected in Mardan forest division; Daily Mashriq March 26, 2004

<sup>22</sup> Probe into auction of trees in Mardan forest division demanded; Daily Mashriq May 29, 2004



trees to ground and show that these trees are fallen or dried and they take them away. This practice is very common which turns to be an unsustainable logging. Media did report on this particular issue. This practice causes losses to both the government and the forest communities who share the income of the dried up and windfall trees.

A newspaper reports the outcome of a meeting of Mishran from Upper Dir district which observes that windfall and dried up trees were being destroyed and besides the provincial government, the locals are also suffering losses worth millions of rupees as both share the income with a ratio of 60:40 percent.<sup>23</sup>

#### **6.1.6 Other Issues**

Some other issues including retaliatory or threatening attacks against the forest officials by timber mafia and their agents are also reported in media. Daily Mashriq reported murder of a forest officer in forestry related clash and in the subsequent follow up news coverage, the newspaper covered demands for arrest of the killers.

A report with Takhatbhai dateline reports a meeting of the Forest Guards, Foresters and Deputy Rangers Association Mardan district in which participants demanded immediate arrest of the persons involved in the murder of a forest officer in Buner district during an armed clash between two groups over a dispute on forest. They demanded that the culprits should be brought to book and awarded punishment according to the law of the land.<sup>24</sup> Issues of beating of the forest staff are also usually covered in section of local media.

#### **6.2 Daily Aaj, Peshawar (AP)**

Urdu daily newspaper Aaj appears from Abbottabad and Peshawar. The Peshawar edition is considered to be one of the biggest dailies in the North Western Frontier Province and is reaches to top government officials and general public in Peshawar as compared to Abbottabad edition. Over 20 news items have been selected for

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<sup>23</sup> Failure to dispose of windfall timber: NWFP government suffers loss of billions; Daily Mashriq July 27, 2004

<sup>24</sup> Arrest of persons involved in murder of forest officer demanded; Daily Mashriq March 28, 2004

analyzing the content material on forestry related issues. Some of them speak of almost the same issues which were raised by daily Mashriq, however some are new issues.

### **6.2.1 Timber smuggling**

Timber smuggling is taken as a juicy and sexy story in media as it involves mafia, forest officials and some times some locals in the gang. It is always a cross provincial or cross international borders. Timber smuggling from NWFP links to other parts of the country or to Afghanistan. Aaj newspaper's Peshawar edition covered news stories highlighting both linkages of timber smuggling. Timber smuggling to Afghanistan was raised at a high level meeting when Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and the provincial chief minister Akram Durrani met in Peshawar. A news items says it was decided in the meeting between the prime minister and the NWFP chief minister that a checkpoint would be established at Ghulam Khan to check timber smuggling to Afghanistan<sup>25</sup>

Timber is also imported from Afghanistan. The NWFP government put ban on its import which was criticized on the pretext that hundreds of people may lose their job due to the ban. The affectees protested saying while the NWFP Assembly had passed a bill for lifting of the ban, the provincial government was maintaining a restriction on import of timber from Afghanistan, which is a cruelty with the people. They said the government can earn Rs2 billion through import of timber from Afghanistan.<sup>26</sup>

Timber smuggling across the country is rampant and newspapers do cover this issue at local level. The coverage is of both success and failure cases of smuggling. A news report says in a joint action, police and officials of the forest department foiled a bid to smuggle timber and recovered a huge quantity of prime timber from truck (PRC-6085) and besides seizing the recovered timber, arrested the smugglers included Fazal Akbar and Laiq Wazir. Police also imposed Rs24000 fine on the vehicle. According

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<sup>25</sup> PM, NWFP chief minister discuss timber smuggling from Afghanistan; Daily Aaj Peshawar January 1, 2004

<sup>26</sup> Lifting of ban on import of timber from Afghanistan demanded; Daily Aaj April 12, 2004

to a spokesman of the forest department, the timber smuggling has been controlled to a large extent through joint action by police and the department officials.<sup>27</sup>

Dr Salahuddin in his article<sup>28</sup> opines that the acts of the leaders are interpretation of the law, and that if the leaders would be neglectful of law, a common man would be free from all responsibilities. This tradition of our society has not only discredited the country abroad, but leaders within the country are also ready to frame laws that pave the way for wastage of the national resources. And decision of the NWFP cabinet for reduction in penalty for timber smugglers is testimony to this fact. He said instead of protecting forests and taking steps to curb timber smuggling, the elected representatives belonging to the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal are bent upon giving boost to elimination of forest cover and timber smuggling. He points out that in Islam, the first benefit of trees is stated to be praise of God so people should be told not to end praise of God by cutting a tree. He says the legislators in NWFP, who are closer to Islam, should have framed laws that could help check timber smuggling, what to talk of doing otherwise. He points out that reduction in rate of fine would definitely give a boost to the timber smuggling because the profit margin for smugglers would further increase and they would be tempted to smuggle more timber than already being smuggled.

This sort of policy articles rarely appear in the Urdu local media. Since this article appeared in Peshawar edition of daily Aaj, this must have been seen by several key government functionaries but no visible follow up action in terms of raise in penalty against smugglers is reported later in the forthcoming days. This shows a gap between the media and policy makers.

### **6.2.2 Illegal Tree cutting**

Illegal tree cutting is linked to timber smuggling as based on demand and supply rule, mafia in collaboration with the forest department and sometimes with the local people

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<sup>27</sup> Bid to smuggle timber from Chakdara foiled; Daily Aaj Peshawar January 29, 2004

<sup>28</sup> Timber smugglers and reduction in fine; Daily Aaj Peshawar January 30, 2004

manage to cut trees illegally and then smuggle them. Like timber smuggling, a lot of local media coverage is around illegal cutting of trees.

Despite a very critical article by Dr Salahuddin, the NWFP cabinet chaired by the chief minister Akram Durrani decided to reduce the rate of fine on illegally cut timber at the time of its export from Kohistan district from Rs 300 per square foot to Rs 200 per square foot on 'Diar' and Rs150 per square foot on timber of all other kinds. The step has been taken on a longstanding demand of the elected representatives and the people of Kohistan district.<sup>29</sup>

This decision is similar to the one which has been criticized by Dr Salahuddin in his article. If fine is reduced on illegal cutting of trees, then it means that illegal cutting is being promoted at higher level and when such a decision is cited to be on the demand of the local elected representatives of Kohistan. It sounds a big question mark on the transparency of governance. Actually both the decisions regarding reducing rate of fine on illegal cutting and timber smuggling are interlinked which literally promoted more illegal cutting or felling of trees as well as timber smuggling causing damage to already scarce natural resource and the environment.

Literally after four days of the above decision of the cabinet, a high level meeting attended by provincial ministers and representatives of local government was held in Peshawar to discuss steps to control growing environmental pollution and raising awareness in this regard. The meeting was told that the environmental pollution has grown to an alarming proportion that is injurious to human health. It was stressed upon the government to take concrete measures to control environmental pollution and particularly maintain a strict ban on cutting of trees.<sup>30</sup>

In another new report next day of this meeting, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the NWFP Assembly for Environment Shahzada Gustasap Khan said that discriminatory policies with regard to cutting of forests and royalty on forests should be abolished and same laws should be enforced across the NWFP in this regard.

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<sup>29</sup> NWFP cabinet reduces fine rate on illegal cutting of trees; Daily Aaj Peshawar January 11, 2004

<sup>30</sup> Meeting discusses environmental pollution; Daily Aaj Peshawar January 15

In a related development Justice Mian Muhammad Ajmal and Justice Sardar Raza Muhammad Khan of the Supreme Court of Pakistan on a petition observed that trees worth millions of rupees are illegally cut from the reserved forests, and institution of cases against a few persons by the officers and employees of the forest department is mere an eyewash. Thus, they said, the forest department officials are partners in losses of millions. The court was hearing an appeal filed by Conservator Malakand Raza Muhammad Khan for enhancement of punishment of a Grade 7 employee of the department, describing the stoppage of two increments as insufficient.<sup>31</sup>

Public interest groups and organizations' concerns over tree cutting were also covered by this newspaper time and again. In a statement published by the newspaper, Provincial President Environmental Protection Network Syed Mukarram Ali Shah Gilani demanded the government to declare cutting of tree a crime because timber mafia is causing irreparable loss to the environment to make money.<sup>32</sup> The same statement was published again by the daily in October 2004. There was no difference between contents of the two stories.

In a news story datelined Peshawar, Chairman People's Rights Commission, Muhammad Zia Popalzai, called for taking notice of involvement of forest department employees in unchecked cutting of trees, and a stringent action against such elements. He was addressing a meeting of the Committee for Protection of Environment, Forests and Wildlife. He regretted that Pakistan topped the list of countries where forest cutting is on the rise, as forest cutting rate has crossed the ratio of five per cent per annum. He warned that if this situation persisted, Pakistan would lose its forest cover, which would definitely accelerate the environmental pollution.<sup>33</sup>

These strongly worded statement carried by Aaj Peshawar edition speak high of the sensitivity of the issue of illegal logging and how much attention of the government it does require but illegal logging is still on the rise and it seems that nobody from the top is going to give it a serious thought. They consider these press statements just as a

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<sup>31</sup> Forest department officials involved in loss of millions: Supreme Court; Daily Aaj Peshawar February 11, 2004

<sup>32</sup> Cutting of trees be declared a crime; Daily Aaj Peshawar April 11, 2004

<sup>33</sup> Plea for taking notice of tree felling; Daily Aaj Peshawar July 7, 2004

hollow criticism on their illegal activity as they mint millions of rupees from this illegal practice.

### **6.2.3 Tree Plantation**

As usual tree plantation is a ritual throughout Pakistan and it is more propagated in NWFP. The Aaj newspapers carried messages from the chief minister and other line ministers on this occasion which show greater commitment on the part of the government for forestation. The following messages speak themselves of these sort of commitments.

#### ***Message of NWFP chief minister on occasion of spring plantation drive<sup>34</sup>***

*Trees have deep-rooted link with the human life and both are vital for each other. Trees are jewel of the earth and protect it against erosion, so it is religious and national duty of every Pakistan to plant and look after trees. The benefits of trees have been mentioned in Quran in detail and Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) has also enumerated benefits of trees with great detail. According to a saying of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said the trees have not only worldly benefits, but would also be beneficial on the Day of Judgement. Plantation is a tradition of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). The importance has never been felt so badly like it is being felt in today's developed world. As the growing environmental pollution has become a serious threat for the earth, a coordinated strategy is required to overcome this problem.*

*The sitting government formally chalked plans for development of forestry immediately after assuming power and for the first time in the history of the country has prepared a comprehensive policy. Under this policy, various administrative and procedural changes have been introduced in the forestry sector because the forest preservation and better management would not only give a boost to the national economy but would also help in checking environmental pollution. I appeal to people of the province, particularly farmers, to help government in protection of forest*

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<sup>34</sup> Daily Aaj Peshawar February 12, 2004

*wealth and make the country green. I also urge all government departments, including the education, health and police departments, to make concerted efforts for making the plantation drive a success.*

***Message of NWFP minister for forestry Sirajul Haq***

*Trees are jewel of the earth and plantation and look after of plants has been hallmark of efficient nations. Particularly, the Muslims have more responsibilities in his regard because Quran and Sunnah have also enumerated various benefits of trees. The government has devised a comprehensive strategy to expedite the plantation process and develop forests to check environmental pollution.*

*Under this strategy, 24.9 million saplings would be planted over 38,000 acres of land, leading to a remarkable increase in the area under forest cover that will prove to be a milestone in the national development. I hope the officials of the provincial government, particularly officers and employees of the forest department, will make concerted efforts for achievement of plantation target. I urge all government departments and educational institutions in general and farmers and religious scholars in particularly to actively participate in the plantation drive.*

The coverage of the newspaper speaks of tree plantation plans such as the NWFP environment department's plan to carry out block plantation in the government schools, other government institutions, graveyards and other open places in Peshawar city to help check growing pollution in the provincial metropolis. During tree plantation campaign, various government officials and NGO and community based organizations issue statements to media which is covered by it time and again expressing resolve to do massive forestation and plantation but hardly any follow up story appearing on whether or not all claims during plantation campaign were fulfilled.

The media usually covered stories of the governor, chief minister, provincial ministers and districts nazims urging upon the people to take part in tree plantation to achieve the target of forest cover for the country. During the campaign, news coverage of the

dignitaries themselves planting saplings was on the rise. Reports regarding free provision of millions of saplings also appeared in the newspaper.

#### **6.2.4 Influence of Timber mafia**

Timber mafia happens to be influential and powerful as they work in line with all the line departments and they have their own armed men who give them an edge even on mostly the unarmed and unprotected forest guards and forest officials. There are reports of timber mafia manipulating posting and transfers of the forest staff and sometimes cause harm to the staff if they do not cooperate with them or if they refuse bribe and do not accept minimum share what the mafia want them to take in return of allowing them cutting trees illegally in huge quantity. It is not that true that hundred percent forest staff is corrupt. Those who resist have to suffer a lot most of the times.

In a press statement published by daily Aaj, public and social circles in Chakdara and Temergara have demanded that the authorities should take notice of the conspiracies of timber mafia against a forest officer Karim Khan and scrupulous elements should be punished stringently, as the timber mafia is active against the officer, who reportedly resisted timber smuggling in the areas.<sup>35</sup>

#### **6.2.5 Editorials**

Editorial is an important tool to influence policy but even local newspapers rarely make forests a topic for their editorials. Aaj Peshawar during the period of study carried two editorials one on the ritual and traditional tree plantation campaign and the other on new legislation for protection of forests. Lack of editorials is a serious policy and advocacy gap. News coverage on forestry issue alone cannot influence the policy and law making process. Instead, editorial do play an important role in this regard.

Daily Aaj Peshawar in its editorial on ‘Opening of plantation drive 2004’ on February 11, 2004 refers to the message of NWFP chief minister on the opening of spring

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<sup>35</sup> Timber mafia lobbying for transfer of forest officer; Daily Aaj Peshawar February 1, 2004



plantation drive 2004 in which he highlighted importance of plants to check environmental pollution and said that immediately after taking charge of the province, his government prepared a comprehensive policy for development of forestry. He said the policy would certainly have positive impact but for this purpose proper look after of newly planted saplings is imperative. The daily welcomes the MMA government's step of educating people about benefits of trees besides launching the plantation drive. It says it is obligatory for every Pakistani to take part in this continuing charity and make the plantation drive successful through individual efforts.

In another editorial on February 15, 2004, the daily refers to the speech of the NWFP chief minister at the inaugural ceremony of the spring plantation drive and after mentioning the pledges and admissions made by the chief minister, asks how much saplings planted during the campaign would be looked after properly and would meet a success. Referring to the allegations of sale of saplings to private nurseries by the forest department officials, it stresses upon every member of the society to fulfil the responsibilities with regard to preservation of forests. The newspaper calls for new laws to check corruption in forest department.

If we look at these editorials, they lack professional approach rather they mostly captured the chief minister's statements. The editorials in most of the local newspapers seem very ordinary lacking professional skills and wisdom. They normally found to be weak on content and arguments.

#### **6.2.6 Protection of Forest Officials**

Media also covers issues and demands relating to protection of forest staff mostly based on the statements of FWFP forest guards and foresters association. This content analysis included four stories relating to protection of the forest staff. In a statement published by Aaj Peshawar, Central President NWFP Forest Guards, Foresters and Deputy Managers Association Muhammad Zeb Khan said that protection of legitimate rights of the forest department employees is the responsibility of the association. He described the approval of Rs 0.5 million as compensation for family of each forest department employee killed in Buner a big achievement. He hailed the efforts of NWFP Secretary Forestry Noorul Haq for regularisation of services of the

contractual forest department employees. Another news story describes the decision of the NWFP government to raise a forest protection force for protection of forest cover on 4.2 million acres of land in the province. The proposed force would be provided arms from the government armory, said NWFP Secretary Forestry and Environment Noorul Haq while speaking in a radio programme.

President Forest Officers Association NWFP Dr Naseem Javed has demanded that the forest department employees be provided modern weapons and legal cover for taking effective measures against timber mafia. He also demanded arrest of the accused in attack on field staff of the forest department in Haripur forest division.<sup>36</sup>

### **6.2.7 Irregularities and corruption in forest department**

Corruption and irregularities in forest departments show lack of transparency and accountability in this regard. Newspapers carry a number of stories on corruption which has multiple reasons. All the three major news items quoted in this analysis relate to official disclosure of the public accounts committee of the NWFP assembly.

A staff report dateline Abbottabad says: “taking notice of irregularities in the forest department, the Public Accounts Committee of the NWFP Assembly has directed fixation of responsibility and recovery of Rs 673,000 from the responsible persons for depositing the amount in the public exchequer.<sup>37</sup> The Public Accounts Committee of the NWFP Assembly very next day also directed that the persons involved in irregularities in purchase of a new transformer at a cost of Rs164000 under the PD Forestry Project should be pointed out and embezzled amount be recovered from them.

While further scrutinizing audit objections regarding the forestry sector for 1997-98 financial year, the Public Accounts Committee of the NWFP Assembly ordered recovery of Rs14.341 million from the district forest officer of Swat. The committee referred the matter of illegal cutting of trees worth Rs2.770 million from the jurisdiction of district forest officer Battagram to a subcommittee for further scrutiny.

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<sup>36</sup> Provision of arms, legal cover to forest department employees demanded; Daily Aaj Peshawar November 12, 2004

<sup>37</sup> Financial irregularities in NWFP forest department; Daily Aaj Peshawar August 6, 2004

The committee directed the district forest officer Battagram to recover Rs 662000 arrears from contractors and Rs 396000 under the head of fine within two months.<sup>38</sup>

The Public Accounts Committee of the NWFP Assembly next day referred various matters regarding the forest department to different subcommittees, directing them to submit a comprehensive report on the issues of non-recovery of dues, royalty and timber smuggling.

### **6.3 Daily ‘Aaj’, Abbottabad (AA)**

Urdu daily Aaj (which means today) also appears from Abbottabad. This edition gives more coverage to local areas and the issues of the local communities as compared to the Peshawar edition. So, over 50 news items have been selected to analyse the issues covered in this newspaper during 2004.

#### **6.3.1 Performance of the forest staff**

Since the newspaper is operating mostly in Abbottabad and the vicinity, news coverage minutely observes the performance of the forest department staff in terms of both good and bad performance. Even, individual level performance also figured in the news coverage of this newspaper. In small newspapers, such promotional individual performance related news stories do appear due to personal contacts and lack of professional judgement of what is news.

A news report of January 14, 2004 with Dadar dateline says the looters of ‘green gold’ (forests) deserve no leniency, as forests play an important role in the progress and development of a country, local social circles have said while lauding performance of Forester Muzaffar and Forest Guard Muhammad Sajjad. They pointed out that the two officials recovered thousands of rupees as fine from those involved in illegal cutting of trees and detained several donkeys and sent to the range headquarters for auction. Expressing their satisfaction over performance of the two officials, the locals expressed the confidence that would continue showing similar performance in the days ahead.

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<sup>38</sup> Rs15 million irregularities unearthed in forest department; Daily Aaj Peshawar August 10, 2004

A June 9, 2004 story from Balakot says timber supply is continuing in accordance with the law and officials of the forest department are performing their duties efficiently, said Babar Qayyum, central general secretary of the Sarhad Forest Guards, Foresters and Deputy Range Officers Association. He said that record is maintained at checkpoints. He said that some miscreants in the timber mafia are hatching conspiracies to malign the forest department but officials of the department would foil their attempts.

These news items professionally seem weak as social circles have not been quoted. While in the other story, foresters association's office bearers are praising their colleagues. These seem to be table stories to please or favour forest officials. They may have done the good work indicated in the stories but this should not have been given as a news item as it was their duty to do what they have reportedly done. Some reporter or desk editor must have accommodated these two officials for any vested interest or for the sake of promoting them.

Most of the stories regarding performances are critical in general blaming the forest officials for neglect and their possible collaboration with timber mafia. A June 21, 2004 news report from Sarai Saleh says smuggling of illegally harvested timber worth millions of rupees via Srikot, Chhappar and Grand Trunk roads and Tarbela reservoir to the Punjab has been unearthed and the said areas are serving as gateway for the timber mafia and all this is happening in connivance with the officials of the forest department.

Some news stories speak of the forest guards' action against timber smugglers. A June 28, 2004 story says in successful raids, the patrolling squad of the forest department recovered thousands of feet of timber and recovered hundreds of thousand rupees as fine after impounding dozens of vehicles. This news story like hundreds others lack professionalism as it carries no information regarding source of the story; and even exact numbers of feet of smuggled timber, vehicles impounded and who were the smugglers were missing in the story.

In contrast to this story the following story seems professional correct as it provide all relevant information which require for a news story. “Range Officer Shinkhari Forest Range Muhammad Siddiq Khan intercepted a truck (ZBT-4729) at Dhariyal checkpoint and recovered 118 square feet of precious timber from secret cavities. He also arrested smuggler Taj Mahmood son of Nasrullah Khan, a resident of Swat, and sent him to jail. Later, the nabbed smuggler paid Rs182000 as fine and urged other timber smugglers to abandon their activities and adopt a legitimate way of earning livelihood”.<sup>39</sup>

### **6.3.2 Timber smuggling**

Timber smuggling has been a popular topic with local media. News stories regarding timber smuggling and some raids against timber smugglers and foiling of smuggling bids are generally covered in these news items. A January 18, 2004 story with Haripur dateline says foiling a bid to smuggler timber to Punjab via Tarbela reservoir, the local police intercepted five Datsun pickups loaded with timber and arrested the culprits involved in the smuggling. The police also arrested drivers of five vehicles. A February 25, 2004 story from Haripur says the district forest officer and range officer Haripur foiled a bid to smuggle two trucks of timber and besides seizing the timber also arrested the accused smugglers.

Another story of February 28, 2004 from Ayubia says during a late night raid, Forest Guard Muhammad Pervez foiled a bid to smuggle timber and besides seizing the recovered wood, also imposed Rs18,000 fine on the accused. The sudden raids by the forest guard have made the life of timber mafia miserable and locals have hailed performance of the forest guard, expressing the hope that he would not compromise with the timber mafia and would continue his action. A story dated April 15, 2004 with Mansehra dateline says the Choki forest is on verge of elimination due to cutting of trees and pine resin exudation. Although pine resin exudation has been banned by the government for the past 22 years, the practice is going on unchecked. On a complaint by a former additional secretary, Muhammad Sadiq Swati, the district forest officer raided the forest along with his staff and a team of daily Aaj and besides

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<sup>39</sup> Forest range officer nabs notorious timber smuggler, recovers fine; Daily Aaj Abbottabad June 28, 2004

arresting four timber smugglers, also recovered freshly cut timber and equipment for collection of pine resin.

A report from Mansehra says all the previous records of timber smuggling from Kohistan, Balakot and Mansehra districts have been shattered, as 10 to 20 trucks carrying hundreds of thousands feet of wood depart from the area in every hour to other cities of the country. The raiding party constituted by the forest department is supervising and facilitating timber smuggling. The wages of workers employed for cutting and logging have been increased by the timber mafia and workers are erected tents in the forests to continue their work round the clock. If police impound any truck loaded with illegal timber, the officials of the forest department reach the spot and release the vehicle. This practice is going on unchecked for the last three months publicly.<sup>40</sup>

News stories in local newspapers normally carry comments which give slant or colour to the story. For example, a news story with Haripur dateline starts saying timber mafia has expanded its activities and besides the old routes, timber is also being smuggled to Punjab through new routes, while the activities of the forest department officials are limited to sightseeing. People of the area have demanded abolition of the forest department through its merger with the police. Dozens of vehicles loaded with wood daily head towards Punjab from different routes, while now smugglers are also using Tarbela reservoir for smuggling timber avoiding the checkpoints. This story does not quote any body who is saying all this. No official version is quoted; no accusers are there in the story. No source is mentioned. Such stories are carried in large number which shows lack of professionalism on the part of both the reporters and the desk editors.

### **6.3.3 Illegal logging of trees and recovery of timber**

News coverage of illegal logging of forests and recovery of timber in raids do appear in large number in local newspapers. A February 21, 2004 story says 80 feet of illegally cut precious wood recovered during raid. The seized timber belongs to

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<sup>40</sup> All past records of timber smuggling shattered; Daily Aaj Abbottabad May 27, 2004

Assistant Sub-Inspector of Police Mir Afzal Khan. The forest department officials had also recovered illegal timber from the same police official and that had led to a quarrel. The timber was transported by the official police vehicle. Locals have asked the police high-ups to hold an inquiry into the issue. This seems to be one sided story. No version of the police official accused of involvement in illegal logging has been given in the story. A staff report from Oghi quotes a trader Haji Sher as demanding a probe into cutting of trees in Kala Pahar forest, saying that transfer of concerned range officer is not a solution to the problem. He said that illegal cutting of timber is going on unchecked due to negligence of the concerned officials.<sup>41</sup> This story also seems to be incomplete and lack objectivity as it is a vague statement by a trader but without describing why his statement is important in this context.

A news report from Abbottabad says the Sherdil Squad of Abbottabad Forest Division recovered 12,500 feet of timber in raids at different spots and besides arresting the smugglers, also recovered Rs3.85 million fine, which is a record. The squad saved millions of rupees of the national exchequer during the past one decade by recovering around 11,000 tree trunks that were cut illegally. The recovered timber has been estimated to be 0.6 million feet.

Interestingly, the squad has two old vehicles and just one driver, who is working round the clock. The forest division has received Rs 48000 for diesel and Rs3600 for maintenance of vehicles for the past four years, whereas this amount was insufficient even for a few months. No funds have been released for changing tyres of vehicles during these four years, whereas reject officials from other forest divisions are posted in the squad. The district forest officer and his staff patrol 4,000 kilometres of roads in the Hazara Forest Division. In this age of technological revolution when smugglers have the latest weapons and communication gadgets, the patrolling squad of the forest department has even no telephone facility, whereas besides local forest department officials, the police and timber smugglers are always attentive to the activities of the squad. One-fourth of the amount recovered as fine is paid to the squad members as

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<sup>41</sup> Illegal felling of trees goes unchecked in Kala Pahar forest; Daily Aaj Abbottabad May 11, 2004

reward and they pool funds out of this reward money for keeping their vehicles running.<sup>42</sup>

Though this story provided some information about the raid but it needed more information to be a complete story. The reporter wrote more about the plight of the forest squad and their vehicles in a comment style without quoting any person and real benefit holder of stakeholder of the story. The facts given regarding the squad may be correct but news reporters are not supposed to become party to the story.

A report from Shinkiari says on the pretext of windfall trees, the felling of green trees is going on unchecked in Mansehra forests and ignoring thousands of poor forest owners, the forest department have joined hands with the ringleaders of timber mafia. The elimination of forest cover is going on under the supervision of the forest department officers through formation of a fake joint forest management committee. Alleging that deforestation is gradually increasing after formation of the joint forest management committee, the locals have demanded formation of a supervisory body to monitor activities of the management committee.<sup>43</sup>

Taking serious notice of large-scale cutting of forest in Hazara division, the federal government has directed the NWFP government to dismiss the provincial secretary forests with immediate effect. The directive has been issued after the intelligence agencies submitted a report to the Ministry of Environment, Inspector General of Forests, National Accountability Bureau Chairman, the Governor and the Chief Minister of NWFP as well as other senior civil and military officials. The report said the joint forest societies have inflicted huge loss on the national exchequer by cutting green trees on the pretext of removing dried and windfall trees.<sup>44</sup>

#### **6.3.4 Tree Plantation**

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<sup>42</sup>Forest department officials seize 12,500 feet of timber in various raids; Daily Aaj Abbottabad July 3, 2004

<sup>43</sup> Cutting of trees goes unchecked in Mansehra; Daily Aaj Abbottabad July 11, 2004

<sup>44</sup> Federal government directs NWFP to sack secretary forests; Daily Aaj Abbottabad November 5, 2004



As compared to the cutting of trees and recovery of timber, Aaj Abbottabad gave less coverage to tree plantation campaigns. Even the story selected under this heading speaks of plantation and deforestation together. The report says if the number of saplings planted during plantation drives since independence of Pakistan and half of the total number are considered wasted, even then every inch of land in Hazara division should have 100 plants because the international organisations, federal and provincial departments and NGOs plant millions of trees in documents. But, on the contrary, even wild plants are not spared by the timber mafia what to talk of saplings planted during plantation campaigns and instead of being green, mountains are looking red, as hundreds of trees being cut daily illegally.<sup>45</sup> This seems to be an editorial comment and not a news item as it does not quote any body saying this. Normally reporters working with local newspapers lack professional writing and reporting skills and the desk editors lack editing skills.

### **6.3.5 Burning of Forests**

Fire in forests is a common phenomenon; some times it erupts naturally while most of the time deliberately by the vested interests. Even around federal capital Margala Hills see fire every year. It is generally said that this fire provides safe pretext to the officials to hide the timber theft. Same pretext is used in the forest areas of NWFP. Local media covered stories relating to fire in the forests.

A report from Dadar says a fire that raged in the Koh Tanglai forests for the whole last night level hundreds of thousand small plants and trees, which resulted in loss of millions of rupees. However, the district forest officer of Mansehra said if the forest department officials were found guilty after an inquiry would be taken to task. However, locals alleged that the forest was set on fire to conceal the damage to the forests by the timber mafia.<sup>46</sup>

### **6.3.6 Exudation of resin, elimination of forests**

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<sup>45</sup> Plantation starts but deforestation does not stop; Daily Aaj February 13, 2004

<sup>46</sup> Thousands of trees burnt in forest fire; Daily Aaj Abbottabad April 6, 2004

Daily Aaj covered a number of stories on resin exudation which caused elimination of forests in various parts of Hazara Division. A story on April 15, 2004 from Mansehra says practice of pine resin exudation has badly harming forest in Hazara division because when a tree trunk is cut for resin exudation, the tree dries up after a couple of years and timber mafia cuts the tree. According to an estimate, currently 40,000 pine trees in Choki forest are bearing cuts for resin exudation and would dry in a couple of years. No pine tree will be found in the forest after a few years because all small and big trees are bearing cuts.

Another related story accuses Contractor Yousaf Khattak of Peshawar of being involved in resin exudation in Choki forest. He has been first staying in Mansehra and is now living in the most expensive area of Abbottabad town, as he is involved in resin exudation for the past three years. He himself owns a varnish manufacturing unit in the Mansehra industrial estate but he sells resin to big paint manufacturers of the country to make huge sums of money. It further says the workers of the contractor are staying at the forest rest house, where cans of resin and related equipment have also been stored by the contractor. A related news items says the case pertaining to seizure of 75 canisters of resin collected from Choki forest is still under trial in a court of law. Locals have appealed to the provincial government, particular NWFP Senior Minister Sirajul Haq, to save the forest from elimination due to resin exudation.

### **6.3.7 Editorials**

**Daily Aaj Abbottabad in its editorial comment on May 26, 2004 calls for saving forests from being eliminated. It says:**

“It is not difficult to judge from the continuity of reports about destruction of forests and illegal cutting of trees that timber mafia is fully active and wherever they get an opportunity ‘cleanse’ the precious forests. Several cases of illegal forest cutting through connivance between the timber mafia and officials of the forest department, which have come to fore in the recent weeks, are an evidence of the fact that the government, despite its tall claims, has since failed in taking action against the elements harming the country and the nation. This is the reason that they are getting encouraged with the passage of time and are busy in ‘cleansing’ precious forests openly.

“The officials posted at various barriers of the forest department are also fully involved in the timber smuggling and receive bribes from the smugglers in the broad daylight for allowing their timber-laden vehicles to pass. Thus, not any one or a few individuals are involved in the timber smuggling, but there is a huge network that is playing role of facilitator in promotion of this heinous trade. In today’s world, every person is well aware of the benefits and importance of forests, which are not only helpful in checking and reducing environmental pollution and supplementing the process of rainfall but also play a vital role in prevention of floods. Today, the environmental pollution has made the life in major cities miserable, as various fatal diseases are emerging due to breathing in a polluted environment.

“However, Hazara division of NWFP is fortunate in a sense that the nature has bestowed it with the best environment and climate, which helps patients recover from diseases. In view of these facts, the protection of natural environment of the area is utmost necessary but this goal cannot be achieved with preservation of the forest cover in the region. Not only the forest cutting must be stopped through effective and concrete measures, but further plantation is carried out to extend the existing forests. But ironically, the officials who have been deputed by the government for the conservation efforts are involved in elimination of forests. They sell their conscience for a few bucks and even put their faith on sale. Whereas removal of such dishonest people from the important duties of forest protection is imperative, steps must be taken to empower locals for preservation of forests.”

**In another editorial on July 11, 2004, the newspaper stressed the need for forest preservation and new plantation. It says:**

“A plantation drive is link to the rainy season that is around the corner. Every year, general public and government departments in general, and forest department in particular, take part in plantation by planting saplings in large number. But it is all the more necessary in Hazara division because illegal cutting of forests in the area has been going on unchecked since long and instead of showing any signs of decline, the practice is intensifying gradually. Thus, the lands which were covered by thick forests in yesteryears now look like a desert.

“The timber mafia makes money by smuggling green gold, but inflicts huge revenue losses on the government. These people have made billions by destroying the national wealth of forests and are still oblivious to the national loss. These people do not care of plantation campaign every year, as they think participation in plantation drive contrary to their status and the plains that were covered with thick forests some years ago are a glaring example of stubbornness of the timber mafia.

“The forest department should launch an organised campaign to carry out plantation in the areas where forest cover has vanished, so that the previous losses are compensated after some years. The forests not only add to the beauty of a region and keep the environment clean, but also play an important role in development of any region and country. Forests have not only a unique role in rainfall, snowfall and flood prevention, but particularly play a vital role in promotion of tourism.

“Therefore, it is the need of the hour that strict measures are taken against those involved in illegal cutting of forests and rules are framed in such a fashion that there is no let up for the timber mafia. Plantation is not only necessary on mountains and forests, but cities and towns equally need plantation for their beautification and provision of clean environment to citizens. Abbottabad town particularly needs extensive plantation because there has been a large-scale cutting of trees.

### **6.3.8 Forestry Ordinance 2002 and criticism on it**

Forestry Ordinance 2002 is being criticized mostly by the public interest groups such as Sarhad Awami Forest Ittehad (NWFP People’s Forest Alliance) and the local media has time and again covered news stories based on their criticism and analysis.

Daily Aaj covered a press conference of the office bearers of Sarhad Awami Forest Ittehad held at press club Abbottabad in which they rejected the Forestry Ordinance 2002 describing it anti-people and oppressive. On the occasion of World Environment Day, President of the group Riaz Muhammad Khan said through the ordinance, the forest department officials have been given dictatorial powers, which might be misused. He said when he staged a sit-in outside the NWFP Assembly, some

ministers had promised to introduce amendment in the law but nothing has so far been done in this regard. He said that June 10 would be observed as black day and would continue protest until the ordinance in question is not withdrawn.<sup>47</sup> The reasonable positions taken by the Ittehad leadership usually get befitting coverage and too some extent these positions are listened in certain power corridors.

### **6.3.9 Politics of permits as gratification**

Permits to deal in timber are considered to be given by the forest department to the legitimate community and people under forest policy but they are quite often reportedly used to bribe influential or granted as political gratification or issued after getting bribe from timber mafia. Reports on use and misuse of such permits are covered in local newspapers.

A June 30, 2004 story from Balakot says in a monthly meeting of the Tehsil Council, Balakot, Maulavi Haroon-ur-Rashid called attention of the speaker on a point of order towards issuance of permits by the forest department and sought details in this regard. He said he had learnt that forest permits were being offered as political gratification, which deprived the rightful of their due rights.

### **6.3.10 Other Issues**

Daily Aaj Abbottabad also covered stories relating to Forest Land grabbers, Forests and wildlife and demand for gas as substitute for forest use as fuel.

## **6.4 Daily Azadi, Swat (AS)**

Daily Azadi (Liberation) is fairly independent newspaper appearing from Swat. Its news coverage seems critical of authorities and it covers largely the community groups by highlighting their standpoint and raising issues confronting the communities. In a July 11, 2004 news story, the newspaper carries a statement by

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<sup>47</sup> Sarhad Awami Forest Ittehad rejects Forestry Ordinance 2002; Daily Aaj June 7, 2004

Alfatah Organization's president Mr Imroz Khan who criticizes NWFP senior minister Sirajul Haq for covering up of the role of the forest department officials involved in smuggling of timber.

With special reference to allegation by a member of the NWFP Assembly regarding involvement of officials deputed at checkpoints in looting the national wealth, Imroz Khan said that without any probe into the allegations, the senior NWFP minister encouraged the officials. He also voiced concern over harassment of innocent villagers, ignoring the influential involved in smuggling of timber.

#### **6.4.1 Plantation**

Daily Azadi Swat also covered stories on tree plantation campaign as ritual. In September 2, 2004 news story Secretary Environment and Forestry NWFP Noorul Haq has been quoted as saying that two million saplings would be planted in Malakand division. He said this while inaugurating monsoon plantation drive. He said strict action would be taken against timber mafia with the help of the area dwellers. In a briefing to the secretary, District Forest Officer of Swat Hashim Ali said that 100000 saplings would be planted in Swat district during the plantation campaign, and committees would be constituted in the area to conserve forest and promote afforestation.

#### **6.4.2 Reforms and investment in forestry sector**

NWFP Ministers and officials usually speak of reforms in forestry sector. A report from Dargai says while addressing office-bearers of the Dargai Timber Association and Transport Owners, the minister said that investment in Dargai timber market would be encouraged. He claimed that wrong decisions by the government in the past gave boost to the timber mafia, and that the present government was taking steps within the legal framework to ensure protection of forests.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Report on address of NWFP Minister for Forestry and Environment; Daily Azadi Swat September 4, 2004

On demand of local timber merchants to save already cut down timber from being wasted due to impact of weather, the minister said that export of 400,000 feet of timber harvested from the Northern Areas has been allowed. He said that to minimize unemployment in the area and promotion of investment in forestry, the timber market would be expanded. He also directed the concerned officials of the forest department to ensure elimination of corruption from the department. He also ordered departmental action against the corrupt officials of the department to purge the department of corruption.

According to another news story, while addressing a dinner hosted by union nazims of Malakand Agency, NWFP Minister for Forestry and Environment Shahraz Khan accused the previous governments of involvement in corruption, and asked union nazims to avoid discrimination on the basis of political affiliation. Stressing need for reforms in the forest sector, he said that 1100 unarmed and powerless forest guards could not protect forest on 4.4 million acres of land in the NWFP. Saying that the Mutahida Majlis-e-Aamal (MMA) government has given powers to the forest guards besides arming them, he said that legal action would be taken against those who are indulged in corrupt practices in the past.<sup>49</sup>

These two quoted news items speaks of the policy of the NWFP government regarding forests. Professionally, these news items carry weight and sound as the government want to reform the forestry sector. Such policy reforms should have been the topic of local newspapers for editorials and further follow up investigative pieces so that the minister could be made accountable for what he had promised in public on forestry issues. But hardly any such follow up comes in the local newspapers. They usually go for statements after statements.

### **6.4.3 Illegal Cutting**

Like other newspapers, daily Azadi Swat also carried news stories on illegal logging and felling of trees in valleys across Swat and adjoining areas. A September 15, 2004 story with Buner dateline says: “During visit to Pir Baba Kalail-Swat Road forests, a

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<sup>49</sup> Address of NWFP minister for forestry and environment; Daily Azadi Swat October 16, 2004

team of journalists noted that illegal felling of trees in Buner Valley and smuggling of timber was going on unchecked due to involvement of officials of the forest department in corrupt practices. They also noted that an open timber market is being run at Sangar. Referring to an open forum at Kalail village, the report says that whenever forest department officials visit the area, instead of taking any action against timber mafia, they indulge in receiving illegal gratification from smugglers or sell seized timber to make money. The report says that forest was looking like a timber market as a large number of cut down trees were seen and it seemed that the forest department is non-existent in Buner district in general and Dagar Range in particular.”

A news item of October 27, 2004 from Mingora speaks of concern voiced on unchecked cutting of forest in four districts of former Swat state since its accession to Pakistan in 1968. It says that timber smugglers from the four provinces of Pakistan have joined hands and besides making timber smuggling source of their income have severely harmed the local environment and ecology by denuding the mountains of the forest cover.

President of Tehrik Tahaffuz Haqooq Qadeemi Swati of Swat district and former nominee for NWFP Assembly seat Bakht Shireen has accused Hayat Ali, an official of the forest department posted in Madian, for elimination of forest cover in the area. He demanded dismissal of the official from service and probe into his assets made illegally as well as their confiscation. He said that innocent people are charged with illegal cutting of trees whereas real culprits are given a free hand. He pointed out that if anybody cuts five trees, only one is mentioned in the case and four others are sold by officials. The confiscated wood is sold in the local market. He also leveled a number of other charges against Hayat Ali and Hazrat Syed, an official of Bahrain.<sup>50</sup>

A November 11, 2004 story from Buner quoted a youth group of accusing forest officials for allowing illegal cutting of trees. The office-bearers of local Youth Welfare Association accused local forest department officials for indulgence in corrupt practices and thus allowing illegal cutting of trees. They demanded immediate

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<sup>50</sup> Involvement of officials in illegal cutting of trees; Daily Azadi Swat November 7, 2004



transfer of the official and appointment of any honest official within a week otherwise the association officials would take to streets to stage protest.

Several other such stories were carried out by this newspaper. But one thing is common that all stories appear to be single sourced and lacking version of the other side which is considered to be unethical in the profession. Accusations that too on the basis of a single source cannot be run in news stories in the way it has been run in these stories. This shows that there is a dire need of skills development for local reporters.

#### **6.4.4 Row between Provincial and Local government on permits**

Timber permits are usually used for political gratification and always involve likes and dislikes of the ruling elite of the area. Earlier, it used to be the sole domain of the provincial government but now with district governments in different areas, issuance of permits become bone of contention between the provincial and local governments. Media do carry news stories on this vested interest related row.

A Mingora dateline story says: “Tehsil Nazim of Swat Rafiul Mulk Kamran criticized an order of the provincial minister for forestry that those who would purchase timber from Dargai and Chakdara legally would need transportation permit from the district forest officer of their area for transportation of the timber to Swat, Buner, Shangla, Dir and Chitral. He said it is very difficult for a common man, and besides creating difficulties for people of Malakand division, it would lead to increase in illegal felling of trees and timber business. He demanded cancellation of the order.”<sup>51</sup>

Local media carry such conflict stories to highlight how vested interest use their political influence to get rules relaxed or imposed whenever they find such an action in their favour.

#### **6.4.5 Forest department’s critical role**

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<sup>51</sup> Report on criticism of an order of NWFP minister for forestry; Daily Azadi Swat October 6, 2004

Local people usually complain of the forest officials of abusing their powers to file cases against common people from the community while giving the real culprits, the timber mafia, a free hand to continue with their activities. They generally accuse the forest official of siding with timber smugglers and those causing deforestation. Even local leaders of political parties come hard on them.

In a news story published on October 21, 2004 with Mingora dateline, Bakht Shireen Swati, an activist of Jamaat-e-Islami who is also president of Tehrik Tahaffuz Haqooq Qaidi Swati of Swat district and former candidate for NWFP Assembly, challenged the officials of the forest department for debate on deforestation. Mentioning various illegalities with regard to forest harvesting and activities of timber mafia in connivance with local officials of the forest department, Swati pointed towards various steps of the forest department, which according to him added to the miseries of local population besides giving a boost to the timber smuggling and deforestation. Saying that he would send a detailed report to the high-ups of the forest department on the corrupt practices and illegalities, he demanded immediate removal of local forest department officials and warned that if no action was taken on his statement, the locals would be compelled to take direct action.

In a story from Dargai, traders accused the forest officials of harassing contractor even for legal timber trade on mala-fide intention. The news story says: “With special reference to “illegal” action against a contractor who was transporting 640 feet of timber to Dargai, the traders of Dargai timber market claimed that Forest Range Officer Dargai Gulzar Rehman imposed Rs113000 fine and kept the loaded truck impounded for 11 days with mala fide intention on behest of District Forest Officer Batkhela Bakht Zamin Khan due to his personal difference with the district forest officer of Lower Dir. They demanded of the concerned federal and provincial authorities that besides cancellation of fine, the trader should be paid Rs55000 as fare for impounding his vehicle for 11 days. Pointing out that 30 feet of timber owned by the contractor was also found missing from the truck, they said the action has sent a wave of shock among those who are doing legal business of timber.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Report on harassment of contractor involved in legal trade of timber; Daily Azadi Swat October 25, 2004

In a December 7, 2004 story, a local, Mahabat Khan accused the forest department officials of implicating innocent people in false cases of timber smuggling. He said that he has been jailed several times on registration of false cases against him. He alleged that local officials were involved in cutting of forest but register cases against him without any proof even after he left his native town.

This story seems to be one side accusation of one individual who had been behind bars several times on charges of timber stealing of cutting. The story should have the version of the forest officials to give the people real perspectives instead of providing an individual a chance to get a clean chit. He may be true that he was being maligned by the forest officials but there would be another side of the story.

#### **6.4.6 Article on forestry for survival of human being**

Daily Azadi in his edition of December 9, 2004 carried a thought provoking article by a Field Forest Officer Mr Ijaz Ahmed which could be seen as an attempt to bridge gap between policy and practice. Research based articles can play an important role in bridging this gap.

In the article on “Forests are necessary for survival of humans”, the writer has highlighted importance of the forests in human life and uses of wood for various purposes as well as role of trees in soil conservation. Describing forests as gift of God to regulate flow of rivers, he also mentioned role of forests in protecting wildlife. He pointed out that only 4.8 per cent of Pakistan’s land mass is under forest cover, whereas this ratio in the developed countries is 12 per cent.

The forests contribute to GDP of the country by 0.21 per cent. Punjab has forest cover over one million acres of land, while Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan have forest cover over four million hectares, 13 million hectares and four million hectares of land respectively. Around half million people are directly and indirectly employed with the forest industry, while 30 million animals are fed by forests.

In 2001-02, 271,000 million cubic feet of timber was harvested for construction purpose while another 474,000 million cubic feet of wood was provided for domestic use and exports of wood products fetched Rs1.5 billion. Today, the country is facing various environmental problems, including less rain, water and air pollution, damage to ozone layer, and excess of carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide, due to lack of forest cover.

According to the World Health Organisation estimates, the ratio of nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide in the Pakistani air increased by 23 and 25 per cent respectively in the past two decades, and the carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide increased to the alarming proportion, leading to increase in asthma and allergy diseases 70 times. According to G S Plast, if carbon dioxide in the air is doubled, the temperature on earth would increase by 6.5 Fahrenheit.

On the one hand, forests are being eliminated in Pakistan at a rapid pace while on the other hand, population of the country is also increasing fast. The population of the country was 33 million in 1947-54, while according to census of 2000-01, it has increased to 145 million, and soon Pakistan would become one of the few most populated countries of the world. The writer opines that if population growth is not arrested and forest depletion is not controlled, the earth would turn into a hell for the people.

The writer says that the population growth in Punjab is 207 per cent, 3.3 in NWFP, 3.6 per cent in Sindh and seven per cent in Balochistan. If the population growth continued at the same pace, the resources of the country, particularly forests, would be burdened immensely and as a consequence the nation would face a major environmental disaster badly affecting the economy of the country. The writer says that some people consider the birth control contrary to the Islamic injunctions, but they forget that the whole Islamic philosophy is based on moderation.

#### **6.4.7 Medicinal plants**

Medicinal plants are important in the context of highland areas in the north of the country. These plants are over harvested and are generally not given due value. The issue of medicinal plants hardly gets media space as it requires.

A Mingora dateline story says a programme was arranged at the sub-office of the Environmental Protection Society, Matta. A large number of activists, collectors of medicinal plants and hakeems of Matta tehsil attended the programme. On the occasion, speakers highlighted importance of medicinal plants and opined that proper use of medicinal plants can help alleviate poverty in the area.<sup>53</sup>

### **6.5 Daily Shamal, Swat (SS)**

Daily Shamal is a well known local newspaper in NWFP's forest areas. It gives massive coverage to forestry issues. Some of its reports really impact situations relating to forestry.

#### **6.5.1 Timber import from Afghanistan**

Timber import from Afghanistan has been an important issue carried by the newspaper. A report from Dargai speaks of the reported losses due to ban on timber import from Afghanistan. According to the news report, the government has suffered Rs. One billion losses because the Frontier Constabulary officials posted at Balahisar Fort, Peshawar are creating obstacles in import of timber from Afghanistan despite the fact that the provincial assembly has unanimously adopted a resolution allowing import of timber from Afghanistan through two routes in Dir and Bannu districts. Similarly, the NWFP secretary environment, Pakistan Customs and Central Board of Revenue have also allowed import of timber from the neighbouring country.<sup>54</sup>

The report says that around 50,000 people are attached to the timber business because it is a source of income for people of Afghanistan. It says that around 500,000 to 600,000 feet timber is lying at the border and season of snowfall is approaching fast

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<sup>53</sup> Importance of medicinal plants highlighted; Daily Azadi Swat December 19, 2004

<sup>54</sup> Report on stoppage of timber import from Afghanistan; Daily Shamal Swat January 7, 2004

due to which roads will remain closed for five/six months. It says that on persuasion of people by the provincial government to invest in the timber business, people have invested millions of rupees to import timber from Afghanistan and the government has to give way for transportation of timber that will help it raise Rs One billion revenues.

**Though this report could be true but the reporter has not quoted the sources of information. It seems to be an investigative report but it has not been written in investigative reporting format citing the sources and related information. Investigative reporting skills need to be imparted to the reporters in northern areas.**

#### **6.5.2 Concerns over elimination/illegal cutting of forests**

Repeated concerns are expressed through press statement by various communities in the mountainous areas in north of Pakistan. Sometime community leaders, political leaders and local government officials express their concern, while other times, forest department officials express their concern on illegal cutting of trees. Despite realization of fast elimination of trees, illegal cutting of trees and timber smuggling continues unchecked and duly reported in the media.

According to a news story, a meeting of the Forestry Owners Development and Conservation Association of Swat was held at a hotel of Madian. The meeting was attended by nazims, naib nazims, notable and forest owners from Utroz, Kalam, Bahrain, Madian, Shahgram and Teerat. Addressing the meeting, the speakers said that the timber mafia had eliminated forest in Chilas and Kohistan districts and now they were eyeing on the private forests. They said if the forest owners get united, the forest cover could be saved. A resolution was passed in the meeting to constitute six-member committees for forest conservation. The speakers also voiced concern over usurpation of the forest owners' rights and stressed need for unity among forest owners to discourage smugglers.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Meeting voices concern over elimination of forest in Chilas, Kohistan districts; Daily Shamal Swat February 9, 2004

A February 10, 2004 report from Swat says illegal felling of trees in forests of Swat district is going unchecked in connivance with officials of the forest department, and authorities are not taking action despite repeated complaints. The report says that no action is being taken against timber smugglers despite publication of reports in newspapers and area of Swat is losing its beauty due to unhindered cutting of forest. The forest department officials have been urged in the report to stop timber smuggling.

A report from Khawazakhel says illegal cutting of forest in Swat is going on unchecked, as the officials of the forest department are hand in glove with the timber mafia. The mobile squads of the forest department are equal partners in crime of the timber mafia. According to locals, the patrol parties of the forest department chase innocent people but do nothing to check the vehicles of the timber mafia. They said the mountains in the area, which were covered with forest some years ago, are now looking bald due to misdeeds of the forest department officials. They urged the high-ups of the department to take necessary steps to save forest cover in the area.<sup>56</sup>

### **6.5.3 Issues confronting forest guards**

Forests guards association and their office bearers also get news space in local newspapers. They raise their complaints and demands for cooperation and facilities as well as protection. A February 10, 2004 news items from Nangolai speaks of non payment of salaries to forest guards. It says, "Hundreds of forest guards, who were recruited by the forest department in collaboration with the ERP on a meager salary of Rs1200 per month, did not receive their salaries for nine months. After a lot of struggle, they were paid three-month salaries while the remaining payment for six months has been embezzled by the officials of the forest department. The forest guards, majority of whom belongs to Matta range, appealed for payment of salaries, warning that otherwise they would be compelled to move a court of law.

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<sup>56</sup> Illegal cutting of forests goes on in Swat in connivance with officials; Daily Shamal Swat March 30, 2004

In this news item, nobody from the guards has been quoted as demanding for their salaries rather only the journalist reports as he adjudges the situation, which is not the job of a reporter.

In a news report from Mingora, Divisional President of NWFP Forest Guards, Foresters and Deputy Rangers Association Muhammad Ma'az Toofan lamented that cooperation of people in Swat district with the forest department officials is limited to unnecessary criticism.<sup>57</sup> He regretted that the officials of the association were not given an opportunity to speak at the Forest Conference. In a statement, he said that preservation of forests is a collective responsibility of the forest department officials, common people and political leaders because forests are national wealth. He alleged that timber smugglers enjoy patronization of the political figures. He in a June 14, 2004 statement said that their job is very difficult and they are performing their duties efficiently despite lack of resources and a host of problems. In an interview with 'Shamal' News Editor Nasir Alam, he said that duty at River Swat is very difficult because smugglers are armed with sophisticated weapons and they chase them unarmed. He said that several foresters have so far died while performing their duties.

#### **6.5.4 Forestry Conference and lack of government's interest**

A March 10, 2004 story with Marghzar dateline says a forestry conference was held at Saidu Sharif and Senior NWFP Minister Sirajul Haq was invited to attend the meet as chief guest but he could not attend the conference due to other engagements. The members of the NWFP and National Assemblies also stayed away from the moot. Speaking on the occasion, District Nazim of Swat Asfandyar Ameer Zeb said that when Swat was a state, a handsome amount of revenue was generated from the forests that were completely protected, but the forests suffered colossal loss due to unchecked cutting after merger of the state with Pakistan. He pointed out that 15 per cent of the state's total area was under the forest cover before merger of the state with Pakistan and now it is just four per cent. He said that if 'save forest committees' are constituted at the village level, the forests could be saved to a large extent. He said there were some problems due to lack of resources at the district and provincial level.

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<sup>57</sup> Head of local association of foresters' laments lack of public cooperation; Daily Shamal Swat March 10, 2004



On the same day an official hand out with Swat dateline quoted the District Nazim of Swat Asfandyar Ameer Zeb as saying that committees would be constituted at the village level for preservation of forests and increasing the ratio of forest cover up to 25 per cent of the total area. He said that according to international standards, a country should have forest cover over 25 per cent of its total area but this ratio is dangerously low in Pakistan. He said that 7.6 million saplings would be planted in Malakand Division during the spring plantation drive and all people are responsible for looking after and protecting plants.

The coverage of this conference should have been given large space in the newspaper but the story covered in Shamal only covered what the district nazim spoke and rest of the people who spoke on the occasion have not been quoted which surely would have their own vision of forestry in the area. Such conference should be given a balance coverage which is a professional requirement.

#### **6.5.5 Timber mafia playing havoc**

The news coverage on the reported loot and plunder of timber mafia is as wide in Shamal as it used to be in other newspapers as the mafia seems to be too strong that it continue its activities unchecked despite realization at all level that unsustainable logging and smuggling of timbers cause damage to forests and to environment. A lot of news items were carried out by Shamal detailing how timber mafia is operating across the forest areas.

A March 15, 2004 news item with Alpuri datelines says the timber mafia belonging to Shalpeen area is savagely cutting forests and this national wealth is being destroyed badly, whereas agricultural farms are also being harmed. Two residents of the area said in a statement that names of the mafia members have been mentioned in an application submitted to the district authorities. They said that timber mafia has purchased 660,000 trees and is eliminating forest cover. They accused the forest department officials of patronizing timber mafia. They expressed their surprise that

influential people have purchased 660,000 trees but the concerned authorities were playing role of a silent spectator.

A staff report from Shangla says elimination of forest in Shangla is going on unchecked. On the one hand, the government is spending millions of rupees annually to preserve forests, while on the other hand the employees of the forest department are equal partners with the timber mafia in cutting of forests and are backing those involved in felling trees. Millions of dollars are being received as foreign aid for preservation of forests and protection of environment, but the officials of the forest department are embezzling huge amounts by constituting committees comprising persons of their choice and thus hoodwinking masses. Plantation has been carried in a block of Lailonai village seven times, but the result is zero. The people of the area have urged the NWFP governor, minister for forests, chief conservator forests of NWFP and forest conservator of Malakand circle to hold an inquiry against officials of the forest department in Shangla district.<sup>58</sup>

#### **6.5.6 Community blames forest officials of embezzlement**

Forests communities largely blame forest officials for deforestation, illegal cutting, corruption and embezzlement accusing them of supporting timber mafia and smugglers. Newspaper coverage on these issues is extensive, though news stories are mostly written based on one sided accusations. Such accusatory stories lose value once they are one sided.

A March 21, 2004 news item by Shamal's staff reporter from Alpuri says all development schemes of the forest department in Shangla district have failed and officials of the department have adopted a new method of embezzling FSP fund. The officials have constituted so-called village development committees called VDC that have set up VDC nurseries, which are providing substandard plants. Moreover, plantation is going on despite the fact the weather conditions are unfavourable, and substandard saplings are also being planted in the blocks, where plantation is not required at all. Thus, hundreds of thousands of rupees of the forestry sector project are

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<sup>58</sup> Elimination of forest in Shangla by timber mafia; Daily Shamal Swat March 17, 2004

being embezzled in the name of forestation and plantation. The locals have urged the authorities concerned to look into the matter and save the national kitty from losses.

According to a staff report from Darashkhela, a local social worker and peasant councillor, Alam Sher Khan, has filed a defamation case against District Forest Officer Kalam Rustam Khan, Range Officer Hayat Ali Khan, Forest Officer of Madian Muhammad Ayaz and an informer, Sher Khan, demanding Rs30 million in a defamation claim. He contended that passenger vehicle carrying furniture was heading to Karachi and when it reached Madian crossing, it was stopped by the respondents and they illegally imposed a fine. He submitted that the respondents impounded the vehicle for two days without any legal ground and later accused him of smuggling furniture.<sup>59</sup>

In a press statement, the petitioner said neither he owned the vehicle nor the recovered furniture belonged to him. He further stated that also he was not present on the occasion. He admitted that he is manager of the bus terminal from where the bus had originated, but involving him in the case is sheer excess. He said he is a social worker and elected representative and his involvement in the case has defamed him, thus he was compelled to move a court of law to restore his lost credibility.

This story also does not have the version of the accused in the statement. So, it could not be judged as a sound story having any further impact. Most of such stories are single source based which lose the track of being a news story rather becomes an accusatory statement by one party. That is a big flaw in the local reporting.

### **6.5.7 Timber smuggling/plantation and some other common coverage**

Timber smuggling is a popular subject with local media since this continues unabated, so reporters keep filing stories on the topic. Timber smuggling has multiple linkages and a lot people are involved in it. Reportedly, it usually continues in connivance with the forest officials and police. Some times, stories regarding failed smuggling bids

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<sup>59</sup> Councillor files defamation case against forest department officials; Daily Shamal Swat August 29, 2004

and raids of the forest officials and police do appear in the newspaper. Almost similar stories appeared in Shamal as have been reported in other quoted newspapers.

Similarly, Shamal also covered stories on tree plantation campaigns covering messages and ritual sermons on this occasion. Shamal also covered forestry alliance's campaign against forestry ordinance 2002. It also cover some common issues on forestry sector.

## **7. Findings**

The data/news clippings were collected from five daily newspapers published from different parts of NWFP. They are Mashria Peshawar, Aaj Peshawar and Abbottabad, Azadi and Shamal Swat. Following are the finding based on the detailed and analytical descriptions of the contents of hundreds of news items appeared in these newspapers. For a better understanding the findings have been classified into two: general finding about the news coverage and issues and professional finding describes journalistic worth of reporting and editing in these newspapers.

### **7.1 General**

- Most of the news coverage was about the failure of forest department in protecting forests from illegal loggers, timber mafia and smugglers.
- They also blamed forest department not only for their cooperation with timber Mafia in illegal logging but also for their help/support in illegal smuggling of timber.
- They also criticized different ongoing activities of forest department like their legal reforms, formation of joint forest management committees and village development committees and their unsatisfactory performances.
- In different news statements community also complained about the negative/non cooperative attitude of forest depart officials.

- A few news items were published about the serious concerns of communities over the decade long ban on legal harvest of forests.
- On a few occasions, civil society organizations got their strong protest published against the forest department's legal reform process.
- The newspapers generally gave least importance to forestry issues in their editorials, and the columnists also rarely discussed /highlighted the forestry issues in their columns.
- The second largest coverage is given to the policing efforts of forest department vigilance squads and police department recovery of illegal timber. Though, people generally believe it could be a myth.
- In some statements the community also praised their areas forest depart staff for their good performance.
- Most of the policy level issues and affairs were published in Peshawar based newspapers. Most of them were press releases of forest department. While at regional level except for a few news items of transfers of forest officials there is no coverage of any policy level information.
- Fire in forests is a common phenomenon; some times it erupts naturally while most of the time deliberately by the vested interests. Even around federal capital Margala Hills see fire every year. It is generally said that this fire provides safe pretext to the officials to hide the timber theft. Same pretext is used in the forest areas of NWFP. Local media covered stories relating to fire in the forests.
- Permits to deal in timber are considered to be given by the forest department to the legitimate community and people under forest policy but they are quite often reportedly used to bribe influential or granted as political gratification or issued

after getting bribe from timber mafia. Reports on use and misuse of such permits are covered in local newspapers

- Local people usually complain of the forest officials of abusing their powers to file cases against common people from the community while giving the real culprits, the timber mafia, a free hand to continue with their activities. They generally accuse the forest official of siding with timber smugglers and those causing deforestation. Even local leaders of political parties come hard on them.
- Medicinal plants are important in the context of highland areas in the north of the country. These plants are over harvested and are generally not given due value. The issue of medicinal plants hardly gets media space as it requires.
- Repeated concerns are expressed through press statement by various communities in the mountainous areas in north of Pakistan. Sometime community leaders, political leaders and local government officials express their concern, while other times, forest department officials express their concern on illegal cutting of trees. Despite realization of fast elimination of trees, illegal cutting of trees and timber smuggling continues unchecked and duly reported in the media.
- Forests guards association and their office bearers also get news space in local newspapers. They raise their complaints and demands for cooperation and facilities as well as protection. A February 10, 2004 news items from Nangolai speaks of non payment of salaries to forest guards.
- Timber smuggling is a popular subject with local media since this continues unabated, so reporters keep filing stories on the topic. Timber smuggling has multiple linkages and a lot people are involved in it. Reportedly, it usually continues in connivance with the forest officials and police. Some times, stories regarding failed smuggling bids and raids of the forest officials and police do appear in the newspaper. Almost similar stories appeared in Shamal as have been reported in other quoted newspapers.

## **7.2 Professional**

- Editorial is an important tool to influence policy but local newspapers rarely make forests a topic for their editorials. Both Peshawar and Abbottabad editions of Urdu daily Aaj during the period of study carried two editorials each on the ritual and traditional tree plantation campaign and on new legislation for protection of forests. Lack of editorials is a serious policy and advocacy gap. News coverage on forestry issue alone cannot influence the policy and law making process. Instead, editorials do play an important role in this regard.
- Similarly, hardly any research oriented articles are published in local newspapers. Dawn and The News carried articles on forestry related policy issues but except for Shamal, which carried an article on forestry that too written by a Field Forest Officer, no other newspaper carried significant articles or opinion pieces. Giving analytical position in an article or opinion piece or editorial in popular public information format converting it from a research based technical knowledge is important to influence policy makers. If such pieces do appear in newspapers, the gap between policy and practice is made visible thus could be addressed properly.
- If we look at the news items covered by regional press, we found that these news stories professionally seem weak as generally original sources, officials, direct beneficiary or losers are not quoted in most of the news items rather anonymous social circles are quoted which make news item vague and of no use in terms of having any impact or improvement. While in the some stories, foresters association's office bearers seem praising their colleagues or some individuals laud the role of some individuals to promote vested interest. These seem to be table stories to please or favour forest officials. They may have done the good work indicated in some stories but this should not have be given as a news item as it was their duty to do what they have reportedly done.
- News stories in local newspapers normally carry comments which give slant or colour to the story. For example, a news story with Haripur dateline starts

saying timber mafia has expanded its activities and besides the old routes, timber is also being smuggled to Punjab through new routes, while the activities of the forest department officials are limited to sightseeing. People of the area have demanded abolition of the forest department through its merger with the police. Dozens of vehicles loaded with wood daily head towards Punjab from different routes, while now smugglers are also using Tarbela reservoir for smuggling timber avoiding the checkpoints. This story does not quote any body who is saying all this. No official version is quoted; no accusers are there in the story. No source is mentioned. Such stories are carried in large number which shows lack of professionalism on the part of both the reporters and the desk editors.

- Based on one source, most of the stories of regional newspapers seem to be one sided story. No version of the police official accused of involvement in illegal logging has been given in these otherwise accusatory stories.
- Majority of news stories seem to be incomplete and lack objectivity as they are generally vague in nature based on any statement by a trader or any common individual without describing why this statement was important in that context.
- Though some stories provided information about the raid by authorities against timber smugglers or mafia but still it needed more information to be complete stories.
- In a story, a reporter wrote more about the plight of the forest squad and their vehicles in a comment style without quoting any person and real benefit holder or stakeholder of the story. The facts given regarding the squad may be correct but news reporters are not supposed to become party to the story.
- Most of reporters' files seem to be an editorial comment and not a news item as it does not quote any body saying this. Normally reporters working with



local newspapers lack professional writing and reporting skills and the desk editors lack editing skills.

- One thing is common in regional newspapers that all stories appear to be single sourced and lacking version of the other side which is considered to be unethical in the profession. Accusations that too on the basis of a single source cannot be run in news stories in the way it had been run in these stories. This shows that there is a dire need of skills development for local reporters.
- A story seems to be one side accusation of one individual who had been behind bars several times on charges of timber stealing of cutting. The story should have the version of the forest officials to give the people real perspectives instead of providing an individual a chance to get a clean chit. He may be true that he was being maligned by the forest officials but there would be another side of the story.
- Though a report could be true but if the reporter does not quote the sources of information, it would make the report half truth. Some news stories were found to be investigative reports but they were not written in investigative reporting format citing the sources and related information. Investigative reporting skills need to be imparted to the reporters in northern areas.
- In one of the news items, no forest guard was quoted as demanding for salaries rather only the journalist reports as he adjudges the situation, which is not the job of a reporter. Reporters are supposed to only report the even or cover the news worthy item and not become part of the even or the report as party.
- A huge forest conference was held in Swat valley which should have been given large space in the newspapers but the story covered in Shamal only covered what the district nazim spoke and rest of the people who spoke on the occasion were not quoted despite the fact that they surely would have their own vision of forestry in the area. Such conference should be given a balance coverage which is a professional requirement.

- The news coverage on the reported loot and plunder of timber mafia is as wide in Shamal as it used to be in other newspapers as the mafia seems to be too strong that it continues its activities unchecked despite realization at all level that unsustainable logging and smuggling of timbers cause damage to forests and to environment. A lot of news items were carried out by Shamal detailing how timber mafia is operating across the forest areas.
- Forests communities largely blame forest officials for deforestation, illegal cutting, corruption and embezzlement accusing them of supporting timber mafia and smugglers. Newspaper coverage on these issues is extensive, though news stories are mostly written based on one sided accusations. Such accusatory stories lose value once they are one sided. Most of such stories are single source based which lose the track of being a news story rather becomes an accusatory statement by one party. That is a big flaw in the local reporting.

## **8. Recommendations and conclusion**

If we look at the content analysis of the news coverage of the forestry issues in regional and national newspapers, we find that there is a huge gap between regional press and policy makers. The policy makers sit in the provincial and national capitals while those who practice forest policy operate at local and community level. The news coverage at local and regional level hardly reaches at policy level. Moreover the coverage does not have any substance to influence policy makers.

A lot of research has so far been done on forestry issues in Pakistan and heavily funded projects have been launched in the forestry sector but piles of these documents lack outreach to media, particularly at local level. The level of journalistic effort at regional press could not be expected to be up to the mark as local journalists are not properly and professionally trained for the job. They are not properly paid. For that matter the newspapers do not earn sufficient resources to sustain as their revenue is marginal and they can not earn through their circulations.

In such a situation, there are chances that some times, motivated and planted news coverage is done to benefit one or the other party. Since journalists are not trained and skilled and not properly paid, so there is always a chance that they use their journalistic clout to grab some money or benefits to earn their living. That is why they go for superficial coverage instead of indepth and follow up coverage of events. They hardly bother to chase a story of illegal logging or smuggling as most of them are not full time working journalists and they are not paid for even an investigative story.

Due to lack of knowledge, skills and understanding, and limited or no access to knowledge or research material, journalists hardly file informative stories rather they file vague stories without quoting sources and balancing their story by having all the versions. So they lose credibility and once news story is not credible, it would be just a vague piece of information and half truth and not a story that can motivate reaction or influence.

If we look at the content analyzed in this paper, we see that hundreds of news items speak of corruption in forestry sector and continued unsustainable logging and timber smuggling, but their impact seems zero as no policy is made, no protection mechanism is devised and even no real information is shared with the people. On the other hand, research volumes in forestry sectors are piled up in cupboards of government and donor agencies. The community hardly get such information. The local and regional media could be a source of information for the people but media itself is information starved. So, there is a dire need of wider sharing of information and research knowledge on forestry with media so that they can make its outreach to the people possible.

The NCCR Pakistan Research groups could take a lead in bridging the gap between policy and practice by imparting knowledge and skills to the journalists by providing them access in Urdu and local language to its research findings so that the people should know what we have done so far.

Since, majority of communities do not have access to newspapers in terms of availability and readability, their need of forestry related knowledge and research results should be shared with them through a community based radio broadcast.

Through PAMS/NCCR we need to organize training programmes for reporters and editors on writing, reporting and editing skills to build their capacity to professionally report the forestry issues in regional as well as national newspapers.

If we really bring about any change in the lives and livelihoods of the forest communities by enhancing their say in forest management and use, we need to use media as a tool for outreach. We need to provide maximum research information and results to local communities in their local or Urdu language and to policy makers either in Urdu or in English language. NCCR Pakistan group website needs to be made available in Urdu too some extent.

NCCR Pakistan Research group's forthcoming volume needs to be published in Urdu language as well so that maximum people could benefit and media publish it excerpts for wider public information.

By taking these measures, we can hope bridge gap between policy and practice through promoting media activism on forestry issues so that media can make forestry an issue of the marginalized communities and not just a profiteering drive for mafia. We need to really motivate media and journalists by building their capacity and raising their access to information so that they can play their due role of protecting the right to know of the people, the communities.

ENDS...