

Governance and Benefits Sharing in the Swedish Forest Commons: an Assessment of the Shareholder Satisfaction

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Abstract

Unlike forest commons in many other countries, within Europe and elsewhere, Swedish forest commons are formed and organised in a particular way in that the parcels (or shares) of forestlands involved are privately owned but as commons they are jointly managed by forest professionals. Furthermore, shares in forest commons are considered as “set asides” of the private landholding (farm/forest) and thus cannot be owned or sold in isolation. This leaves little space for the shareholders to be ‘hands-on’ in the management of these commons, although they are involved in decision making through a management board they elect. Moreover, it has been claimed that the shareholders in the Swedish forest commons do not bear the costs (for management and governance) proportional to the benefits they receive from their commons.

In this paper, we use data from a mail survey directed to resident shareholders in three of the major forest commons in Sweden (Jokkmokk, Tärna-Stensele, and Älvdalen) to assess their satisfaction on the governance and benefits sharing within their forest commons. This study shows that generally a significant majority of the shareholders in these three forest commons seem to be satisfied with the status quo regarding the governance/management of their commons and the benefits they accrue. However, women’s participation in most aspects of the forest commons seems to be significantly lower than their male counterpart leaving them benefiting less from their commons as a result.

Keywords: Forest management, gender, survey, Sweden.

1 Introduction

The origins of the modern Swedish forest commons (FCs) date to the late 19th century, by the time as the undesired effects of great land redistribution and privatisation

of land was being felt (NYLUND 2009, NYLUND and INGEMARSON 2007, HOLMGREN et al. 2010). In creating these forest commons, the government not only wanted to prevent the forest companies purchasing and exploiting the forestlands unsustainably to the detriment of the farmers, it also aimed to improve the local economy and create a firm base for taxation; beside making sure independent class of farmers continued to exist in Sweden (HOLMGREN et al. 2010, CARLSSON 1997, 1999).

Unlike forest commons in many other countries, within Europe and elsewhere, Swedish forest commons are formed and organised in such a way in that the parcels (or shares) of forestlands involved are privately owned, but as commons they are jointly managed by forest professionals. Furthermore, shares in forest commons are considered as “set asides” of the private landholding (farm/forest) and thus cannot be owned or sold in isolation. However, these shares can be transferred, usually to family members as inheritance, or sold along with the associated private holdings, thereby paving way for even an outsider to get access to the commons. Moreover, shareholders in the commons could not only be the individuals but could also be companies, the church or the State as long as they own the corresponding property linked to the share in the forest common (CARLSSON 1997).

From 1861 to 1918, a total of 33 forest commons were established in Sweden. These forest commons currently cover about 0.5 million hectares of productive forestland, with about 25,000 individual shareholders. Among these individual shareholders, roughly 20 % are thought to be remote owners of the forests (ibid.). The Forestry Act and corresponding regulations that relate to the management of Swedish forests also apply for the forest commons, in addition to the specialised law like the Forest Commons Law (1952) (HOLMGREN et al. 2004). In terms of jurisdiction, the Swedish Forest Agency and the County Administrative Board oversee the running of the forest commons; however, as CARLSSON (1997) states, the latter one is “largely a formality”. However, HOLMGREN et al.

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(2010), in their paper on the governance of forest commons in Sweden, come to the conclusion that unlike in other forest management regimes and forest policies, government control in the forest commons and policies pertaining to the commons is still strong. In terms of day-to-day governance and management of the forest commons, the primary responsibility lies with a management board elected by the shareholders. Moreover, every forest common must have, by law, a professional forest manager for all its forest management activities (CARLSSON 1997, HOLMGREN et al. 2004).

It is not surprising then that, as CARLSSON (1997) points out, a lot of the forest commons in Sweden are managed like commercial enterprises. The benefits accruing to the shareholders from these enterprises however depend upon the bylaws of each common, with some giving annual cash payments as dividend, some providing subsidies to carry out forestry-related activities in their private property, some providing both these benefits, while others providing no direct benefits to shareholders instead choosing to use profits in local public goods such as roads, schools etc. These differences have also been highlighted by the previous studies on the Swedish forest commons (see for example HOLMGREN et al. 2010, HOLMGREN et al. 2007, HOLMGREN et al. 2004). Moreover, it has also been shown that not all forest commons are equally successful in terms of governance/management and in generating revenues for their shareholders (ibid.). This last point leads us to the question how satisfied the shareholders are in Swedish forest commons.

In this paper, we use data from a mail survey directed to resident shareholders in three of the major forest commons in Sweden (Jokkmokk, Tärna-Stensele, and Älvdalen) to assess their satisfaction on the governance and benefits sharing within their FCs. More specifically we explore whether the shareholders' gender influence their level of involvement in the governance and in benefits sharing, and hence on their satisfaction with regards to the governance and resource utilisation from their commons.

2 Methodology and Data

In this study, we try to combine 1) questionnaires eliciting participation in the management/governance, use, and appropriation of benefits from the forest commons; 2) questionnaires eliciting the perception of the respondent shareholders regarding the benefits and costs of the forest commons; and 3) questionnaires eliciting their 'opinions' and levels of 'agreement' on how their FCs and benefits from them are being managed, and how they should be managed. The idea is to combine data from the level of participation in the governance/management and benefits sharing from the FCs; shareholders' perceptions

on aforementioned matters regarding their FCs; and their opinion regarding the status quo and whether it should change so as to gauge their level of satisfaction, and conduct a thorough analysis of the current situation. This should not only help come to an informed conclusion regarding the shareholder satisfaction on the management/governance of and benefits sharing from the forest commons, but should also have an important policy relevance with regards to the commons.

This study is based on the shareholder survey data collected in three of the major forest commons in Sweden: Jokkmokk in Norrbotten, Tärna-Stensele in Västerbotten and Älvdalen in Dalarna. In this study, a questionnaire was designed to capture the local shareholders' opinions about what the forest commons contribute to them as individuals (households), and to the local community, in terms of economic welfare, landscape identity and the quality of the environment. In order to maintain the local perspective, only resident shareholders in the three FCs were included in the study. Only individuals (no companies or other juridical persons) were included.

Before administrating the survey questionnaires, the shareholders were divided into three strata based on the size of their individual share in the FC: the 25 % largest shareholdings, the 50 % intermediate, and the 25 % smallest shareholdings. As previous studies on small-scale private forest owners points to a significant difference in management involvement between women and men (see for example LIDESTAV 2010, LIDESTAV and NORDFJELL 2005, LINDROOS et al. 2005), we decided to further split each stratum into female and male shareholders. Thus, shareholders for each common were divided into six strata. We decided to limit each group to 50 individuals, selected by uniform random sampling, but some of the groups contained fewer than 50 shareholders (this was taken into account in the statistical calculations). In total, 862 questionnaires were sent out in March 2009. After two reminders, 423 questionnaires were returned and the results are thus based on a total response rate of 49 %. At the stratum level the response rate varied substantially, from 23 % to 65 %, and at the FC level from 44 % in Jokkmokk to 53 % in Älvdalen. The response rate for women was 48 % compared to 50 % for men. Although the response rate may be considered low, it should be noted that the responses represent 22 % of the population.

The collected data, which was primarily categorical and descriptive in nature, was analysed using STATA 11.2 (STATA CORP 2009). The main statistical tools used were ranking of responses, cross-tabulation and chi-square tests, particularly using various strata to compare and contrast the responses of shareholders belonging to different strata, and to test whether these responses were statistically significant.

3 Results

3.1 Stated participation and benefits in the forest commons

In terms of participation and benefits from the FCs, fishing and outdoor recreation was the most participated activity (61 %), followed by receipt of cash payment from the FC (46 %), receiving subsidies from the FC for activities on their private property (46 %), and hunting on the FC land (41 %) (Table 1). Moreover, only 4 (1 %) of the respondents said they had 'no contact or benefit from the FC'. Views regarding the participation in and benefits from the FC varied significantly between the male and female respondents. Female shareholders were found to participate significantly less than their male counterparts in many of the activities. Their participation was significantly less in 1) governance of the commons, for example, as 'elected representative' or in 'annual meetings/general assembly'; 2) the use of the common lands such as for 'hunting', 'fishing & outdoor recreation'; and 3) receiving cash payment from the commons (p -value < 0.05 for all).

3.2 Perceived benefits, costs and local contributions of the FCs

'FCs benefit by providing spaces to hunt, fish and for other recreation' – this was the top perceived benefit from the FCs with a total of 67 % of the respondents agreeing to it (Table 2). Other highly thought-of benefits from the FCs were the 'provision of roads' (56 %), 'subsidies' (48 %), 'local employment' (47 %), and 'keeping revenue/income locally via local subsidies' (45 %). Overall respondent shareholders perceived much higher benefits from the FCs than otherwise – only about 3 % mentioning they provide 'no benefits at all'. There were significant variations in the perceived benefits from the FCs between male and female respondents. Significantly higher proportion of male shareholders perceive benefits

from FCs through 'large scale forestry', 'direct income', 'spaces to hunt, fish and recreation', and 'local employment'; while significantly higher proportion of female shareholders perceive benefits from FCs by helping manage part of their forests without themselves 'bothering' (p -value < 0.05 for all).

It is clear from the responses that generally a high majority of the respondents (64 %) perceive no disadvantages from their FCs (Table 3). The difficulty to 'get most shareholders to agree & act for a common goal' was perceived as one of the main disadvantages, though by only 25 % of the respondents. Other perceived disadvantages include 'lack of control and impact on 'my share' in the FC' (9 %), 'FCs provide too little profit' (8 %), and 'too many shareholders' (7 %). All these responses indicate that overall, the respondents see FC as providing benefits rather than creating disadvantages for them. In terms of variations in perceived disadvantages between male and female respondents, significantly more male shareholders perceived 'lack of control on their own share in the FC' as being the disadvantage of the FC compared to female shareholders (p -value = 0.027). However, as with other strata, there were no other significant differences between male and female shareholders regarding their perceived disadvantages of the FCs.

3.4 How should the FCs be managed?

The respondent shareholders were given a list of statements concerning the management and utilisation of benefits from their FCs, and were asked to choose what priority those actions should be given – with 'higher priority', 'lower priority', 'fine as it is', and 'no opinion' being the four options for each statement – in order to gauge their satisfaction (or lack thereof) at the way their FCs are managed/governed and the way their FCs revenues are being used. Overall, it is clear that a majority of the respondents seem to be satisfied with the status quo (based on their response 'fine as it is' to the statements), except

Table 1: Overall participation in and appropriation of benefits from the FC activities as stated by the respondent shareholders

(The top five items are ranked in descending order based on the number of responses each received.)

Participation in & benefits from FC activities	Frequency	Percent of cases
I fish & do outdoor recreation on FC land/water	252	61.02
I receive cash payment from the FC	196	47.46
I receive subsidies from the FC for different activities on my private property	191	46.25
I hunt on the FC land	168	40.68
Take part in annual meetings/general assembly	130	31.48
Valid Cases: 413	Missing Cases: 10	

Table 2: Overall perceived benefits of the FC

(The top five items are ranked in descending order based on the number of responses each received.)

Benefits of the FC	Frequency	Percent of cases
FCs benefit by providing spaces to hunt, fish and for other recreation	274	66.83
FCs benefit through the provision of roads	231	56.34
FCs provide benefits through the subsidies	196	47.80
FCs provide employment locally	193	47.07
FCs benefit by keeping revenue/income locally via local subsidies	185	45.12
Valid cases: 410	Missing cases: 13	

for one area – ‘hydroelectric and wind power’, which a larger section of the respondents seem to think should be given a higher priority (Table 4).

We further analyse these responses in depth based on the gender of our respondents. Particularly we analyse the ‘fine as it is’, ‘have no opinion’, and ‘higher priority’ responses – each indicating, generally speaking, ‘satisfaction’, ‘indifference’, and ‘dissatisfaction’ respectively with the status quo. The response ‘lower priority’ was excluded from this in-depth analysis as there were very few respondents choosing this option to have a meaningful statistical analysis. Our in-depth analysis on the ‘fine as it is’ response to the statements regarding the management of the FCs and use of the revenues from them showed that there was no significant variation between respondents based on their gender. Therefore, in general, we can conclude that majority of the respondents were, regardless of their gender, satisfied with the status quo regarding the management and use of revenue from their FCs.

A considerably large number of shareholders had responded with ‘have no opinion’ on the statements regarding the management and use of revenues from their FCs. Furthermore, a significantly higher proportion of female respondents had ‘no opinion’ on many of the issues related to the management and sharing of benefits from the FCs than their male counterparts. Particularly, significantly more female respondents (proportionally) said they

had ‘no opinion’ regarding ‘forest production’, ‘hunting and fishing’, ‘asset management’, and ‘considerations to other businesses’ compared to their male counterparts (p-value < 0.05 for all).

Around 15 % of the respondent shareholders, on average, responded that a higher priority should be given to various aspects of FC management and use of benefits, indicating that they were not entirely satisfied with the way things were being managed at present (i.e., the status quo). Upon further investigation, we found that generally there was no significant difference in responses between male and female respondents. However, there were some exceptions. A significantly large number of male respondents were of the opinion that forest production, and hydro and wind power should be given ‘higher priority’ compared to their female counterparts.

3.5 Satisfied with the way the revenue is being used?

A set of four statements related to the use of the revenue from their FCs were put to the respondents, and asked whether each should ‘increase’, ‘decrease’, ‘is fine as it is’, or they had ‘no opinion’ regarding the item. Generally more than half of the respondents for all four statements perceived the current distribution of the FCs’ revenue to be ‘fine as it is’, indicating their overall satisfaction with the status quo (Table 5). Interestingly, second most res-

Table 3: Overall perceived disadvantages with the FC

(The top five items are ranked in descending order based on the number of responses each received.)

Disadvantages with the FC	Frequency	Percent of cases
FCs have no disadvantages	214	64.34
Hard to get most shareholders to agree & act for a common goal	93	24.93
Lack of control and impact on ‘my share’ in the FC	33	8.85
FCs provide too little profit	30	8.04
Too many shareholders	28	7.51
Valid cases: 373	Missing cases: 50	

Table 4: Responses to statements regarding how their FCs should be managed (Overall valid cases 396, 27 missing – number of valid and missing cases for each statement is provided in the parentheses in the first column.)

Statements (valid/missing)	Responses Frequency (% of cases)			
	higher priority	lower priority	fine as it is	no opinion
Forest production should be given ... (362/61)	36 (9.94)	17 (4.70)	232 (64.09)	77 (21.27)
Hunting and fishing should be given ... (365/58)	50 (13.70)	18 (4.93)	248 (67.95)	49 (13.42)
Hydroelectric or wind power should be given ... (350/73)	128 (36.57)	29 (8.29)	90 (25.71)	103 (29.43)
Asset management should be given ... (342/81)	33 (9.65)	5 (1.46)	186 (54.39)	118 (34.50)
Recreation should be given ... (350/73)	50 (14.29)	5 (1.43)	227 (64.86)	68 (19.43)
Biodiversity conservation should be given ... (353/70)	59 (16.71)	16 (4.53)	202 (57.22)	76 (21.53)
Cultural heritage should be given ... (344/79)	50 (14.53)	5 (1.45)	195 (56.69)	94 (27.33)
Considerations to women's forest ownership should be given ... (351/72)	59 (16.81)	4 (1.14)	180 (51.28)	108 (30.77)
Considerations to other businesses should be given ... (358/65)	30 (8.38)	32 (8.94)	203 (56.70)	93 (25.98)

ponded choice was that of 'no opinion' for three of the four statements. Significantly less female respondents (proportionally) seemed to agree that the current structure of benefits distribution/revenue utilisation from the FCs was 'fine as it is' compared to their male counterparts (p -value < 0.05 for all four statements). This could likely mean female respondents/shareholders, in general, were not satisfied with the status quo with regards to the use of revenue. However, looking at the distribution of the 'no opinion' responses further, it becomes clear that a significantly large proportion of female respondents had 'no opinion' regarding the current scheme of revenue sharing from the FCs compared to their male counterparts (p < 0.001 for all four statements).

3.6 "Pleased to be a FC shareholder"

89 % of the respondents agree (72 % totally agree, 17 % partly agree) to the statement 'I am very pleased to be a FC shareholder', which shows a high level of satisfaction with the status quo in the management of and the use of benefits from the FCs. A similar pattern is apparent on the responses to other statements presented to gauge the shareholder satisfaction – 79 % agreeing that the FC has contributed to a positive development of their community, 74 % agreeing that the FC has contributed to their personal well-being, and 71 % agreeing that the FC contributes to a fair distribution of resources as well as to overall better use of natural resources (Table 6). In contrast, only 32 % agreed

Table 5: Responses to statements regarding how the revenue from the FCs should be spent

(Overall valid cases 406, 17 missing – number of valid and missing cases for each statement is provided in the parentheses in the first column.)

Statements (valid cases/missing)	Responses Frequency (% of cases)			
	should increase	should decrease	fine as it is	no opinion
Dividend to the shareholders ... (379/44)	65 (17.50)	10 (2.64)	242 (63.85)	62 (16.36)
Dividend for common benefits ... (365/58)	44 (12.05)	11 (3.01)	209 (57.26)	101 (27.67)
Proportion of revenue that stays locally ... (364/59)	81 (22.25)	1 (0.27)	190 (52.20)	92 (25.27)
Proportion of revenue that stays with the individual forest owners ... (350/73)	42 (12.00)	9 (2.57)	182 (52.00)	117 (33.43)

Table 6: Responses to some concluding statements related to FCs governance/management and utilisation of benefits (Overall valid cases 410, 13 missing – number of valid and missing cases for each statement is provided in the parentheses in the first column.)

Statements (valid cases/missing)	Responses Frequency (% of cases)			
	totally agree	partly agree	not at all	no opinion
[1] I am very pleased to be a FC shareholder (400/23)	287 (72)	67 (17)	12 (3)	34 (8)
[2] FC has contributed to a positive development of my community (386/37)	196 (51)	108 (28)	18 (5)	64 (16)
[3] FC has contributed to my personal well-being (388/35)	174 (45)	112 (29)	25 (6)	77 (20)
[4] FC contributes to more fair distribution of resources than individual ownership (386/37)	172 (44)	103 (27)	24 (6)	87 (23)
[5] FC contributes to overall better use of natural resources (380/43)	161 (42)	109 (29)	24 (6)	86 (23)
[6] FC contributes more to other interests like tourism, nature conservation etc. (382/41)	151 (39)	111 (29)	26 (7)	94 (25)
[7] FC has been a good role model for my own forest management (381/42)	114 (30)	140 (37)	31 (8)	96 (25)
[8] FC is a source of conflicts between the shareholders (380/43)	30 (8)	90 (24)	167 (44)	93 (24)
[9] FC is a source of conflicts between shareholders and non-shareholders (377/46)	23 (6)	71 (19)	169 (45)	114 (30)

(44 % 'not agree at all') to FC being a source of conflicts between the shareholders, and just 25 % agreed (45 % 'not agree at all') to FC being a source of conflicts between shareholders and non-shareholders.

An analysis into these responses by gender also confirms that generally a majority of the shareholders seem to be satisfied with the status quo with regards to their FCs. However, when responses 'totally agree' and 'partly agree' are taken together to mean 'agree', there are some significant differences in the responses between male and female respondents. A significantly larger proportion of male, compared to female respondents, agreed that 'FC contributes more to other interests like tourism', 'FC contributes to overall better use of natural resources', 'FC has been a good role model for my own forest management', and 'FC has contributed to a positive development of my community' (p-value < 0.05 for all). On the other hand, significantly more male respondents (proportionally) do not agree with the statements regarding conflicts between shareholders, and between shareholders and non-shareholders (p-value < 0.01 for both). Overall, a significantly larger proportion of female, compared to male respondents, had 'no opinion' on a number of statements put to them regarding the management and sharing of benefits from their commons (p-value < 0.01 for all statements in Table 6 except [4] where p-value was 0.042).

4 Discussion

It is important to note, at first, that our survey data reveals a generally high level of satisfaction with the status quo with

regards to the way FCs are being governed/managed and the way the revenues from the FCs are being shared/utilised. Being industry-driven and professionally managed forestry operations, it is not surprising to see that the most participated activity in the commons was fishing and outdoor recreation, followed by hunting, i.e., non-timber related forest activities. In terms of appropriation of benefits from the commons, cash payments, and subsidies for activities on private property were the common benefits the shareholders received; however, the rates are low for both at below 50 %. We believe this could be due to two main reasons. First, not all shareholders in the commons were receiving cash payment and/or subsidies for the management of private property. Second, not all of the three forest commons were providing cash payment and subsidies to their shareholders. For example, Älvdalen was primarily providing subsidies and no cash payment, while Tärna-Stensele was primarily giving out cash payments but no subsidies.

However, one crucial result stands out from the analysis of participation in the commons – that female shareholders' participation is significantly low in all areas from governance/management, to use of the forests (for recreation etc.), to receiving cash payment from the commons. It is not surprising that female participation is low in activities like hunting and fishing, which are primarily male-dominated activities. Furthermore, despite growing female forest ownership in recent years, their participation in various forest management activities are found to be relatively low compared to their male counterparts (LIDESTAV 2010, LIDESTAV and NORDFJELL 2005, LIN-

DROOS et al. 2005). Moreover, it has been reported that agriculture and forestry sectors are lagging behind in gender equality compared to most other areas of the Swedish society (Ds 2004:39). It is not surprising that the responses on perceived benefits and disadvantages from the commons follow the responses on the participation, with provision of spaces for hunting, fishing and other recreation perceived to be the main benefits of the FCs. Responses related to perceived benefits and disadvantages of the FCs not just indicate how a shareholder is/might be benefitting from her/his commons, but they also provide us a shareholder's general attitude towards the commons.

In general, what we see from these two sets of responses is that the shareholders largely held a positive attitude towards their forest commons. There are variations of course, particularly between male and female shareholders, with significantly low proportion of the latter seeing benefits from their commons compared to the former. But again, this leads us to a generally low participation of women in governance/management as well as in appropriation of benefits from these commons. This is further highlighted by the fact that a significantly large proportion of male shareholders compared to female perceived 'lack of control on their own share in the FC' as being one of the few disadvantages of the FCs, indicating that they wanted to be more hands-on in the management of their shareholding in the commons, or would prefer that they were given their share to be privately managed.

4.1 Gauging shareholder satisfaction: How should the FCs be managed?

Based on the analyses of the survey data, the answer to this question is rather simple: the FCs should be managed the way they are being managed now. However, there are a number of finer details. One interesting response overall was that the shareholders were largely of the opinion that renewable power generation (hydroelectric and wind) should be given higher priority by the FCs. In terms of the respondents' views about how the revenues from their FCs were being used, again, we find an overall satisfaction with the status quo. However, the response 'no opinion' features very prominently for queries related to both the management and use of benefits from the FCs. Moreover, in-depth analyses of the three responses (equating largely to 'satisfaction', 'indifference', and 'dissatisfaction') regarding the management of and use of revenue from the FCs provide us with some interesting results, which we discuss below. Interestingly, there was no significant variation between the male and female respondents on the 'fine as it is' response, further supporting the case for an overall satisfaction with the status

quo. However, when it came to the details on the way revenue from the FCs was being used, although a majority of female respondents also seem to favour the status quo in line with the overall responses, in comparison with their male counterparts, fewer of them seem to think the current structure of management and use/sharing of the revenue from the FCs was 'fine as it is'. Furthermore, it is clear that a significant number of the female respondents were actually indifferent ('no opinion' response) with regards to the management and use of benefits from the FCs. This is a very important finding, as this could not just mean they genuinely have 'no opinion' in these matters, but it could also mean they are protesting as they seem to be represented less not just in the management/governance structures, but also in the appropriation of benefits. The dissatisfaction with the status quo was often highlighted by the 'should increase' or 'should be given higher priority' responses. However, only 10-15 % of the respondents on average expressed dissatisfaction with the status quo by choosing these alternatives. Only one case really highlighted an overall sense of the dissatisfaction, and that was related to the production of renewable energy. More respondents wanted renewable energy given a 'higher priority' than those mentioning that the situation was 'fine as it is'.

4.2 Conclusion and Policy Implications

This paper attempted to analyse the satisfaction (or lack thereof) among the shareholders of three of the major Swedish forest commons (Jokkmokk in Norrbotten, Tärna-Stensele in Västerbotten and Älvdalen in Dalarna,) through an assessment of their participation (in using and benefit sharing) in their forest commons, their perception of benefits and costs of their commons, and their views regarding the management of and sharing/utilisation of benefits from their commons. Although a majority of shareholders expressed general satisfaction to the status quo regarding the governance/management and utilisation of revenue from their commons, a significant proportion expressed indifference through 'no opinion' response.

Furthermore, a significantly larger proportion of these with 'no opinion' were female members of the commons. This is a major concern, especially at a time when the participation in the forest commons is declining generally and a number of forest owners (and hence FC shareholders) are becoming non-resident owners/shareholders by moving away to larger towns and cities (NYLUND and INGEMARSON 2007). Success of any community-based resource management institution depends on the involvement of its members, not only in appropriating benefits (as is often the case in Swedish forest commons) but also in active participation in formulating and implementing plans and policies to govern/manage the commons (in

attending meetings, for example), thereby incurring their fair share of the costs (MCKEAN 1998). Moreover, a balanced participation in any community groups to reflect the composition of the community, such as male and female, small and large landholders and so on is often necessary for the success of the group. Thus, exploring further the cause(s) of this indifference and dealing with them should be a major policy priority for continued success of these commons.

Although small in number (and in proportion), there are certainly some grievances with regards to the current governance/management and use of revenues from these commons among some shareholders. In particular, there seem to be a legitimate concern among a large number of shareholders regarding the involvement (or lack thereof) of their commons in investing in renewable energy such as wind and hydropower. A successful common not only recognises the legitimate grievances of its members but also provides forum/opportunities to express and discuss such grievances, as examples of Japanese and Swiss commons demonstrate (MCKEAN 1998, 1995, 1992, 1991). In this regard, it is important that these forest commons create or devise institutional arrangements such that grievances of these kinds can be expressed in a democratic way for discussions and debates, and decided upon democratically.

Finally, one major concern for all the forest commons studied is the lower level of participation of female shareholders/members in all aspects of the commons – from governance/management, appropriation of benefits, to expressing views about how the commons should be governed/managed and how revenues utilised (in other words, policy and planning). As stated earlier, it is important not just to have participation in the commons, but also to have a “balanced participation” reflecting the community at large for the success of these commons in the long run. Encouraging greater participation of women in all aspects of their forest commons should therefore be a major policy priority for these commons.

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