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Deep Roots
and Tangled Branches

Bureaucracy and Collaboration in Natural Resource Governance in South India

Marcus Wangel
Abstract


This is a study about collaboration within bureaucracies tasked with natural resource management in the contemporary Global South. It seeks to fill a considerable knowledge gap in the extant literature by exploring how individual public officials perceive the policy environment they work in. These individuals face multiple pressures to work more collaboratively yet the ways in which they are incentivised and develop goals and strategies for collaboration have been neglected in past research. A deeper understanding of this process is essential as public officials are largely responsible for implementing policies ensuring the welfare of millions of deprived people in rural areas, and for safeguarding the sustainable use of the natural commons.

This book is an institutional analysis of the drivers of collaboration at the individual level. It builds on immersive ethnographic fieldwork on the forest bureaucracy in Kerala, South India where field observations and ninety interviews were conducted with state forest officials. The empirical analysis finds that the majority of officials are in favour of working more collaboratively for a plurality of reasons, but perceive themselves constrained by the formal institutional setup of the forest bureaucracy. To mitigate these limitations forest officials design numerous boundary-spanning, informal networks that function as vehicles of institutionalised coordination and collaboration.

Importantly, the officials develop preferences for joint action on policy issues which they perceive the formal organisation is incapable of delivering, not least improved forest livelihoods. These findings are a significant contribution and stand in contrast to most previous related research which has focused on issues of bureaucratic malfeasance in the context of natural resource governance. The findings are also noteworthy as they point to a rich variety of more nuanced roles and abilities individual public officials in India may hold, beyond that of the stereotype corrupt bureaucrat.

In addition to the contextualised and vivified empirical description of informal collaboration this study makes two additional contributions. First, it highlights and demonstrates the utility of an ethnographic approach to the study of informal institutions and institutionally constrained behaviour in settings that are little studied and hard to access. Second, it contributes to theoretical discussions on the interplay between formal and informal institutions. In particular this concerns the rationality and necessity of informal strategies when formal institutional frameworks impose constraints on individual agents or lack the capacity to solve complex problems.

*Keywords:* collaboration, networks, governance, development administration, bureaucracy, public officials, roles, institutional analysis, informal institutions, rules-in-use, political ethnography, natural resource governance, forest governance, common pool resources, India, Kerala

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To my parents
Of the wheels of public service that turn under the Indian Government, there is none more important than the Department of Woods and Forests. The reboisement of all India is in its hands; or will be when Government has the money to spend...They are responsible for all the timber in the State forests of the Himalayas, as well as for the denuded hillsides that the monsoons wash into dry gullies and aching ravines; each cut a mouth crying aloud what carelessness can do...In the plains the chief part of their duty is to see that the belt fire-lines in the forest reserves are kept clean, so that when drought comes and the cattle starve, they may throw the reserve open to the villager’s herds and allow the man himself to gather sticks...But since a Forest Officer’s business takes him far from the beaten roads and the regular stations, he learns to grow wise in more than wood-lore alone; to know the people and the polity of the jungle; meeting tiger, bear, leopard, wild-dog, and all the deer, not once or twice after days of beating, but again and again in the execution of his duty. He spends much time in saddle or under canvas – the friend of newly-planted trees, the associate of uncouth rangers and hairy trackers – till the woods, that show his care, in turn set their mark upon him...

– Rudyard Kipling, The Jungle Book
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Writing this book has been much comparable to the dauntingly long mountain trail races I have made a habit of suffering through once or twice every summer in recent years. The sanity of the whole endeavour has been justifiably questioned by me and people on the outside. At times it has deprived me of more sleep than could possibly be healthy, broken me down and left me longing for anything at all but this. When one seemingly impossible peak has been mastered, countless more have laid ahead, unending and unyielding. But just like trail running, it has taught me the value of persistence, that surrender is failure, and that the sense of accomplishment when you stand on the finish-line and say ‘I actually made it’ is satisfying beyond what words can describe. But most of all, it is an undertaking that you would be ill-advised to go through with alone. For me, several people have offered invaluable support in assisting me to the finish-line.

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Marcus Wangel
Stockholm, April 2018
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Abbreviations and Glossary

CBN  Capacity Building Networks
CF   Conservator of Forests
CCF  Chief Conservator of Forests
CPR  Common Pool Resources
DFO  Division Forest Officer
FRA  Forest Rights Act (2006)
GOK  Government of Kerala
GOI  Government of India
IAD  Institutional Analysis and Development (Framework)
IFS  Indian Forest Service
IGNFA Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy
IRAN Immediate Response and Action Networks
JFM  Joint Forest Management (1990)
KFD  Kerala Forest Department
MoEF  Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
NFP  National Forest Policy (1988)
NTFP Non-Timber Forest Products
PCCF Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
PFM  Participatory Forest Management (1998)
RFO  Range Forest Officer
SFO  Section Forest Officer
SLB  Street-Level Bureaucracy/Bureaucrat
SPIN Strategic Planning and Information Networks
VSS  Vana Samrakshana Samithis, forest protection committees in Kerala

Adivasi  Collective term for indigenous people
District  Largest sub-state administrative unit
Grama Sabha Village assembly
Gram Panchayat Village government
Malayalam Language spoken in Kerala
Malayali The people of Kerala
Panchayati Raj System of decentralised government (1993)
Taluk (or Block) Second largest/smallest administrative unit
Thiruvananthapuram The capital of Kerala
Perched on a hilltop in the heart of the Western Ghats mountain range stands a small outpost managed by the Kerala Forest Department. Formally these outposts are known as forest stations, a word alluring to something more sumptuous than the single-floor concrete structure we are sitting outside of on plastic chairs, sipping tea. Gazing out over the landscape around us it is difficult to not be moved. Lush vegetation meets the eye in all directions, broken up only by the occasional farming settlement or hamlet of a few dozen indigenous families. Close by on the eastern horizon lies the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu and the large manufacturing town of Coimbatore, to which many of the local youths travel daily for work in the bustling textile mills. All that seems light years away from our remote hilltop. There is an air of tranquillity and peacefulness surrounding us and it is hard to grasp that only a few hours’ drive to the west lays the Arabian Sea and the coastal cities where half of Kerala’s thirty-four million people live densely together.

It is barely eight in the morning but we have been on the road since dawn, navigating a narrow, winding path that took us up here from the small town where I am staying this week. There are four of us: Prathap, a forest range officer and my jack of all trades seeing that he guides, drives and translates for me, Balakrishna and Jayadeep, local forest guards who often camp at the outpost, and me. The guards are the lowest-ranking officials of the KFD, usually hired from the local area on shorter-term contracts and are expected to spend a considerable amount of time patrolling and monitoring the forests. I am told that another handful of guards also stay here but they appear to have set out for the day already – or maybe they spent the night in the forest. For a good twenty minutes little is said apart from sporadic exchanges between the three officials in the local Malayalam, entirely incomprehensible to me. The extremely rapid burst of sentences puts into perspective why even other Indians consider this one of the most difficult languages in the world.

On the motorbike ride coming here Prathap explained that he starts every workday by visiting one of the forest stations in the vicinity. He informs me that such a habit allows him to keep track of all the goings-on in the area the guards spend their days and nights patrolling. Has any wildlife been sighted and could they be a danger to the local farms? Has any conflict or problem arisen in the surrounding hamlets he should know about? Have any poachers or rumours thereabouts been heard of? When I ask Prathap why they do not simply call him if something happens – even these remote stations are equipped with numerous phones and radios – he frowns. How are they to
keep the guards happy and motivated on their miniscule wages if they are left all alone in the field? He goes on to state that eventually some written and filed reports on events in the area will reach his desk, but by then the information in them will be obsolete. Men like Balakrishna and Jayadeep spend most of their time patrolling the forest: they are foresters, not clerks he sighs and hands me a heavy folder filled with sheaves of paper; report-forms which at some point will have to be processed and passed on upwards in the administration. He sighs and tells me that this is a later problem, for now he just needed to know nothing urgent had arisen in this vicinity.

The tranquillity is broken as Prathap hastily rises and declares that it is time to start the day properly. There is a lot on the agenda for today he says and much ground to cover. We bid Balakrishna and Jayadeep farewell and they stand to attention as we mount the motorbike that we are to spend the next few days on. They are all dressed in the impeccable khaki uniform with red-green details and heavy trekking boots that is mandatory among forest officials in the field. While it looks clever and doubtlessly commandeers some amount of authority, I have never adjusted to how apart they look from the lungi-wearing villagers whenever we stop for our routine visits.

A forest hamlet populated with some thirty indigenous families is our first stop of the day. Despite the material austerity it is a picturesque little community invoking the feeling of a place lost in time, set against the backdrop of the higher peaks of the Western Ghats. A couple of leafy trees scattered in the centre offers some well-needed shade from the already warming sun. Again plastic chairs and cups of tea are produced as men, women and children gather, somewhat curiously, around Prathap and me.
I cannot help fearing that men may reach a point where they look on every new theory as a danger, every innovation as a toilsome trouble, every social advance as a first step toward revolution, and that they may absolutely refuse to move at all.

– Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America
1. The Collaborative Public Official

Over the past few decades the developing world has seen a rapid progression in the policy discourse on natural resource management. Contemporary doctrines promote ideals such as collaboration, public participation and decentralised management, each highlighted as an approach to combat rural poverty and marginalisation and to mitigate ecosystem degradation and species extinction (Barnes and Child 2014; Matson et al. 2016). Yet this is not unique to either natural resource management or the Global South – in most liberal democracies a transition from government to governance as a way of organising and handling complex societal problems has been underway for the past thirty years, with a multitude of additional actors becoming involved in public affairs through various policy networks and collaborative arrangements (Isett et al. 2011; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016; Milward et al. 2016).

This book takes its broader starting point in the literature dealing with this transition and the drive for collaborative forms of governance. In the scholarship focused on natural resources in the developing world – spearheaded by Elinor Ostrom and the common pool resource (CPR) literature – there has been an almost one-sided focus on resource-using communities and the way in which they self-organise, craft institutional arrangements and collaborate internally. Only in recent years has the focus changed, but then to a more system-wide perspective on multi-actor collaboration (Emerson and Gerlak 2014; McGinnis and Ostrom 2014; Ostrom 1990; Ostrom et al. 1994). While offering some of the best insights we have on natural resource management, it simultaneously comes with a considerable knowledge gap: the role of the state bureaucracy and individual public officials in particular. With few exceptions, public officials have been largely side-lined in past research and the organisations they belong to are often reduced to uniform notions of ‘the state’ as one single, unitary actor. Detailed micro-level studies of the individual bureaucrat in a developing country are few and far between. Yet public officials in the Global South may also face pressures to work more collaboratively – whether it is by external policy directives, popular demand, or just their own preferences – but we know little of the drivers of collaboration at the individual level. This means studying their incentives, goals and strategies of collaboration, and is the core focus of this book.

More explicitly, the aim is to understand the perceptions, motives and incentives of public officials to work collaboratively, the goals they want to attain, and the substantive strategies they employ in order to do so. The study is of an exploratory and descriptive nature as I seek to provide a grounded
in-depth account of how public officials reason and think about collaboration, what they possibly want to accomplish by collaborating, and how they subsequently behave and act. In other words, I seek to answer three interrelated questions:

What incentives for collaboration do public officials refer to? What goals do they want to accomplish? What strategies do they employ?

As will be elaborated below, the main contribution lies in the nuanced and vivified in-depth description of how this plays out in practice, filling a gap in our knowledge on what diverse incentives, goals and strategies officials may exhibit and utilise. Through ethnographic fieldwork on forest governance in the state of Kerala in south India, a case of bureaucratic incentive structures, goals and strategies in the face of pressures to collaborate is examined. It investigates this from the explicit viewpoint of individual state forest officials and the micro-level actions and patterns of behaviour they engage in.

For clarifications, incentives (or motives or reasons) derive from some factor or event driving an individual to change her behaviour or perspective on a certain policy task; in short it is the stimulus to action. Goals refer to what an individual seeks to accomplish; the desired product or sought-after outcome if she manages to translate her incentives into substantive action. Last, strategies refer to what she actually does more tangibly; employing or utilising a certain course of action. Regarding outcomes it should be noted that this study does not intend to measure or evaluate the performance of collaborative governance arrangements; a topic which has been much emphasised in recent literature (see Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Newig et al. 2017; Siddiki et al. 2015). This is indeed an important aspect of the research on collaboration, but I suggest that in a little studied policy environment we also need a solid understanding of how collaboration becomes a driver and incentive in the first place. Put differently, how individuals reason and think about the purpose of collaboration, rather than the outcome of that purpose. As such, the book is not oriented towards evaluation. References to goals or outcomes are those expressed by individual officials, in their subjective interpretation.

This introduction proceeds as follows. The next section outlines the broader research problem and empirical context this book may be located in, with particular attention to perceived shortfalls in prior literature. In light of this I make an argument for selecting Kerala as the empirical setting for fieldwork and briefly summarise the key findings. In the ensuing section I outline the theoretical and methodological approach followed in this study, and then the perceived relevance and desired contributions are discussed. A final section outlines the structure of the book.
Setting the Scene

The empirical setting of this book is forest governance in the South Indian state of Kerala, and more particularly the Western Ghats mountain range; a world natural heritage region rich in biodiversity and ecosystem services, containing most of the state’s areas of dense forest cover. While acute deforestation has been halted in Kerala, forest degradation persists due to high demands for land-use change and extreme population densities, putting much pressure on an already fragmented and non-contiguous forest landscape (Gadgil 2011). The Kerala Forest Department (KFD) is the agency mandated to carry out forest and wildlife policy in the state, and is one of the leading actors charged with reaching the goals of ecological sustainability and human development. Similar to the departments of other states and forest bureaucracies in many developing countries, it is a largely unreformed organisation with roots in the nineteenth century. Such organisations were once established for maximising revenues from timber extraction for the colonial administration and have to this day retained much of their uniform colonial-bureaucratic structure and management culture, a feature critics argue is incompatible with current forest policy discourses emphasising tasks such as ecosystem management and providing for the welfare of millions of rural poor people (Guha 2014; Springate-Baginski and Blaikie 2007).

The international policy doctrine of collaboration in decentralised management regimes, institutional diversity, flexibility in management and adaptive learning-by-doing is gaining increasing foothold in the laws and written policies of developing countries, in letter and progressively in spirit. Yet this transition might not always be a smooth ride, for at least three different reasons. First, the monolithic public agencies, moulded in a culture of command and control and with a poor track-record of structural reforms, may resist adopting a more collaborative logic of management. The legal framework for resource governance in a country like India still draws on acts and charters from the colonial era, reaffirming the centrality of the government as the principal caretaker of the natural commons. Bureaucratic norms and values might therefore preclude cooperation and resource-sharing by default (Fleischman 2016; Gadgil 2008). Second, the silo-like organisational setup of resource bureaucracies may be rigged against collaboration, with jurisdictional boundaries mismatching the ground-level realities they have to attend to, and few institutional mechanisms fostering interagency coordination (Messier et al. 2013). Third and last, the wider socio-political landscape of the rural hinterlands of developing countries may work against contemporary ideals and goals of collaboration. Corruption and clientelism in resource management is often widespread and state actors may stand to lose from the devolution of decision-making power and participatory reforms (Ribot et al. 2006; Sundström 2015). As such, the transition to an era of collaboration and public participation rather than government control might constitute something of an abrasive clash between contrasting management traditions.
Within natural resource management this transition has been vigorously studied in past research, yet from a limited amount of vantage points and perspectives. In the CPR literature the original objective was to refute Garrett Hardin’s notion of a tragedy of the commons (1968) and evince that there was a third way, beyond state control or privatisation, to protect natural resources from depletion (Ostrom 1990; Ostrom et al. 2002). The deliberate focus on local self-organising groups in much of this work struck out a trajectory for most future research in which state actors, not least public officials were confined to a more peripheral scope of enquiry. We know a lot about how self-governing communities cooperate and craft durable institutional strategies to overcome collective action problems, and how they mediate exogenous pressures and policy changes, but considerably less about how public officials reason and work in the very same policy environment. For this research program cooperation and collaboration became the norm, and progressed from hardly focusing on officials at all to a focus on complex, collaborative regimes in which individual officials and public agencies are included but not dealt any deeper consideration. Current studies of so-called social-ecological systems (SES) take a holistic perspective, attending to the tremendous wealth of actors and processes involved as well as the many ecological variables in play (McGinnis and Ostrom 2014). While scholars working within this research program would point to conceptual differences over time, my argument is that the focus (the key unit of analysis) has remained at either ‘communities in complex systems’ or ‘complex systems’ as a whole. This book will rather attempt to look at ‘public officials in complex systems’, from the explicit perspective of that type of actor.

The largely one-sided focus on communities and citizens is also found in the literature examining the bureaucracy and administrative system in countries like India. In many of the best micro-level studies of the contemporary Indian bureaucracy and its officials (see for instance Corbridge et al. 2005), the focus is consistently on how ordinary poor people engage and interact with the local state, rather than how the state perceives and executes its task of providing services to its citizens and collaborating with other actors to do so. In fact, the internal world and logics of these vast organisations is more or less a black box that is rarely opened up and explored in any greater depth from the viewpoint of public officials. I believe that this partially has to do with the difficulties of gaining access to such organisations, and the fact that it may be a quite time-consuming undertaking. This is recognised in the methods literature on doing field research on the developing state (Aronoff and Kubik 2013; Hertel et al. 2009; Kapiszewski et al. 2015), in which India is no exception (see Fuller and Harriss 2001; Sharma and Gupta 2006). In the specific case of forest management and forest bureaucracies in the Global South a number of studies exist which usually take a critical perspective, outlining the hierarchical working culture and the wider unfavourable policy environment as deep-rooted structural problems which inhibits the ability and interest of public officials to do well (Gadgil 2008; Lele and Menon...
In their perspective implementing policies centred on a collaborative logic thus becomes a futile task, doomed from the outset.

In this book I choose to advocate a more agency-oriented perspective, in which individual public officials are made the unit of analysis and subject of primary enquiry. This implies treating individuals as the key building blocks of all human interactions and assuming that they have a relatively free will to pursue their own goals, but within the constraints of institutional and cultural rules and norms and with consideration to issues of trust, reciprocity and reputation (Ostrom 1998, 2005). Doing so may put us in a better position to understand how they see their incentives and reasons for working collaboratively, how they might embrace or resist pressures to collaborate beyond their own organisation, and how they go about doing it in practice. This is important keeping in mind the clash of management traditions occurring at the macro-level. Facing external pressures to change their practices – which may come from the senior policymaking level as well as from below; from citizens at the grassroots – officials have two much simplified options. Either they resist all pressures that might change the way they work, or they adapt to new conditions and circumstances. The processes and junctures at which officials choose between these two options – or possibly find a middle-way – are what have been largely black-boxed in most prior research. The CPR and SES research programs, to do them justice, have never had this as their primary research objective (Mansbridge 2014), while most other literature focused on resource bureaucracies in the Global South appears to ex ante assume that hierarchical structures, colonial working cultures and unfavourable socio-political conditions bestows officials with incentives and motives that precludes collaboration from the start.

To be clear, my ambition in this book is not to vindicate forest officials or redress the fact that they are consistently portrayed in negative terms. On the contrary I seek to more profoundly understand the incentives they perceive, the goals they formulate, and the strategies they employ with regards to collaboration. If officials outright resist any changes to their practices they could theoretically do nothing at all, but may still be able to motivate their choice. If they instead wish, or are directly forced, to adapt their behaviour they have to make a range of more conscious choices, which may then be studied in terms of, incentives, goals and ultimately strategies. This research task stands central in this book and has direct implications for the selection of Kerala as the empirical setting, elaborated in the subsection below.

Why Kerala

In this book Kerala is not a case per se but is selected as an empirical setting favourable to what I seek to study. To briefly introduce it to the non-India scholar (chapter three presents the setting in full), it is a state regularly portrayed as having an active and mobilised citizenry, a vibrant civil society, a
modern history of state-society co-production, strong public accountability, well-functioning governance, very high literacy levels, and high social capital levels, and conversely low levels of corruption, political violence and patronage politics (all relative to the South Asian context) – features which has earned it the label of a ‘development miracle’ in the literature (Drèze and Sen 2002; Evans 1996; Heller 2012; Oommen 2014; Singh 2016).

On reflection I suggest that the combined features make for an auspicious setting in which to study the drive towards collaboration, for at least three reasons. First, given the vibrancy and activism of its civil society, forest officials might be incentivised or forced to respond (or at least not outright ignore) to bottom-up demands for inclusion and collaboration; demands which might reflect the provisions and entitlements in contemporary policies and programs, or be endogenously arisen at the grassroots. This may subsequently lead to strategies taken by officials which foster or increase the degree of collaboration.

Second, the drive for more collaborative practices may also arise within the state forest administration. As subsequent sections and chapters will discuss Kerala sees multiple incongruous boundaries between the de facto composition of the forest landscape and the formal jurisdictional boundaries of various departments operating in rural areas, with few integrative mechanisms. Simultaneously, numerous functional overlaps occur in different jurisdictions with very similar programs running in parallel without much dialogue in between. Officials may therefore see a need and stronger incentives to collaborate with other actors. Given the relative progressiveness of the state’s bureaucratic apparatus, officials may thus transform their incentive structures into substantive action. Relatedly, they might also be more receptive to current policy discourse which emphasises collaboration to a higher degree than an earlier generation of policies. Again, the relative progressiveness and high education and literacy levels might make officials more inclined to adopt this discourse; either because that is what they formally should do, or because they see a normative value and appeal in working more inclusively, across jurisdictional boundaries.

Third and last, the case could also be that forest officials perceive the hierarchical management system to work well as it is, giving them few incentives and motives to change their practices. This is also a viable possibility, in which pressures to work collaboratively are rejected on the grounds that it adds little value to the officials’ already established routines.

To summarise, I argue that these three possible factors are comparatively clear and strong in Kerala, which makes it a favourable empirical setting to study the tensions between a policy discourse emphasising increased collaboration, a hierarchical and traditionally top-down heavy bureaucracy, and an active and mobilised grassroots community.¹ The study is not about investi-

¹ Conducting the same type of study in a state like Uttar Pradesh or Bihar in northern India is likely to have generated very different findings, given the caste-ridden and divisive political culture there, and the comparable lack of functioning state institutions.
gating how a potential clash of management traditions plays out at either the macro or micro-level – it is rather a study of how individual public officials located at the centre of these trends perceive what is going on and how it bestows them with various incentives, what they want to accomplish or avoid by collaborating, and how they then take subsequent actions. As such, Kerala is selected as it offers the best possible vantage point to study the drivers of collaboration at the individual level.

Yet, it should be kept in mind that the considerations and factors mentioned here are all relative to the South Asian context, and the term collaboration should not lead us to expect a *modi operandi* similar to that in the developed West, where much of the best collaborative governance literature has been focused empirically, not least that on environmental governance broadly (Fahey and Pralle 2016). Kerala is in several aspects an outlier within India, but the state forest department is yet part of the wider institutional management framework with roots in the colonial era, and issues of corruption, bureaucratic recentralisation and rural impoverishment cannot be assumed to be non-existent. Despite this, I suggest that it a suitable context in which the research problem at hand may be examined.

Incentives, goals and strategies: empirical findings summarised

In this section I will forestall the empirical chapters slightly by summarily outlining their content. In the specific setting at hand – the forest divisions of rural Kerala – forest officials exhibit incentives to collaborate on three different but related policy tasks, outlined just below. Put differently, collaboration with other actors enables them to address tasks and difficulties in their immediate policy environment which they believe that they cannot do alone, or only at suboptimal levels. Moreover, these are tasks that they perceive the formal institutional framework constrains them from carrying out.¹

The first has to do with incentives and perceived necessities of long-term strategic planning; harmonising policies deriving from different departments which might be in discordance on the ground, reducing functional overlaps, and rationalising service delivery. Closely connected is a desire to share and diffuse information, knowledge and ideas about best management practices and an interest of building up an environment for adaptive learning. The forest officials perceive that the administrative setup of the forest department (and most other rural line-departments) constrains their ability to carry out their work and leads to an excessive workload, as most formally mandated

¹ It should be noted that the tasks outlined here are those for which they seek out collaboration in order to undertake. As chapter four will further discuss, some of these are (far) beyond what they formally are charged with doing (for instance building a capacity for adaptive learning), while others have to do with activities they more or less should carry out on their own (for instance tree plantations and reforestation, and forest vigilance), but which they perceive they cannot do, or only at suboptimal levels, without seeking collaboration with other actors.
policy tasks are implemented in isolation in sharply delineated jurisdictions. At the same time, similar policy tasks are carried out by other actors in adjacent areas, but without any significant communication between them, leading to perceived unnecessary functional overlaps. This has generated an incentive structure and preference for collaboration, and subsequently a preference for sharing information and knowledge in order to facilitate collective action.

The second incentive has to do with addressing problems requiring joint action on comparatively short time-frames, such as mitigating wildlife-issues and preventing forest fires and illegal activities. Again, the formal institutional framework underlies the incentive to work together; the jurisdictional boundaries and silo-like organisation of the different departments and agencies creates time lags and constitutes a rigid obstacle to immediate responses on urgent issues they would prefer to deal with at the local level.

The third incentive for working more collaboratively has to do with enhancing the capacity of forest communities. Capacity building is a wide term but is here referred to in terms of human livelihood interventions aiming to augment the socio-economic development of relatively marginalised forest-user groups. The incentive is a reflection of the relatively mobilised grassroots in which forest communities and local governments lodge multiple demands and requests at the forest officials they feel obliged to address. Yet in order to meet these demands, officials need to seek out the cooperation of other governance actors, either to procure the requested resources or goods, or work together to deliver services.

Connected to each of these – and the third in particular – is an expressed willingness among a range of officials to adopt some of the ideals and practices of a new policy generation and to try to work in a novel and slightly different way, not least when it comes to the social goals and objectives of contemporary forest policies. As we shall see, there is a broad spectrum of different incentives and motives at play.

Another interesting discovery during fieldwork is how they translate their incentives to collaborate into more substantive actions and strategies. Had their perceptions of a given problem been a momentary issue a one-shot interaction with the necessary actors would have sufficed. On the contrary, the incentive structures are quite deeply rooted and they repeatedly find themselves in situations where they need to collaborate with others. Instead of starting negotiations anew each time they face a mutual problem, they have crafted institutionalised arrangements for this particular purpose.

Indeed, one of the central findings of this book are relatively loose, cross-jurisdictional and mostly informal arrangements which exist in varying degree of institutionalisation throughout the operational frontline of forest governance in Kerala. In the following chapters I will refer to these as collaborative networks, and they should be seen as the vehicles of institutionalised coordination in which officials interact to transform their incentives and needs into (joint) action. The networks are a forum where different strategies
may be employed, such as trading resources or advocating change, but are simultaneously also a goal in themselves. For example, to convince others to harmonise programs in order to rationalise service delivery (an ultimate goal), they need a forum to express and ventilate their opinions and ideas.

To be clear, these are not any centrally or top-down planned networks but are rather quite organic and loose arrangements spanning across boundaries. Later chapters will discuss them in more depth, but I do not make it my research task to precisely map and demarcate their exact boundaries and membership, beyond the general categories of actors usually found within them. On the contrary, a collaborative network is the label I assign to the numerous informal confluences of actors encountered and observed during fieldwork. Recall that the key unit of analysis in this book is the individual public official and the networks only come into relevance as they are an important forum in the working life of the studied officials.

Network arrangements were discussed and observed in each of the studied forest divisions throughout Kerala, contained a multitude of actors from the governmental, bureaucratic and civilian spheres, and transgressed multiple formal boundaries. The vast majority of studied officials were also participants in multiple networks simultaneously. Studying these in the field was a slight challenge as they are informal and made relevant only through the accounts of the officials and their observed behaviour. Yet for ease of presentation, and to give the empirical analysis structure I outline three aggregated varieties or types of networks existing in the field based on their function – or put differently, as outlets for the different incentives and motives forest officials have with regards to collaboration. The terminology here draws on classifications made by Agranoff (2007) and Milward and Provan (2006), outlined further in chapter two.

- **Strategic Planning and Informational Networks (SPIN).** These are the practical manifestations of incentives to plan and strategize policy tasks and problems actors collectively face, and to share and diffuse information and knowledge.
- **Immediate Response and Action Networks (IRAN).** These are the reflections of the perceived need to work together in order solve problems on very short time-frames.
- **Capacity Building Networks (CBN).** These are the outputs of the incentive and willingness to cooperate across boundaries in order to foster capacity building and development in forest communities and hamlets, and also to meet demands made at the grassroots.

The three varieties should not be seen as watertight compartments. In many cases the same individuals were participants in institutional arrangements corresponding to two or all three types of networks, depending on the functional problem they perceive may be better solved in collaboration with other actors. Moreover, all the observed or recounted policy tasks and activities
officials undertake cannot be neatly assorted to one of the types. For instance, an official who perceives that collaboration is needed in order to harmonise wildfire prevention training to rural forest communities may be a participant in either of the first or third type of network, and his actions might have implications for future actions within the second type.

Chapters five, six and seven address each of these arrangements in turn. Together with chapter four, these three chapters should be understood as three related answers to the book’s research questions. I will examine three different categories of incentives to collaborate, three different aspirations or desired goals, and three different manifestations of attempted collaboration, together providing an answer to the overarching question. Regarding the various manifestations I focus on the strategies forest officials employ in order to motivate and persuade other actors to also start (or keep) collaborating (for instance aligning perceptions and mediating conflict), as well as the substantive actions they undertake together (for example coordinating local NGOs to rationalise their service delivery). The next section attends to the approach followed in order to study these issues in the field.

The Followed Approach

Central to this book’s theoretical and methodological approach is a focus on the drivers of collaboration at the individual level. In contrast to the CPR literature and its subsequent advancements I shift the gaze from communities to public officials while remaining in the same type of policy environment. In contrast to the motley literature dealing with bureaucracies in developing countries I take an explicit agency-oriented perspective, engaging in depth with individual motives, ambitions and strategies.

Political ethnography

In this book I employ an ethnographic approach to fieldwork and the gathering of data. As I elaborate in chapter three, this puts the researcher in an advantageous position to identify and study the practices, actions and patterns of behaviour that officials engage in. If we are to make sense of and understand a diversity of behavioural patterns we need to be on the ground, observing how they occur in real time. Ethnography also helps set the incentives, motivations and reasons of individuals into a wider context; in this study that of multiple pressures to work more collaboratively in forest management. It allows the researcher to ‘get inside the heads’ of the people he studies, going some way in understanding the world from their perspectives (Kubik 2009; Schwartz-Shea 2010). All in all I spent just over seven months in India between 2013 and 2015, during which I conducted a total of 90 interviews with 75 individuals, spent about 36 full days on field observations, and collected written material. Interviews and field observations, the two
techniques used to gather the bulk of the material are both suitable for studying micro-level incentives and actions (Pader 2013; Wedeen 2010), capturing the contextual details and specificities of the empirical setting, and serve the complementary aim of getting close to the \textit{de facto} reasons and behaviour followed by forest officials. Central to this endeavour is also a deeper appreciation of the \textit{rules} individuals follow, and I suggest that if we genuinely are to understand why individuals think and behave in a certain way, rules should be our starting point.

The importance of rules and institutions

Rules are the skeleton of all social interactions and associations. They shape incentives and they establish a particular course of action, determining whether it becomes a pattern. They are the deeper-lying component that structures and orders interactions and relationships between actors in different positions, and between any human beings. In the literature associated with Elinor Ostrom (1990, 2005) and the research program on the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework, they hold a central position and institutions are commonly seen as the “rules of the game” (North et al. 2009: 15). Rules are understood here in the regulative sense of the word; instructions stating what individuals are allowed to do, and importantly as \textit{shared} understanding among those involved, so that some degree of order and predictability in interactions may be achieved (2005: 18).

Many rules are formal and written on paper, but many more are of an informal nature; agreed-upon conducts of behaviour or abstract norms which shape how individuals act. As such, we instead talk of \textit{rules-in-use}, or working rules; the ones an individual would invoke to describe and justify her own actions to fellow participants (2005: 19). By digging deeper into the rules-in-use the studied officials follow, their incentives and motives may become clearer, and their patterns of behaviour and action may be better accounted for. Explicitly focusing on rules-in-use, as opposed to just examining formal rules, becomes a task of understanding and interpreting the studied actors' own understanding and interpretations of their world. Additionally, it may shine light on the \textit{de facto} practices individuals are engaged in. Just examining formal guidelines would give a quite narrow image of what officials in any context are up to, constraining the potential for theory development and the ability to draw policy implications. This is particularly important in settings where we have reason to expect a considerable diversity of rules and norms being followed, which might also diverge substantially from the formal rules. In my mind the context at hand – a developing country region where we have reason to expect tensions between different management traditions and the wider socio-political culture – is the precisely the type of setting where close attention to micro-level rules-in-use is warranted.

The study of individuals operating and interacting at the interface of formal and informal rules sits within a longstanding scholarship that has taken
on the research task to expose and uncover informal, sometimes hidden institutions (Arnold and Fleischman 2013; Ostrom 2005; Ostrom and Ostrom 2014; Sabetti and Castiglione 2016). Yet the approach is not entirely exclusive to the CPR and IAD research programs; in the wider development literature informal institutions have been thoroughly examined in relation to democratisation processes as well as clientelism and corruption (de Soto 2002; Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 2006; Lauth 2000; Maclean 2010). Moreover, in the field of political recruitment recent literature has paid increasing attention to the role and influence of informal institutions in candidate selection (Bjarnegård 2013; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015).

If we are to understand the incentives, goals and strategies of officials, not least in a setting which may yield conflicting or ambiguous influences, it is important to first understand how they perceive and navigate between different kinds of institutions, both formal and informal. In this book the IAD framework (and particularly the component known as the action situation) serves the purpose of being an applied empirical tool used in the field to make sense of a diversity of rules and institutional pressures, complemented with insights drawn from the literature cited just above. Of particular interest here is an understanding of the perceived institutional gap (Helmke and Levitsky 2004), void (Franzén et al. 2016) or soft spot (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015) in which the forest officials see an incentive to collaborate and start doing so. In other words, understanding what they perceive to be the limitations of the formal system of rules, which they then complement or substitute by crafting their own informal institutional arrangements.

**Roles as the sum of incentives, goals and strategies**

The aim and research questions above highlight incentives, goals and strategies as central concepts in this book. In order to better account for these at the individual level we need a more nuanced and diversified understanding of the way in which individuals are stimulated to act or think in a new way, and the many different strategies they may utilise to translate their incentives to more tangible goals.

The argument in this book is that the CPR-literature and its subsequent advancements, and that on development bureaucracies, do not hold the answers or clues for this endeavour. At best, it provides us with important insights on the wider socio-political and institutional landscape officials are found in. To mitigate these limitations I suggest that we turn to the public administration literature developed in a largely western setting, which gives public officials a relatively more pronounced place, not least that on collaborative and network governance. This scholarship is large and well-developed (Klijn and Koppenjan 2016; O'Leary and Bingham 2009; Raadschelders 2011) but is almost entirely focused on the developed West, leaving some uncertainties as to its applicability in the Global South where public institutions and policy processes may function quite differently. This literature
does not provide clear-cut answers or directly testable hypotheses relevant to the empirical setting at hand, which is not the aim of the book either. Yet importantly, it does offer a useful and comprehensive source of ideas to start thinking about the various incentives for collaboration officials may exhibit, the strategies they might employ, as well as the conditions which might constrain or facilitate their employment of these. In the next chapter I will engage with this literature in more depth but a brief outline of what is relevant for the empirical case at hand is in order.

In short, the reasons or drivers for collaboration in the case at hand have to do with perceived interdependencies between actors. A group of officials may find that they are dependent on other actors to obtain a certain resource they need, or find that they cannot take a certain course of action without coordinating with other relevant groups. Whereas the CPR-literature focused on resource-using communities, the literature on network- and collaborative governance typically examines public agencies that need to come together to solve a common problem. In the setting at hand, the formal organisational framework prevents any cross-jurisdictional cooperation of significance, for which reason individuals prefer voluntary informal institutions of collaboration, which circumvent the perceived obstacles of the hierarchy, while also giving them an important exit-strategy if they are dissatisfied with the proceedings of the collaborative arrangement. Yet importantly, it gives them an institutionalised forum where they can employ their preferred strategies.

As for the particular strategies – the set of actions and patterns of behaviour forest officials engage in in order to transform their incentives to something substantive – we find (but are not limited to); trading information and knowledge, trading material resources, harmonising policy activities, reducing functional overlaps, building grassroots capacities, building trust (and indirectly social capital), mitigating conflict, and advocating policy change. Within the institutional arrangements they craft additional strategies may come into play, for instance regulating other participants using different instruments, mediating and negotiating conflicts of interest, aligning perceptions, and synthesising and framing policy issues. As we shall see these strategies draw upon a repertoire of resources or skills the forest officials claim to be in possession of, including information and knowledge, material goods and infrastructure, legitimacy, autonomy and discretionary power, competence, expertise, strategic contacts and leadership. Last, the literature suggests that the employment of such strategies is facilitated by conditions of high trust and social capital, strong public accountability, and capacities for learning.

Who then develops incentives for collaboration, envisions goals and employs strategies? The short answer is evidently individual public officials, but I believe that something more may be said about this. In this study I also focus on what different roles officials may hold. The way I see it, a particular role is a summation of the incentives, goals and strategies a rational actor exhibits, pursues and utilises. For example, if an official perceives that there
is a repeated lack of information and resources available to actors and believes that this constrains their ability to collaborate, but simultaneously prefers to see a more collaborative policy environment based on learning and dialogue, she might use her expertise and knowledge of the field to ensure that these assets are traded and shared between other parties. Such reasoning and behaviour might then be summed up under the role of *facilitator*. Another official who perceives that the way things are done needs to be modified in order to implement and enforce certain policy goals might begin to advocate change and promote his agenda of collaboration across boundaries. His way of thinking and subsequent actions may then be summed up as those of a *policy entrepreneur*. Seen in this perspective, roles become an additional and more complex way of accounting how forest officials envision goals and transform associated incentives into substantive action. Related, it is also of interest to nuance roles that are formal and sanctioned by the administration, those that are entirely informal, and those at the interface of the two. Why is this relevant to do? I suggest that in much of the past literature that this book concerns itself with public officials are framed and studied in a quite narrow perspective – as the stereotype corrupt civil servant in the development administration literature – or barely at all in the CPR literature and its advancements.

While an individual may find herself in multiple roles throughout life (within the family, in civilian associations, as juryman in the courts and so forth), I focus here on professional roles; the ones she has in her working life and environment – in this particular study as an official involved in forest governance. In the everyday use of the word, roles may be seen as a description reflecting what an individual does (and is expected to do) in order to carry out a certain task or assignment, and more often than not comes with some sense of identity attached to the role. An individual who is a *network manager* may be expected by others to attempt to synchronise and harmonise policy activities of actors working together in some form. When she calls to a meeting, she is exerting the authority and mandate assigned to that role, and is in most cases responsible for the outcomes of her actions. Most likely she also draws upon certain resources when doing so, for instance legitimacy or strong leadership skills. Digging deeper, the strategies employed also aim to reach a certain goal, and are taken on the basis of some incentive structure. In the next chapter I will look at further aspects of the role concept; for instance what constitutes having a role in the officials’ own perspectives, and how often they believe the authorities assigned to it must be exerted. Last, the role-labels I will use are theoretical – the officials seldom spoke of themselves or others as *policy entrepreneurs* or *facilitators* – yet they are reconstructed on the basis of what officials saw themselves and others doing, and how they justified their actions and behaviour.

Roles will be a recurring theme throughout the empirical chapters; a part of describing what incentivises officials to collaborate, how they do it and to what end. In the final chapter I revisit the issue and discuss how a more fine-
grained and nuanced understanding of roles public officials hold may be instructive and useful for future research in this broader field. It should also be noted that the roles discussed throughout are ideal-typical and exist only as constructs at the theoretical level; no one real-life official is for instance a street-level bureaucrat or network manager.

Relevance and Contributions

From a strict policy perspective I find that a more thorough and deeper understanding of the motives and role played by public officials is much warranted. This is due to the fact that most of the planet’s forest commons and ecosystems – some of the systems that support human societies and life – are publically owned by the state and in the case of developing countries, still predominantly managed by the state bureaucratic apparatus and its numerous officials. This should be set in the context of what is essentially a tragedy of the commons situation on an unprecedented scale; the continued degradation of the world’s forest resources and ecosystems, with multiple negative side-effects (FAO 2015, 2016; Matson et al. 2016).

Despite progress on a number of fronts and countless local success stories, the overall pattern is still one of grave concern. For hundreds of millions across the developing world the loss of biodiversity and human livelihoods is an everyday reality and bureaucracies stand at the centre of that (Kashwan 2017; Messier et al. 2013). These agencies and their officials are ultimately responsible for the implementation of policies ensuring the safety and welfare of poor rural citizens, and for promoting environmental conservation and enhancement (Duit et al. 2016). Moreover, in the setting of this book officials play a significant role as attempts to change other non-forest variables hinges on the ability and willingness of officials to carry out certain tasks and work more collaboratively. For instance, programs like JFM and FRA both seek to also democratise forest management and foster grassroots participation, but rely on officials to share decision-making authority with forest dwellers and to work to safeguard their interest; two variables that should not be taken for granted (see also Fleischman 2012). Addressing sudden and possibly devastating problems like forest fires and injured wildlife (typically elephants or tigers) may require much interagency coordination, that too necessitating an alteration in how officials perceive their tasks (see also Provan and Kenis 2008; Thomas 2003).

The argument made in this book is certainly not that more bureaucracy or curtailing the influence of non-state actors is a suitable solution to societal problems, nor does it propose that drastically reducing the influence and size of the developmental state is the viable solution in this context, which has been part of what is known as the good governance agenda (Andrews 2008; Brinkerhoff 2008). While public bureaucracies function poorly or not at all (in terms of for instance public service delivery) in many developing coun-
tries they are yet, for the foreseeable future, likely to be an integral part of whatever arrangement or solution that fits the particular policy context, and should in my opinion be dealt deeper analytical consideration. In light of the fairly grim reality for both the world’s natural heritage and scores of poor people, gaining a better understanding of how an influential type of actor perceives and reacts to pressures to collaborate, and how this plays out on the ground is fundamentally important. It should aim to complement the rich and policy-relevant literature already existing on community management of common pool resources. Moreover, it may provide a useful complement to the literature heavily focused on the functional performance of (environmental) collaborative arrangements (see Bodin 2017; Emerson and Nabatchi 2015; Newig et al. 2017; Newig and Fritsch 2009; Siddiki et al. 2015).

Yet, a responsive and generally well-functioning bureaucracy, with public officials who enthusiastically adopt new practices is no guarantee for successful outcomes in terms of ecological sustainability and human development. Exogenous factors such as political, cultural, economic and ecological changes all have an impact too, which means that the eventual policy implications that may be drawn from this kind of study are directed at one piece of a much larger jigsaw puzzle. Relatedly, this book does not seek to investigate or measure the extent to which the studied officials are successful in orchestrating de facto development. I do not evaluate their performance in terms of preserved forest cover or socio-economic development. On the contrary, but equally important, I seek to understand their incentives, motives and micro-level actions and behaviour in relation to collaboration; the initial output rather than the outcomes in the evaluative sense.

In contrast to previous research (and subsequent policy advice) this book builds on an in-depth exploration of how officials – the target of advice and reform – think, develop incentives and behave in accordance with these. Should I wish to engage in the debates on forest policy reform in India I would argue that my contribution would be made from more of an insider-perspective, giving it more leverage in the target group; the forest officials themselves. During fieldwork I was often confronted with the question what a political scientist was doing studying forests in rural India, a theme I discuss a bit more in the methods chapter. For many respondents this was peculiar and some were quick to point out that I lacked the training to give technical advice on forestry matters. While that is true, I find that political science (and as I argue later, political ethnography in particular) has an advantage which goes beyond explaining the evolution of collaborative networks, processes of institutional crafting, or whatever else may be our theoretical focus. The real strength rather lies in acknowledging that problems and solutions may be conceived and formulated in many different, nuanced and sometimes contradictory ways. For that reason, the most valuable practical contribution of this study, should it be read by forest officials in some format, is not specific advice about what they do right or wrong in relation to governance tasks, but rather a template and roadmap for thinking
about the various incentives they face, and how they subjectively conceive their subsequent solutions.

Contributions to prior literature
Leaving practical relevance aside, this study also aspires to make a few contributions to past research. The overarching contribution is the contextual and vivified in-depth empirical description of how public officials in the context of natural resource management in a developing country reason, develop incentives and take action in order to realise their incentives and goals. This is done from their subjective perspective, by placing the individual official at the centre of enquiry and as the key unit of analysis. We may distinguish between empirical, methodological and theoretical contributions.

The empirical contribution
The explicit focus on individual public officials stands in contrast to much prior literature in similar settings, outlined in more depth in the beginning of chapter two. The CPR school and its advancements has focused almost entirely on resource-using communities, examining how these devise their own institutional solutions to address gaps and ambiguities in externally imposed policies and legal frameworks (see Baggio 2016; Cardona et al. 2014; Ostrom 1990). The development administration literature has either studied bureaucracies and officials from the perspective of grassroots communities and policy recipients (Corbridge et al. 2005; Gupta 2012; Harriss-White 2003), or at a more aggregated macro-level (Andrews 2013; Brinkerhoff 2008; Kohli 2012). As mentioned, the micro-level internal world of public bureaucracies in a country like India is often black-boxed, remaining something of an enigma to the scholarly community. I suggest that the contribution here is twofold. First of all, I provide an immersive and richly contextualised narrative of how that specific internal world de facto operates and constitutes itself on a daily basis, seen from the perspective of individual officials rather than an outside actor. In the particular case of natural resource management, this is an avenue of enquiry that has only recently been opened up and still poses more questions than answers (see notably Fleishman 2012, 2014; 2016 for recent work on this theme). An in-depth and empirically grounded study of the phenomenon at hand might therefore be a much-needed contribution.

Second and related is the fact that the studied forest officials actually do develop incentives and preferences for collaboration, and make efforts to translate this into action, despite the empirical policy environment they are found in. Even though Kerala stands out as a progressive case in contrast to the rest of India and South Asia, it is not western Europe or the US where most of the contemporary (network and collaborative) governance literature has directed its focus. As we shall see in the later chapters, formal bureaucratic practices and routines are still considered sacrosanct by many senior
officials and the public bureaucracies are exceedingly top-down heavy, resulting in quite some organisational rigidity and inertia (Das 2010; Mitra 2006; Ramesh 2015). Moreover, there is in my interpretation a bias towards studying collaboration leading to normatively desirable outcomes in the developed West, while collaborative actions in the Global South often are associated with normatively undesirable practices. There is for instance an abundance of literature on resource governance that illustrates how officials and public agencies distort contemporary policies and programs, and exploit cracks and gaps in the formal organisational setup – by crafting or twisting rules – to seek rents, engage in corrupt practices, or recentralise decision-making power (see for instance Larson and Lewis-Mendoza 2012; Poteete and Ribot 2011; Ribot et al. 2006; Robbins 2000; Sundström 2015). Given this trend I find it instructive and encouraging to focus on an empirical setting, here the state of Kerala, where officials might use the cracks and gaps for more collaborative, problem-solving strategies, in line with their incentives and preferences.

The methodological contribution
The suggested approach opens up for an additional contribution which is demonstrating the value and utility of using ethnographic field methods to study micro-level institutions and rules-in-use, and for this investigation, individual incentives and strategies. Such an approach was followed in the early work of the IAD research program (Boettke et al. 2013; Schwartz-Shea 2010), but is not as common in the contemporary IAD-literature which overall has moved to more quantitative approaches, also focused on the functional performance of actors. In addition, in much of the current and best literature on collaborative environmental governance (see Bodin 2017; Ingold and Fischer 2014; Newig et al. 2017; Newig and Fritsch 2009), the predominant approach has been quantitative, building on large-N datasets and social network analysis. Yet once again, the role of the individual actor becomes more obfuscated. More recently, ethnography has been (rediscovered and) highlighted as a suitable way to approach the study of public administration, also in a developed country setting (see Rhodes 2014; van Hulst 2008; Ybema et al. 2009). Chapter three outlines a number of synergistic advantages of combining ethnography with institutional analysis, not least in research settings that are yet understudied. Yet, the value of ethnographic approaches goes beyond this particular research program and I make the suggestion that if we are to genuinely understand the de facto micro-level interactions occurring between individuals in a large Indian state bureaucracy, or possibly any complex collaborative arrangement, prolonged and immersive fieldwork is the most promising approach.

The theoretical contribution
In this book one of the central findings are the collaborative strategies forest officials employ, particularly through the informal network arrangements
which exist in a form of parallel coexistence with the formal hierarchical organisation. In one sense we could ask whether this is very remarkable or unexpected at all; communication and interaction with other officials across organisational boundaries and with the grassroots policy recipients – more or less without any external direction or interference from higher administrative levels – might be a behaviour that is expected of officials everywhere, regardless of empirical setting. In this case the combined incentive structures of numerous individual officials lead to action being taken in collaborative networks, in a more bottom-up or endogenous fashion.

Yet this speaks to an important theoretical literature concerned with the interplay of formal and informal institutions, and the rationality of informality when hierarchical organisations impose constraints on individual agents or lack the capacity to solve certain problems (Danielsson et al. 2018; Hertting 2007; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016; Schärpf 1994). This is addressed both in the literature on network governance, as well as in a wider literature dealing with informal institutions and channels for collaboration when formal institutions are perceived to be lacking or inefficient (de Soto 2002; Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 2006; Lauth 2000). In the specific case of India, numerous studies point to the relevance of informal institutions existing alongside formal ones, though these have predominantly focused on how poor citizens access the state and the bureaucracy, and not how public officials themselves may craft informal institutions to mitigate limitations in the same type of organisations (see Ananthpur 2007; Ananthpur and Moore 2010; Harriss-White 2003; Krishna 2011; Kruks-Wisner 2011; van Gool 2008).

Structure of the Book

The book consists of two main parts. In the first, following this introduction, chapter two presents the book’s theoretical approach in more detail. It begins with a concise review of two literatures that one could be led to think would hold the answers to the type of questions being posed in this book; that on natural resource governance in the Global South, and that on development administration in the same setting. I suggest that these bodies of research provide useful contextual insights but few ideas which may help us understand the micro-level incentives and strategies of officials, or the specific roles they may hold. To overcome these shortcomings I instead turn to a wider literature developed in a largely western setting, providing a richer and more nuanced source of ideas for the task at hand. On the basis of this work I formulate a template of various strategies and resources officials may have, which I bring into the empirical analysis. I then argue that this is basically a matter of crafting and enforcing rules, and finally look at the idea of roles in some more detail. Chapter three is the main methodological segment of the book. It first discusses the conventional aspects of research design before elaborating the combined and synergistic use of political ethnog-
raphy and institutional analysis for the purpose of studying micro-level incentives and interactions between individuals. I then account for the process of preparing for fieldwork, selecting the empirical setting and study-sites, and gaining access to the field. Next I outline the process of conducting fieldwork. Each of the data-gathering techniques is discussed here, as is the practice of taking fieldnotes. It also provides a more tangible description of how parts of the IAD framework were used in the field. Last, I outline the analytical deskwork that followed fieldwork and how the empirical analysis was written up.

The second part of the book begins with chapter four which is part case description and part empirical analysis. The overarching theme is the formal institutional framework forest officials operate within but also perceive gaps in, which leads them to develop incentives and a preference for collaboration. Yet in order to understand the formal constraints they face, I suggest that we first need some deeper knowledge of how the system has developed and is structured. Thus I give a condensed account of the history and formal organisation of forest management in India, and outline what forest officials are formally charged with doing. I then turn to examine how these obligations are reflected in relationships within the administration, and pay particular attention to non-collaborative incentives and strategies employed within the forest department, not least among the senior-level officials. It proceeds to touch upon the organic evolution of collaborative strategies and the difficulty of accounting for this process.

Thereafter follows three chapters each looking at the three different sets of incentives and goals of collaboration listed above, and the three approaches officials employ by interacting in the institutional arrangements I term collaborative networks. Chapter five looks at incentives, goals and strategies related to strategic planning and information sharing, chapter six at immediate response and action tasks, and chapter seven engages with those related to capacity building in forest communities. Each of them takes a decidedly within perspective of the network arrangements, examining how forest officials reason and develop incentives for collaboration, what it is they seek to accomplish, and how they do it. I look at the different resources and strategies of relevance and examine their behaviour relating to both substantive action, and interactions between officials with the aim of persuading others to collaborate or keep doing so. Each ends with a summary of what has been in focus and looks briefly at the roles of relevance. Last, chapter eight provides a final concluding discussion, tying together the summarising parts of chapter four to eight in order to give a final answer to my research question, and delves into a few additional areas of importance.
2. Starting Points and Theoretical Approach

The aim of this book is to understand the perceptions, motives and incentives of public officials to work collaboratively, the goals they want to attain, and the substantive actions and strategies they employ in order to do so. This chapter presents the deeper theoretical perspective and the chosen approach through which this is studied and analysed. The chapter has five main parts. The first two offer a concise review of prior research focusing on a) governance of the commons in the Global South and b) development administration and reform, with specific attention to India. These reviews play a dual role in that they highlight important insights that contribute to a better understanding of the contextual setting at hand in this book, but also points to the absence of any deeper attention to the role of the individual bureaucrat. The third part turns its gaze to a wider literature on public administration, and collaborative and network governance in a western setting. I find that this scholarship offers a more suitable and nuanced source of ideas to help us understand the incentives and behaviour of public officials. A condensed survey results in a roster of the resources and strategies officials have at their discretion. The fourth part discusses why and how this basically is a matter of crafting and enforcing rules, and delves a bit deeper into the concept, and the importance of looking at both formal and informal institutions. The fifth and final part elaborates the idea of roles and offers a tentative list of what roles figure in the empirical setting at hand. Last the research question is briefly revisited.

Empirical Foundation I: Governance of the Commons

The research program on common pool resources (CPR) emerged as a response to the theoretical propositions made by Garrett Hardin (1968). In articulating his notion of a tragedy of the commons, he posited that resource users in any open-access property regime were unlikely to cooperate and would instead pursue their narrow self-interests (the *homo oeconomicus* model), pushing the resource towards overuse and ultimately exhaustion. As solution he advocated either total state control or full privatisation as the only way to safeguard the commons; suggestions that came to inform natural resource policy around the world for several decades (Ostrom et al. 1994). What the CPR research program aimed to demonstrate both theoretically and
empirically was that open-access systems indeed could be managed and protected through collective action, in other words voluntary self-governing between individuals. Since the late 1980’s this finding has been reiterated time and again in a long range of publications and syntheses drawing on in-depth empirical studies around the world (see Agrawal 2001; Baland and Platteau 1996; Ostrom 1990; Ostrom et al. 2002; Ostrom et al. 1994), as well as in more recent meta-analyses (Baggio 2016; Cox et al. 2010).

The research tradition has provided substantial empirical evidence that local groups often may craft durable institutions in order to overcome collective action problems without external direction, but has seldom explored external actors in any greater depth. Yet it should be noted that the aim was to demonstrate that there was a third way beyond state control or privatisation, for which reason the role and place of public officials was left aside. Mansbridge states that “because Ostrom was writing against a state-centric tradition, she did not dwell upon the functions of the state” (2014: 9-10). Contrary to common misunderstandings, CPR-theory and the many studies it has generated are not deliberately inadvertent to officials or the bureaucracy more widely, and Governing the Commons (1990) should not be read as an anti-state thesis. Quite the opposite, Ostrom argued that state action often is necessary at higher levels by providing conflict resolution, arenas for negotiation, and the task of monitoring compliance with rules at more local levels (in other words being a third-party enforcer) within a nested system (Mansbridge 2014).\(^3\) The explicit focus on local communities in the early CPR work struck out a trajectory for future commons scholarship in which officials simply remained outside the direct scope of enquiry.\(^4\) Though recent attempts have been made to apply CPR-theory to large-scale commons (Fleischman et al. 2014) most CPR-studies published to date remain both theoretically and empirically grounded at the local community-level. In a synthesis of over ninety published case-studies on CPR-institutions, Cox et al. (2010) arrive at the conclusion that few studies in this vein even address the broader socio-political environment in which communities are located.

The commons in nested enterprises

The perceived trajectory is also evident in the vast body of literature that has emerged over the past two decades, building on the original premises of CPR-theory. It has expanded the scope and studies resource communities as part of nested enterprises; wider institutional arrangements and settings beyond the local level or the single village. The empirical backdrop to this

\(^3\) This resonates closely with the concept of metagovernance (Sørensen and Torfing 2007a), returned to later in the chapter.

\(^4\) It should also be noted that this research program has benefitted a lot, and been spurred on by the actual practice of community-based conservation and support to self-governing groups around the world (Ostrom et al. 2002), albeit with doubts about its overall accomplishments (Shackleton et al. 2010).
literature are the decentralisation reforms that have swept the Global South (see Andersson et al. 2009; Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006; Faguet 2014) and the new policy regimes promoting governance across levels, with improved accountability and participation of local groups. In the case of environmental and resource governance, Wright et al. describe decentralisation as “one of the most important innovations in environmental policy in the past 30 years” (2016: 14958).

This literature has done a lot to improve our understanding of how decentralised governance regimes affect human development and livelihoods in local communities, as well as forest cover change and conditions, delivering the intuitive but important lesson that positive outcomes seldom are automatic and are mediated by a wealth of local-level factors playing out differently in various contexts (Agrawal et al. 2008; Cardona et al. 2014; Coleman and Fleischman 2012; Wright et al. 2016). One stream of this literature, with relevance for the case at hand, focuses on the importance of institutional linkages between actors, their social embeddedness and the degree of nestedness in the governance system. In the setting of Latin America, Andersson and colleagues find that the more connected rural municipalities and villages are to actors at other governance levels, the better the outcomes in forest conservation and service delivery. In particular, the frequency and nature of interactions between villages and local governments, in other words the political connectedness, is held to be crucial, suggesting that decentralisation per se does not lead to positive outcomes. They posit the argument that when resource users are able to engage local politicians and officials, a more conducive environment for resource governance is created, and the actors will have access to more resources, information and a forum for conflict-resolution. Yet, the rate of success will also depend on the degree to which local governments are responsive to local demands in decentralised regimes; a matter of public accountability (Andersson et al. 2006; Andersson and Ostrom 2008; Wright et al. 2016).

Another region that has been vigorously studied in terms of decentralised forest governance is the Indian Himalayas. This region has a long history of experimentation with decentralised regimes, some dating back to the 1930’s while others are more recent efforts to promote community forestry. Here research has found that areas with community-led arrangements consistently report better forest conditions and less negative forest cover change as compared to areas under more direct state management, attributing the difference to the better use of local ecological knowledge and more inclusive decision-making (notably of women) in the former arrangements (Agarwal 2010; Agrawal 2005; Baland et al. 2010; Somanathan et al. 2009).

A second stream in this literature focuses on the many failures and non-achieved goals resulting from decentralisation reforms, particularly bureaucratic recentralisation and reclamation of power (Poteete and Ribot 2011; Ribot et al. 2006) and the risk of elite capture (Lund 2015; Persha and Andersson 2014). Poteete and Ribot (2011) for instance, talk of repertoires of
domination employed by public officials and local elites to retain their traditional and deep-rooted hegemony following decentralisation. As reforms (and additionally modern forest policies) are introduced into contexts of pre-existing social inequities, persistent rural poverty and low social capital levels, distorting well-intended institutional changes to their advantage is often an easy task for officials and local strongmen (Andersson and Agrawal 2011; Robbins 2000). Failures also result from what Lund (2015) terms a ‘paradox of participation’ in forest management. Participatory reforms are often narrowly framed around technical issues, which end up promoting professionalization and a reliance on rational, scientific management approaches by officials, excluding often illiterate forest users lacking the formal, technical knowledge, and side-lining traditional indigenous knowledge. The same problem is experienced in external interventions oriented towards the inclusion of women. It is the group that is most dependent on forest produce for livelihoods and diets, but reforms regularly fall short of goals to empower women in decision-making (Agarwal 2010). Generally, if social accountability mechanisms are weak or non-transparent to start with, decentralisation may well aggravate the situation as weakly empowered local bodies are captured by more powerful and resource-rich actors (Andersson and Agrawal 2011). The presence of external organisations and NGOs may moderate the risks of elite capture (Persha and Andersson 2014), but it has also been found that NGOs may reduce the responsiveness of local governments to livelihood needs as they tend to promote their own goals (Cook et al. 2017).

Another commonly used term is polycentric resource governance (see Andersson and Ostrom 2008; Nagendra and Ostrom 2012). The concept derives from studies of metropolitan governance in mid-twentieth century America (Ostrom et al. 1961) but is often used in relation to resource governance systems that include multiple actors with some de facto decision-making authority. Higher degrees of polycentricity are thought to increase the endogenous evolution of institutional arrangements among interdependent actors, as it “seeks to unleash the ingenuity, and stimulate creativity of political entrepreneurs. It is a system that is structured so that actors within the system are given opportunities for institutional innovation and adaptation through experimentation and learning” (2008: 77). Relating to the discussion above, this essentially has to do with the degree of political connectedness between actors in a nested system.

The literature on CPR institutions in more decentralised (or polycentric) arrangements has much improved our knowledge and understanding of the diverse factors at play, and the multiple possible outcomes. In cases it has also directly or indirectly contributed to actual policy debates in the Global South (Ramesh 2015). However, for the study at hand this literature does not examine the micro-level roles of individual officials in more depth than the older CPR scholarship did. It discusses the importance of them, but rarely from that particular perspective, and often reduces public agencies to uniform notions of ‘the bureaucracy’ or ‘the state’ as one single actor. The same
detailed attention that has been dealt the internal world of local communities has not been directed at understanding the internal organisational culture of bureaucracies or the strategies and incentives officials consider before implementing a new policy, even though they are identified as critical actors. Hence, there is scope for an important empirical contribution here.

Last, it should be noted that this review targets the research focused on the commons in developing countries. While extensive it is simultaneously dwarfed by a much larger literature on environmental policy and governance in the West, that too drawing many of its ideas from Ostrom and the CPR program. This is made apparent in a recent meta-analysis of almost 400 published articles which found that the Global South is significantly underrepresented in this literature (Fahey and Pralle 2016). The authors rightly observe that “the heavy focus on Europe and North America could reinforce assumptions about professionalized legislatures and bureaucracies that may not apply to less developed areas of the world” (2016: 532). This also reaffirms the relevance of turning to the more western-focused literature examined further on in this chapter.

Empirical Foundation II: Development Administration

In this diverse scholarship the general focus lies on how governments in developing countries can improve (often with external, foreign aid) their bureaucratic apparatus and institutions in order to translate the needs of its population into viable policies and programs (Brinkerhoff 2008; Gant 2006). This literature is growing steadily, but is yet embryonic compared to that on public administration in the West (see Raadschelders 2011). To illustrate, Gulrajani and Moloney find, in a thorough content-analysis of public administration journals that “administrative research on the developing world published in leading international publications has become a small-scale, disparate, descriptive, qualitative, and non-comparative subfield dominated by researchers from the global North” (2012: 78). This should be seen in light of the fact that the Indian government for instance, is directly or indirectly responsible for the welfare and security of one sixth of the world population. To many of the country’s poorest, in both rural areas as well as in urban slums, the government is the primary, if not only, provider of welfare services, a task they have neglected or failed at in several regions and policy areas (Kohli 2012; Singh 2016). Gupta for instance asks that “after more than sixty years of development efforts by the postcolonial state, why do so many of India’s citizens continue to be subjected to the cruelties of endemic hunger and malnutrition and to be deprived of such basic necessities as clothing, shelter, clean water, and sanitation?” (2012: 3).
Good governance, isomorphism and capability traps

One stream of the literature engages with institutional reforms of the bureaucracy, usually with reference to the efforts and intentions of international donor organisations. Brinkerhoff (2008) provides a review of this scholarship and demonstrates how state agencies have had a shifting understanding and importance in development theory and practice over the past few decades. From an infatuation with the state as the vehicle for development in the immediate post-independence period, it shifted to a more sceptical approach from the 1980’s during which good governance reforms were promoted.

A key implication of the good governance concept lies in evaluating the performance of the state and its bureaucratic apparatus in terms of accountability, transparency, responsiveness and public participation – in addition to the core functions of pursuing sound economic policies and providing basic public services to citizens (Andrews 2008; Brinkerhoff 2008). These ideals, along with decentralisation reforms, dominated development discourse for more than two decades, when it became apparent that the state-led development efforts were failing and even exasperating problems. But good governance has also fallen short of its goals to sustain any temporary improvements in performance and human development. It has been criticised for promoting apolitical development (Ferguson 1994; Mosse 2005), presuming that bureaucrats operate in a setting void of pre-existing political relationships, and for imposing blueprinted solutions that have been transplanted from elsewhere (Evans 2004; Gibson et al. 2005), with little regard to local contexts.

The literature attributes many of these failures to what is termed isomorphic mimicry (see DiMaggio and Powell 1983). These are strategies in which public agencies simply pretend to look like successful organisations and project an image of doing something innovative, when they in fact are not. This may be undertaking superficial changes in rhetoric, such as incorporating ‘public deliberation’ in their guidelines, or undergoing reorganisations like setting up a new department-branch oriented towards participation, or shifting the natural resource portfolio between ministries – typically from industry to environment. It provides a semblance of change but does little to enhance the agencies functionality and promote new ideas and practices (Andrews 2013). The idea is that senior officials and managers seek external legitimacy – whether from donors or policymakers – instead of better performance, and will comply with cosmetic changes rather than actually altering their practices, in order to maintain their budgets and rents. For frontline officials (street-level bureaucrats), the suggestion is that they choose superficial routine compliance over a genuine concern for their clients, as it allows them to maintain the corrupt or clientelistic ties they might have (Andrews et al. 2012; see Robbins 2000 for an empirical illustration from India).

Ultimately governments and bureaucracies may end up in what is known as a capability trap, a reinforcing dynamic in which they keep adopting reforms, or a semblance of them, to ensure ongoing flows of money and legit-
imacy, but never actually improve their performance or practices (2012: 2). The authors state that this captures the essence of decades of development failures in many areas of the world: donor agencies keep pouring in funds and new initiatives, but few manage to orchestrate any deeper, lasting reforms. Yet, in recent years some important steps have been taken, illuminating ways to break out of capability traps. Part of the approach lies in a reconsidered ambition of what may be accomplished. Scholars now speak of good enough governance (Grindle 2004, 2007), in which the bar is lowered, suggesting that not all deficits can be tackled at once, and that modest changes ensuring improvement in more delineated areas are to be encouraged.

An older hypothesis about co-production between state and society (Evans 1996) has been revitalised and the role of civil society has gained renewed recognition for the demands that a better informed and connected citizenry may place on the bureaucracy for goods and services (Brinkerhoff 2008; Gant 2006). In recent years Andrews and colleagues (2013; 2012) have focused on how countries can escape capability traps and outline four general elements (not blueprints) that characterises enhanced possibilities to break free. They term this ‘problem-driven iterative adaptation’ (PDIA) and suggest that reforms should aim to solve particular problems in local contexts, via the creation of an authorising environment that encourages experimentation, which leads to ongoing learning-by-doing and feedback, by including a broad set of agents and actors that ensure that reforms are viable and legitimate (2012: 8). While they direct their advice to donor agencies and reform-minded governments, I would cautiously suggest that these elements might also arise more endogenously in settings where the political climate allows it.

While these ideas point to important contextual conditions to keep in mind, it should be noted that most of this literature focuses on broader institutional and organisational factors at the macro-level. Some of the best books on the developing state retain a focus on the aggregated level; what whole agencies do, rather than what individual officials do and how they think and reason, and the literature build inquiries on more formal program evaluations rather than in-depth ethnographies. In the case of India a number of influential publications over the past two decades have examined the political economy of development, but seldom move down to the micro-level and internal world of the large bureaucracies (see for instance Corbridge et al. 2013; Evans 1995; Kohli 2004, 2012; Mitra 2006; Singh 2016). Writing on this literature more than twenty years ago Gupta formulated a critique which in many aspects still holds today:

Research on the state, with its focus on large-scale structures, epochal events, major policies, and "important" people (Evans et al. 1985; Skocpol 1979), has failed to illuminate the quotidian practices (Bourdieu 1977) of bureaucrats that tell us about the effects of the state on the everyday lives of rural people. Surprisingly little research has been conducted in the small towns (in the Indian case, at the level of the subdistrict [tehsil]) where a large number
of state officials, constituting the broad base of the bureaucratic pyramid, live and work - the village-level workers, land record keepers, elementary school teachers, agricultural extension agents, the staff of the civil hospital, and others. This is the site where the majority of people in a rural and agricultural country such as India come into contact with "the state," and this is where many of their images of the state are forged (1995: 376).

Seeing the state rather than seeing like a state

A second stream of the literature focuses on local politics and state-society relationships in the Global South. Apart from the issue of scale it differs in that it attends more carefully to individual government agencies and officials. At the centre of these are interactions between officials, politicians and ordinary citizens, against the wider backdrop of poverty alleviation and human development programs, some at the intersection of ecological sustainability efforts too. In India these themes have come to be explored mainly by political- anthropologists or geographers (see Corbridge et al. 2005; Gupta 2012; Harriss-White 2003; Shah 2010). They provide rich descriptions and insights into the nature of local politics, power imbalances, and the construction of state-society relationships in diverse regions of India’s rural interior.

While this scholarship offers the valuable, but perhaps intuitive insight that there is a vast discrepancy between the intentions of many development policies and the actual outcomes that materialise, they too consistently focus on understanding how poor and marginalised people engage and interact with the local state, rather than how the state perceives and constructs its task of providing services to its citizens. To paraphrase, they examine how people see the state (Corbridge et al. 2005), in contrast to seeing like a state (Scott 1998). To illustrate, Corbridge and colleagues (2005: 11) interviewed close to 300 public officials at selected block and district level offices in three states in eastern India, but do not explicate how and why those officials fail to implement the human development programs as planned, but rather describe how citizens experience and perceive those failures.

In a similar fashion, Gupta (2012), in a book that aims to deal explicitly with the bureaucracy says little about why it functions poorly the way it does and instead pays most attention to how ordinary citizens are routinely discriminated by public officials in their interactions with them. While it shines light on the structural violence reportedly built into the very fabric of the Indian state administration, it does not examine the institutional motivations, incentives and constraints individual bureaucrats face in their work, but rather take as a starting point that structural factors inhibit any ability or intention of officials to do well. Moreover, studies in this vein do not offer much in the way of tangible policy advice on how to improve governance, or mitigate the effects of misgovernance, but rather focus on delivering critique against the apparatus, reifying an image of the state as an inherently dysfunctional vehicle of development, and also the widespread assumption that most
public officials are rent-seekers and malignly intended towards the public interest (Corbridge et al. 2005; Gupta 1995). In recent years a few political scientists have engaged these questions in the same context (for instance Krishna 2011; Kruks-Wisner 2011), providing ideas of how the state is approached by ordinary people through various formal and informal channels, and how they muddle through complex power structures and imbalances. Once again, the gaze is directed at citizens rather than officials, obfuscating the role of the latter, regardless of successful or failed outcomes.

Yet, there are a small number of studies taking a somewhat more individual-focused perspective on Indian public officials. These usually tend to focus on the themes of either bureaucratic culture or the transfer of bureaucrats at an elite level, often in relation to corruption. Potter (1996) explores the history of the elite Indian Administrative Service (IAS) from the colonial to the post-independence era, suggesting that the civil service remained more or less structurally unchanged from the late 1800’s up to the 1980’s, while at the same time becoming more and more politicised. Elite public officials thus hold their primary loyalty to the incumbent political leadership, making the bureaucratic culture and efficiency of state-level administrations reflective of the broader political environment of that state. Echoing the arguments made in this book, Das writes on the role of the contemporary civil service, following the decentralisation reforms of the early 1990’s:

there has been a marked unwillingness on the part of the civil servants to accept the changes in control and accountability, the altered roles and responsibilities…the framework that is provided by the command and control paradigm is based on the concept of the authority of the individuals at the top of the hierarchy; and this is no longer adequate for addressing the issues thrown up by the recent changes in our country (2010: 12-13).

Political control of officials is common also in the West (Meier and O'Toole 2006) and not necessarily something negative, but the same phenomenon in India is often described as a powerful mechanism politicians hold at their discretion. Officials enter their job through extremely competitive but politically neutral examinations and enjoy promotion along standardised procedures (Das 2010), but may be transferred at any time by politicians who wish to reward or punish officials under their control (Iyer and Mani 2012). The effect is that officials spend much time and resources on raising funds in order to pay substantial bribes to politicians to acquire a desirable posting. Leaving aside the institutionalisation of bribery, this also leads to many officials staying such a short time in one posting that they will not learn the job properly, or not make efforts to get acquainted with the local context (Banik 2001; Iyer and Mani 2012). While the intention is to prevent networks of corruption and patronage from developing by regularly transferring officials (Das 2010), the transfers themselves become the very item at the centre of such networks.
At the opposite end of the hierarchical spectra, we find a small amount of studies looking at civil servants operating at the grassroots, and how they are influenced by factors such as caste, gender and identity. One example is van Gool’s (2008) ethnography of low-caste officials in rural Uttar Pradesh in northern India, examining whether those recruited to the bureaucracy on representation quotas act and make decisions which reflect the interest of the marginalised groups they represent. Overall, they are more prone to follow incentives deriving from local strongmen and seek to gain favour among high-caste groups – in part dictated by the prevailing political environment in that region – rather than represent their peers. van Gool also finds that the officials, acting as street-level bureaucrats easily become elevated above the groups they represent as they enjoy a secure government-employment and significantly higher wages, alienating them from fellow caste-groups. The study suggests that the downward accountability (vis-à-vis citizens) and responsiveness of officials is low, and that the political environment offers few incentives for them to alter their behaviour. While one of the best ethnographies of local officials, it is also focused on one of India’s poorest and most politically fragile regions, leaving the dynamics operating at the local level in a state like Kerala an open empirical question.

The inclination to study regions and contexts which regularly lead to policy failures and distortions rather than successful cases may well reinforce the prevalent discourse of the corrupt civil servant, even if corruption and oppression is rife in rural India. In his ethnographic doctoral study on the forest departments in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra in central India, Fleischman (2012; see also 2014, 2016) interviewed over 130 forest officials, investigating how the two departments function internally, and what and incentivises and constrains officials in their daily work. He finds that colonial legacies and widespread corruption and bribery are far from the only explanation as to why the departments often are unable to carry out their work and meet policy goals. Personal motivations and relationships within the department, resource shortages, political interference and a less than conducive socio-political environment all have an influence on individual officials. He concludes, importantly, that

…the problem is not that forest officers are greedy or unethical – some may be, but many try to do their best. Rather, the problem is that they operate in a political and organizational environment that mitigates against good governance in several ways (2012: 225).

In other words, the wider landscape works against initiatives to align with more contemporary governance doctrines and practices, indicating that the problem of a capability trap might span across policy sectors and much of society. While those two states overall are more functioning in terms of governance than Uttar Pradesh as in the case of van Gool, they do not rank similarly to Kerala, which is by and large an outlier within India (Heller 2012).
Beyond India instructive examples may be found of studies engaging the way in which public officials are able to provide public services in rural areas, and what factors and institutions motivate them. Tendler (1997) for instance describes a case from northeastern Brazil where a combination of high work dedication and a sense of mission was instilled among local extension workers following decentralising reforms, allowing them to successfully provide public services despite a wider environment of political corruption and institutional inertia. Not only an unusual example of ‘good government’ (in the tropics), the study also looked closely at what motivated and constrained individual officials. Similarly, Tsai (2007) reports on case from rural China where officials, despite operating in setting of limited accountability and non-democratic institutions, are able to provide public goods quite responsively to local demands. She finds that officials derive moral standing, personal esteem, and work satisfaction from local solidary groups (for instance village temples and community groups) when they provide services, fostering a virtuous circle of interactions between officials and villagers.

To summarise, our knowledge of the Indian administrative system is quite limited and not unlike the case of resource bureaucracies in the CPR literature. We know little about what occurs within the administration between the formulation of policies at the topmost level, and the actions of officials at the local level, but then largely from the viewpoint of policy recipients. At the local level, the socio-political influences on officials remain understudied, and the few who do look at these influences tend to focus narrowly on corruption and power imbalances. While several of the cited studies provide important insights on local state-society interactions, it is regularly from the perspective of citizens, again black-boxing institutional practices and factors operating within agencies.

Theoretical Foundation I: Collaborative Public Officials

In order to overcome the shortcomings in the literatures reviewed above I make the argument that we should look at the scholarship on public officials as developed in a western setting, not least that on network and collaborative governance. While it has been observed that individuals get “short shrift” in this research in favour of organisations (O'Leary and Vij 2012: 514), it does offer a somewhat fuller and more balanced source of ideas to help us start thinking about the strategies officials may pursue and the resources they may enlist in order to transform their incentives and aspirations into substantive action. This is indeed a vast body of research (see Isett et al. 2011; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016; O'Leary and Bingham 2009; Raadschelders 2011; Scott and Thomas 2017a for recent surveys) for which reason only aspects relevant to this study are highlighted below.
A note on fuzzy concepts

Networks and collaboration are both ubiquitous concepts in contemporary political science and there is an inherent risk of conceptual stretching unless we are clear with what we refer to. O’Leary and Vij shine light on this problem by stating that

…”conceptual boundaries among coordination, cooperation, coalition, collaboration, network structures, collaborative public management, collaborative governance, civic engagement, alliances, mergers, and partnership are blurred and lack clear, coherent, operational definitions that can be mutually agreed upon by researchers. The multiple terms, meanings, and implications are overlapping, elusive, and unclear, leading to inconsistencies in the nomenclature…This is most acute between the research on collaborative governance and the research on network governance. Although collaboration can be a feature of networks, it can also exist outside of networks. Similarly, networks too can extend beyond collaborative linkages. Since the terms are often used interchangeably, however, the incorrect impression is that all networks are collaborative and all collaborations happen in networks (2012: 517).

This fuzziness is also apparent when going through conceptual articles and literature reviews on the theme of collaboration (see Agranoff 2006; Ansell and Gash 2008; Bodin 2017; Bryson et al. 2006; Bryson et al. 2015; Emerson et al. 2012; Huxham and Vangen 2005; Imperial 2005; Koontz and Thomas 2006; Newig et al. 2017; Scott and Thomas 2017a). The literature on networks and network management also adds to the conceptual ambiguity (see Hertting and Vedung 2012; Isett et al. 2011; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016; Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; O'Toole 1997; Provan and Kenis 2008; Span et al. 2012; Sorensen and Torfing 2007b). For instance, Klijn and Koppenjan define the latter term as “all the deliberate strategies aimed at facilitating and guiding the interactions and/or changing the features of the network with the intent to further the collaboration within the network process” (2016: 11) – yet something that should be contrasted with networks as a type of structural interdependency between actors (see Hertting 2007).

My intention here is not to sort out the boundaries between these various concepts, a research task far beyond the scope of this book. However, two commonalities to the majority of definitions in the literature cited above is that collaboration arises when actors are unable or at great difficulty to solve problems on their own; and that it is a dynamic and evolutionary process rather than a single static condition (O’Leary and Bingham 2009; Scott and Thomas 2017a). Importantly, it is also something more than just cooperation or coordination, which I believe (at least in the dictionary sense of the word), does not catch that dynamic and more organic notion of collaboration, which as we shall see is much the case in Kerala. I use the definition produced below, which I find to fit the empirical context at hand quite well. Yet, the words cooperation and coordination do figure in the text, but then more for linguistic variation than conceptual difference. When referring to the institu-
Incentives and drivers of collaboration at the individual level

Why do individuals develop incentives to collaborate in the first place, or to form network arrangements? There is no shortage of propositions in the literature and this section only provides a brief outline (see Scott and Thomas 2017a for a recent review). Yet, we first need to reemphasise the focus on individual agency as the driver of collaboration, or put differently, their search for an informal forum for coordination. This is contrasted to a perspective seeing networks or collaborative arrangements as a permanent functional or structural dependency between formal actors such as public agencies and local governments. In a classic definition by O’Toole and colleagues it is stated that

An implementation network, like any other policy network, is the pattern of linkages traced between organizational actors who are in some way interdependent. It is also [emphasis added] a socially constructed vehicle for purposive action. Like organizations themselves, implementation networks are intended to be used as instruments for mobilizing the energies and efforts of individual actors to deal with the problem at hand (1997: 139).

The two perspectives are not incompatible, but treating networks or collaboration only as way of organising societal governance obfuscates the role of individual actors who in the end are the agents populating organisations and network arrangements. While dependencies may be rooted at the structural level, the associated tangible problems may be manifest and experienced by individuals in a much more local context, then at the actor level (see Hertting 2003: 56-58).

Interdependencies

A well-established proposition is that individuals perceiving interdependencies develop incentive structures to collaborate, as they are dependent on each other insofar they cannot realise goals or fulfil an agenda by themselves, which ultimately leads to a preference for coordination and resource exchange; a joint effort to craft collective rules (Hertting 2003, 2007; Hill
and Lynn 2003; Klijn 1997). We may also make the important analytical distinction between resource dependencies and dependency relations that produce strategic externalities. In the former case actors lack a resource held by another actor and need that in order to take a preferred action. In the latter case actors have the necessary resources themselves but the desired outcome they seek is reliant upon other actors also taking action. As such, the interdependency is found at the outcome level rather than the action level. In other words, their implementation capacity is constrained or possibly lacking. Yet this distinction is mainly analytical and in the real world the two are often interwoven (Hertting 2007: 47-50). Moreover, interdependencies come in different degrees or symmetries. Scharpf (1978) suggests that actor dependency is based on the importance an actor attaches to a resource held by other actors, and the possibility of substituting this resource for another one, or acquiring it through a third party. Perceived importance and substitutability thus establishes the dependency relationship.

The preference and search for networks – unless the problem at hand is a one-time occurrence – becomes an overarching and continuous rational strategy for actors, where they may exchange resources and coordinate their different individual strategies and preferred courses of action. Put differently, if actors repeatedly find themselves facing interdependencies that have no or little prospect of diminishing, investing in a common forum for dialogue and negotiation becomes a worthwhile task, so that interactions do not have to be started anew each and every time (Hertting 2003; Scharpf 1994). Moreover, much like classic CPR theory posits, the lack of any institution for coordination leads to strategies and behaviour that falls short of both the maximum individual and collective utility (Ostrom 1990). As a later section will highlight, trust, reciprocity and a past history of collaboration may also be helpful in tying interdependent actors together, and may aid them in their initial attempts to coordinate themselves (Ansell and Gash 2008; Ostrom 1990, 1998).

The rationality of informality

Much collaboration – including that focused on empirically in this book – occurs between actors representing formal organisations and agencies. While formalised collaboration imposed by decision-makers from the top-down is common (see Bryson et al. 2006; Bryson et al. 2015; O'Leary and Vij 2012; Span et al. 2012), much remains informal, carried out by individuals in their capacity of bureaucrats and public managers, but beyond the formal boundaries and confines of the organisations and agencies they belong to. This insight is quite well-established in the literature. For instance, Hertting and Vedung suggest that informal interactions and cooperation is the most feasible and rational strategy available to individuals when the bureaucratic structure is overly rigid, or when the transaction cost of reorganisation and external network formation from the top-down is too high, time-consuming or politically cumbersome (2012: 33). In short, when hierarchical organisations
are perceived to be ineffective or lacking the capacity to solve a certain problem, informal solutions become attractive (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson et al. 2012; Scharpf 1994). This is also emphasised in the literature on informal institutions in developing countries (outlined further below) which speaks of an institutional gap (Helmke and Levitsky 2004), where individuals form collaborative arrangements to address – or exploit – perceived limitations in the formal institutional framework.

Importantly, informality is the rational strategy in this type of situation. This rests in the fact that actors enter informal collaborative arrangements or forums voluntarily, meaning that it is not formally prescribed, though they may indeed face sociocultural incentives to collaborate (Ostrom et al. 1994). Consequently, leaving the arrangement should also be voluntary, even if it comes at a social cost in terms of lost trust or broken commitments. In theory, actors avoid committing to explicit and formalised once-and-for-all solutions, and instead prefer an informal and incremental process, where they have an exit-strategy if they perceive that they can realise their goals on their own, or find more preferable partners for collaboration; in other words not surrendering all of their autonomy (Danielsson et al. 2018: 42-44; see also Hertting 2007). This wider idea has recently been formulated as a logic of limited institutionalisation by Danielsson and colleagues (2018), which holds that in principle incompatible perspectives and values may be temporarily aligned or harmonised if participants are not required to make ultimate commitments to a certain agenda or bind themselves to a fixed network structure; again having an exit-strategy. Koppenjan and Klijn (2004: 202) talk of the same phenomenon as a loose coupling between the decision-making process and the outcomes of the interaction process, not leaving participants any guarantees about reaching a certain outcome, but at least giving them a chance to get their arguments and viewpoints across (see also Blumberg 2001; Hirschman 1970).

Sometimes collaboration is rational for a set of actors as it is their least negative strategy. For instance, it may give them a chance to exchange information and best practices, ventilate concerns and arguments, ease workloads, and possibly settle on strategies that help them reach goals they perceive as desirable, which they could not have done alone, or only at great difficulty. Yet collaborative arrangements or networks does not in itself give any assurances or guarantees that actors will be more successful in terms of reaching desired goals or pursuing preferred strategies than if they remain content with working solely within their own jurisdictions. It might give an opportunity for experimentation and learning in which perspectives and ideas may be traded and new competencies may be obtained (Gerlak and Heikkila 2011) but no assurance about reaching substantial policy outputs (Klijn and Koppenjan 2016). Hertting and Vedung summarise the situation by stating that
Informal organization is not lack of organization. The rationale behind network governance is its presumed ability to flexibly bring together organizations and sector actors with different goals and affiliations to different hierarchical systems for the purpose of framing strategies and taking action in individual cases. This is achieved because the relevant vertical organizational units get involved on the basis of their own organizational goals and assignments. Hence, the very informality of networks enables organizations to come together and create problem-solving collaboration without changing any fundamental lines of command and authority (2012: 33).

Drivers beyond the individual level
To reiterate an important point, this book is about incentives and drivers of collaboration at the individual level. This is not to say that this focus is dominant in the literature. On the contrary, there is a substantial literature focusing on what drives and explains collaborative governance at a more encompassing level. These studies are often based on large-N quantitative datasets, and empirically test large amounts of hypotheses about the drivers of collaboration (see Lubell et al. 2010; Lundin 2007; Newig et al. 2017; Scott and Thomas 2017b) on a diversity of environmental issues, including watershed governance (Emerson and Gerlak 2014; Imperial 2005; Sabatier et al. 2005; Schneider et al. 2003; Scott 2015) and climate policy (Ingold and Fischer 2014). The focus in these studies and various literature reviews (Ansell and Gash 2008; Bodin 2017; Emerson et al. 2012) is to explain collaboration between actors and offer evidence on why it arises. This is certainly an important field but this book rather attempts to understand the drivers of collaboration at the individual micro-level: how public officials perceive, think and reason about collaboration.

Resources of public officials
What kinds of resources do public officials need in order to employ or design strategies and in extension to carry out policy tasks? Again there is no shortage of propositions in previous scholarship. In a book focused on the context of public officials in Sweden, Hysing and Olsson (2012) suggest three resources all officials hold. The first is the virtue of their position as employees of the state. A sanctioned, authoritative position bestows them with an amount of legitimacy to draw upon when taking actions and decisions vis-à-vis citizens, as well as direct access to other relevant resources like funding and infrastructure. Second, all officials hold competence, expertise and experience, including information and knowledge. This derives from both formal training and education within a certain profession, though experience gained from years spent as a civil servant may be equally valuable. Last are strategic contacts and networks as a specific type of resource, which may be enlisted when officials need to realise a certain policy requiring the joint efforts of multiple actors. Intuitively, the ability to deploy this resource
is aided by personal leadership skills and social competence which is a further resource of relevance.

Leadership and interpersonal skills is a widely cited facilitating factor in pursuing various strategies and joint courses of action. The literature holds it as a critical ingredient in bringing parties to the table, mediating and negotiating conflicts and diverging interests, for setting and maintaining the rules of the game, and ensuring that these are abided to throughout a collaborative process. Strong and facilitative leadership may also cultivate inclusivity and instil confidence in hesitant participants, and to build up trust and a common vision of what a collaborative endeavour is to accomplish (see Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson and Gerlak 2014; Koontz et al. 2015; Lubell 2004; O’Leary et al. 2012). Emerson et al. (2012: 15) find that “leadership can be an external driver, an essential ingredient of collaborative governance itself, and a significant outgrowth of collaboration.” O’Leary et al. (2012) argue that strategic leadership is highly important but stress interpersonal skills and attributes as more determining, for instance having an open mind, patience, flexibility and self-confidence. Important for the empirical context of this study is a proposition made by Ansell and Gash (2008: 555) who state that when power distribution is asymmetric and incentives to participate are weak (as in rural areas of developing countries), the importance of strong, ‘organic’ leaders emerging from the local context is critical in making collective action succeed.

Yet, the ability and capacity of individual officials is also mediated by the amount of autonomy and discretionary power they have at their disposal, or whether they are constrained by a high level of political control exerted by their political principals. The two concepts derive from the street-level bureaucracy (SLB) literature (see Brodkin 2012; Lipsky 1980; May and Winter 2009; Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Tummers and Bekkers 2014). The former is here understood as the ability to actually affect the implementation process or pursue a preferred strategy, while autonomy is the freedom, either delegated from superiors or deliberately taken, to do so; in other words a form of precondition. Simply put, officials need autonomy in order to exercise discretionary power at the operative field-level. In settings where the degree of political control (Meier and O’Toole 2006; Scholz et al. 1991) is high, elected officials typically enjoy high administrative subordination, in which individual bureaucrats are much more constrained in their repertoire of strategies and capacities.

Strategies and powers of public officials

The literature gives a number of suggestions on the various strategies, capacities and instruments public officials may have at their disposal. Again, Hysing and Olsson (2012: 20-22) provide a useful template. They outline four general powers all public officials have in theory. The first is the power to initiate action and to push a policy area forward by trying to get pertinent
issues on the agenda. This is thanks to presumed superiority in information, knowledge and expertise in the particular field an official works in. Dealing daily with the issue, close to citizens, they develop insights on what should be emphasised or done differently; insights which travel up the bureaucracy to get onto the political agenda. Connected, is the power to formulate policy as bureaucrats often supply information and data on which policy decisions are made, or even write the actual texts politicians then make decisions on. Second, officials have to power to prioritise actions. In its widest sense this implies determining which issues a public agency attempts to push upwards, onto the political agenda, while in a more narrow sense it implies prioritising between different courses of actions when resources or time is scarce.

Third, officials have the power to implement and realise policy, which is likely to be their most defining function. Public officials interpret written directives from the political leadership and translate it into implementable and realisable actions which citizens receive and experience. In the contemporary implementation literature (Hill and Hupe 2014) it is recognised that this process is far from linear or straightforward, and rather characterised by a good deal of complexity. Fourth and last is the power to evaluate and monitor policy decisions and actions, which in turn has implications for how future policies are designed. They may formulate indicators for evaluation, measure these and provide direct input or complaints that travel up through the hierarchy. In theory all officials could be involved in this process, though managers usually play a greater role.

Regulating other actors

Next, there are three strategies which state actors – either as a collective unit or at the individual bureaucrat level – may use to shape the behaviour of other actors, including networks. Vedung (1998) distinguishes between economic, regulatory and informative instruments, or more colloquially carrots, sticks and sermons. The first aims to remunerate or deprive an actor of material resources in order to incentivise or dis-incentivise a certain course of action, the second aims to shape actions and behaviour by coercion; stating what an actor must do or not do, while the third focuses on informative strategies or intellectual and moral appeals; making an actor see the benefits of changing behaviour.

Similarly, Jessop (2003) uses the terms distributing resources, setting the rules of the game, and storytelling to describe ways state actors can steer non-state actors. A third classification is provided by Koontz et al. (2004) in a book on the role of bureaucracy in US environmental regulation, and is further elaborated by Scott and Thomas (2017a). They distinguish between the tasks of issue definition, referring to the way governments frame an issue and what solutions are possible; supplying resources for collaboration, which implies various kinds of support that the government supplies; and establishing group-structure and decision-making processes, referring to how governments may influence the setup and mode of conduct of self-
governing networks. In reality, the strategies may be difficult to separate entirely, and may often be deployed in conjunction, but conceptually they are distinct.

**Metagovernance and regulating within networks**

The strategies above may also be deployed with a varying degree of interventionism, a theme that has been explored in the *metagovernance* literature (Sørensen and Torfing 2007a). Sørensen defines it as “a way of enhancing coordinated governance in a fragmented political system based on a high degree of autonomy for a plurality of self-governing networks and institutions...an indirect form of governance that is exercised by influencing processes of self-governance” (2006: 100). This enables what Scharpf (1994) termed *negotiations in the shadow of the hierarchy*. A governing actor will be able to steer actors at a lower level to ensure that they conform to an overarching set of rules and thus safeguarding against opportunistic behaviour. The mechanism is the awareness of being monitored at a distance and the anticipation of repercussions will steer actors into certain behaviour. The degree of monitoring may vary and also the extent of interventionism. This is often referred to as *hands-off* and *hands-on governance*.

Hands-off governance as a strategy implies an approach in which an actor frames or shapes the broader aspects of a network’s institutional design without being in direct contact with the self-governing actors. This can be done more or less assertively. At one end of the scale, we find the establishing of overall strategies and visions for a network while actual policy-making is left to the network actors. At the other end are strategies and incentives aiming to influence network actors by specific institutional designs to which they must abide and shape their actions within (Scharpf 1994; Sørensen 2006). Hands-on governance implies a more interventionist strategy in which an official involves herself more directly by offering support and facilitation to network actors, but does not seek to achieve her own goals, rather promoting and ensuring that a specific group of actors are able to fulfil the goals of the network (Rhodes 1997; Sørensen 2006). This too may also vary in assertiveness; ranging from lending support and advice, to cases where the meta-governor steps into a network as a participant in order to ensure its continued operations and function. This last option would imply the most horizontal structure of a network, as the governor may become a participant and have to abide by rules set by other network members.

Another classification is given by Agranoff and McGuire (2001: 298-300). They identify four key networking strategies or tasks. First, *activation* involves the process of identifying participants to be included in a network, and also surveying the skills, resources and knowledge of the potential participants; assets which might be critical integrating mechanisms. Hertting and Vedung (2012) touch upon a very similar task in discussing actors who enable cooperation in networks by stimulating the concerned actors using some policy instrument that activates the latter group. They also differentiate
activating one key actor – a forerunner – in the network, and activating the whole network as a cohesive group. They also mention facilitating; which occurs when an actor pushes for network cooperation with the hope that the participants will be able to organise themselves in the future (2012: 33-34). Deactivation may also occur if a network functions poorly or in an undesirable way, typically by adding new members or removing extant ones.

The second strategy the authors find is framing, which involves establishing and influencing the operating rules of the network, as well as influencing the values, ideas and perceptions of the members. It involves offering suggestions on how to look at a problem differently and how it may be tackled. Third, we have the task of mobilising which includes inducing individuals to make a commitment to a joint undertaking and sticking to it; getting people ‘on-board’ and building support. They find that this task is reliant on support from the mobilising officials’ own organisation and requires a good deal of motivating and inspiring skills. The last task is synthesising; the process of creating and enhancing the conditions for favourable and productive interaction between network members, notably by mediating conflicts and removing obstacles to cooperation. While the four tasks are conceptually separated, in practice they run almost seamlessly and simultaneously (Agranoff and McGuire 2001: 301).

Varieties of networks

Agranoff (2007) proposes four different types of networks with regards to the scope of activities and strategies undertaken by officials in them. The first are informational networks which have the primary purpose of exchanging technology, knowledge and information, examining the scope of a problem, and to evaluate possible solutions. These networks are usually broadly inclusive and function as sounding boards, but seldom or never take decisions on their own: trading information as a resource is their main function. Next we have developmental networks that exchange information in addition to providing training and shared learning opportunities for the members, which aims to foster further cooperation and improve the ability of the individual participating public agencies. The third type are referred to as outreach networks which fulfil the two tasks above but also develop strategies for implementation of programs and activities that can be used by the members themselves or additional stakeholders somewhere else. Plans and strategies for action are produced but are not carried out jointly by the network members. Last, we have action networks which are the most far-reaching in terms of activities. These ones engage in joint action by adopting collaborative strategies and courses of action, and provide services or information together to their target groups (for instance citizen groups).

Following similar reasoning Milward and Provan (2006: 11-17) distinguish between service implementation networks that focus on joint service production by several horizontal actors; information diffusion networks
whose primary function is share information and knowledge across organisational boundaries; problem solving networks intending to resolve existing complex problems, usually on a temporary basis after which it goes dormant; and last community capacity building networks whose primary aim it is to strengthen social capital and trust in the policy community for both current and future problem solving.

Wider facilitating conditions
Finally, we should consider what kinds of conditions are conducive for public officials when pursuing their preferred strategies, forming and managing networks, and in extension, carrying out policy implementation.

Trust and social capital
In a sense these are resources that may be enlisted by officials in an indirect way, but are better understood as a reflection of the policy environment officials find themselves in. In networks trust and social capital are the product of dependencies and the equivalent to the legal-rational authority vested in (state) hierarchical organisations; the ingredient to make people remain and work together even without a legal charter (Agranoff 2007; Agranoff and McGuire 2001). If there is a history of cooperation, trust and reciprocity among actors it will be easier to engage in new collaborative endeavours and overcome conflicts, even if interests are highly diverging. On the contrary, a history of antagonism and low levels of trust will make it more of an ordeal. High levels of trust will also decrease the need for constant monitoring of compliance from each of the network members (Ansell and Gash 2008; Heikkila and Gerlak 2005; Ostrom 1998, 2005). Trust and social capital may also be defining characteristics of a society’s political culture. When they exist in high degrees, cooperation may be facilitated at a more encompassing level than just specific networks (Matson et al. 2016).

Capacities for learning
A second conducing factor for the endurance of networks is the capacity for learning within them. This occurs when actors have the chance to interact with each other to produce and exchange information and knowledge that is relevant for both the collaborative endeavour and their own agencies (Armitage et al. 2007; Bodin 2017; Gerlak and Heikkila 2011; Koontz et al. 2015). As Ostrom and colleagues (2008; 2005) point out too, institutional arrangements are improved and made more robust when participants get the chance to experiment and evaluate the rules in operation, and also retain locally accumulated knowledge within the network or community of actors. A capacity for learning and trading information not only improves the internal cohesion of the group, it also makes the networks better equipped to adapt themselves more rapidly and respond to sudden challenges more flexibly (Koontz et al. 2015). Agranoff and McGuire state that “collaborative
processes among organizational representatives can be characterized as joint learning systems...An environment conducive to learning is created when network members follow principles of civil discourse...and when conditions of sincerity, comprehensibility, accuracy, and legitimacy are met” (2001: 303). It should be noted that capacities for learning, trust and social capital, and strong leadership skills may work together in a virtuous cycle, in which a high presence of one may trigger the increase of another to create a self-reinforcing pattern (Ansell and Gash 2008).

**Accountability and separation of mandates**

A third conducing factor has to do with *accountability* and the *mandates* on which officials enlist the resources and pursue the strategies outlined above. This is a classic theme in public administration and particularly important in a developing country context; the separation of politically elected officials and merit-based appointed bureaucrats. In most functioning democracies we find distinct mandates among politicians and bureaucrats. The former formulates policy and allocates resources, while the latter implements and manages, respectively. Different norms are also appropriate for each type of official; politicians should abide by norms that protect the interests and demands of the electorate that voted for them, while bureaucrats should abide by universalistic administrative norms of fairness, impartiality and objectivity, though in practice they often have additional norms specific to their profession too (Agranoff and McGuire 2001; Hysing and Olsson 2012). This description is reflective of an ideal-type Weberian bureaucrat. In reality, bureaucrats may adopt the norms and agendas of the politicians they work under, or alternatively, use their position in an administration to advance their own political goals (see also Peters and Pierre 2004).

Hysing and Olsson (2012) suggest that officials may make decisions and take action on the basis of political opinions and loyalty, rather than professional norms of objectivity. It could be that they sympathise with a particular cause or ideology and thereby prioritise directives from specific politicians who represent that cause. More commonly, not least in developing countries, is that politicians need or force bureaucrats to get ‘on board’ their agenda or programs in order to get things done and ultimately secure votes and political victories. The problem is widespread in the Global South, and often leads to loyalty to a party or an individual politician replacing merit and professional competence at appointments and transfers (Fleischman 2016; van Gool 2008). In such cases bureaucrats may be said to follow a *particularistic* agenda, rather than a universal one, implying some form of deviation from what a sanctioned program or policy states, or who is intended to benefit

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5 In an earlier age it was suggested that these two domains be kept separated and insulated from each other, to avoid the party-politicisation of bureaucrats (Wilson 1887) or to keep a powerful bureaucracy outside of politics (Weber 1947). This dichotomous perspective has been largely abandoned in academic research, though not as norm in practice (Raadschelders 2011).
from it, as they follow a certain political agenda rather than universal norms of impartiality and rule-of-law (Hysing and Olsson 2012: 55-64; Peters and Pierre 2004). In a case of service-provision that is intended to benefit everyone in society, a particularistic agenda would instead see certain favoured recipients benefitting more than others.

Note that a particularistic agenda must not necessarily be associated with something normatively undesirable or unjust. A bureaucrat encouraged by his political superior to place emphasis and energy on benefitting a highly marginalised group, more than a program states, would be following a particularistic agenda. But much more common, not least in the developing world, is following a particularistic agenda resulting in corruption, clientelism and nepotism. Blomkvist (1992) for instance uses the same term in reference to officials who seek to benefit a more narrow constituency of service recipients, possibly engaging them in clientelistic relationships. He contrasts the rule-governed universalistic state with a particularistic state, one “whose actions are ordered by something other than rules; for example, the whims of the ruler, friendship or family relations, esteem, political connections, or money (bribes)” (1992: 124). Officials in such settings often seek to gain political favour for future promotions or transfers, or are wholly controlled by local strongmen (see also Fleischman 2012, 2016).

Alternatively, an official may follow a particularistic agenda rather than abiding by sanctioned programmatic rules, but without direct ties to a political superior. While political control seldom is entirely lacking, certain officials may be more of a ‘loose cannon’, doing what they see fit. In the specific case of India, Gupta (2012) and van Gool (2008) discuss instances where local public officials – often in isolated rural areas or drawing on superiority in caste or class – are able to ‘run the show’ in their jurisdiction, taking on the function of both policymaking and resource-allocation, in addition to their resource managing functions. In some ways this could be likened to a SLB who disregards the bounds of her lawful authority to push for an agenda she finds more important than her mandate allows her to take action on. But again, this must not only be normatively undesirable goals. Kingdom (1995) and Mintrom and Norman (2009) talk of policy entrepreneurship to refer to individuals who distinguish themselves by pursuing strategies such as advocating change, getting new issues on the political agenda, or by creating arrangements for more harmonised policy activities.

In a more general perspective Klijn and Koppenjan (2016) suggest that public officials operating in networks develop different ideas of accountability, which may result in some amount of tension and confusion. They write;

On the one hand, they [the officials] emphasize hierarchical and classical values such as viewing themselves as public servants and not as policy advocates. On the other hand however, they stress that working in networks implies being challenging and creative and that in their behaviour they try to be accountable to the stakeholders…They also emphasize that national standards of policy (and policy goals) have to be met, and this can be seen as creating
tensions between various forms of accountable behaviour: towards the classical bureaucracy, towards national goals (to deliver performance), and towards stakeholders involved in the process (2016: 233).

A roster of resources and strategies

The above sections sought to briefly illustrate the diversity of ideas, insights and propositions offered in the literature on what public officials may do in order to realise their goals and incentives, and what enables them to do so. The short list below summarises these and provides us with a roster which may be used in the ensuing analysis to place the empirical observations and statements in a theoretical context. Put differently, it becomes a theoretical peg on which to hang empirical findings for further examination, which I argue that the CPR (in a broad sense) and development administration literatures do not provide. It may help us nuance the range of activities officials are engaged in with regards to collaboration, and may be used to distil tentative conclusions that go beyond the specific empirical context described in much depth and detail. Elinor Ostrom captures the approach followed here quite well, stating that

Understanding how individuals solve particular problems in field settings requires a strategy of moving back and forth from the world of theory to the world of action. Without theory, one can never understand the general underlying mechanisms that operate in many guises in different situations. If not harnessed to solving empirical puzzles, theoretical work can spin off under its own momentum, reflecting little of the empirical world (1990: 45-46).

It is suggested that public officials (in their capacity of state employees) may draw upon resources such as information and knowledge, funding and infrastructure, a secure position within the administration, legitimacy by position or by moral authority, competence, expertise and experience, strategic contacts and networks, leadership and interpersonal skills, autonomy and discretion, and flexibility and responsiveness. The associated strategies involve deploying economic, regulatory and informative instruments (carrots, sticks and sermons), having the capacity to organise actors, defining and framing policy issues, influencing group structure and decision-making processes, providing resources, initiating action, prioritising actions, implementing and realising policy, evaluating policy, mediating conflict, trading and exchanging information and material resources, sanctioning rule-breakers, activating, framing, mobilising and synthesising policy issues in a network, advocating change and building capacities and social capital. Each of these may work better under conditions of high trust and social capital, capacities for adaptive learning, and strong accountability and separation of mandates.
Theoretical Foundation II: Rules and Institutions

Each of the resources, strategies and tasks outlined above have been thoroughly elaborated, examined and critiqued in a substantial body of scholarship over several decades – albeit not in the kind of empirical context dealt with in the book. I suggest that they are all matters of crafting, enforcing and evaluating rules; tasks carried out jointly by a group of individuals. Rules are the deeper-lying component of all human activities; the skeleton of social interactions and associations. While the literature cited above makes varying reference to rules, the institutional research program developed by the Ostroms makes rules its explicit and central focus; an elaborate toolbox that may be applied to any social situation ranging from network regulation in the West to natural resource corruption in rural India.

Rules and institutional analysis

I follow an understanding of institutions associated with the new institutional economics tradition (North 1990; Ostrom 1990) and the literature associated with the IAD framework (Ostrom 2005). This variety is sometimes known as behavioural rational choice institutionalism and the underlying set of assumptions is one of bounded rationality (McGinnis 2011b: 170). Actors make decisions and take action under institutional constraints (both cultural norms and formal rules) in this research program, which also offers something of a middle ground in the yet unresolved debate on structural and agency-oriented perspectives (Giddens 1984). In this literature rules are interpreted in a regulative sense 6, as a set of instructions on what individuals are allowed or required to do (or not do), and importantly as shared understandings among those involved (Ostrom 2005: 18). There is an intimate connection between rules and institutions and North et al. define the latter as

…‘the rules of the game’ (North 1990 p. 3-4), the pattern of interaction that govern and constrain the relationships of individuals. Institutions include formal rules, written laws, formal social conventions, informal norms of behaviour, and shared beliefs about the world, as well as the means of enforcement. The most common way of thinking about institutions is that they are constraints on the behavior of individuals as individuals…however, institutions also structure the way individuals form beliefs and opinions about how other people will behave (North et al. 2009: 15).

Yet, institutions are often conflated with organisations but are two different concepts. In this book I focus on institutionally (or rule-bound) constrained behaviour within a large organisation. North et al. proceed to suggest that

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6 Citing an earlier scholar (Black 1962), Ostrom suggests that “when using rule in its regulation sense, one can meaningfully refer to activities such as the rule ‘being announced, put into effect, enforced, disobeyed, broken, rescinded, changed, revoked, reinstated’ ” (2005: 16).
...in contrast to institutions, organizations consist of specific groups of individuals pursuing a mix of common and individual goals to partially coordinated behavior. Organizations coordinate their members' actions so an organization's actions are more than the sum of the actions of the individuals. Because they pursue a common purpose in an organization and because organizations are typically composed of individuals who deal with each other repeatedly, members of most organizations developed shared beliefs about the behavior of other members and about the norms or rules of their organization. As a result most organizations have their own internal institutional structure: the rules, norms, and shared beliefs that influenced the way people behave within the organization (2009: 15).

In this book the organisation of empirical interest is the subnational forest department in the state of Kerala. The whole Indian forest administration is a larger organisation of sub-organisations, and the Indian state is a yet larger, complex web of organisations. At the same time, each of them is host to countless sets of rules, both formal and informal, in operation at different levels of the organisation and in the surrounding policy environment. For the individual officials under study a myriad of different rules may influence and shape their incentives and behaviour. The term institutional analysis is thus an endeavour to understand the rules and norms that shape or constrain individual action, with the aim of making it less complex and more observable. McGinnis suggests that it “involves the decomposition of institutional contexts into their component part as a prelude to understanding how these parts affect each other and how institutions shape outcomes” (2011b: 170).

Rules may be both formal and informal, for which reason we talk of the rules-in-use (working rules rather than rules-on-paper); those individuals cite to explain and motivate their own actions and reasoning. The utility of focusing on rules-in-use is that it deliberately encourages the studied individuals to justify their actions using a language and context they are familiar with. While this requires the researcher to ask the right questions and as we shall see, spend prolonged time in the field, it goes one important step further than only focusing on observable patterns of behaviour, or only examining formal laws and guidelines. Some rules are indeed formal and established in written regulations, while others are informal, either as verbal agreements between individuals or as tacit cultural norms. In both cases the rules-in-use have been crafted at some point in time.

However, this does not occur at just one level, but rather at three different but nested levels (Kiser and Ostrom 1982; Ostrom 2005). The first is called the operational level and is governed by operational rules. These regulate mundane, everyday actions that generate outcomes directly in the world and may be changed on a day-to-day basis. In other words, the implementation of practical decisions. The second is termed the collective-choice or policy level and is governed by collective-choice rules. Such rules establish what may be done at the preceding operational level, and also how to change those rules. The third and last is the constitutional-choice level in which
constitutional-choice rules are followed, which also establish how collective-choice rules may be formulated and changed. As Ostrom puts it; all rules are nested into another set of rules that define how the first set of rules can be changed” (2005: 58).

When discussing matters of institutional change or adaptation – in contrast to action within institutional constraints – it is important to realise that changes in rules at one level are dependent on the rules at a deeper level, and that these tend to be more stable and difficult to change. These levels should however not be equated with levels of an organisational hierarchy or a federal state, though that could be the case in certain settings. They are rather analytical levels referring to what depth of rule structures we are examining at a particular moment (2005: 62). An individual may theoretically be involved in rule-crafting at two or three levels in certain issues, but only at one in others. Within small communities largely isolated from the outside world (see Wangel and Blomkvist 2013 for an example), rule-crafting at all three levels is likely to be done by the same individuals. Once we expand the scope to a much wider governance system, multiple actors will be involved in crafting rules on a greater variety of policy issues. In the empirical analysis, the three analytical levels will have an important role in relation to discussions of adaptation and change.

Informal institutions and rules
In order to gain a deeper understanding of de facto behaviour and practices we need to pay close attention to the rules-in-use underlying them, which often may consist of many informal rules. Outlining and understanding de facto arrangements has been a longstanding tradition in the IAD research program, going back to the early 1960’s and the studies on metropolitan governance systems in the US. The conventional wisdom at the time held that such systems were characterised by chaos and very weak organisation as numerous small, medium and large-scale government units were functioning within the same geographical area. Vincent Ostrom and colleagues (1961) challenged the assumption and suggested that these areas should be interpreted as unified polycentric systems instead of fractured monocentric hierarchies, and that there was an invisible institutional logic at work, rather than chaos. The empirical existence or absence of polycentrism was not the main objective, but rather to question the inherent pathological assumption about having jurisdictions with overlapping boundaries and functions (Ostrom and Ostrom 2014; Sabetti and Castiglione 2016). 7 8

7 This echoes a mode of thinking present in many centrally planned economies and resonates closely with the idea of ‘authoritarian high-modernist regimes’ which Scott examined in his Seeing Like A State (1998). See also Ferguson (1994) for a critique of foreign donor agencies overlooking or disregarding various forms of indigenous, informal organisation in favour of quicker blueprint solutions.

8
A similar problem is found in the current literature on natural resource governance in the Global South; public agencies and their officials are _ex ante_ affixed with uniform assumptions and blanket statements, and are also black-boxed, disregarding the potential institutional diversity found within them. The same empirical attention to _de facto_ arrangements that has been dealt self-governing CPR institutions is lacking for bureaucracies. As such, this study is in some measure a return to the original aims of the IAD literature, applied to a slightly different empirical setting, and a focus on individual actors, rather than whole governance systems.

Yet the study of informal institutions has generated highly mixed findings with regards to micro-level individual behaviour, and also the resulting outcomes. In the classic CPR literature they are often interpreted as something positive with respect to ecological conservation; sustainable use of shared resources may be achieved by means of communication, trust and reciprocity within self-governing communities, without the need for written laws or external interventions (Ostrom 1990; Ostrom et al. 1994). More recently issues of corruption and elite capture, both varieties of informal institutions, have been examined in relation to sustainable resource use (Persha and Andersson 2014; Sundström 2015). Arnold and Fleischman (2013) on the other hand examine how informal micro-level institutions within a US environmental bureaucracy contributes to organisational homeostasis, reverting externally imposed reforms. In the literature focusing on the wider political economy and administration of developing countries the treatment of informal institutions is varied. In macro-level studies they are regularly equated with matters of corruption, clientelism and low capacity for service delivery (Andrews 2013; Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 2006; Lauth 2000), while studies at the micro-level show more mixed results, with Tendler (1997) and Tsai (2007) detailing cases where informal institutions have led to positive outcomes. In the literature on political recruitment, informal institutions play a critical role, often influencing candidate selection to the disadvantage of underprivileged groups, not least women (Bjarnegård 2013; Bjarnegård and Kenny 2015).

In India, informal institutions (with varying degree of explicit reference to the concept) often tend to be associated with clientelistic relationships, malfeasance and oppression. Corbridge et al. (2005) and Gupta (2012) describe how citizens encounter informal institutions operating within the local bureaucracy, finding that arbitrary discrimination constitute everyday experiences. In a study of post-tsunami recovery in Tamil Nadu, Kruks-Wisner (2011) found that the powerful customary governance institutions excluded women and caste minorities, forcing them to turn to the formal local government for support. In sharp contrast Ananthpur (2007; 2010) found that

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8 The roots of this approach goes even further back; when studying democracy in early nineteenth-century America, de Tocqueville observed “the appearance of disorder which prevails on the surface leads one at first to imagine that society is in a state of anarchy; nor does one perceive one’s mistake till one has gone deeper into the subject” ([1835] 2003).
customary village councils in neighbouring Karnataka are transforming to become more representative and pluralistic, complementing the functions of the formal government. In Kerala lastly, Singh (2011, 2016) finds that high levels of social capital and a shared subnational identity has overcome divisions along religious and caste lines, enabling a relatively high level of public service delivery to citizens. Evidently, informal institutions have very diverging characteristics and reported impacts in different studies, further motivating a deeper enquiry into the informal rules public officials create or abide to in their work, and in response to pressures to collaborate.

Last, this literature also offers instructive insights and typologies (for instance Arnold and Fleischman 2013; Helmke and Levitsky 2004) which may help us account for the case at hand. This relates back to the discussion above on the rationality of informal strategies (Hertting and Vedung 2012; Scharpf 1994), and has to do in particular with the role informal institutions play when formal institutions are perceived to be lacking or insufficient for the tasks or purposes individuals seek to accomplish, and how the informal ones relate to the formal institutional framework. This is not an absolute dichotomy and officials may often navigate and operate at the intersection of formal and informal institutions. For example, in the setting at hand, forest officials seek out collaboration with other actors when they find that the formal setup constrains them. Yet the network arrangements are not entirely informal as they still interact in their capacity of frontline representatives of the organisation they belong too; frequently promoting the interests of their agency rather than illegal or corrupt incentives based on their personal preferences. As such, the literature provides a helpful terminology to shine light on their incentives and behaviour.

Roles of Public Officials

As mentioned in the introduction I see roles – or more precisely an official holding a role – as a summation of the incentives, goals and strategies an actor exhibits, pursues and utilises. If we follow the assumptions of bounded rationality (McGinnis 2011b), an individual will perceive some factor or event that acts as a stimulus to change their behaviour or way of thinking, in other words develop an incentive. An incentive is then related to a goal, the desired outcome or product that may materialise if they do change their behaviour. To reach that outcome, they will employ or utilise certain resources and strategies, or at least attempt to do their best within the constraints of the institutional environment they are embedded in. Roles are thus an expression of incentives, goals and strategies taken together.

I find that speaking of roles becomes an auxiliary and more nuanced way of describing how forest officials transform their incentives into substantive action in order to reach a goal, and also constitutes a small contribution to prior literature on this empirical setting, which yields a very narrow view of
the roles public officials hold. Ascribing roles to the studied officials is not an objective task carried out solely by the researcher. On the contrary, roles are co-created and reconstructed on the basis of what officials see themselves and others doing, and how they justify and explain their actions and behaviour. Yet a few qualifiers are in place.

A first question has to do with what constitutes holding a role. Let’s say that in an interview during fieldwork a person relates a range of incentives, goals and strategies they envision and employ, which might resonate with a network manager role. If that is the only person interviewed, we might accept her statement and subjective understanding of the role she holds. But if it is revealed through subsequent interviews with other actors that they know nothing about this, or are unable to confirm her statement, does she still qualify (analytically) to hold the role of network manager? If she never takes any action consistent with a managing role we might speculate that she was seriously misinformed about her own work or even lying. If she does take actions – for instance calling to meetings – her behaviour might simply appear erratic or confusing to others.

The critical component here is the shared, collective meaning and understanding assigned to a role (see Ostrom 2005). It raises the bar and requires that in order for an individual to hold a role, both she and other actors must identify and confirm the expectations and obligations that are embedded in a role. This is not to say that all subjective meanings and interpretations expressed by a single actor are irrelevant. On the contrary, they are of importance in a study focusing explicitly on individuals and their own agency, but as far as statements about roles are concerned, the relevance hinges upon the shared, collective understanding.

This raises the tricky question of how much actors might be expected to know (or have a shared understanding of) about the incentives and goals of other individuals. While tangible strategies may be observed or heard of by actors, the two former may well be hidden or only partially known to others. How much they know or understand is by and large an open empirical question that varies from individual to individual. Yet, at a minimum the understanding must be shared among the individuals directly involved or affected by an employed strategy. For instance, if a network manager calls to a meeting, other actors should at least be aware of why they are called (though not necessarily the substantive content of the meeting), unless it is the first time and they know nothing at all about the agenda of the network manager (even through rumour or reputation). Given that they have interacted in the past, something is known about the incentives and goals, and the expectations that lie upon them and the managing official.

On the other hand, the incentives and goals an individual sees and wishes to pursue may be well known among other actors, but if that individual never calls to a meeting or makes any effort to harmonise policy activities, is it still a role? Here, the formal and informal dimension comes into play. If the role of network manager, to keep with that example, is enshrined in the formal
institutional framework, the individual still has the role but if she never takes any action consistent with it, the role becomes quite toothless. More recurring in the empirical setting at hand were the informal roles held by officials. In these situations, I include the active employment of strategies as a requirement to hold a particular role. Taking *de facto* action becomes more important (in relation to roles) when they lack the formal mandate to do so.

To sum up, roles are a summation of incentives, goals and strategies and are reconstructed by the studied individuals and me as a researcher. While the considerations above are at a more theoretical level, the mention (and identification) of roles in the field was continuously recurring and quite straightforward. Officials often spoke of themselves and their colleagues in terms of what they are attempting to accomplish and how they go about doing so, seamlessly and implicitly making statements about their own and others incentives, goals and strategies. They expressed their shared, collective understanding of what they do and how they reason (Ostrom 2005), which I ascribe a label (derived from prior theoretical literature) to for analytical purposes. The roles discussed throughout are ideal-typical. No official is for instance a policy entrepreneur or a facilitator, but rather their behaviour and reasons share *more or less* similarities with what we would refer to in the literature as a policy entrepreneur or facilitator.

**A classification of roles**

In the empirical chapters the idea of roles will be addressed in the final summarising parts. These discussions are then revisited in the last chapter in which I elaborate on the concept further and make the argument that future research in this type of empirical setting might benefit from a more diversified understanding and appreciation of the roles a public official may have. To substantiate this argument I will outline eight general ideal-typical roles, also presented in the table below. The roles I concern myself with are derived from a broad literature, which offers numerous ideas and propositions about various roles officials may have. My intention is not to provide a predefined comprehensive list or template of every imaginable role with all possible variation accounted for, and I do not attempt to classify every empirical observation of individual behaviour as a unique or novel role. My intention is rather to illustrate that there is a slightly wider spectrum of roles at play in this type of empirical setting than prior literature has acknowledged. In the last chapter I also elaborate briefly on how certain roles may be further disaggregated and interpreted on various dimensions, suggesting that this could be an avenue for future studies in this type of policy setting.

Note that the list below is not intended to be exhaustive. A network manager for example is a type of meta-governing role that may be further distinguished on a range of dimensions, such as hands-off/hands-on approaches (Sørensen 2006). Yet the idea is to diversify our understanding of roles Indian public officials may have with regards to literature that has focused on those actors, and not the wide literature providing countless *theoretical clas*
sifications of what a meta-governing network manager may do. The roles below are also established in the western-biased literature they are derived from, but have been less focused on in the kind of context I look at in this book. Put differently, I try to empirically substantiate the ideal-typical roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Weberian Bureaucrat</td>
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<td>The Street-Level Bureaucrat</td>
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<td>The Particularistic Bureaucrat</td>
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<td>The Activist Bureaucrat</td>
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<td>The Facilitator</td>
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<td>The Policy Entrepreneur</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Network Agent</td>
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<td>The Network Manager</td>
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Table 1. A list of roles officials may have.

Moving On

This chapter argued that the two literatures where we might expect to find a source of ideas and propositions on what resources, strategies and incentives officials may hold or develop in the context at hand – that on common pool resources and that on development administration – does not provide such. While offering important contextual insights, I suggest that we complement it with the literature on public administration and network- and collaborative governance as developed in a mainly western setting. The drive for collaboration we are seeing in rural India is not entirely dissimilar to similar processes that have occurred in the liberal democracies of the West for the past few decades, whether we look specifically at collaboration, interagency coordination, participation or even the wider shift from government to governance (Milward et al. 2016; Olsen 2006; Pierre and Peters 2000). Though the empirical settings are very different the broader trend is much the same. Yet what is largely lacking for the developing context is a nuanced understanding of how individual bureaucrats make sense of this drive, what reasons they might see for collaborating, and how they go about doing it. This is a case of bureaucratic incentive structures, goals and strategies in the face of pressures to collaborate. For that reason it makes sense to turn to a field of research that has concerned itself with this theme for quite long, even if the geographical setting is very different.

Next, I suggested that the propositions about strategies officials might employ are basically a matter of crafting and enforcing rules (both formal and informal). Using the tools provided by the IAD framework literature I propose studying rules-in-use as a way of understanding their behaviour and reasons for it. In order to get close to these, as they are collectively understood by the studied officials, I propose an ethnographic approach; a theme discussed in the next chapter. Rules-in-use may be hard to initially identify and hinge upon the officials own understanding and interpretation of the
incentives they are facing. Yet, this endeavour is necessary if we are to take the desired agency-oriented approach, placing the viewpoints and behaviour of individual forest officials at the centre of enquiry. Finally, I suggested that we may see the summation of incentives, goals and strategies in terms of roles public officials hold, giving us a more nuanced way of accounting for the empirical context at hand. Tying back to the introduction, the overarching research question posed is threefold and is as follows:

What incentives for collaboration do public officials refer to? What goals do they want to accomplish? What strategies do they employ?
3. An Ethnographic Approach

In this chapter I provide an outline of all the considerations that went into planning and conducting the study and the challenges encountered before, during and after fieldwork in India. It consists of five parts. The first short part concerns traditional aspects of research design; the type of case-study at hand and the prospect of generalisation. The second looks at the combined, synergistic use of political ethnography and institutional analysis in this study, with a short introduction to ethnographic methodological approaches. The third part concerns the field preparations, starting with the challenge of selecting an empirical setting for fieldwork and the actual study-sites. It also discusses the process of gaining access, both formal and personal. The fourth part covers the conduct of fieldwork in India, looking at the data collection techniques and also provides a practical discussion of how parts of the IAD framework were used in the field to study rules. The fifth and last discusses the activities undertaken during post-field deskwork, mainly analysing the material and writing up the empirical chapters.

A Heuristic Single-Case Design

Broadly, this book follows a single-case design, in which the empirical case at hand is the range of incentive structures, goals and strategies individual officials follow in the face of pressures to collaborate. More specifically, I follow a design that George and Bennett (2005) term a heuristic case-study with regards to expanding theoretical knowledge and understanding about a particular phenomenon. They state that such case-studies are instructive and appropriate when we seek to “inductively identify new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms, and causal paths” (2005: 75). The terminology in their definition differs slightly from that used in this book as I do not explicitly seek to formulate new testable hypotheses, but rather seek to enhance our understanding of how officials perceive incentives to collaborate and what they do about it. Building on contextually rich in-depth insights, we may also find an opportunity for theoretical refinement and advancement.

Single-case studies have been criticised for offering little more than thick descriptions of particular idiographic contexts and have as such been thought to hold little value in making inferences to other settings (see King et al. 1994). Yet, this builds on a misunderstanding about case-studies and a belief
that the principles of statistical inference must apply to qualitative case-studies as well (Flyvbjerg 2006). In fact, the literature offers a range of suggestions for generalising from one case-study setting to another (see for instance Flyvbjerg 2006; George and Bennett 2005), including the idea of generalising on the basis of causal mechanisms (Falleti and Lynch 2009).

Mechanisms in the social sciences come with multiple meanings (see Gerring 2007). In this study I follow a ‘pathway’ understanding of mechanisms, in which they serve as a connecting bridge between different but contextually similar settings. Bengtsson and Hertting (2013) have suggested that by carefully identifying ideal-type mechanisms we may formulate portable expectations of similar dynamics occurring in other settings where actors face similar problems. Inferences are thus not made to a specific population (such as Indian states or forest governance systems elsewhere) but rather to settings where the same mechanism might be in operation (for instance officials in any bureaucracy facing pressures or incentives to change behaviour). Similar to Ostrom’s notion of bounded rationality (2011), the authors propose a model of thin rationality in which “individual actors are assumed to have some logical consistency in the pursuit of their goals, whereas the nature of these goals (the preferences of the actors, including the social norms they adhere to) is not necessarily assumed a priori, but may be open to empirical investigation – where the social and institutional context is of crucial importance” (2013: 9). In this book the different ideal-typical roles officials may reflect, and the strategies they employ within their networks serve a similar purpose to the idea of ideal-type mechanisms. While I do not use the vocabulary of mechanisms throughout the book, the concluding chapter offers a discussion of how the insights gained from the phenomenon at hand may be transferred to similar settings. The refined yet empirically substantiated ideal-types in that chapter are abstracted from the setting of Kerala, but include elements of what Bengtsson and Hertting term thin rationality: a template of stylised roles public officials may have in similar policy settings, also beyond natural resource governance or India.

Political Ethnography and Institutional Analysis

This book is both a political ethnography and an institutional analysis of public officials in India. This may strike the general political scientist as an odd statement. With the risk of tarring everyone with the same brush, ethnography in contemporary political science is regrettably often equated with the data collection method known as participant observation, or yet more erroneous, an attempt to mimic anthropologists. Both are common misconceptions. Participant observation may be the most characteristic method employed by ethnographers but is by no means the only one, typically forming part of a wider repertoire of data collection methods. It is also true that the approach emerged from anthropology almost a century ago but the ethnog-
raphy practiced by political scientists today is vastly different. The French sociologist Wacquant has described ethnography as

…social research based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or with-in) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do (2003: 5).

Breaking down the definition we may find two elements that most scholars in the field hold as the *sine qua non* of political ethnography; a broad *repertoire of methods* that engages living people in some sense, and an *ethnographic sensibility*. The first implies a collection of qualitative methods that allows the scholar to get the nearest possible vantage point to study the people or phenomenon that she wishes to engage with (Schatz 2009b: 307). This means talking with people, observing them, participating in their daily activities or even living with them. This is compatible with a range of data collection techniques, such as semi-structured, elite and focus group interviews, life stories and participant observation, of which the last is the most distinguishing, and possibly the most common too. Collecting written material of various forms may also help in the pursuit of getting closer to the people under study. The ambition is to achieve *immersion* into the field in which the evidence sought after is located, in other words getting neck-deep or ‘down and dirty’ into that field (Schatz 2009a). For this study, the field is not so much one physical location (for instance a village or district), but rather the world of subnational forest governance in Kerala where the studied officials work. Hence it is a *multi-sited* ethnography (Kubik 2009).

An ethnographic sensibility is what Schwartz-Shea describes as a “curiosity about other’s views, an appreciation of the complexity of experience and evidence and the limits of a priori theorizing, and a respect for the ways in which ‘ordinary’ people engage with their worlds” (2010: 587). This simply means an attempt to see and understand the world, in our best ability, from the perspectives of the people we study; their culture, norms and rules, power structures, and tacit knowledge and logics guiding their everyday life and behaviour (Pader 2013). The expression ‘to put oneself in someone else’s shoes’ is a fitting term to describe what sensibility is and what it aims for. There is not one single way of employing a sensibility, nor is it an ability one switches on when entering the field. Having an open mind to novel experiences and an eagerness to immerse into the world of those studied is rather a trait which develops with practice and repeated exposure, often aided by previous experience of fieldwork in similar settings (Pader 2013; van Hulst 2008).
The value of combining the two

In this book political ethnography plays a synergistic role together with institutional analysis. Iterating chapter two, institutions are the rules and norms that shape an individual’s behaviour and actions (Ostrom 2005) and institutional analysis is the intellectual process of understanding how rules influence individuals (McGinnis 2011b). Digging deeper and identifying the rules-in-use the studied officials in this study follow is essential in the pursuit of understanding the incentives they refer to, the strategies they seek out and the roles they have, often requiring a good deal of exposure and insights into the sets of rules. For me, political ethnography is the methodological approach followed in order to acquire the empirical material needed.

Methods should be chosen on the basis of the problem that has to be solved, allowing theory, or gaps in past theorising and knowledge, to take primacy over methods. The use of political ethnography in this project is thus instrumental and I find that it provides an exceptional approach to the study of incentives, rules, and institutionally constrained behaviour in hard-to-access places, and also in contexts where relatively little research has occurred. The goal is to illuminate de facto practices and actions by individuals, which might be hard to capture by large-N surveys or just a few elite interviews.

Ethnography has been used in the study of institutions for a long time. Much of the whole IAD and CPR research programs was based on Ostrom’s appreciation of fieldwork in the pursuit to “understand the diversity of institutional arrangements, the mechanisms of on-the ground rule making, and the self-governing capacities of citizens…and capturing the inarticulate norms and personal circumstances that affect the incentives of any individual actor” (Boettke et al. 2013: 407, 11). Ostrom herself has also suggested that to “analyze an institutional-choice situation, one needs to view it from the perspective of the individual making choices about future operational rules” (1990: 192), a statement much in line with what ethnographers term a sensibility (see also Schwartz-Shea 2010). In some ways the current knowledge on the role played by public officials in the context at hand is not too different from the knowledge landscape on resource-using communities when Governing the Commons was written. My suggestion is that an ethnographic approach, building on immersive fieldwork is warranted, seeing that we need to build knowledge from the ground up on de facto rules and patterns of behaviour. Ostrom in fact argues that

The problem for the field researcher is that many rules-in-use are not written down. Nor can the field researcher simply be a survey worker asking a random sample of respondents about their rules. Many of the rules-in-use are not even conceptualized by participants as rules. In settings where the rules-in-use have evolved over long periods of time and are understood implicitly by participants, obtaining information about rules-in-use requires spending time
at a site and learning how to ask nonthreatening, context-specific questions about rule configurations (2011: 21)

Two reasons underlie the choice of an ethnographic approach in this book. The first is that it allows for the observation of institutions, structures, processes, events and behaviour that would typically be considered informal or hidden from the public eye. These may be illegal or illicit, such as clientelism in a developing country, but must not be so by definition. Many reflections of an organisational culture are informal but far from illegal, but would perhaps not be identifiable in survey-responses or elite interviews. On the other hand, when certain practices are intentionally hidden from public view, close-up observations may be the only viable option, but is no guarantee for obtaining the sought-after data (Kapiszewski et al. 2015; Wedeen 2010). In studies where the divergence between formal and informal rules is of interest, close observations may be of further use as it allows for more revealing insights and more credible interpretations or conclusions. In this study, field observations helped both identify and discover strategies and roles, but also confirmed or nuanced prior statements on this. Kubik summarises this well by stating that

…ethnography is the best method of studying the complex interplay between (formal) social structure and (informal) social organization. Ethnography’s contribution to the study of the relationship between formal and informal institutions should be carefully appraised by political scientists, as this relationship has been one of the hallmarks of new institutionalism (2009: 33).

The second reason is that it helps set the behaviour, ideas and motivations of individual actors in the context of a broader whole, in this study the wider organisational and political context, and the macro-level transitions occurring. By focusing on individuals and seeing them as the essential building blocks of more complex relationships, their role in the surrounding policy environment may be illuminated and possibly understood better. This requires some measure of ethnographic sensibility; seeing the world from the perspective of the officials. Ethnography, with its heavy reliance on both immersion and sensibility goes some way in helping to gain access to the minds of the people under study. van Hulst suggests

Ethnographers not only look at the experiences of the people in and around local government, they also draw on their own experiences. Because the experiences of politicians, administrators, bureaucrats, professionals and citizens are both the result of and the basis for their acts, understanding these experiences helps ethnographers to explain the practice of local governance (2008: 144)

This is particularly useful in cases where we seek to understand how individuals develop incentives and perceive pressures to change their habitual way of doing things. In van Hulst’s article the shift from government to gov-
ernance is used as an example, and scholars of that transition are encouraged to examine (ethnographically) how it plays out in practice and what actors do about it, what strategies they develop and what partnerships they form (see also Rhodes 2014). In this project the very same principles apply and my approach gives me a good vantage point to study how officials across levels perceive the drive for collaboration, by enquiring how they answer two general questions: ‘what is going on?’ and ‘what should we do about it?’ (see van Hulst 2008). The complementarity of this approach with institutional analysis may be reemphasised. Blomquist and deLeon suggest that

One of the categories of question the IAD framework encourages us to remember to ask is: “What are people really dealing with here? What are the attributes of the goods or services they are trying to produce or consume or distribute, or the resource they are trying to use or share? (2011: 2).

By studying drivers of for instance collaboration in the field the skilled ethnographer may observe how those drivers are perceived by individual actors, and how they develop incentives, goals and subsequent strategies. If repeated during longer spells of fieldwork, the regularised patterns of behaviour in response to various drivers may emerge as more identifiable, and over time we may begin to sketch on tentative answers to our research questions.

Selecting the Empirical Setting and the Study-Sites

This part outlines the motivation for selecting India for fieldwork, the justification of Kerala as a favourable empirical setting given my interest and theoretical focus, the process of selecting study-sites, and last the trials and tribulations of gaining access to the field.

To start with, I suggest that India is a suitable setting for at least three reasons. First, it has a well-developed bureaucracy dating back more than 150 years and has a physical presence of some sort in every district and village of the country. In contrast to countries lacking basic state institutions (see Wangel and Blomkvist 2013 for the case of forestry in Sierra Leone), India has rather been criticised for having an over-developed bureaucracy (Das 2010; Gupta 2012). The criterion is thus not how well it works in terms of reaching policy goals, but rather that it has a reasonable capacity to function and pursue its own agenda. Second, India has a federal administrative structure which also applies to forest governance. Each of the levels of government has some degree of autonomy to operate independently on a range of issues. This nestedness allows for interactions between levels, both within the forest administration, and with other actors at each horizontal level. This might not be the case in a unitary state where the central government has significantly greater authorities. Third, we find in India a case where competing interests and demands for access to forests combine with a tradition of
(some would say unlikely) democracy that has been largely uninterrupted since independence. The former aspect derives in part from the large population, its growth rates and densities, all of which have led to a scarcity of land and resources. There are numerous actors with authority (or claims on authority) on such issues as ecological conservation, commercial logging, agroforestry and plantations, mining and quarrying, tourism, and human livelihoods. A few respondents claimed that it was something short of a miracle that India still has any forests left standing given the population growth it has experienced over the past half century.\(^9\) The latter aspect, democracy, allows these groups, at least in theory and despite the reported prevalence of corruption, to pursue their demands and interests vis-à-vis each other, but also vis-à-vis the bureaucracy. In combination with the wider societal changes occurring it becomes a relatively complex and dynamic case to study.

Within India the *state* is the political-administrative unit I chose for the next step of the selection process. But why pick this unit at all? An alternative approach would be to select a specific ecoregion within the larger Western Ghats mountain range for instance, which transgresses state boundaries and at least in principle comes with interagency coordination to the backdrop of wider changes and challenges in the policy environment. Another option would be to focus on one specific policy or program involving multiple agencies and their interactions across levels, for instance the recent Forest Rights Act. Each has its advantages, but for a study seeking to gain a deeper understanding of how public officials work in India cannot bypass the state as a political unit. Though the Centre has assumed increasing authority in forest matters vis-à-vis the states, the latter still has much leeway to shape forest policy, and the forest departments are also accountable to the state governments (Chaturvedi 2016). Additionally, scholars of comparative Indian politics still overwhelmingly use the state as their units of analysis (Kohli 2012; Singh 2016; Widmalm 2008) and it is the political construct millions of Indians share a cultural, linguistic or ethnic affinity with (Corbridge et al. 2013).

Kerala as a favourable empirical setting

The state of Kerala is not a case in itself but rather a context which is favourable if we seek to study the drive towards collaboration, how individual officials perceive this, what they might seek to accomplish by collaborating, and what they do about it.

The state is remarkable and suitable for the purposes of this study for several reasons. Within the field of development studies Kerala is sometimes heralded as a ‘development miracle’ and has been associated with a ‘Kerala model of development’ (see Drèze and Sen 2002; Heller 2012; Véron 2001). This epithet is attributable to the fact that state, with a population of 34 mil-

\(^9\) Interview 3, CF (retired); Interview 12, PCCF (retired); Interview 18, CCF.
lion people, has attained levels of social development (particularly in health, education and gender equality) far exceeding the rest of India, often on par with countries in Latin America and Eastern Europe. Singh (2011) for example compares the development levels to those of Argentina and Serbia. Additionally, this has occurred in a setting of high religious diversity and under relatively low levels of economic growth. Yet more remarkable is the fact that Kerala in the period from the early 1900’s up to national independence in 1947 had one of the strictest and most deeply entrenched caste systems on the Indian subcontinent, in which the lower castes were de facto agrestic slaves and oppression from higher castes was reportedly among the most severe in all of India (Menon 2008; Singh 2016).

Multiple historical explanations exist as to how the state managed to achieve these development levels. These include the emergence of a strong collective sense of ‘we-ness’ and a cohesive subnational identity, triggering demands for collective social welfare for all malayalis (Singh 2011, 2016); the longstanding influence of the state communist party, the CPI (M)\textsuperscript{10}, and its commitment to high social expenditures and a strong public sector (Isaac and Franke 2001; Williams 2008); and also the history and tradition of broad-based, bottom-up class mobilisations which have generated high levels of social capital, and especially solidarity-norms and values that in turn facilitates cooperation and collaboration for joint outcomes (Evans 1996; Heller 1999; Heller et al. 2007). The most well-known occurred in 1996 in what is termed the People’s Planning Campaign, which in retrospect is seen as instrumental in blending together state and society, and interlocking them in more innovative modes of cooperation, than just service-provision from the bureaucracy to the citizens (Heller et al. 2007; Isaac and Franke 2001). To me, a combination of the different explanations is likely but it is evident that the state stands out from the wider Indian context in terms of socio-political development and culture. Heller summarises the matter well

Simply put, what distinguishes Kerala from other state in India but aligns it with other cases of social democracy is the extent to which subordinate classes have been effectively empowered and mobilized and have seen their interests institutionalized in the state. Democratic practices have penetrated deeply into social life, directly challenging traditional forms of authority (2012: 272-73)

In the modern day the state enjoys a vibrant civil society and strong associationalism, qualities often included under the rubric of (strong) social capital (Blomkvist 2001; Fung and Olin-Wright 2001; Singh 2016; Williams 2008). There is a relative lack of corruption and patronage politics (Heller 2012)

\textsuperscript{10} In 1957 Kerala saw the first democratically elected communist government in the world and it has kept coming back in various coalitions, trading incumbency with different Congress-coalitions. Though communist by name and political imagery, their political practices in modern time resembles Scandinavian social democracy much more than Soviet-style Marxism (Oommen 2014).
and Kerala consistently ranks in top positions in lists of functioning governance among the 29 states and among the lowest on bribery (Oommen 2014; TI 2005). Education levels are beyond comparison in India and total literacy is close to 100 per cent in the state (Drèze and Sen 2002). Accountability is strong both upwards and downwards in the political and bureaucratic domains and there is a history of co-production between the state and society, and within the government apparatus (Evans 1996; Heller 1999; 2007). Last, the state is politically and culturally cohesive, and has not seen conflicts along ethnic or religious lines (despite a very heterogeneous population) or violent political extremism (Moser and Younger 2013; Singh 2016).

Taken together, these factors offer an empirical setting with a political culture and environment that may generate a more dynamic and collaborative policy environment, where governance in a broad sense is shaped by multiple, more empowered actors with their own voice and authority, and where demands from the grassroots force officials to respond and react. I also suggest that this context is more conducive to interagency cooperation and facilitates a more deliberative policy environment, somewhat aligned with the principles of contemporary resource governance (Barnes and Child 2014; Emerson and Gerlak 2014). In a wider perspective and connecting back to chapter two, this type of setting may possibly enable what Andrews (2013; 2012) terms problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) as a way of escaping capability traps, where much emphasis is placed on an inclusive, authorising environment as a key ingredient. At the same time, the case could also be that the studied officials perceive the formal, hierarchical management system (the forest department) to work well as it is currently structured and organised, providing them with few incentives to collaborate or change their practices at all. Thus, the drive for collaboration also could be resisted on that ground. In sum, it is a favourable setting to study dynamic and multifaceted reasons and responses to the drive for cooperation and collaboration, deriving both from the grassroots as well as contemporary forest policies (each relative to the Indian context).  

11 Note that the studies cited above rarely focus on forest management. I selected the state on the reasoning that the capacities, resources and relative performance of bureaucracies and individual officials are a reflection of the socio-political characteristics of the state they are found in. To alleviate any uncertainties about the suitability of Kerala, I undertook a month-long exploratory visit in November-December 2013, during which I met with a range of academics and senior forest department officials across the state. They all confirmed that Kerala was indeed an appropriate state to study given the criteria about expecting a more dynamic, inclusive and responsive policy environment, aligned with ideas and practices of modern forest governance. A few suggested conducting comparative studies with an additional state, but no one identified a state more suitable given my criteria. There is a small risk of bias here, as most respondents were located in Kerala and might have had an interest in promoting that state. Yet several of the officials and the academics had backgrounds or experience from multiple regions of India, and gave informed and qualified justifications confirming my expectations from the literature.  

12 Though Kerala is a suitable choice, it should be noted that several other states had to be ruled out due to security reasons, lack of any substantial forest cover, or extreme difficulty in obtaining research permissions. Ultimately, I chose from about twelve different states.
Selecting study sites

The key units of analysis are the individual forest officials employed by the state forest department, and the incentives they develop and the actions they take in relation to wider pressures to work more collaboratively. In many cases, those actions are taken collectively, together with other officials of their own or other departments, and occasionally with the forest communities; in other words, through the institutional network arrangements they create. These are important to describe and understand but only insofar they also are important and relevant to my units of analysis: the individual officials.

Before starting fieldwork, I was not aware of the degree or nature of the comparatively widespread incentives to collaborate or the existence of the collaborative networks, for which reason I could not predetermine the selection of specific units of analysis on theoretical grounds, like I had with the state of Kerala. Instead, I began by choosing the forest divisions in which fieldwork and data collection would be conducted. This was done with the help of academics and retired senior officials in Kerala with whom I had conversations during my first visit in 2013. I informed them that I sought to locate divisions that would allow me to capture and observe a broad range of activities carried out by the forest department, if relevant across organizational tiers and jurisdictions, and with relevance to the larger shifts and currents in forest policy. I took care to inform them that I sought to obtain a holistic picture of what the department works on, and not a specific program or area within the state. They suggested a range of divisions which they maintained were the most reflective of the policy issues of current relevance in the state, citing aspects such as a diversity of programs and policies being implemented there, significant forest cover, a high proportion of forest-dwelling people including indigenous groups, and a presence of different agencies and NGOs working on rural development.

I eventually settled for a total of eight divisions. These are located in four different circles (the unit above the divisions), in different parts of the Western Ghats range. We should keep in mind the relatively small geographical distances in Kerala. All of the selected divisions are densely forested and located in mountainous terrain but none of them took more than four or five hours to cross by jeep on paved roads (accessing the interior areas by motorbike could take much longer). The sizes of the divisions encouraged me to focus on these eight, which my informants also deemed a suitable number for the approximate six months I knew I could allocate for fieldwork in the state. Later, this enabled me to move between them fairly quickly, so interviews in multiple divisions could be conducted over consecutive days. There is a trade-off at stake here. I could have focused on fewer divisions and spent

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13 Forest divisions are one of the most important jurisdictions in this study, described in some more detail in the next chapter.

14 In total, twelve individuals were consulted, about half being academics at universities and research organisations, and the other half senior forest officials, most of them retired.
more time in a smaller number but then I would run the risk of getting an incomplete picture of what the informants held as the full range of activities carried out by the department. Alternatively I could have increased the number of divisions if I only sought to hold interviews in each, but that would rule out conducting field observations, and make identification of de facto practices and rules much harder. At the request of the majority of informants and respondents I withhold the names, biophysical details and approximate location of the divisions. Kerala has a total of 35 forest divisions whereof several lack significant forest cover, for which reason someone with knowledge of forest management in Kerala could easily identify the divisions using a combination of details here and in the empirical chapters. The issue of anonymity is discussed further below.

Selecting this number of divisions and in this manner has some methodological implications. It could be argued that the eight divisions, drawn from a total of 35, do not give an accurate or representative picture of forest governance at the frontline, even though that was the criteria for selecting them in the first place. As I lack comparable data on other divisions, there is a slight possibility that my findings diverge from what is the de facto scenario in the state, and may in turn affect the conclusions I draw later on. Another less severe objection concerns the almost complete reliance on the twelve informants for selecting the divisions. As hardly any published material exists specifying the characteristics of divisions beyond the most basic, descriptive data15, I had few other options if I did not wish to randomise the sample. Therefore, there is a risk of selection bias (Collier and Mahoney 1996) as the informants might suggest divisions which they had a personal preference in seeing me study for some reason, or that their judgement may be questioned. Yet I deem that risk small as the informants could each motivate their suggestions well, and that they represented both prestigious academic institutions in Kerala and top-ranking positions in the KFD, and were all approached in separate emails, phone calls or visits.

Gaining and maintaining access

Once the divisions had been selected the next step was to secure what is known as access to the field. Gaining access implies the whole spectra of activities and choices a researcher undertakes throughout the full course of fieldwork to get into the position where the data becomes visible, accessible and collectible (Feldman et al. 2003; Kapiszewski et al. 2015). It includes time-consuming steps like obtaining the correct permissions to start planning practical aspects of fieldwork, but also building ties and relationships with people who eventually set up the desired interviews or grant permission to follow them around. It is seldom a linear process and is described as rela-

15 Which is available on the forest department webpage, see http://www.forest.kerala.gov.in/
Seeing access as relational emphasizes the importance of relationship-building skills in gaining access. One’s ability to relate to others becomes a part of the research process. Some people are better at having conversations or at keeping commitments. Some excel at keeping confidences. Some are better at conveying appreciation. Overall, a variety of interpersonal skills is important to developing and sustaining the wide range of relationships a researcher encounters during the process of gaining access (2003: xi).

Gaining access varies tremendously between people and settings and there is a limited amount of blueprinted, general advice. In my experience flexibility and persistence helps, as well as some measure of simple luck, but also having prior experience of fieldwork in order to mentally prepare for long periods of being patient, or even helpless. Yet, access may be determined by many factors one cannot alter; gender, race, nationality or religion, each aspects of your *positionality* that may both open and close doors (Feldman et al. 2003; Kapiszewski et al. 2015). Schatz states that “access is a sliding scale, not a binary” (2009b: 307) and is seldom something held secure in perpetuity. It involves having and using a diversity of interpersonal skills and a good deal of persistency as the two sections below demonstrates, also illustrating the inherent nature of ethnographic fieldwork.

**The Gordian knot of research permissions**

My first objective was to secure the official permits to conduct fieldwork in Kerala, and some form of sanction from higher levels to engage officials throughout the forest department. At the time, riding on an initial wave of confidence, and in retrospect much naivety, I envisioned that I would obtain documents with an official letterhead, full of stamps and signatures from the highest levels. These I would keep stored in a plastic folder and swiftly produce whenever a door needed opening; my own *Rosetta stone* to the forest administration. Encouraged by academic contacts I therefore struggled to secure a meeting at the head office of the KFD (not an easy task in itself), to which I arrived armed with various supporting letters, recommendations and my research plan detailing what I sought to do. The head of the department listened intently for some five minutes before cutting me short and informing me that all official permits had to be issued by a special unit within the MoEF in New Delhi, and that there was nothing he could do. I was disheartened for I did not relish the idea of having to approach that vast ministry and put off fieldwork for a few weeks. Even with institutional support from my academic contacts, filing the application with the MoEF according to ‘correct procedure’ was an energy-consuming task. Waiting for a reply I refocused the sequence of my fieldwork and started conducting interviews with retired officials, and some active ones suggested by the former (as private individuals). After two weeks of follow-up calls I eventually received a short
memo by post stating that all official permits had to be issued by the head of the state forest department, and that the MoEF could do nothing about it – a classic Catch 22 situation.

This disheartened me further as I saw my carefully planned strategy being tied up in red tape at the hands of the Indian bureaucracy. Around this time an academic acquaintance familiar with my situation and growing frustration suggested that I go visit a CCF (head of a forest region in Kerala) with whom he was close. In contrast to the meeting with the head of department, this official read my plan minutely before stating matter-of-factly that no official permit would be needed for what I intended to do. Confounded, I learnt that in order to do research in actual forest areas I would need official permits, but for doing what I proposed – interviewing and observing forest officials – that would not be needed at all since those activities would not leave any ecological impact on the forest. He told me that the majority of researchers that approach the KFD are natural scientists who seek to collect biological samples, and that social scientists using pen and paper as their ‘tools’ are virtually unheard of. He, like many other officials I met later on, had a hard time fathoming why a political scientist would have any interest at all in studying forests if no sampling of forest materials was carried out.

This account demonstrates one aspect of gaining access I had not foreseen or been prepared for; the dissimilarities in culture which gave rise to a different interpretation of what a researcher does in the forest. To them the norm was an ecologist who gathers samples and therefore needs permits in accordance with different biodiversity laws. Not knowing this norm beforehand, I had not made it explicit in my research plan that I would not do any sampling. The CCF stated that my project was unusual but not infeasible and also that he approved of it, going ahead to make calls to the heads of the selected divisions in his jurisdiction, ordering them to be of assistance when I later approached them. By coincidence or perseverance, the CCF became my first and most important gatekeeper to the field as he cut the Gordian knot and solved the formal issue of permissions, directed his subordinates to assist me, and gave me the confidence to thereafter approach officials (at least at the division level and above) directly to request a meeting.16 17

Accessing the field and forest officials
The methods literature usually attends to matters of access of a more personal kind; building trust, confidence and rapport with the studied subjects, and

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16 It deserves to be mentioned that at the very end of my fieldwork, just as I was about to leave Kerala for New Delhi, I received a new memo from the MoEF stating that they had started processing the application I had filed almost a year before and that I soon should have the permissions needed for carrying out my proposed fieldwork.

17 In the course of my fieldwork I visited several villages and hamlets in forested areas, as well as remote camps belonging to the KFD, often travelling on poorly maintained roads deep into the forest. Legally speaking they were not on ‘forestland’ and were thus accessible to me, but it is slightly ironic that a dissertation focused on the Indian forest bureaucracy was conducted without ever setting foot on what that bureaucracy defines as a forest.
the challenges that go into that (Feldman et al. 2003). This has to do with the type of field we are trying to access. In studies focusing on for instance traumatic experiences, gaining acceptance and consent may be hard and take time (see Söderström 2011 for accessing ex-combatants in post-conflict settings). For me, delineating the field was initially quite easy; the eight divisions (with subordinate levels) and also higher levels of the hierarchy. Yet, these jurisdictions are of less interest than the individual officials that populate them. Given my focus on de facto practices a more appropriate way of defining the field is on the basis of what officials do, and where. As we will see, formal jurisdictional boundaries do not always matter to frontline officials, for which reason a rigid adherence to those boundaries would be an unsuitable way of defining my field. For me, the field was in constant flux, shaped by where the studied officials went. However, for ease of presentation the respondents are sorted by division, and I also tried to do fieldwork in each in a somewhat systematic order. For accessing the field in the more relational sense of the word, this was much less of a challenge than the process of trying to obtain formal, written access. A valid question I have been asked is what impact being a white western scholar has when doing fieldwork in rural India. For me the short answer is some at first, but little later on. I believe three reasons underlay this, in descending order of importance.

The first, and frankly speaking, being a white foreigner in Kerala worked to my advantage, without me actively exploiting that attribute. Many malayali officials I got to know a bit better (but also ordinary people in my age I made friends with) explained that for them the chance to interact with foreigners was rare beyond the occasional tourist, while they simultaneously were highly knowledgeable and curious about the outside world few of them can travel to. I became, in some measure, a wandering encyclopaedia which they could use as an outlet for their questions and opinions. I recall few interviews that did not start out with, or was not interjected by dozens of questions about life, culture and of course forests in Sweden. Many stated that they found my project unusual but were also intrigued (a few retired officials even touched) by the fact that someone wanted to listen, watch and learn about their work, practices and routines. Over time, a tacit mutual relationship developed; they let me in on their world and I let them in on mine.

The second has to do with personal endurance and putting up with some of the discomforts of living and travelling in rural India. As much as ethnographers closely observe individuals of interest and what they do, I believe that those individuals observe the researcher too; judging how we act, what our motivations are, and how we blend into the local environment (see also Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012: 57-60). This refers mainly to the ties I built with officials involved in the field observations. I often had the sense during the first few days I spent with them that I was being tested; could I put up with long days travelling by motorbike? Could I handle the strenuous walks between villages in fairly rough terrain? Could I eat the local food? And so forth. Perhaps I defied their expectations (and prejudice) or maybe they were
relieved that I did not give them any extra workload, for after a few days I could usually sense an increase in their approval of me following them around, which also led them to talk a bit more freely and relaxed. When this insight dawned on me I used it to my advantage; I told officials I met for the first time about my experiences in the field so far, indicating that I was not a complete, uninitiated outsider.

Last, I am certain that having a word of introduction from a superior official helped to a large extent. This has to do with the respect for authority that is deeply ingrained in Indian bureaucratic culture, a theme that has also been confirmed in comparative organisational psychology (Aycan et al. 2000). While the CCF mentioned above served as a first gatekeeper I made sure to always seek the approval from the superior official to whoever I wanted to meet with. While I often contacted officials personally, it helped if a superior had first phoned his subordinate, informing him of my interests.

**Limits of my access**

Needless to say, there were factors that limited my access, both in the personal sense and in terms of what I could not obtain material-wise. This is part and parcel of doing fieldwork in somewhat unfamiliar contexts, and something we have to be aware of writing the empirical analysis and final conclusions. For me, the primary limitation was the fact that I do not speak the local Malayalam, the first language of the vast majority of my respondents.\(^{18}\) I discuss the impact of this in relation to field observations below, but more generally the language barrier did create an invisible social boundary I could not surmount. This was often sensed during informal occasions when travelling or having lunch with field-officials. Such occasions may be part of ethnographic data collection in one sense (see Zirakzadeh 2009), and it instilled a subtle feeling of remaining an outsider in more ways than just being a white western scholar.

Another issue was the theme of corruption and illegal activities. A few officials would insinuate that some illicit activities occur within the KFD and in the wider system too. But when probing for further insights on this, the respondents would usually state that they did not know any details or would simply change the topic of conversation. Maybe knowing the language or the officials better would have made a difference, or staying longer in a fewer amount of divisions. Yet, studying corruption in the field is hard and possibly dangerous (but see Sundström 2015), and probing too far could have angered respondents and closed the door to other valuable insights, also with other officials. I had to tread very carefully here. Even if Kerala enjoys some of India’s lowest levels of bureaucratic corruption and that the theme very

\[^{18}\] A handful of officials were not from Kerala and did not speak Malayalam themselves or quite little, some describing it as impossible to learn. They usually communicated with local colleagues in a mixture of English, Malayalam or whatever other language they had in common. A linguistics professor I met by chance estimated that it would take me some full two years of training to bring it up to even the most rudimentary conversation level.
rarely came up in discussions with non-KFD respondents – perhaps indicating that it de facto is an insignificant problem – it is still a limitation in my gathered material.

Gathering Data

Fieldwork in Kerala began in early April 2014 (though formal access to frontline officials was not granted till mid-May) and continued till the end of July that year, and a second fieldwork trip was undertaken from early January to mid-March 2015.

Interviews

Interviews were my main and predominant source of data and the major part of the empirical analysis is based on insights offered by the interviewed individuals. In total I conducted 90 interviews with 75 different individuals. A detailed breakdown of these is provided in the table below and a full list of the respondents is found in the appendix. The vast majority of the respondents (57) were officials of different ranks belonging to the KFD. Of this total, 21 were administrative superiors, a role I define as being above the Division-level, occupying the positions of PCCF, CCF, CF and ‘assistant’ varieties of these. Ten of these superiors were based in the capital Trivandrum and eleven in other larger cities. Of the total 57, eight were DFOs and 28 were frontline officials, here defined as below the Division-level, notably the positions of RFO, SFO or BFO. Nine of the officials were retired, having left the department either recently (5) or more than ten years ago (4). It should be noted that these were all men between the ages of about 25 and 60 (of the currently active), many holding at least a bachelor’s degree (in a natural science subject) and several also a doctorate degree.

Another eighteen interviews were held with non-KFD respondents. Eleven of these were academics and/or social-environmental activists who provided useful knowledge and information about the context of forest policy in both Kerala and India. These are all individuals who have been lead figures in social- and environmental advocacy at the state and national level for decades, both as activists and academics. Two were former KFD officials now working with forester training at the IGNFA in Dehradun in northern India. Three were senior employees of the MoEF in New Delhi, each with a background in the KFD. One was also a former head of the MoEF and thus ex-Minister of Environment and Forests. The last three were officials working in other line-departments in rural Kerala. These 75 are the ones with whom I conducted proper interviews, whereof fifteen were interviewed twice. In addition to these, countless informal conversations were held with another two dozen individuals during field observations, for instance when travelling in the ranges or when having lunch or dinner. Another fifteen conversations
were also held with various academics, NGO representatives, retired officials and MoEF staff during the first visit in 2013 and throughout fieldwork. All of these helped provide important background understanding and to enrich my knowledge about forest governance in the state.

**Obtaining and conducting interviews**

Most of the respondents were tracked down and approached using a standard snowballing-procedure. For the senior officials in Trivandrum or other large cities initial introductions were supplied by contacts established already on my first visits, several by academics familiar with the KFD. Once the gatekeeper-CCF mentioned above had enabled my access, I began calling the DFOs in the divisions of interest. Contact details and names of all officials down to RFO level are found in the KFD telephone directory, publicly available on the department webpage. At the end of each interview with the DFOs or seniors officials I would ask for further individuals with whom they suggest I meet. Within the divisions the RFOs and SFO/BFOs were either recommended by their superior or approached independently by myself.

I often used my ‘outsider-ness’ to my advantage in securing interviews; several respondents were excited that I wished to learn more about their work, and would heartily welcome me. On occasions, I ‘shocked’ my academic hosts at my affiliated university (The Kerala Agricultural University in Thrissur) with the ease with which I set up interviews with fairly high-ranking officials they reportedly would have difficulty in accessing. Interviews were overall not conducted in any conscious order, though there is a slight pattern of hierarchy in the list of respondents; with a somewhat larger share of superior officials interviewed during the first longer visit to Kerala.

Due to the diversity of respondents with regards to rank and location I did not follow one pre-fixed interview guide or questionnaire, but rather tailored specific questions to the individual respondents. Interviews with all KFD officials sought to gain deeper insights into their worldview and perspective on the system of forest governance in the state; how they perceive that it works and functions, their role in it; and how they envision the system should be organised vis-à-vis how it actually is organised. I would pay special attention to asking about the institutions (in practice the rules, regulations and norms) they follow and what they are expected to do by colleagues, and vice versa. In general I did not ask straight on why a given program or policy is not carried out as planned, as that might just lead to a list of pathologies of what is wrong in the administration. Instead, I asked why the officials follow a certain pattern of behaviour and actions, which then avoids lists of expectations of what they should have done, but failed to do. I saw this as helpful as officials may deviate from what the formal guidelines state or what their superiors intend, but still manage to design solutions that fulfil that meet the intentions of their political principals, in this case the

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19 http://www.fmis.forest.kerala.gov.in/sites/all/modules/address/address_book.php
collaborative networks (see Thomas 2003: 2 for a similar argument). In most cases, the interviews generated a rich mixture of detailed facts, insightful stories and accounts, and many personal reflections and opinions. For almost all officials I would also ask them to explain in as much detail as possible what their average working day and week looks like, and also what they believe motivates or justifies their work.

The format of the interviews varied to some degree depending on the type of respondent. Overall, the interviews may be described as semi-structured or open-ended; I made sure that important topics were brought up at some point during the meeting but also allowed the conversation to remain open enough so that they could go deeper into certain issues they were more inclined to talk about. Officials of all ranks brought up quite tangible examples and referred to events and processes related to forest governance in which they had been part. I quickly learnt that it was better to then focus on these accounts and pose follow-up questions related to them, rather than pose questions of more abstract or theoretical nature.

The setting for the interviews varied tremendously. Many were held in the official’s personal offices in both large cities and small rural towns, some in imposingly large assembly rooms, some at private residences (mostly the case with retired officials), and a few in the lobbies of my different hostels. Most of the time I was not in a position to determine or choose the location and setting of the interviews, nor the time during the day. My sense is that many of the officials I met are individuals used to giving orders and wielding influence, hence the interviews had to be partly on their terms. As regards most of the frontline officials, we would often hold the interviews in the evening, after having been in the field. Given the strong command of English most government officials in Kerala have, even at lower levels, all interviews were conducted in that language. Though some officials occasionally struggled to find the appropriate term or did not comprehend my every word, their English was yet sufficient to manage conversation. During fieldwork only two interviews had to be cancelled due to the language barrier, a fact which is telling of the high education level in Kerala. Before starting the interviews I took care the explain the intention and purpose of my study, sometimes going to lengths explaining why I had travelled all the way from Sweden for my research, a fact which was varyingly met with astonishment, jubilant exclamation and gratitude. Interviews were of varied length but usually lasted around 60 to 90 minutes, though almost all meetings, particularly those at more senior levels, were frequently interrupted by the entry of subordinate officials, clerks, and peons bringing tea and snacks. Almost all interviews were concluded with lunch or dinner, which despite my eager insistence were always generously paid for by the official.

The vast majority of the KFD respondents wished to remain anonymous or not have their name quoted. I enquired about this at the beginning of each interview, while others insisted before I got to chance to ask. For this reason the book does not provide personal details about the officials or their loca-
tion as someone familiar with the state forest administration would be able to identify them in hindsight. Officials within the KFD are rotated and promoted on a regular basis, and a number of officials working at the headquarters as of early 2018 were met and interviewed when at lower positions (derived from the current telephone directory). As I plan to distribute this book personally to some individuals within the KFD it is imperative to avoid revealing their identities. Early informants advised me to not tape discussions as that could make respondents apprehensive, especially given positionality as a white, foreign researcher. I took detailed notes during interviews, and often stopped to ask them to repeat and clarify statements, allowing me to write down what they had said as accurately as possible. At the end of the meeting I took some time to go through my notes to make sure I had understood them correctly. With a few of the officials I had email contacts to I sent them summaries of the interview and took the opportunity to pose follow-up questions, a practice known as member-checking (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). The excerpts in the empirical chapters are very close to what was said, and have only been modified to follow proper grammar.

Assessing the interview material

On the whole, and in hindsight, I am satisfied with the relative ease in which respondents could be approached, defying many of the trepidations about fieldwork in India I had before starting it. That said, there is also reason to be self-critical about the interview material gathered, on at least two related counts. The first is my positionality as a foreign scholar. While it opened many doors in terms of gaining access it may also have shaped or biased the responses I obtained, at least during the first dozen or so interviews. For some officials, not least the senior ones, to which I was much junior in age and informal ‘standing’, the interviews sometimes took the form of them giving lectures and talking quite uninterruptedly about the structure and function of the administrative system. To use a different terminology, many were inclined to talk at length about the rules-in-form, assuming that was my interest and seeing the opportunity to impress a foreigner with the history and organisation of this quite complex organisation. After some time I learnt how to manage this tendency; by actively allowing senior officials to assume the role of ‘teacher’ to which I could ask informed follow-up questions which were more tacitly directed at getting to the rules-in-use.

Related to this is my own learning curve. The further fieldwork progressed, the more I learnt about the intricacies of forest policy, and the more informed and detailed questions I could ask. The quality of my questions, of the interviews and resultantly of the material increased over time. As such, the interview material has to be assessed a bit differently, with a slight bias towards the last three quarters of the interview series. This is partly mitigated by the fact that I managed to conduct a second interview with some of the first officials I met, allowing me to revisit certain topics I had overlooked or been unaware of the first time. The second issue is the reliance on snowball-
ing for obtaining new contacts, as this introduces a certain degree of bias in who I gained access to. Those I met with might have been inclined to direct me to colleagues who share their opinions, work in similar ways, or follow similar rules, which potentially could have lead me onto a slight path dependency in my sample. I believe that the problem is lessened by the fact that I also approached and met with a large number of officials that had not been suggested to me. While these individuals often knew other officials personally, I was not explicitly directed to them.

Looking at my material in retrospect, and the aggregated narratives that emerge from readings of it, the overall picture is coherent and is corroborated by my own observations in the field. Certainly, had I had an additional couple of months for fieldwork, the emerging narratives might have been yet richer or even more coherent but at some point one must decide when theoretical saturation has been reached and interviews no longer yield new insights (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). Towards the end, I had the impression that obtained insights rather reaffirmed prior findings than generated entirely new ones.
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Table 2. Breakdown of interview respondents
Field observations

Field observations were carried out in each of the eight divisions selected for fieldwork, although the extent of access varied slightly between localities, largely depending on how much time an official would allocate me on different dates, and his willingness to take me along into the field. In total, I conducted field observations with six DFOs and twelve RFOs (often together with their subordinates), altogether totalling close to 36 full but non-consecutive working days. Note that these 36 days are those which I spent following or travelling with officials in the actual field; days which typically started with me being picked up at my hostel early in the morning and dropped off at again in the evening. Some three months, or roughly 90 days, were spent staying in the selected divisions, usually in the main town or city of each. On the days that we were not travelling, I would seek permission to spend time at the local KFD compound, either for preparing coming interviews or to write up my notes. I would sometimes be allocated a desk in a hallway, or to sit outdoors in the courtyard. While such days did not contain data collection per se, they did contribute to the immersive ethnographic experience (Zirakzadeh 2009) as it gave me a chance to observe the mundane practices of the KFD, and to hold shorter chats and conversations with officials passing by. Remaining in that environment (rather than heading to the more comfortable coastal cities) helped me retain a certain ‘field state of mind’, which made the processing of notes easier and more enjoyable.

The days spent following frontline officials were on the whole varied, much depending on the tasks and agenda of the accompanying official. I always made it very clear when I first met a new RFO or DFO that I did not wish to alter their schedules, or be given an official tour of local areas, as they might give a visiting superior (this risk is also highlighted by Fleischman 2012). Some found this surprising but complied and took me in on their daily activities. Over the total 36 days I was able to observe a broad range of meetings and interactions with other KFD officials, officials of other agencies working in the district, representatives from the local government bodies, as well as visits to rural forest communities, both indigenous and non-indigenous. We would usually set off just before or around dawn and then spend the major part of the day moving around different locations for different meetings, either by motorbike or jeep. It was seldom just me and the accompanying official; we would often be an entourage of five or six people including subordinate officials, assistants, clerks or officials-in-training. My presence was explained to them by the main official, who also acted as my guide seeing that it was he I turned to with questions and queries.

As mentioned, a limitation was the language barrier. While it did not affect the interviews a large part of the observed meetings in the field were held in the local Malayalam, though occasionally they would shift to English when they felt that I should be included too, or when the accompanying DFO did not speak Malayalam. To mitigate this limitation I would always
ask my guiding official to thoroughly recap the meetings and interactions as soon as possible afterwards, in as much detail he could. If possible, I would ask the other officials to do the same. This implies that much of the empirical material from the observations has been mediated through the same officials that are my main unit and object of analysis. Unavoidably, this may raise concerns about a subjectivity bias in the material; that the officials related the transpired events based on what they think I should hear, or what they thought I wanted to hear. On this point, there was not much that I could do as I did not speak Malayalam. Conscious of this limitation I have tried, to my best ability, to corroborate the accounts related by the officials with statements made in interviews, as well as with other observed officials. By and large, there are few extreme deviations from the aggregated narratives (though some exist and are dealt with in the empirical chapters), and patterns that emerge from the notes taken during observations. While there is some local variation between divisions, the identified strategies and sets of roles are fairly consistent across study-sites; in other words the officials gave coherent explanations to their actions and behaviour though they were located in different parts of the state.

I considered taking on a research assistant who also could have functioned as an interpreter, and in some measure a more unbiased guide alongside the officials. I enquired at my affiliated university and actually ‘interviewed’ three master students who were looking for a short-term assignment. While proficient in English I did regrettably not get the impression that they fully understood the purpose of my project or that they were willing to travel and stay in the upland districts for any longer time-periods. While I took care to develop amiable relationships with the officials I followed, so that they would not see me as a burden that was harder with the villagers we encountered on shorter stops in the communities. Many were curious, and in some indigenous hamlets even apprehensive, about my presence. My guiding official would explain why I was travelling with him and reassured them that I was simply a student studying his work, and not the communities in themselves. As for officials of other agencies my presence was fairly unproblematic and I did not hear of anyone opposing my ‘sitting in’ on meetings.

I was also invited to ‘sit in’ in the offices of senior officials for parts of their working day, observing their routines, and the coming and goings of different people to the office. In total, some 45 hours were spent ‘sitting in’, which is in addition to senior-level interviews. I would go through my notes or written documentation supplied by the officials, not interfering with their work but still having the chance to ask short questions about certain rules or procedures within the department. Senior officials usually complied, for the

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20 This may have to do with the fact that they were all trained in forestry as a natural science, and had studied very little social science and management/governance aspects of forestry. Again, they too were surprised that I would not need to use a laboratory for analysis, in which their skills and training lay.
reason (or at least so I was told by local doctoral students) that being seen with a foreign scholar was a sign of prestige for them. Apart from the opportunity to ask spontaneous questions and get facts straight, this undertaking helped reveal quite valuable insights about departmental culture and everyday routines, in other words observing *de facto* practices.

As with the interviews I guaranteed the observed officials their requested anonymity in the final written book. While the fieldnotes I kept contain information and details about their person and location, this has been omitted from the empirical chapters. Moreover, I have omitted excessive details about the local geography or demographic composition of the divisions or ranges, as that could lead to their identification.

**Ethical dilemmas in field research**

The literature on field research stresses the ethical challenges that may arise when studying humans and societies in an unfamiliar context, and more so in a developing country context (see Gustafsson and Johannesson 2016; Hertel et al. 2009; Kapiszewski et al. 2015). These challenges are related to the topic being studied, which in more sensitive cases – for instance studies about ex-combatants in post-conflict settings (see Söderström 2011) – poses more dilemmas. I would argue that my wider topic, public officials in natural resource governance, is not overly sensitive and controversial, or ethically challenging. While focusing on individuals, I study and write about them in their professional roles and capacities and not the person behind the role. The themes I addressed in conversations were unlikely to stir up trauma or painful memories and are also unlikely to lead to danger for the respondents.

That said, parts of the material concerns the way in which officials do not only follow the formal protocols of the administration, in other words how they also abide by informal rules, some standing in direct contrast to what they are mandated to do. Though nuances exist and are discussed in the analysis, such practices are not directly illegal but nor are they what many officials refer to as “formal and correct procedure”. Yet, these *de facto* practices and roles – once I had become aware of them myself – were often talked about voluntarily and without much hesitation. Officials sought my reassurance that I keep their accounts and experiences anonymous but did not, in my impression, fear losing their jobs or fear for their personal safety should other department officials read about it. Several respondents, especially those working at the field level, were openly critical about how certain things are run within the administration and how it is structured, only asking that they not be quoted by name.

**Taking fieldnotes**

Writing fieldnotes is a central practice in field research (Emerson et al. 2011; van Maanen 2011) and may be described as the reconstruction of the empirical world on paper. As the fieldwork process seldom is linear, foreseeable, or has an evident endpoint, documenting the different trials one encounters is
helpful, not least for later recollection of what transpired in the field. Fieldnotes may take many different shapes, but is most often kept in the form of a journal in which one illustrates and describes day-to-day activities, events and processes observed, including details on sights, smells, natural environments and people encountered. In this project I kept two different journals; one in which I wrote down everyday observations as they occurred and as I witnessed them, and one of a more personal kind reflecting on the fieldwork process more broadly. The former was usually written up from loose paper notes every other evening, partly to make it more legible but also to record analytical notes and reflections (e.g. inferences and theoretical insights). These notes are the raw data material derived from the field observations, comparable to interview transcripts or survey responses. Fieldnotes, in the ethnographic tradition, should also be reflexive. In the words of Schwartz-Shea and Yanow

> “Reflexivity” refers to a researcher’s active consideration of and engagement with the ways in which his own sense-making and the particular circumstances that might have affected it, throughout all phases of the research process, relate to the knowledge claims he ultimately advances in written form (2012: 100)

This meant continuously considering and reflecting on my own positionality and identity, and how it affected the data collection. If done well, and conveyed to the reader, it may help bring transparency to the writing; explaining equally much the process of doing fieldwork as presenting the analytical outcomes of the research. All fieldwork contains limitations; being transparent about them will not solve the problem but may bestow a greater deal of confidence to the text. One may be reflexive and think of those issues in many different ways, but fieldnotes are generally a suitable place in which to write down such thoughts (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). I find that the more contextualised and reflexive my notes have been in my journals, the easier it has been during the writing process to ‘return to the field’ and also help retain a sensibility when doing the empirical analysis.

Gathering written material

Collecting written, published material was the least time-consuming activity during data collection but still constitutes a part of my material. I gathered documents, reports and working plans published by the forest department, some which were official guidelines and plans detailing what the department is mandated to do21, and some which were internal guidelines, reports and memos intended for use within the administration. The latter were sometimes given to me during interviews, but in many cases I could only take notes or copies from them and not bring the whole document back home. To

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21 Many of these are also available on the KFD’s webpage: http://www.forest.kerala.gov.in/
a much smaller extent I also collected newspaper clippings reporting events and activities of interest that occurred in my selected divisions. This material reaffirms interview responses and observed activities to a certain degree; as much of the analysis focuses on more informal practices, corroboration rather has to be sought by checking for consistency in the rest of the data material. Yet, these sources do provide a strong account of the formal, or *de jure* institutions in place, which also are vital to understand to make sense of the full rules-in-use.

**Employing the IAD framework in the field**

The IAD framework is broad and contains multiple components which apply to the entire governance or policy process in most imaginable settings (see Ostrom 2005; Ostrom 2011 for a full review). It helps a researcher ask what problems and challenges are at stake, what resources individuals have, and what rules and norms regulate their strategies and patterns of behaviour. See the figure below for a graphical representation of the framework. The second figure is the action situation, the key component used in this study.

![The IAD framework](image)

*Figure 1. The IAD framework (Ostrom 2010: 646).*

The box below constitutes what is known as the *action situation*, defined as the “social spaces where individuals interact, exchange goods and services, solve problems, dominate one another, or fight” (Ostrom 2011: 11) and the “core component of the framework, in which individuals (acting on their own or as agents of organizations) observe information, select actions, engage in patterns of interaction, and realize outcomes from their interaction” (McGinnis 2011b: 173). The seven variables inside the box describe the structure or setup of an action situation at a particular moment, and the seven rules surrounding the box determine or instruct what may be done in a given situation. Note however, that despite the arrows, these are not linked in a directly causal pattern; they represent a joint configuration of rules, wherein
the effect of a change in one rule depends on some or all of the other rules (Ostrom 2011: 20).

An action situation exists in the real, empirical world whenever two or more individuals interact and decide to take some form of joint action that produces an outcome. As such, the threshold is quite low but in real cases the complexity of an action situation and the amount of different variables and rules increase dramatically. Ostrom states that in “field settings it is hard to tell where one action situation starts and another one stops. Life continues in what appears to be a seamless web of [action situations]” (2011: 15). At the same time, an action situation is also an analytical unit used by the researcher, in which somewhat delineated observed actions may be described and analysed. In one sense they are determined by the actors under study; they meet, interact or cooperate for some reason relevant to the policy environment at hand. In this book an interdepartmental meeting between several public officials for instance, is an event they undertake irrespective of my presence as a researcher. My task as an investigator is to first identify that an action situation is occurring, and thereafter to identify the variables of interest (who is participating, what is the intention, what information do they possess and so forth), and more importantly the rules being cited. This is largely a joint task between the researcher and the studied actors; I ask them questions and probe for information, or request to observe them, in order to reconstruct the occurring event as an action situation in the stricter analytical sense. As the focus is to identify their own interpretations of the action situa-

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22 In principle any number of rules could be relevant in an action situation, necessitating some form of classification. The seven proposed in the IAD literature are deliberately of a universal nature and are intended to represent a wide diversity of different rules that may be in use.
tion, questions leading to answers along the lines of ‘in cases like this, we usually follow this process and it is my task to...’ are helpful. In most cases, the types of resources and information different actors in an action situation have will not be known beforehand, for which reason the participation of the actors is essential in reconstructing it on paper (Ostrom 2005, 2011).

Moreover, in each situation a studied individual will have past experiences of interactions and negotiations with others, and will follow different sets of rules depending on who the counterpart is. A forest official is likely to cite different rules and be influenced by different norms when engaging with local communities, similarly ranked bureaucrats in other departments, or superior officials. Importantly, these relationships are not static, but rather fluid and under continuous evolution. This implies that a single observed action situation – like a meeting between a number of forest officials and local forest-users – is more like a ‘snapshot’ taken at a specific point in time. Observing the same meeting (assuming it is held regularly) a few weeks later will generate a different action situation; the set of participants might be the same but the available information or range of possible actions might have changed markedly. A critical task of the empirical fieldwork is to identify numerous actions situations and pay attention to the rules shaping them.

In this book I employ the IAD framework and the action situation in particular as an analytical tool to identify and tease out the rules-in-use public officials cite and follow. The ambition is not to sort every statement or observation made into a specific category of rules, but rather to use the action situation and its sub-components as a template to organise a large variety of stated rules and variables. In the empirical chapters I refrain from an overly technical language with regard to the IAD framework. While certain statements might clearly be position or choice rules, I will discuss them in a language fitting the substantial policy setting at hand. Last, this might not always be a straightforward task. Ostrom states that “the capacity of humans to use complex cognitive systems to order their own behaviour at a relatively subconscious level frequently makes it difficult for empirical researchers to ascertain what working rules underlie an ongoing action situation” (2011: 18). Recapping the chapter’s earlier sections, this may be mitigated by immersive, ethnographic field approaches.

Post-Field Deskwork

Once the data collection process is over a second, and perhaps more challenging process begins. The term deskwork distinguishes it from the former set of activities, as it involves a good deal of reading and writing; tasks best done behind the comforts of one’s desk. It has to do with structuring large and at times seemingly fragmented material, the thought process that goes into the transformation of fieldnotes and transcripts to the empirical analysis,
and how that part of the study is written up (see van Maanen 2011; Wolcott 2009).

Analysing the material

In one sense the process of analysing the gathered material starts already in the field with making small notes and theoretical reflections in your field-notes. Continuously doing so may lead to new ideas, insights, questions and approaches which in turn may lead to a new or reoriented focus in the data collection. One example of this is the initial discovery of the collaborative networks. The existence of these initially took me by some surprise; as they are informal they could not be found in any published material. Or put differently, the followed rules-in-use which I began to uncover diverged substantially from the formal, rules-on-paper. Here was a *modus operandi* that stood in contrast with much of what I had read about the forest administration. Once these arrangements and their associated strategies and roles had been identified as important in the perspective of the officials, I could adapt my questions and focus in the field, but also start thinking more in terms of other theories, for instance network management and policy advocacy. This is one case of data analysis in the field.

The main analysis began upon returning home from the field. Since the material had been collected over an extended time-period in which my own skills and learning gradually improved, a range of initially contradictory themes emerged from the reading of the material. Numerous re-readings are often the best way to approach ethnographic field data (Gustafsson and Johannesson 2016), and the first step was thus to simply read the material several times, not taking any notes on them. This refreshed my memory, and as far as possible, ‘took me back’ to the field setting. On the fourth or fifth reading I started writing notes on different themes and narratives that seemed to emerge from the text, eventually leading to the chosen structure of the empirical chapters (see the next subsection).

While the use of word-processing software is becoming more common (Gustafsson and Johannesson 2016), I did my ‘coding’ and ‘theming’ manually, largely with pen and paper and only later by longer, written drafts and sketches. I found it helpful to have contextualised descriptions in my field-notes and as comments to transcripts, providing detail and nuances which a program cannot attach the same value to. An unavoidable implication of doing the most of the analysis more than a year after data collection is that memories of the observed events and processes fade a bit, which could lead to different interpretations and conclusions than if they were done much sooner. This could be seen as a limitation but I would also suggest that the lapse in time strengthened the analysis, as one is so ‘immersed into’ the empirical context straight after fieldwork that distance is needed for more clarity once the analysis starts.
Structure and style of the empirical chapters

The four empirical chapters (even though the next one begins with a shorter but necessary descriptive background part) each seek to illuminate aspects of how individual forests officials perceive incentives to collaborate, what they hope to accomplish by it, and what they do in practice. In other words, different aspects of the final answer to my research question.

The first half of chapter four partially describes what forest officials are charged with doing as per the formal guidelines and codes. The second half then looks at how these obligations and tasks are reflected within the administration itself, not least the relationships between frontline officials and their superiors, and how this enables the former group to obtain the needed autonomy for following their preferred strategies at the local level. It also describes briefly the process in which the networks emerge and evolve quite organically. The three following chapters each look at the three different categories of incentives and reasons for collaboration listed above, and the three approaches officials follows by interacting in the institutional arrangements I term collaborative networks – or Strategic Planning and Informational Networks (SPIN), Immediate Response and Action Networks (IRAN), and Capacity-Building Networks (CBN). They each take a decidedly within perspective of the arrangements, examining how forest officials reason and develop incentives for collaboration, what it is they want to accomplish by this, and also how they do it. I pay attention to the different resources and strategies of relevance and examine their behaviour relating to both substantive tasks, and where relevant, interactions aiming to persuade others to collaborate or keep doing so. The chapters attend to the micro-level influences and constraints officials perceive and make decisions in relation to. Using a different terminology, they reflect numerous action situations, involving different actors, incentives and strategies. Each also ends with a summary of what has been in focus and looks briefly at the roles of relevance.

Alternative ways of organising the chapters are possible; for instance focusing on different type of interactions forest officials engage in (such as with communities, with other agencies, and within their own department), different challenges they face (for example interagency coordination, meeting multiple demands from diverse actors, and managing asymmetries of information), or even different categories of roles they find themselves in (for instance regulative, boundary-spanning, and planning roles). While each has its advantages, they run the risk of becoming too theory-driven, imposing an order on the empirical material that does not do it justice, and leads to unnecessary overlaps. While some overlaps are inevitable, I find that the chosen structure brings out the optimal blend of empirical encounters and subsequent theorising.

Lastly, it has been my ambition to write this book, and particularly the empirical chapters in a style that represents the ethnographic approach followed. While writing is important in many subdisciplines of the social sci-
ences, ethnography places it at the fore. The main intention is to do justice to the studied political and institutional environment, and the officials that populate it, by writing about it in a language that blends rich, contextual descriptions with theoretical reasoning. It may help place observed actions and behaviours in a context which may become accessible to others, first and foremost the readers of this book. More particularly, this style of writing aims in my case to elucidate the rules-in-use followed by officials strongly enough, so that my subsequent theorising about their incentives, goals and strategies is as cogent as possible. An object such as rules-in-use is far from easily studied – sometimes actors are not even consciously aware of the rules themselves (Ostrom 2011) – for which reason a transparent but contextualised language is required. In an insightful book van Maanen (2011) proposes a number of different styles of writing ethnography, spanning from highly impersonal, dispassionate and non-reflexive realist tales, to highly personalised, figurative and semi-literary impressionist tales. The one followed in this book, more as loose inspiration than rigorous template, are termed structural tales.

They are analytically sophisticated, ambitious, and determinedly conceptual...Structural tales mix a good deal of engaged and rigorous theoretical reflection with spare, highly focused I-witnessing. They are typically less an ethnography of a specific social group than an ethnography of specific, highly contextualised cultural processes...Theoretical and empirical inquiries run parallel and are carefully adjusted to one another (2011: 166).

Elaborating on these tales, van Maanen suggests that the “intent is to show how a particular authorial understanding of a local practice or specific social situation travels and illuminates larger matters and thus helps resolve theoretical puzzles posed outside ethnographic circles” (2011: 168).

23 Commonly, the term thick description (see Geertz 1973; van Maanen 2011) is used. Since it has strong connotations with anthropology and post-hermeneutic political science I refrain from using the term in this book, but will to some degree follow a style inspired by ethnographies written in what I see as a thick enough description.
As it is not a settled question, you must clear your mind of the fancy with which we all begin as children, that the institutions under which we live...are natural, like the weather. They are not. Because they exist everywhere in our little world, we take it for granted that they have always existed and must always exist, and that they are self-acting. That is a dangerous mistake. They are in fact transient makeshifts...Things will not stay as they are.

– George Bernard Shaw, The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism
4. The Formal Organisation and Its Constraints

This chapter has the overarching purpose to describe and analyse the formal institutional framework forest officials operate within, including the perceived gaps which leads them to develop a preference for collaboration. To understand this we first need to be better acquainted with how the formal system is rigged, how it has developed historically, and what officials are charged with doing. To the non-India scholar it may also help contextualise the wider empirical setting we are dealing with here.

In general, the majority of the official’s quotidian work may be sorted under four overarching categories; tree plantations and forest restoration, forest vigilance and protection (against fires and illegal activities for instance), wildlife management, and human livelihood enhancement. These are each highlighted in the following sections, in relation to the various policies, laws and programs that establish their job description. It should be noted that the four are activities which they are charged with carrying out more or less on their own, without the collaboration of other actors. Yet in reality, there are few substantive policy activities which they de facto undertake entirely on their own (however, bureaucratic inscription and upwards reporting, discussed in the second half of the chapter, obviously occur within the department). The forest officials perceive that they cannot carry out the tasks alone, or only at suboptimal levels, for which reason they prefer to enlist the support and resources of other actors.24

The challenge of separating what is formal and informal is also addressed in recent work by Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2016) on the bureaucratisation of candidate selection in developing countries. They argue that unless rules on a certain activity are written down, explicitly specified in detail, and moreover guides implementation, the process is one of informality rather than a bureaucratic one. They also distinguish bureaucratisation from formalisation (with regards to rules and obligation), setting the threshold quite high for what cannot be considered informal processes. In this book, I will equate formal and bureaucratic tasks and procedures to what is stated in the official guidelines and codes.

The second half of the chapter turns its gaze to the interior world of the forest administration, examining how relationships between frontline offi-

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24 What this means for the empirical analysis in the four following chapters is that descriptions of their de facto work incorporates elements which are both formal and informal, in somewhat integration.
cials and their superiors are structured, and what incentives, goals and strategies are in play. It also looks at how incentives for collaboration develop and how frontline officials are able to secure the autonomy they need to employ strategies aiming to work more collaboratively. Last, it also examines briefly how the collaborative networks evolve at the frontline of forest governance.

Deep Roots: The Evolution of Indian Forest Policy

The institutional framework of forest policy in India has a complex and diverse history, spanning more than 150 years, for which reason I only cover the major events and changes of importance here. A majority of the laws, policies and programs have national origin and coverage though state-specific ones exist too, more or less modelled on their national equivalents. Special reference is made to Kerala where appropriate, but the following sections may be read as a concise description of the issue in both India and Kerala. Moreover, many of the laws in effect today were adopted well over a century ago and carry implications for modern resource governance. The administration carries a long legacy and institutions crafted for one purpose several decades ago are highly durable and are continuously reinforced, even when new problems may require institutional adaptation at both the structural and individual levels. In many aspects, it is a classic case of institutional path dependency (Pierson 2000).

The colonial era

The roots of organised forestry in India – at least that with relevance to this book – may be traced to the mid-nineteenth century, and the then expanding British colonial administration. Having felled most of the old oak forests in Britain, they were in dire need of a new, dependable source of timber for shipbuilding and the naval trade. The preceding century had seen rampant, uncontrolled felling of natural forests under the rule of the East India Company, for which reason the new (British crown) administrators made it an early priority to establish a centralised bureaucracy tasked with institutionalising a system of forest management (Gadgil and Guha 1992; Guha 2014). As railways were laid across the subcontinent, a new and huge demand for timber arose, while also opening up for logging in previously unreachable areas of the interior. Given Britain’s scarce experience of forest management they turned to Prussia for assistance; a state with longstanding experience of tree-planting and forest administration (Scott 1998). As such, the forest bureaucracy as we know it today came into existence through a group of Prussian foresters in the early 1860’s, with the chief task of protecting the forests

25 See Gadgil and Guha (1992), Guha (2014), and Rangarajan and Sivaramakrishnan (2011) for excellent longer accounts.
from further degradation, and ensuring the regrowth of already degraded areas (Gadgil and Guha 1992).

**The Indian forest acts**

Once the administration had been created, the first Indian forest act of prominence was introduced in 1865. Though it was rewritten with changes in 1878 and 1927, the same piece of legislation is in effect to this day, shaping the foundational legal and institutional framework for managing forests in India. The act had far-reaching implications as it principally declared that all forestland was the exclusive property of the state and that they should stand under government control and management. In practice it meant the legal abolition of countless indigenous management institutions that had existed for centuries, and the introduction of strict regulations on what local people could do in the forests. In the updated versions the regulations were made yet stricter by the introduction of numerous forest offences and crimes, with more severe punishments than earlier.

The immediate effect was the institutionalised criminalisation of forest-dwelling people as they per the law became illegal encroachers, and were denied most rights to forest produce, which they depended on for livelihoods (Gadgil and Guha 1992; GoI 1927). It made it harder for communities with ancient *de facto* property rights to safeguard and formally record these as they lacked the capacity and literacy to produce the extensive paperwork needed, a deep-rooted structural problem still widespread in much of rural India (Springate-Baginski and Blaikie 2007). The preserved centrality of the act and its spirit in modern forest governance is made evident in the amount of time Indian forest officials are expected to spend on forest vigilance; enforcing restrictions and regulations, patrolling and monitoring forest boundaries, and pressing charges against ‘forest criminals’.

These acts also form the basis for one of the most fundamental debates in forest policy circles in India: how the country’s forests actually are to be protected. On the one hand several senior forest officials, especially older retired ones claimed that the restrictiveness of the act has helped conserve forests quite well, despite India’s immense population growth over the past century, especially in rural areas where a majority still rely on forests for livelihoods and energy.26 On the other hand, critiques state that it criminalised ordinary people for simply living in or near a forest, and that the strict regulations of the act have reinforced and perpetuated their marginalisation and poverty (Lele and Menon 2014; Springate-Baginski and Blaikie 2007). Overall, the first hundred years of organised forestry was a period of successive consolidation of state control and the massive transfer of *de jure* property rights from local, self-governing communities to the government, though countless communities continued to enjoy some *de facto* autonomy and con-

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26 Interview 2, CCF (retired); Interview 3, CF (retired); Interview 12, PCCF (retired); Interview 18, CCF.
control, especially in remote and inaccessible areas (Rangarajan and Sivaramakrishnan 2011).²⁷

The early independent era
Upon independence in 1947, forests remained a key interest of the government and a resource that had to be protected. As for the bureaucracy, it was completely re-staffed with Indians, although one very old official I interviewed, having served for a few months under the British in 1947, recounted that for the individual officials the transfer was negligible and merely “a matter of swapping the flags on our uniforms”.²⁸ The new administration also enlarged its territories to almost the double extent as the formerly princely states across India were assimilated, increasing the forest resource base greatly (Guha 2007).

The main change is found in the rhetoric on forest policy, which came to be defined as a key matter of national security (GoI 1952). The Soviet-inspired development strategies India embarked on under Jawaharlal Nehru placed considerable emphasis on the nationalisation of natural resources and a massive push for industrialisation, in which forests played a central role (Gadgil and Guha 1992; Guha 2007). To reflect this importance, a national forest policy was adopted (GoI 1952), uplifting the role systematised production-forestry would have in the emerging new economy. Heavy subsidies were introduced in order to increase the production of pulp, plywood and paper; lucrative industries which the British had paid less attention to in favour of raw timber. Simultaneously, vast areas of natural forests were demolished to make way for hydroelectric dams and mines (Gadgil and Guha 1992). As regards the distribution and acknowledgement of property rights to forest communities, the colonial, exclusionary approach was reaffirmed

Village communities in the neighbourhood of a forest will naturally make greater use of its products for the satisfaction of their domestic and agricultural needs. Such use, however, should in no event be permitted at the cost of national interests [emphasis added]. The accident of village being situated close to a forest does not prejudice the right of the country as a whole to receive the benefits of a national asset. The scientific conservation of a forest inevitably involves the regulation of rights and the restriction of the privileges of user depending upon the value and importance of the forest, however, irksome such restraint may be to the neighbouring areas (GoI 1952).

²⁷ The region that is now Kerala consisted prior to independence (and state formation in 1956) of three regions; Malabar, which was part of the British controlled Madras Presidency, Travancore and Cochin, both independent kingdoms. From a forest management perspective the differences between the three were small, if any. In the independent princely states, management models highly similar to the British-colonial were adopted early on (KFD 2015). During fieldwork, there were no visible differences in management practices that could be attributed to the historical regions of Kerala.
²⁸ Interview 11, CF (retired).
In present-day Kerala, widespread deforestation was the norm for several decades before and after independence, largely made possible by government subsidies to greatly increase food production, and policies encouraging people to migrate to upland forest areas from the coast to establish cash-crop plantations. This triggered a massive land-grabbing process which ultimately led to extreme land scarcity we find in Kerala today (Menon 2008; Singh 2016). Overall, independence led to few deviations from the colonial pattern of forestry as regards rights and access to the resource for ordinary people, and also highly limited concerns for environmental aspects of forest management. Large-scale clear-felling of natural forests continued, often to be replaced by monocultures of economically attractive species or wholesale conversions into agricultural land. This was in part facilitated by the fact that the state governments following independence had full legislative power of the forests, allowing them to pursue policies which promoted economic development rather than conservation (Gadgil 2008; Gadgil and Guha 1992).

The emergence of forest conservation

In the early 1970’s the impacts of the prevailing policies were made apparent; the unmitigated clearing of natural forests and the conversion of forestland to agriculture or mining was taking a toll on local environments, wildlife populations were dwindling, and social unrest began to amount (Gadgil and Guha 1992). Under the premiership of Indira Gandhi a few important steps were taken as regards conservation, notably a Wildlife Protection Act (GoI 1972) and efforts to create several new national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Encouraged by international donors, these were set up around the country, creating what is today some of the country’s foremost tourist destinations. Yet, the social implications were vast. Conservation at the time, and to a large extent still, aimed to keep human presence in natural environments at a bare minimum; the national parks were seen as ecological islands which had to be protected from the outside world, even if it meant evicting forest-dwelling communities and restricting their access further (Gadgil 2008; Kashwan 2017). This model of ‘fortress conservation’ continues in much of the Global South and has been criticised in a wide body of literature for its reliance on top-down management approaches, the use of armed forest guards, the fencing off of multifunctional forests, and in India, the focus on only flagship-species like the tiger or elephant, rather than on the wider ecosystem. Criticism is also directed for persisting with out-dated practices, a refusal to collaborate with professional ecologists, and for excluding local communities entirely in the management process (Brockington 2002; Gadgil 2008; Kashwan 2017; Springate-Baginski and Blaikie 2007).

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29 Interview 71, Michael Tharakan, academic.
30 To illustrate, Narain et al. (2005) estimated that at the end of the nineteenth century there was some 20000-40000 tigers in India. In the first nationwide tiger-census in 1972 this figure had dropped to a tragic 1800 individuals.
Today, conservation and wildlife management is an integral part of the forest administration’s agenda and there is evidence that the protected areas are in fact very well protected, but cover no more than 4.9 per cent of India’s geographical, a figure ecologists hold as much too low for a country with a highly rich and varied biodiversity (Gadgil 2011; UNDP 2012). The parks and sanctuaries are often small and fragmented, seldom covering the de facto boundaries of the forest, leaving ecologically important fringe areas unprotected and open to exploitation. Moreover, many of the early conservation initiatives were introduced into an institutional landscape where the state forest departments were used to carrying out governance along the lines of the 1927 act; by top-down command and control and the separation of human livelihoods and society from natural environments, eliminating much of the deep potential for community-based conservation to emerge as a viable alternative.

During this period the inability of the individual states to promote conservation was addressed too. The Centre, fearing that the state governments too often gave into local pressures to convert forests into plantations or clearing them for public infrastructure, amended the constitution in 1976 and declared forests as a policy area where responsibility and legislative power would be shared between the Centre and the states, which it still is today (Chaturvedi 2016). A justification for the continued check on the individual states’ authorities was given by the former Union Minister of the MoEF who stated shortly that “No Chief Minister would ever say no to a new project. If states are given the final veto right for clearances there will be a yes in every case.” The centralisation of legislative powers was further consolidated by the passing of a Forest Conservation Act (FCA) in 1980 (GoI 1988). It is highly restrictive but rather than targeting ordinary people directly, it restricts the ability of state governments to divert any forestlands to any non-forest land-use or activity without approval from the Centre; which if given, also requires compensatory afforestation projects elsewhere. The FCA has been widely criticised for contributing to excessive bureaucratisation of forest management; even for the most minor changes (for instance building wells or tiny clinics in rural areas) approval has to be sought from the Centre – in practice the Supreme Court of India – leading to very long time lags (Rosencranz and Lele 2008; Sivaramakrishnan 2011). At present, a National Green Tribunal (NGT) exists with the authority to rule in any case concerning environmental conservation broadly (GoI 2010; Ramesh 2015), which on the one hand has led to relatively speedier rulings, but has on the other institutionalised the inability of state governments and forest departments to take even the smallest actions involving conversion of forestland.

It should also be mentioned that from a long-term perspective the rates of deforestation in Kerala and the wider Western Ghats region are currently at a historical low-point, and has even seen a small net growth of forest cover in

31 Interview 87, Jairam Ramesh, former Union Minister of MoEF.
the period 2011-2015. This is however largely attributable to increases in commercial plantations rather than natural regeneration (MoEF 2015), but also due to reportedly stronger monitoring of forestlands to prevent illegal logging and strict enforcement of clear-felling bans (KFD 2015). While my own fieldwork found that encroachment, illegal felling and ganja cultivation still poses a problem for the forest department, the recent growth should be set against the 40 per cent forest cover loss in all of the southern Western Ghats during the twentieth century (Gadgil 2011).

The modern era – people’s participation and ecological services

Only towards the end of the 1980’s did a break with the earlier British and post-independence patterns of forestry occur. A new National Forest Policy (NFP) was written in 1988, replacing the previous one from 1952, and also remains the latest one. It presented a new vision for forestry and was the first public declaration to acknowledge that the existence and needs of forest-dwelling communities would be at least equally important to more industrial uses of forests (MoEF 1988). It came about after a growing dissatisfaction with the continued degradation of the forests, despite the efforts of the 1980’s and states in its preamble;

However, over the years, forests in the country have suffered serious depletion. This is attributable to relentless pressures arising from ever-increasing demand for fuel wood, fodder and timber, inadequacy of protection measures; diversion of forest lands to non-forest uses without ensuring compensatory afforestation and essential environmental safeguards; and the tendency to look upon forests as revenue earning resource. The need to review the situation and to evolve, for the future, a new strategy of forest conservation has become imperative. Conservation includes preservation, maintenance, sustainable utilization, restoration, and enhancement of the natural environment (MoEF 1988).

It holds important symbolic value; for the first time, local communities were not singled out as responsible for past environmental degradation, and it also expands the scope of conservation to “ensure environmental stability and maintenance of ecological balance including atmospheric equilibrium which is vital for sustenance of all life forms, human, animal and plant” and that for “the conservation of total biological diversity, the network of national parks, sanctuaries, biosphere reserves and other protected areas should be strengthened and extended adequately” (MoEF 1988). Hence, conservation is to include environmental services and total biodiversity rather than just focusing on certain flagship species or amount of forest cover.

Around the same time decentralisation reforms began to sweep across the developing world, promoting empowered governments at the local level with the aim of strengthening the participation and agency of ordinary poor people (Faguet 2014). In India the vast system known as panchayati raj was
introduced by a constitutional amendment in 1992 and was implemented in the states over the next few years. It established local government bodies at the village (gram panchayat), block and district levels in all states. The intention was to strengthen village self-governance by empowering the village assemblies (grama sabhas), notably including a reservation of at least one third women in the councils, a figure that has later been raised to 50 per cent women, as well as reservations for indigenous groups (Chaudhuri 2006; Dunning and Nilekani 2013). In the case of forests, decentralisation reforms have to date been implemented in over sixty countries and the trend continues despite amassing evidence that the two overall, desired outcomes, improved forest conditions and enhanced forest livelihoods, are far from automatic and often fail to materialise (FAO 2016; Wright et al. 2016). Despite decentralisation, central governments still legally own the vast majority (89 per cent) of the developing world’s forests. In India it is 86 per cent, leaving a very small proportion in communal ownership as privatisation of forests keeps increasing (Whiteman et al. 2015).

**Joint Forest Management (JFM)**

The most notable impact of the new policy was the creation of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) program in 1990. It originated in a very short circular memo send to all state governments from the Centre, and has now grown to be the world’s largest program of decentralised, participatory forest governance, in which daily management and authority is shared between forest departments and villages (MoEF 1990). At present, it has been implemented in all states of India, with close to 120,000 JFM institutions at the village level, managing some 30 per cent of the country’s forests (UNDP 2012).

It was formulated as a more liberal and inclusive approach, in which the objective is to protect forests through collaboration between villagers and officials. On the village-side, registered JFM-committees representing the community are entrusted with protecting the forests from fires, poaching and illegal grazing, and in exchange gain a share of the revenues from timber sales and the permission to extract small quantities of minor forest produce for consumption. JFM also requires a mandatory representation of at least one third women in the committees, reflecting the same quota level that applies for local government councils in the wider administrative system (Agarwal 2010; MoEF 1990). Villagers are also given a more active role in afforestation and tree-planting projects, most commonly on wastelands or previously deforested areas.

Afforestation activities have been experimented with since the 1970’s, often under the name social forestry; an effort to plant trees en masse outside forests, along roads, canal banks and on government-owned wastelands in order to reach a stated, but unrealistic target of 33.3 per cent forest cover (Fleischman 2012; Ramesh 2015). The intention throughout has been to provide a still growing rural population with an alternative source of fuel-wood and biomass to relieve pressures on natural forests, and more recently
to mitigate climate change by enhancing carbon sinks in forests. In recent years a ‘National Mission on Green India’ has been launched, aiming to double the areas under afforestation. However, it should also be noted that planted forests are much inferior to natural ones in terms of carbon sequestration and storage (Fleischman 2014; Kishwan et al. 2012).

Moreover the forest departments are supposed to help villages develop working micro-plans which detail local needs for improvements to community development, such as building schools, wells and training centres. In Kerala the program was not implemented until 1998 and goes under the name Participatory Forest Management (PFM) and the village committees are termed Vana Samrakshana Samithis (VSS), created with the intention that they should operate in conjunction with the KFD. Similarly to elsewhere in India, the program has attracted much international funding, especially from the World Bank who was an enthusiastic proponent in the early stages (UNDP 2012)

JFM is the event in Indian forestry that has attracted most academic interest in the form of evaluations and studies. It is generally found that while some positive aspects have come out of JFM, such as reversals in deforestation rates and enhanced livelihoods in some states, it is largely seen as yet another stalled intervention in a range of failed policies and programs. The heart of the criticism is that forestry is de facto still a very centralised and bureaucracy-dominated policy sphere, curbing participation rates and the influence of villages in decision-making. While it has been suggested that India has transitioned better to participatory institutions than countries with a less democratic tradition after independence, it is found that officials, in their capacity as secretaries of the committees, have run them single-handedly, or developed patronage-based relationships with local elites (see Lund 2015; Springate-Baginski and Blaikie 2007; Sundar 2000; Sundar et al. 2001).

In a set of survey-based studies of officials working on participatory forestry (Kumar and Kant 2005; Kumar et al. 2007) it was found that the hierarchical organisation and bureaucratic culture of the forest departments impedes the implementation of participatory programs. However, these studies do not engage the deeper-lying factors, motivations and influences, and focus exclusively on resistance to reforms, neglecting the possibility that officials may be the agents of change. This contrasts with Joshi (2000), who found that frontline forest officials in West Bengal enthusiastically implemented JFM in order to alleviate violent conflict with local people, and Verma (2004) who notes that top-level officials in Madhya Pradesh were the strongest supporters of the program as it represented an opportunity for them to work with a new, innovative program which stood in contrast to much of the colonial-influenced forest activities.

Much like the literature on CPR institutions and the state in India, most of this scholarship studies the behaviour and actions of forest officials from the perspective of communities, and often confines their scope of analysis to the most local level, lending little support in the way of wider lessons. Vasan
(2002) for instance examines forest guards (the lowest ranking official) in Himachal Pradesh and Robbins (2000) looks at corruption among forest officials in a Rajasthan wildlife sanctuary, both in northern India. Each illustrates how forest officials are deeply embedded in the local socio-political and cultural-legal context and are thus heavily influenced by such factors in their everyday work, echoing many of the findings in the literature on street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 1980), but are based on very geographically confined case-studies.

Despite the (new) forest policy and JFM, biodiversity loss and species extinction has persisted into the twenty-first century, leading to the enactment of the Biological Diversity Act (BDA) in 2002 to ensure better protection of local ecosystems and ecological services. The act empowers local governments to form Biodiversity Management Committees (BMC) to promote conservation and spread knowledge locally, and also keep a database over the local biodiversity stock (GoI 2002). It is a step towards a more multifunctional appreciation of forests and the goals of human livelihoods and ecological conservation, but yet again implementation has been weak and in many villages BMC’s remain a paper-artefact (Gadgil 2007; UNDP 2012).

Recognition of indigenous rights

In India, as in most of the tropical Global South, indigenous groups are often the poorest and most marginalised communities located in forest areas, suffering from low human development levels and often being wholly dependent on the forest for livelihoods (Guha 2014; Kashwan 2017). India’s 104 million indigenous (corresponding to 8.6 per cent of the national population) are some of the most deprived groups in society (GoI 2011; Saxena et al. 2010) and have historically suffered severe injustices. It reached a low-point in the early 2000’s when the MoEF (based on a misinterpreted order from the Supreme Court) ordered state forest departments to start evicting illegal encroachers, which according to the 1927 Forest Act is more or less everyone dwelling in or occupying some piece of forestland. While this in principle would include large plantation owners, the vast majority of the targeted groups were indigenous and landless peasants who have lived in the same forest area for generations. The evictions were brutal with multiple reports of fatal outcomes, and most indigenous groups lacked the strength and political capacity to resist (Kashwan 2017). Kerala saw particularly violent evictions, including the use of intoxicated elephants to demolish mud-thatch houses

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32 By indigenous people or groups I refer to what the vast majority of respondents termed tribals or occasionally adivasis. These are the original inhabitants of the Indian sub-continent and are recognised in the Indian constitution as a historically marginalised group, and enjoy special protective arrangements against discrimination. In the constitution from 1950 they are referred to as ‘Scheduled Tribes’ and a key government department figuring a lot in this book is the Tribal Development Department. The term ‘tribal’ – though used a lot by respondents – is not without controversy for which reason I use the more neutral term ‘indigenous people, groups or hamlets’ in this book, or occasionally ‘Scheduled Tribes’. See Beteille (1998) for further discussion.
and the death of five Scheduled Tribe members by police shootings (Bijoy and Raman 2003).

It did however trigger a nationwide political movement called the ‘Campaign for Survival and Dignity’ (CSD) that began advocating for enhanced rights and security for indigenous people. Eventually, this resulted in a landmark piece of legislation (put forward by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs rather than the MoEF) passed in 2006 known as the ‘Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act’, or FRA for short.

The act sought to undo historical injustices acted upon indigenous communities by restoring the land and property rights they had been historically denied (GoI 2006). Defying massive opposition about the ecological destruction that would occur if forests were handed over to indigenous groups it created a mechanism through which the grama sabhas can establish Forest Rights Committees (FRC) in order to assess and verify land right claims from both individuals and communities. These claims are then further reviewed at the district-level by a coalition of local representatives from the tribal, forest and revenue departments. The prerequisite for filing a claim is providing evidence that a household had been in de facto possession and use of a piece of land for at least three generations and that it belongs to a scheduled tribe (GoI 2006). If successful, the household or community gains formal property and user rights to the piece of forestland, and are also permitted to construct schools, health clinics and other buildings aiming for human development on what was previously strictly regulated areas (thus establishing a unique exception to the provisions in FCA 1980 about ‘non-forestry activities’). To mitigate concerns about how committed the forest departments would be to implement, the framework for assessing land claims gave much authority to the tribal departments, a decision which was fiercely opposed and criticised by the forest administration (Kashwan 2017).33

Since implementation began in 2008 the process has been controversial and fraught with conflicts, with national evaluations finding that it has been obstructed or unnecessarily delayed by the forest departments (Saxena et al. 2010), and that deep-rooted power asymmetries and inequities in indigenous areas hinder many groups from filing claims, or that the claims were dismissed early on (Kashwan 2017). Implementation in Kerala has received mixed results (Sathyapalan and Reddy 2010), but it should be noted that the state has a Scheduled Tribe population of a mere 360,000, or just above one per cent of the population. While poor and marginalised relative to the rest of the state’s population some scholars claim that they are better off than their extremely marginalised peers in central India (Heller 2012; Oommen 2014), but still lead a very fragile existence, marked by forest-dependency and uncertainty.

33 Interview 18, CCF; Interview 19, CF; Interview 80, Official, Department of Tribal Development.
Ecological conservation reemphasised, and political opposition

In 2009 the government of Kerala published new policies for the forests and wildlife, and updated guidelines for the PFM program (GoK 2009b, 2009a). Each was written in the language of contemporary natural resource governance doctrines, accentuating themes such as people’s participation, ecosystem management, and cross-jurisdictional and interagency collaboration. For instance, the new forest policy opens by stating that

The lives of the people and the forests are closely intertwined, mainly in the highlands. It is not possible to separate forests and people. The rural people and tribals are dependent on forests for their livelihood needs to a large extent while the urban people are more dependent on the goods and services that forests provide. Any effort to conserve forests must therefore be a people’s programme and should develop as a people’s movement (GoK 2009a: 4).

While the stated visions, objectives and strategies read similar to what could be found in any current policy document of that kind in the world today, it is noteworthy that no mention is made of the need for any organisational re-structuring or any new mechanisms or forums in which participation and collaboration may be institutionalised. Put differently, the goals and targets of policy implementation are new, but the *de facto* procedural structure for it remains much the same.

In the early 2010’s intense debates on environmental protection and ecological conservation in the Western Ghats resurfaced with the commission of two high-level expert panels and reports by the GoI. The first, the Gadgil Commission Report (2011) sought to classify areas (a total of 64 per cent) of the entire Western Ghats into three *ecologically sensitive areas* which each would enjoy a degree of increasingly strict environmental protection. It recommended a decidedly decentralised structure for conservation, with *grama sabhas* as the critical decision-making body. The village assemblies across all six states would be coordinated by an autonomous authority, creating a system with strong elements of polycentricity, while simultaneously reducing the scope of influence of the state forest departments. Upon its release it met immediate controversy, not least in Kerala, where a resistance movement spearheaded by the influential Christian Church (representing large landowners) vehemently protested the report’s conclusions as being too en-

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34 The Western Ghats stretch from Gujarat in northwest India all along the west coast to the southernmost tip of India. In Kerala they dominate most of the state’s mountainous eastern districts along the borders with Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Of Kerala's total geographical area ($38863 \text{ km}^2$ – comparable to Switzerland) roughly 29 per cent ($11309 \text{ km}^2$) is under forest cover, a figure relatively larger than the national average of 19 per cent (MoEF 2015). They are extremely rich in biodiversity and have been designated a UNESCO world natural heritage site, with a majority of sub-sites located in Kerala (KFD 2015). A majority of the forests in the state are tropical wet evergreen at lower elevations and montane subtropical in the mountains, fed by some of India’s highest levels of rainfall (roughly eight months a year) with some 40 perennial rivers running from the high peaks down to the Arabian Sea, supplying tens of millions with water in the large cities.
vironmentally friendly and anti-development. The executive government at the Centre, fearing a political backlash ahead of the 2014 elections, quickly rejected the conclusions and commissioned a new expert panel, resulting in the Kasturirangan Report (2013). In contrast to the Gadgil Report this one divided the Western Ghats into two landscapes, either natural or cultural. In the former category, which only included already protected areas, the forest departments would be given increased mandate and jurisdiction, while the latter category would be largely exempted from any form of environmental regulation. With only 37 per cent being natural landscapes, the ecological impact could be devastating.

At the time of fieldwork for this book debates were ongoing in the media and at times infectious. While environmental activists and a handful frontline officials enthusiastically supported the Gadgil Report, some of the more senior officials spoke in favour of the Kasturirangan Report as that would increase the department’s authorities, but on the whole forest officials were indifferent to the reports, suggesting that they were still just proposals and not final legislation. Yet importantly, the debates shine light on the role the political environment plays, and the relative weakness of the MoEF vis-à-vis the rest of the government when economic development interests are challenged. The new BJP government, incumbent since May 2014, vowed to review all of India’s environmental protection laws and governance structures, but as of early 2018 few drastic measures have been taken and the vast majority of the laws and policies mentioned above are still in place, though the future remains uncertain.

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35 Interview 30, DFO; Interview 75, VS Vijayan, academic/activist; Interview 76, PK Ravindran, academic/activist.
36 Interview 72, RVG Menon, academic/activist; Interview 75, VS Vijayan, academic/activist; Interview 78, MK Prasad, academic/activist; Interviews 35 & 37, DFOs; Interviews 46 & 63, RFOs
37 Interview 3, CF (retired); Interview 4 & 18, CCFs.
The Formal Structure

The Indian forest administration constitutes a complex “organisation of organisations” (North et al. 2009) and is present throughout the whole federal state, with the formal mandate to govern almost a fifth of India’s land area. This section concisely describes the structure of the administration from the national to the local level.

National level

Since 1976 forest policy and legislation is shared between the centre (New Delhi) and the individual states. In the capital the MoEF is responsible for the setting of national forest policies, enforcing national laws and acts, and controlling the elite-corps Indian Forest Service (IFS). All acts are passed through the Lok Sabha, the national parliament. However, the MoEF is often given considerable freedom of interpretation and much power rests with this body, including the formulation of policy resolutions, such as the 1988 NFP.

The policy process is also influenced by the Supreme Court (Rosencranz and Lele 2008; Sivaramakrishnan 2011) and other ministries, such as finance and tribal development, often have an influence too, which was made evident in the drafting of the FRA. Though the MoEF represents the whole union, Chaturvedi (2016) highlights the important fact that the MoEF also is greatly influenced by the composition of the coalition in power at the Centre. For much of the modern history of India the coalitions have been made up of both national and regional parties in order to reach a majority, for which reason critics claim that larger and more powerful states and their Chief Ministers have held a disproportionally large influence on the ministry and the policy-making process (Chaturvedi 2016). Since May 2014 the BJP under Narendra Modi holds its own absolute majority.

At the national level we also find the Indian Forest Service (IFS), originally formed in 1966 but in practice a descendent of the British-colonial forest service. It is responsible for the recruitment and training of higher officials, which occurs at the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy (IG-NFA) in Dehradun in northern India. Recruitment occurs either through the nationwide civil service exam open to all Indians, or by promotion of senior officials from the individual state forest services (Das 2010). Intensive training is undertaken in Dehradun for two years where officials take some thirty different courses and go on a six-month field tour of the whole country before being assigned to a state at random where they then spend most of their career. As such, many of the top IFS-officials of the KFD are not natives of Kerala and those who are have usually gone through the route of promotion from the state forest service. In the past the training of IFS officials has been portrayed as anachronous and still heavily influenced by colonial legacies,

38 The following subsections draw heavily on the Kerala Forest Department’s latest available administrative report (KFD 2015) as well as Interview 2, CCF (retired) and Interview 9, CCF.
focusing on the much out-dated scientific practices of forest management. Moreover, it has been said to focus narrowly on hard physical training and character-development aiming to preserve an esprit de corps in the service which puts loyalty to the IFS first and suppresses personal opinions. However, the existing studies (Hannam 1999, 2000) and statements by respondents reflecting these views largely refer to an earlier period and training has in more recent years been updated with a new curricula better adapted to contemporary forest practices, although the IFS still only accepts candidates with a master’s degree in a natural science subject (Fleischman 2012).³⁹

State level
At the state level the organisation of each forest department is relatively uniform across all 29 states, structured in a hierarchical, nested setup. The state forest departments are accountable to not only the MoEF, but also the state government where a Minister of Forests (typically also holding the portfolio for wildlife, environment and climate change) makes up one of the cabinet positions. During the time of fieldwork for this book (late 2013 – early 2015) Kerala was governed by a Congress Party-led coalition (2011 – 2016) but lost the 2016 elections to a left-wing coalition led by the CPI (M).

The KFD states that its mission is “conserving forests, such that ecosystem goods and services; flow to forest dependent communities and to society, without compromising on ecological integrity”, whereas its broader vision is “improving and sustaining healthy living conditions through conservation of biodiversity, protection of environment, soil, water etcetera, and empowering forest tribes, women and other weaker sections of the society through scientific, transparent and responsible methods” (KFD 2015), declarations echoing the spirit of the 1988 forest policy.

The head of the forest department is the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Head of Force (PCCF) who is appointed by the Chief Minister and is based at the headquarters in the state capital Thiruvananthapuram. Below the PCCF there are multiple Additional PCCFs (APCCF) responsible for various branches (known as ‘wings’) of the forest department, such as the territorial (the largest by far and the focus of this study), planning and development, social forestry, wildlife, vigilance and policing and so forth.

At the headquarters a diversity of different officials are found, responsible for different aspects of the general administration within each of the two wings, such as planning, human resources, training and financing. Each official will typically have a number of deputies in addition to the countless number of clerks ubiquitous in any Indian state agency. The reason for the high number of deputies is the promotion-scheme within the KFD; after ten years of service an official is automatically promoted from the field-based Division level to an administrative desk-job either at the headquarters or at

³⁹ Interviews 89 & 90, Senior Forest Officials, IGNFA.
the Circle level (see below). As there are many more Divisions than Circles (and just one headquarter), and rates of promotion are higher than retirement rates, a continuous creation of new, additional positions has been set in motion, increasing the de facto chain of command of the administration by several more steps than the seven conventional tiers (KFD 2015). Here the political connections and linkages to other actors are relatively strong, including vertical connections to the MoEF in New Delhi (through the IFS-network) as well as the Government of Kerala and the Minister of Forests. The whole department employs some 6700 people across all wings, but a relatively small proportion (some 350) of these are professional forest officials, the vast majority being clerks and other office staff (roughly 1200), drivers, peons and handymen (some 1000), and forest guards (close to 3000) (KFD 2015).

Local level
Moving down from the headquarters we find a nested organisation which spans the whole way down to the village level, with various forms of political embeddedness depending on the tier at hand. Kerala is first divided into two Forest Regions (North and South) which in turn split into five Forest Circles. Circle offices are usually found in larger cities and are headed by a Conservator of Forests (CF) whose job is largely administrative, serving to connect the operational field level with the headquarters.40

Below the Circles are Forest Divisions (of which there are 35), whose head offices also are located in slightly larger towns or cities and are headed by Division Forest Officers (DFO). These sometimes overlap with the political-administrative unit ‘District’ which is part of the India-wide panchayati raj system of decentralised government. In many cases the head offices of each will be found in the same town or even the same compound, suggesting a closer relationship between the DFO and the District Collector (DC), the top-ranking civil servant in the district. The offices of the DFO will be fairly large, employing numerous clerks, scribes and accountants and a handful of deputies to the DFO, confusingly termed Assistant Conservator of Forests (ACF). While these belong to the state forest service, DFOs are almost always members of the IFS, either having reached it after many years of service at lower ranks, or through direct training in Dehradun after which they enter the hierarchy at the Division level. For this reason some DFOs will be no more than 25-30 years old (the latter category) while others well over 50-55 (the former category). The DFO is a prestigious title within the forest administration and is the main link between the field and the upper administrative echelons of the KFD.

Next we find Forest Ranges (of which there are 103), headed by Range Forest Officers (RFO) which occasionally overlaps with the taluk (block)

40 The two Forest Regions are headed by a Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF).
level of the *panchayati raj* system and are located in slightly smaller towns. RFOs are considered to be the backbone of the forest administration as much of the field-based implementation work is carried out from the Range office. Despite being found far down in the hierarchy, an RFO position typically requires at least a master’s degree in a natural science subject, a strong command of English and intense training for at least two years with the state forest service. While the compounds at the Range level will not be as large and well-staffed as those at the Division level they typically have a number of deputies and clerks, and access to at least one 4x4 jeep and a number of motorbikes (while the Division level often has a larger carpool).

At the bottom of the hierarchy we find two levels, first Forest Sections and below that Forest Beats. These are often small geographical areas and in the case of Kerala (being a relatively small state) far from all Ranges will split into both Sections and Beats. They are headed by SFOs (also called ‘Foresters’) and BFOs (also called ‘Forest Guards’), respectively and will have their offices in very small towns (for Sections) or a tiny compound of one or two huts adjacent to a village (for Beats). Recruitment to the SFO position usually requires a high school degree though in Kerala several SFOs I encountered had additional degrees and training, and would have a good command of English too. BFO/Forest Guard positions require less in terms of formal training and English levels were generally much lower. Lastly, certain Sections and Beats also employ a large number of Forest Watchmen, a position below the BFO. These individuals are usually recruited from local (often indigenous) communities on a weekly basis, sometimes part of job creation programs by the KFD, and usually have the simple task of patrolling and monitoring the forest by walking very long distances days on end. There are approximately 180 Sections and 300 Beats. Table 3 summarises the text above. Recall however that close to half of the divisions (and ranges) lacks significant forest cover or are only sparsely covered by primary vegetation.

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41 In Kerala some ranges occasionally divide into a number of forest stations rather than sections and beats, but are staffed with people fulfilling the same function as SFO/BFO.
To anyone who was set foot in an Indian government building – be it a police station, post office or line-department – the ubiquity of red tape will be a familiar sight. In each office I visited there would without exception always be towering stacks of thin, multi-coloured paper sorted into brown folders and tied together in bundles with red string. These stacks invariably fill the desks, bookshelves and cupboards of the offices, occasionally piled close to tipping-point. They bulge out of filing cabinets and are shuffled around the hallways by a myriad of clerks. During my months of fieldwork I saw mouldy folders at the bottom of stacks decaying away in poorly insulated rural offices, as well as yellowing and crumbled-up folders in dry, air-conditioned storage units in the larger urban compounds. Indeed, the faint musky smell of these stacks remains one of my enduring memories from the many hours spent in forest department buildings. What is particularly striking in many offices is the meeting of old and new; side by side with stacks of bundled folders are laptops, printers and cell phones of the latest brand and kind, producing a bizarre contrast. At times the whole government apparatus seems to be fuelled by paper. At one forest department compound where I spent a few days I went to the front office to see if I could borrow a pad of paper and a pen as I had temporarily misplaced my own. The clerk looked uncertain and asked if I had brought the correct requisition form.

Table 3. Hierarchical levels of the Kerala Forest Department

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Top Position</th>
<th>Number of jurisdictions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>PCCF</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>CCF</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle</td>
<td>CF</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division</td>
<td>DFO</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>RFO</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>SFO (‘Forester’)</td>
<td>~180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beat</td>
<td>BFO (‘Forest Guard’)</td>
<td>~300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Internal World of the Forest Department

To anyone who was set foot in an Indian government building – be it a police station, post office or line-department – the ubiquity of red tape will be a familiar sight. In each office I visited there would without exception always be towering stacks of thin, multi-coloured paper sorted into brown folders and tied together in bundles with red string. These stacks invariably fill the desks, bookshelves and cupboards of the offices, occasionally piled close to tipping-point. They bulge out of filing cabinets and are shuffled around the hallways by a myriad of clerks. During my months of fieldwork I saw mouldy folders at the bottom of stacks decaying away in poorly insulated rural offices, as well as yellowing and crumbled-up folders in dry, air-conditioned storage units in the larger urban compounds. Indeed, the faint musky smell of these stacks remains one of my enduring memories from the many hours spent in forest department buildings. What is particularly striking in many offices is the meeting of old and new; side by side with stacks of bundled folders are laptops, printers and cell phones of the latest brand and kind, producing a bizarre contrast. At times the whole government apparatus seems to be fuelled by paper. At one forest department compound where I spent a few days I went to the front office to see if I could borrow a pad of paper and a pen as I had temporarily misplaced my own. The clerk looked uncertain and asked if I had brought the correct requisition form.
Inscription

As the descriptive vignette above illustrates, the mundane practices of the forest department generates a tremendous paper-trail, and writing reports is a much time-consuming activity for frontline officials. When following them around, several early mornings and evenings were spent in their offices as they had to deal with routine paperwork; filling out sheets and ledgers in meticulous handwriting, and assigning code-numbers to various documents. The practice of bureaucratic inscription – writing and filing reports, memorandums and standardised forms mandated in various guidelines (Gupta 2012; Hull 2012) – is a defining characteristic of the Indian bureaucracy and the phenomenon has been accurately captured by Akhil Gupta in his ethnography of a block development office in northern Uttar Pradesh.

From the standpoint of the bureaucrat, one of the virtues of the form as a genre of writing is that it can be easily stored, compiled, and organised...In the Indian bureaucracy, the key device for the storing and retrieval of information is the file. The file is the critical unit that organizes bureaucratic life. It is a material object, but it attains a life of its own that often looms larger than that of the people who are supposedly acting on it. What is written in a file or what is missing from it can exert a much greater influence on a decision than the ideas of the person making the decision. People who want to forestall a decision or bureaucrats who wish to teach clients a lesson often collaborate with a lowly office worker to make a file disappear. The wheels of government grind to a halt without a file...The importance of the file was impressed upon me by an officer who said, “If it is not in the file, it does not exist” (Gupta 2012: 145-46).

In short, a file or form is sacrosanct and without it nothing happens and nothing materialises, or as Gupta puts it; the motor turning the wheels of the government stops. This tradition explains the vast paper-trail and abundance of documents visible in every government office. The majority of paperwork consists of going through standardised forms comprising voluminous amounts of details and statistics on the four categories of tasks listed above. But importantly, the reporting is consistently focused on technical aspects of forestry lending itself to quantifiable measures and systematised categories like growth rates in tree plantations, amounts of saplings distributed, or kilometres of fences erected. It follows the format and content of the division working plans, the formal guiding documents for much of the policy work officials are charged with carrying out (MoEF 2014b). They are prepared for a ten-year period and are massive, cumbersome volumes replete with statistics, and are a legacy of colonial forest management, where the predominant policy task consisted of timber production and plantation. The ten-year time frames were criticised by officials for lacking relevance to what they actually have to do with regards to social aspects of forestry, but also in matters of
biodiversity and wildlife conservation, tasks requiring more flexibility and shorter timeframes.\textsuperscript{42}

The plans are very coarse and difficult to use. They have a span of ten years and are supposed to include everything that could happen during this period, all the activities are there. How can you plan for ten years? So much is there that could happen in that time. Of course it is useful for tree-planting activities but all the human activities? Events change…and for people living under hard conditions, a ten year plan is useless.\textsuperscript{43}

The institutionalised practice of routine paperwork and reporting takes both time and energy from the officials. The whole process was explained quite methodically by a DFO I spent a few days with. Once his office receives a plethora of information and statistics from the subordinate RFOs (and before that, SFOs), a clerk will take copies – almost always handwritten – of the files and produce a report summarising the received information. The clerk will bring the report into his room and he will look at it and approve it by stamping and signing. The clerk will then assemble the papers in a brown folder with red string before handing it to a courier who brings it to the office of the conservator of forests (CF). A new set of clerks unpack the folder, take copies, and contribute additional writing before taking it to the CF for further approval and stamping.\textsuperscript{44} This procedure is repeated a few more times until offices spanning from the beat or section level up to the headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram have read, approved, stamped and copied the forms. Eventually, the folders generated along the way are stored away into various filing-cabinets to remain there – as far as he could tell – perpetually.\textsuperscript{45} On the follow-up question if anyone ever reads the report the answer – similar to almost all other interviewed officials – was a shrug and a “no”.

Unidirectional reporting

This is a second distinctive bureaucratic task officials spent a lot of time doing. Here an important dividing-line runs through the organisation. Up to the division-level and the DFO position, observed meetings and debriefings between frontline officials tended to focus on what \textit{de facto} occurs in the field. They would talk about visits to communities or local government offices, or discuss tasks and strategies occurring within the collaborative networks; issues returned to throughout the next three chapters. Beyond the

\textsuperscript{42} Interviews 30 & 33, DFOs; Interviews 46, 53 & 58, RFOs; Interview 61, SFO.
\textsuperscript{43} Interview 61, SFO.
\textsuperscript{44} During almost all interviews conducted in KFD offices, the meetings were interrupted several times when the respondents were given new bundles of files by an assistant, which they had to sign and stamp, or simply give further instructions about. Some would be very pedagogical about what had to be changed in the files; others would lash out and reprimand the assistant for a poorly done job.
\textsuperscript{45} Interview 38, DFO.
division-level the situation changes and the role of the DFO as the linking position between the operational frontline and the upper mainly administrative levels becomes apparent. In the latter case the DFOs live up to the role of a traditional *Weberian bureaucrat*, dutifully reporting upwards in the hierarchy where formal protocol is more revered. DFO respondents would suggest that the unidirectional transfer of information is of central concern in this context. To illustrate

I report regularly to the conservator of forests, and sometimes he takes me with him to the chief conservator of forests. When I report to them they will demand to know what is occurring in this division, what I am doing, what the range officers are doing and so on…[MW: Do they ever go to the field themselves?] Very rarely, so they rely on reports from me…Much of the time they prefer to see activities done strictly by the book, following the working plans. Then I need to know what is occurring in the ranges; if there is some reason for complaints from the public or other departments then I know it first. I will tell them matters are under control and in accordance with the working plans.47

We do things differently in the field, we have to…No I do not report that upwards. I write what I should and fill out the forms, but think before I write to avoid complication.48

It is important to clarify that the files and reports do not contain lies or made-up numbers. As mentioned the vast majority of the routine inscription concerns descriptive statistics and highly standardised forms and tables detailing straightforwardly quantifiable activities. If an outside observer would only study these, she could easily be led to believe that all forest officials ever did was for instance to plant trees, measure their growth rates and the quality of the soil, account for the equipment used, and summarise this per forest beat in much detail. The handful debriefing meetings I had the opportunity to witness while following the DFOs frequently took the format of quite short and efficient encounters in which they would recite a number of summary statistics to their superior, occasionally bringing out a ledger or folder to point out a certain figure. The CF or CCF would glance through the material and often do little more than stamp the appropriate papers before dismissing our small entourage. Connected to this is another interesting insight that my DFO respondents first illuminated and which higher-ranking officials also would confirm; that routine inspection visits to the divisions and ranges are fairly uncommon, not least for the officials at CCF level and for those based in Thiruvananthapuram.49 50

46 Interviews 30, 32, 33, 36 & 37, DFOs.
47 Interview 38, DFO.
48 Interview 35, DFO.
49 Interviews 30, 33, 35 & 38, DFOs
50 Interviews 4, 9 & 18, CCFs; Interview 13, APCCF; Interview 25, CCF (retired).
I won’t go to the field unless it’s absolute necessary, which it usually isn’t. Going there takes time and organizing meetings there takes time too. There is little in my work that really requires me to go to the field. [MW: When were you last at a Forest Range?] Many, many years back! I don’t have the time for travelling like that.51

When I was moved to K. [large city] I was very happy at first…But later I would miss spending the day walking around the villages in the reserve and discussing the progress and needful things of our work. Now I just read reports someone else has written…My career now is not forestry, it is reading reports and going to Trivandrum to meet my superiors.52

These statements are somewhat surprising when you take into consideration that travelling any chosen route from any of the large coastal cities (such as Kozhikode or Kochi) to the upland forest districts takes no more than seven or eight hours by jeep (cities like Thrissur or Kottayam even less), and at most one full day from Thiruvananthapuram to the northern districts. In fact, it was one of the least reported tasks senior officials are involved in, when I enquired what they do during a typical working week in interviews. Their answers consistently reflected a very bureaucratic and procedural nature, emphasising functions such as; inspecting reports (from lower levels), writing reports (directed to the higher levels or the MoEF), going through plans, formulating targets, revising plans, signing needful documents, meeting subordinate officials, debriefing my superiors, attending to phone calls, going to the high court, and visiting the Niyamasabha (the state legislative assembly).53 As can be seen, the majority of policy tasks are centred on routine administrative duties; making the cogs of the bureaucratic machinery turn. One recently retired official suggested that

There is a whole chain of work you see, from the beat officer up to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests. It is important that the chain is not interrupted as each official conveys important information from the level below him to the level above him.54

The ostensible tendency for office-based work was reiterated by an eloquent DFO, who stated that the forest department is becoming “an ivory tower of red tape, detached from the ground realities.”55 He shared the opinion that the KFD is becoming increasingly bureaucratic by the year, giving rise to ever-more administrative work and paper-shuffling. Recall the promotion-scheme of the department mentioned earlier in the chapter; after ten years of service a DFO is automatically promoted to the position of CF (if not earlier) and is thus shifted into a more administrative role. The CF is promoted to CCF

51 Interview 13, APCCF.
52 Interview 9, CCF.
53 Based on interviews 1 through 10, 12 through 19, 25 & 26, all senior officials.
54 Interview 21, CF (retired).
55 Interview 30, DFO.
after the same tenure, and the CCF might go on to top positions at the headquarters or in New Delhi (KFD 2015; MoEF 2014a). But since there are many fewer forest circles than divisions for instance, a surplus of senior officials amass at the upper end of the hierarchy, for which reason new positions with the prefix ‘assistant’ or ‘additional’ are created, greatly increasing the actual chain of command. The same articulate DFO stated that “the organisational structure nowadays is more a cylinder or an upside-down pyramid, than a real pyramid. It feels like there are more titles and positions at the top than further down.”

Incentives to comply
Considering the time frontline officials spend on formal inscription and reporting, in addition to the stated obligations to respond to demands and pressures from the grassroots (described further down and in chapter seven), it might not be very strange that they claim to have encumbering workloads. Yet, the diligence they pay to inscription and reporting could also be seen as an odd phenomenon considering the fate of the vast majority of files and documents, and opens up for the question of what motivates them to keep complying. The answer is twofold and has firstly to do with incentives at a personal level, and secondly with incentives related to their ability to even seek out collaboration in the first place. The latter set of incentives requires additional description of the context at hand and will be returned to later on. As for the former I would ask frontline officials, not least the ones I followed around longer, about the importance of this practice. Their incentives appear strong. Some of the respondents acknowledged that they had career ambitions to advance in the ranks of the hierarchy, which rules out scamping with their inscription duties. Yet for the others the predominant motivation was simply to avoid reprimands and possible punishments if they mismanaged their duties. Two DFOs were particularly open about this

For me, I take pride in keeping my reports and books in order. But I also do not wish to make Shri [omitted name] angry and give him a bad name because I did wrong. He is very strict and has disciplined negligence many times.

When I was new to the posting I had difficult time keeping up with all the work I had to do; I missed a number of assignments and I had to go and speak with the Conservator of Forests, to explain and apologise...Rumour of my mistakes then spread and other staff thought I was lazy or unfit for duty.

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56 Interview 30, DFO.
57 Interviews 31, 35 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 46, 48, 60, 62, 66 & 67, RFOs
58 Interviews 29, 34 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 48 & 53, RFOs.
59 Interview 34, DFO.
60 Interview 32, DFO.
While keeping superiors and employers satisfied is sensible in any context, I dare argue from my observations that the working culture in Indian bureaucracies is markedly more hierarchical, strict and moulded in a tradition of deep respect for authority than comparable organisations in the West (see also Aycan et al. 2000).\textsuperscript{61} While frontline officials in Kerala might not work in fear of their superiors and avoid unnecessary interaction, as reported by Vasan (2002) in her study of forest guards in northern India, there seemed to be an implicit sagacity that the formal duties officials are charged with doing should not be mismanaged or neglected.

A culture of transfers

The incentive to strictly comply with routine procedures extends beyond the frontline to also include senior officials. When I asked them – especially those who I managed to ‘sit in’ with and thus have a chance to talk with more informally and causally – what their main and important motivating work factors were, a high proportion mentioned in some way or another the aspiration to secure a transfer to a desirable posting. Within Kerala this usually means the offices of the CCF or the vast headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram, though some mentioned New Delhi and the MoEF as their ultimate goal.\textsuperscript{62}

As discussed earlier in the book, transfers of senior officials within the Indian civil service occurs every five or so years though much subnational variation exists (Das 2010). There is also evidence from a variety of states that the transfer is used as powerful discretionary mechanism by politicians to reward or punish officials (Fleischman 2016; Iyer and Mani 2012), sometimes by means of bribery, though I did not hear openly of such practices during fieldwork, though this might depend on methodological challenges. A few of the senior officials I met with elaborated on this particular transfer culture.\textsuperscript{63} They maintained that personal connections are important when applying for a new posting or when they are up for regularised transfers, and that knowing the right people is essential. At the top positions almost all officials are IFS officers, or part of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), and often know each other well. But even so, they have to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to themselves, suggesting that merit and performance ultimately is the most important aspect. This was also emphasised by non-Malayali officials I met in New Delhi and Dehradun, who stated that Kerala’s overall low corruption levels play in here too, stating that bribery in

\textsuperscript{61} On reflection, I would suggest that this culture and respect for authority and rank extends beyond public bureaucracies, to also include research organisations and universities in India.

\textsuperscript{62} Interviews 4, 9 & 18, CCFs; Interview 7, APCCF; Interviews 8, 10 & 19; CFs; Interview 23, APCCF; Interview 25, CCF, retired.

\textsuperscript{63} Interviews 10 & 19, CFs; Interview 9, CCF.
promotions was rare in that state, even though we cannot be entirely confident based on their statements.64

Given the importance of merit and performance the officials stated that they do their utmost to avoid situations and attention that might stain their future transfer-prospects, which implies being cautious in taking unnecessary initiatives, keeping flawless reporting practices in the jurisdictions they are in charge of, and not getting involved in conflicts that draw media-attention. The last issue seemed particularly important to the senior officials, with one of them pointing out that major newspapers such as The Hindu and Mathrubhumi publish stories on forestry and forest management on a regular basis, and in almost all cases with pictures and names of the concerned officials. They acknowledged that this is very helpful if the news item is of a positive character, while too many negative associations have the direct opposite effect. The following quotes shine light on this line of thinking.

The priority is doing my duty without making noise or getting unnecessary inquiries. See, if I can do that for some years I should reach the headquarters…It limits me too, I have to think before everything I do so it does not disrupt my chances of advancing in the department.65

Yes, it [speaking of transfers] is very important to me, in India much prestige in place of posting…I cannot allow scandals in divisions of my circle but as you have seen [omitted names of two DFOs] keep good shop, very fine reports and nothing embarrassing. It reflects on me if something happens, that I fear.66

My problem is not if this or that target is actually reached or not, my problem is when someone writes in Mathrubhumi that makes me look like the wrong-doer…Then I need to show my commanding officer that I did not do wrong, but the complaint is already there, and remembered.67

**Blame-avoidance as an incentive**

From the perspective of the senior officials, the incentive to maintain the chain-of-command without problems and have their subordinates comply appears logical too. For them to secure desirable transfers and postings, they need to act impeccably and avoid unnecessary attention, or in the very least distance it from themselves. In the public administration literature this is known as blame-avoidance or deniability. The concepts were originally formulated by Weaver (1986) and have been extensively theorised by Hood (2007, 2011). They make the argument that negativity bias; the “cognitive tendency of negative information to produce more activity and impact than positive information” (2007: 192) is a key driver in bureaucratic behaviour.

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64 Interviews 83 & 84, MoEF senior officials; Interview 25, CCF, (retired).
65 Interview 19, CF.
66 Interview 10, CF.
67 Interview 9, CCF.
The issue is not limited to civil servants; it has also been explored in relation to the executive power of the US presidential office (Ellis 1994), crisis management (Boin et al. 2005), and climate change innovations (Howlett 2014; Jordan et al. 2015), with the latter studies finding that the search for blame-avoidance and risk-aversion among decision-makers may lead to little or any policy action and innovation.

Here, the senior officials fear such negativity bias – for instance poor media coverage – and therefore take precautions to not attract unwanted attention, and prefer to sit out their tenure quietly rather than take excessive initiative and action. Hood outlines a number of blame-avoiding strategies typically followed by bureaucrats. One is termed agency strategies; attempts by officials to avoid or limit blame by means of the institutional order in which formal responsibility, competency and jurisdiction is allocated among all officials (2007: 199), which fits the case at hand. In practice it implies avoiding blame by finding a scapegoat and hiding behind the formal allocation of responsibility within an organisation. In other words, officials seek the ability to deny (avoid blame) the knowledge or responsibility for an action (or lack of action) taken (or not taken) by a subordinate official as there is no evidence incriminating them in any way. In its theoretical ideal, it allows an official to distance herself from blame and accountability if an action becomes public, whether controversial or not.

In the setting at hand – where the institution of bureaucratic inscription is deeply permeated and part of the working culture, formal written material becomes a critical asset of blame-avoidance. If a yet higher-ranked official enquires about matters, or requests specific documents they will exist and be in good order, giving that official deniability and the chance to avoid blame. To his best knowledge the subordinates have acted on their own accord, sparing the superior from implication or embarrassment as the action was not mentioned in the report or file. In such cases officials indeed do follow Gupta’s (2012: 146) cited quote: “If it is not in the file, it does not exist.” On this topic a few officials made insightful statements

The reports, yes they are very important. If there is official enquiry or inspection they will check the plans and reports first so these must be pukka [Indian term for top-standards]. Then they will make notations that matters are taken care of; they will have done what they are responsible for…The next officer they report to will be able to do the same, make notations and have then also followed procedure…Yes, it goes on upwards.68

I will do all the reporting and filing early in the morning or late at night. After they are done no one can say I didn’t do my job. That gives me time in the field…They are rarely checked, only signed and stored…It is a suitable arrangement.69

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68 Interview 38, DFO.
69 Interview 48, RFO.
The incentive to avoid blame or obtain deniability is an important driver of bureaucratic behaviour in Kerala, not least among officials at more senior positions where promotion to quite desirable postings is an attainable reality. Yet many of the policy activities that could potentially draw media-attention are carried out at the operational field-level, requiring frontline officials to not digress substantially from what they are formally charged with doing, in particular complying with inscription duties. As we shall see below, the formal institutional framework constrains their discretionary power and de facto autonomy, necessitating an aggregated course of action (the collaborative network arrangements) that is not entirely informal, but rather runs in a kind of integrated coexistence with the formal organisation (see also Arnold and Fleischman 2013; Helmke and Levitsky 2004).

Tangled Branches: Incentives and Strategies for Collaboration

As the book has made repeated mention of, forest officials exhibit a number of interrelated incentives to collaborate, some deriving from perceived limitations and shortfalls in the formal institutional structure, some from pressures and demands from the grassroots, and some from their own curiosity and willingness to adopt the ideals of contemporary forest policy discourse. Each of these comes with different ambitions and goals, and leads them to adopt slightly different strategies and actions, taken within the collaborative networks. As the incentives are intimately connected with the subsequent network arrangements, they will all be explored in more depth in the coming chapters, for which reason they are only concisely outlined below.

Three interrelated incentives for collaboration

The first category revolves around expressed incentives and the stated necessity to plan, coordinate and synchronise policy activities being carried out by multiple different departments and other actors in the rural forest areas. The reason is that the formal institutional setup of the forest administration – as well as that of many other line-departments – is based on sharply delineated jurisdictions and boundaries, which provides few opportunities for inter-organisational communication. In practice this leads to policy tasks being carried out in relative isolation, at perceived suboptimal outcomes. Simultaneously, very similar policy tasks are also carried out by other actors (including NGOs and religious charities) in nearby or adjacent jurisdictions, generating perceived unnecessary functional overlaps and inefficient implementation and service delivery. Closely related is an expressed desire to share and trade information, knowledge and ideas about policy activities being planned and how they may be carried out, but also a more general search for what the
The academic literature would term an environment or capacity for adaptive learning (see Armitage et al. 2007; Gerlak and Heikkila 2011).

The second category of incentives also derives from a perceived limitation in the formal setup and the jurisdictional boundaries but has to do with the need to address problems requiring collective action on short time-scales, not least mitigating wildlife-issues (rampant or injured elephants and tigers for instance), preventing wildfires and curbing illegal activities. The reported problem here lies in the drainpipe-like organisation of the various department and agencies, which constitutes an obstacle when action has to be taken quite rapidly, as information often has to travel up the hierarchy before decisions are made at a level far beyond the local one (see also Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Thomas 2003).

The third category of incentives derives from the multiple demands and requests emanating from the local forest communities and local governments (the latter sometimes speaking on behalf of the villagers), in turn a result of the prevailing socio-political culture in Kerala, a point returned to shortly below. Forest officials report an obligation to address these, for both instrumental reasons (to avoid conflict and complaints) and moral ones (that they see a normative value of including communities in decision-making and enhancing their livelihoods), leading to incentives centred on what I will refer to as (micro-scale socioeconomic) capacity building. But in order to meet demands, more than just superficially, forest officials need to cooperate with other actors also focused on rural development initiatives. Last, it should be noted that I emphasise interrelated incentives here. The categorisation is my one and is done for analytical clarity and distinction; in practice the three may overlap slightly. For example, a group of forest officials attempting to coordinate small-scale NGOs working on livelihood enhancement may express incentives relating to the first and third categories simultaneously and in practice see it as killing two birds with the same stone.

Appeal of contemporary policies
Each of the three categories of incentives — the third one in particular — is underscored by an additional motivating factor: an expressed willingness to adopt the ideals of contemporary policies and to simply try something new. During interviews I asked frontline officials how they perceive and reflect on the range of policies, laws and programs that have emerged over recent decades, emphasising different ideals and practices than those of an older policy generation. Put differently, I was curious to see if it changes their outlooks and worldviews given that they are representatives of a hierarchical organisation and might to some extent have been inculcated in a bureaucratic working culture which focuses on a quite narrow, technical-heavy conception of forest management. The responses would partially consist of a critique of varying subtleness of the organisational setup of the administration for being a hindrance in reaching many of the current ecological goals high-
lighted in contemporary policies and declarations, not least in relation to the boundary incongruity discussed above.\textsuperscript{70}

On the other hand, these officials also spoke in favour of, and embraced new policies and programs for their increased emphasis on the human livelihood-oriented aspects of forest management. They suggested that public participation and cooperation with the grassroots was a useful and important approach when implementing policy or carrying out various projects,\textsuperscript{71} not solely for instrumental reasons but also for some intrinsic value in including people in management activities. They spoke in favour of for instance PFM, the BDA act and various local initiatives that aim to include people in decision-making and implementation, also suggesting that these fit well into the social context of Kerala. Two insights offered by an RFO close to retirement and a newly graduated SFO are quite illustrative in this regard.

When we first started talking about Joint Forest Management in the 1990’s I asked why we need it in Kerala, as the bodies existing at the village level were already very strong and active...And then in 1998 we introduced PFM and I asked the same question. But over time I have changed my mind. PFM gives us a structure and format to make participation a permanent feature in our work...Now I see it as a welcome addition, it has become natural.\textsuperscript{72}

We get training in how to work with forest people, how to manage relationships. These lessons are useful when we go out in communities and hamlets; there are so many projects where working with people is requirement...I like that, sitting in office all day would be frustration.\textsuperscript{73}

A story related by an older DFO illuminates this further. Over lunch in his home he informed me that he had been involved in forest livelihood projects for over twenty years, much of the time in one of Kerala’s large national parks but also in the ordinary forest divisions. When he joined the service in the early 1990s illegal poaching was a widespread problem in the Western Ghats; reportedly organised gangs from the cities in Tamil Nadu that managed to co-opt local villagers (often indigenous) into their illicit business. At the time the reflexive response from the department was to clamp down on the villages and arrest whoever they suspected was guilty. The DFO instead embarked on a course of livelihood interventions, offering the locals the chance to join small projects he managed to initiate locally, primarily household spice plantations and basket weaving using reeds found locally. He spoke of this proudly

We not only stopped the illegal activities but also opened up a new world for these young men; we gave them a chance to know a world that was not dan-

\textsuperscript{70} Interviews 31, 35, 36, DFOs; Interviews 48, 60, 62, 66, 67, RFOs.
\textsuperscript{71} (Interviews 29, 31, 32, 33 & 37, DFOs; Interviews 46, 48, 51, 60, 66 & 67, RFOs; Interviews 54, 61, 65 & 68, SFOs.
\textsuperscript{72} Interview 51, RFO.
\textsuperscript{73} Interview 54, SFO.
He went on to tell me that he felt like something of a pioneer in those days; that the micro-projects he managed to launch were frowned upon by his superior officials, even though they let him try this approach locally – at least it brought some small revenue to the range office and ameliorated the problem of poaching. When PFM came about in 1998, his villages were among the very first to join the program and later became model-villages for implementation all across the country, eventually leading to an award by the UNDP in the early 2000’s. Asking the DFO if he thought that the new policies and programs allow officials elsewhere to replicate (though not blue-print) his success he maintained that they are appropriate tools and offer some form of platform to build up relationships, but that it ultimately hinges upon the willingness and commitment of the individual officials. He suggested, quite eloquently, that programs like PFM, BDA and FRA will not make forest officials work more inclusively per se, but for those officials already possessing an inclusive and open mind-set they become useful tools and frames to enhance their work.

The case is different in Kerala, but in other places there is no program in the world that will make foresters assist villagers in basket-weaving or the cinnamon trade if they do not want to…In [omitted national park] PFM was just a bonus for us doing that from before.

In addition to the interest or norm of including communities in deliberation, officials would also emphasise that the social goals and objectives of contemporary policies – in short human livelihoods – was equally if not more important than ecological conservation goals, not least in relation to the most marginalised segments of the population. Forest laws and policies have become more attentive to both social and ecological outcomes in the last two decades (UNDP 2012), but have simultaneously been critiqued for leading to a bias towards ecological goals when implemented, as the dominant working culture of many forest administrations lends itself to measuring achievement in descriptive statistics: how many trees have been planted, how many specimens of a certain endangered animal exists in one area, what is the nutrient value of the soil in another, and so on (see Fleischman 2014; Fleischman and Briske 2016; Gadgil 2007, 2008). In contrast, the most enthusiastic frontline officials would highlight the centrality of social needs, and that modern policies may be a good way of reaching them. For example

For them to help us protect the forest we need to give them what they need first; better houses, employment and a future for their children… Much work

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74 Interview 27, DFO.
75 Interview 27, DFO; Interview 26, ACF (retired).
76 Interview 27, DFO.
is needed to organise that first. I believe this understanding is growing in the forest ranges of Kerala.\textsuperscript{77}

Nowadays no one wants to live in the forest areas if they can find work in the cities. But we need people there to help us as caretakers. The only option is to make it more economically attractive and minor forest produce is the way to go...We are trying to discover and negotiate how this may be collected, have value added and sold in the market, but still be sustainable...The villagers with their knowledge will be critical in this process. And nowadays we also have the tools to do some of this, with the programs and regulations we work with.\textsuperscript{78}

Last, there is an element of simply wanting to try or experiment with new practices and procedures. As mentioned earlier, forest officials are progressively obtaining electronic access to current international journals and publications on forestry, both natural scientific ones and more human management-oriented ones – a result of technological innovations and digitalisation spreading in India beyond the megacity IT-hubs. Universities and research institutes obtain printed copies of FAO or UNDP forestry-reports and these are trickling down to the rural forest department offices. Close to all officials have Facebook-accounts and many try to connect with organisations and scholars in New Delhi, Japan, Europe and the US. Several would ask me if I could help them connect with universities in Sweden or recommend scholarships that would allow them to go for training and courses abroad. Some of the DFOs are indeed given the opportunity to undertake supplementary training or go for graduate studies in the Global North, usually after five or ten years of service. Altogether, officials related being all the more exposed to international forest policy discourse and management doctrines. While they are aware that much of it is unrealistic for the foreseeable future, they yet express a willingness or curiosity to try something new that breaks a bit with tradition.\textsuperscript{79} While they rarely referred to highly academic terms such as ‘institutional redundancy in complex adaptive systems’ (which means as little to them as to the ordinary non-academic in the West), the core message of including forest-users in decision-making and working more experimentally across organisational boundaries, both vertically and horizontally, is catching on and several were keen on following such practices. One official described it quite well

I try to read new journals and reports from Europe and America, I have a friend at the KFRI [Kerala Forest Research Institute] and he gives me access to these. I read and I think, look what they are doing in America and other places, the way they organise their forest and water management...It will not

\textsuperscript{77} Interview 48, RFO.
\textsuperscript{78} Interview 55, RFO.
\textsuperscript{79} Interviews 31, 34, 36 & 37, DFOs; Interviews 48, 50, 55, 60 & 67, RFOs; Interview 82, NC Saxena, academic; Interview 89, Senior Forest Official, IGNFA.
happen in India, look what they did to the Gadgil Report. But if we can take some of the ideas for inspiration right here I believe that is great progress.80

Political culture revisited

As highlighted in earlier chapters, I believe that the political culture of Kerala is an important incentivising factor underlying each of the factors above. In interviews, the favourable socio-political environment forest officials find themselves in was often brought up, either in passing or as an explicit factor they sought to emphasise.81 82 The majority of the officials I interacted with hail from Kerala and have been socialised into the prevailing culture from childhood. For them it was conscious but yet something of a default conduct of operations to work more inclusively with other agencies and more responsively to bottom-up pressures. More illuminating insights were thus given by officials assigned to the state at the beginning of their careers.

The first thing you need to know about Kerala is that people are restless. Everyone is involved in something, and wants to speak up…For officials from this place it is natural, I had to learn about it. But it is something good. If they care and make an effort so will we and this build good relationships.83

The first challenge is to learn Malayali. I still struggle. The second is to understand the Malayalis, they are very engaged and committed We learn nothing of this at Dehradun but we all know about Kerala; their social history, the planning campaigns and mobilisation…the communist legacy and the politics.84

One retired official with professional experience from several states whom I met in Dehradun spoke at some length about this topic, suggesting that Kerala indeed is different if we keep in mind that forest areas in certain states in central India are more or less in a state of war with the Maoist insurgents, and that other states are so torn up by caste conflicts and patronage politics that public management and impartial service delivery of any kind has grinded to a halt. He further argued that the expectations of many forest administration critics and commentators in the media are grossly unrealistic, suggesting that even in Kerala, they are decades away from perfectly amiable relationships. "They hope that foresters and tribals will sit together as equal partners and discuss the Forest Rights Act. That will not happen in our

80 Interview 35, DFO.
81 Interview 14, ACF; Interview 20, CCF (retired); Interviews 27, 34, 36 & 37, DFOs; Interviews 39, 48, 50, 60, 64 & 67; RFOs; Interviews 40, 52 & 61, SFOs.
82 The specific term ‘political culture’ was seldom used by me or respondents; I would rather ask them to compare Kerala to other states, and questions about how active and engaged forest-users were in the management of the resource.
83 Interview 35, DFO.
84 Interview 18, CCF.
lifetime.” He proceeded to state that what really sets Kerala apart is not the absence of violence or deep poverty, but rather the literacy and education levels, suggesting that this empowers forest-users to speak up, and forest officials to listen. However, two officials – a DFO and RFO, both Malayali and located in the same division – downplayed the influence of the political culture. They acknowledged that people are active and industrious but that it is the interdependencies; the management challenges vis-à-vis other KFD jurisdictions and other agencies that really incentivises officials to work more collaboratively. The DFO claimed that

I am not sure if Kerala is more progressive than Tamil Nadu or Karnataka. People keep saying that and they teach it in schools…If I was DFO in another state and had the same difficult workload I would form partnership there too. It is the forest landscape that makes us work this way, not the people.

Interdependencies
Summing up the sections above, we may now look at the exhibited incentives and stated preferences for coordination in terms of interdependencies. Recall the distinction Hertting (2007: 47-50) makes between resource dependencies and dependency relations that produce strategic externalities. Regarding the first two incentives structures – largely deriving from perceived (not objective) limitations in the formal structural setup of the administration – forest officials may in principle have the sufficient resources to carry out their work on their own, but believe that smoother and better outcomes may be attained if all involved actors engage in some form of cooperation. In other words they are reliant on others also taking action, or else their implementation capacity is constrained (2007: 48). As such, it reflects the strategic kind of interdependency. Regarding the third category of incentives, the case is that forest officials cannot meet all the demands and requests on their own: they are then reliant on securing resources (mainly material resources, but also some information and knowledge) that other actors possess and need to yield, possibly with some form of counterperformance. Thus, the interdependency situation is of the resource dependency kind.

Moving on, the rational strategy for the officials is to translate their incentives into substantive action; attempting to overcome the interdependencies, and collaborate with others to attain the goals they set up for themselves. Yet this is not as straightforward as it may seem. To be able to take any substantive action and make decisions on issues falling outside the formal purview of the forest department frontline officials need a certain degree of autonomy and discretionary power. Yet to obtain that they are also required to follow a strategy of informality. How this works out in practice is in focus below.

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85 Interview 26, ACF (retired).
86 Interview 33, DFO; Interview 53, RFO.
87 Interview 33, DFO.
The strategy of informality and search for autonomy

The earlier accounts of bureaucratic inscription and reporting could lead one to believe that every single action and decision taken by an official is recorded, filed and stored in some way. As described this is true to a certain extent, but a lot of activities are in fact left non-recorded. To these belong the majority of activities occurring outside the formal institutional framework; within the collaborative networks described in the coming chapters. This is somewhat perplexing and deserves further mention. Once this practice dawned on me, the typical response to enquiries about why they do not record many of their de facto activities would suggest in some way that it is ‘beyond formal and correct procedure’.88 One official summarised it particularly well, stating that

If we create a file there will always be several more steps. It must be registered, given a number and stored, more work for me than I already have. Also it will lead to complications. Some official in some place will complain, why did you make this agreement...The best option here is to not make a file; to just make agreement with the others, I know them well to trust them.89

This taps into an interesting incentive structure. Frontline officials actively opt for not creating a file or submitting a report as that will generate more work for them, but also that this may cause more questions and enquiries than need be. If activities are written down, there is the chance that someone – realistically a superior official – may interfere and make life difficult for him, or worse; discipline him for having overstepped his authority, which they in turn wish to avoid.90 Their incentive is thus to keep things as informal as possible. This initially defied my expectations about the bureaucracy in India, or for that part any developing country. But when explained to me, it makes quite a bit of sense

We have to handle our work this way, to be able to manage at all. Many objectives and instructions are there, and many resources as well. But one resource we do not have is time. This is the way we must proceed with work, even if it is not correct procedure. Also, it makes work easier...then no one can say that this is not in the micro-plan or some other document.91

The case at hand is almost the exact inverse of what Gupta (2012) described, and has a quite different logic at work. The very absence of a file in the more collaboratively-oriented activities is what makes the wheels turn and actions to be taken. As they diverge from what is the formal and correct procedure it lies in their self-interest to not create a paper-trail which could impede or complicate their work in practice. The existence of a file or report – given

88 Interviews 32, 35 & 38; DFOs; Interviews 48, 51, 53, 58, 60 & 66, RFOs.
89 Interview 58, RFO.
90 Interviews 29, 35, 37 & 38, DFOs.
91 Interview 48, RFO.
the venerable status such objects have in the Indian administration – will be an everlasting record of how something was carried out, precisely the kind of record officials here prefer to avoid. The officials rely on personal relationships and trust, rather than formal agreements in order to reach results, and also choose informal channels, illustrated by statements such as

We meet when we need to. Sometimes many days straight, sometimes only once a month. If my station needs the support of the Revenue Department or the Tribal Department we will approach them directly…To manage this work we need to share.92

They [the other involved actors] make obligations to the villages and hamlets in their programs and projects; we make the same to the ones in KFD areas. If we work together we can reach goals quicker…No, we do not sign any form or MOU [memorandum of understanding], it is not necessary…In this Division we are of similar age and mind-set, a close team.93

To someone familiar with the Indian administrative context this type of informality might appear confounding; it certainly did for me at first. Given the top-down, command and control structure of this country’s bureaucracy (Aycan et al. 2000; Das 2010) the de facto practices in focus later on caught my interest as I imagined that they cannot develop and be institutionalised all too easily. When I started to ask how the frontline officials manage this in practice, the narrative that emerged was one centred on de facto autonomy and discretionary power (Lipsky 1980; Tummers and Bekkers 2014). It is one in which officials in the divisions, ranges and jurisdictions below have relatively much leeway to pursue activities and strategies in their own preferred way, seeking out joint action and coordination with other governance actors to overcome interdependencies and work towards a different set of goals and ideals. Put differently, the amount of political control exerted vis-à-vis frontline officials is sufficiently low enough for them to be able to translate incentives into institutionalised substantive action through network arrangements (see also Meier and O'Toole 2006; Scholz et al. 1991).94 Autonomy and discretionary power are thus of central importance to the frontline officials.

This shines light on something interesting. There is a potential conflict between three different sets of rules and incentive structures here. First, frontline officials need autonomy in order to realise their incentives on the ground. Second, they are incentivised to comply with routine bureaucratic duties, or risk reprimands and punishments from the superiors. Third, the senior officials are incentivised to keep clean records of performance, or risk ruining their chances for desirable transfers and promotion, and for that they seek blame-avoidance. One could be led to believe that this causes inertia or

92 Interview 48, RFO.
93 Interview 35, DFO.
94 Interviews 32, 37 & 38, DFOs; Interviews 48, 58, 60 & 66, RFOs.
A mutual resource dependency and exchange

To start with I suggest that autonomy and blame-avoidance should be construed as the two critical resources at hand, one held by each roughly drawn category of actors (frontline and senior officials, with the breaking line at the DFO level), which the other seeks to acquire. In this sense a situation of interdependency also exists within the forest department, spanning across hierarchical levels, and not only between different actors at the frontline. This interdependency situation reflects both a resource dependency and one that produces strategic externalities: officials need to exchange resources and are mutually dependent on the other actor taking action too. Frontline officials offer the senior officials blame-avoidance by following a strategy of compliance with the formal routines and procedures, and in return the senior officials offer their subordinates de facto autonomy by not frequently undertaking routine inspection visits or interfering in daily field activities – if the frontline officials also follow a strategy of informality and avoid actions that might draw unneeded attention. Through the compliance with formal regulations a paper-trail fulfilling all the de jure requirements is created which both frontline and senior officials in some measure may hide behind. The trade, to use that word, then becomes an incentive structure common to both categories of officials.

I always check to make sure that the documentation is in order, when I was DFO, then CF and now as CCF. You surely understand India now, everything is about papers and records. Keeping them in order is always a good choice.95

The first thing one looks at is the files and ledgers. If they are on par the responsible officer at that level can say that the problematic issue did not happen on his watch.96

This mutual resource dependency and exchange also brings an overall institutional stability to the department as neither frontline nor senior officials have any immediate incentive – or pressure, external or internal – to alter the conduct of operations as it currently stands, or renege on implicit agreements they have entered; in other words deviate from their common strategy. As long as both categories of actors obtain the resource they need, the exchange is self-reinforcing and contributes to a status quo they are satisfied with maintaining. As we shall see further down, this strategy enables the integrat-

95 Interview 9, CCF.
96 Interview 25, CCF (retired).
ed co-existence of two quite different management styles in the very same policy environment, or to use different terminology: informal institutional arrangements set within the broader formal framework.

Another point deserving brief mention has to do with the way in which this whole arrangement and mutual resource exchange is upheld within the forest department, at least indirectly and implicitly. In my interpretation, it is an institutional mechanism very akin to what Scharpf (1994: 40-41) termed *negotiations in the shadow of the hierarchy*. Scharpf posited that interactions between actors in a network will be monitored by a meta-governing authority at a higher level, to ensure that the former conforms to an overarching set of rules, in order to safeguard against opportunistic behaviour and to protect the interest of actors not directly involved in the network. The mechanism in his thesis – similar to that in this case, but for different reasons – is one of anticipation of repercussions; simply being aware that you are monitored will steer actors into certain behavioural patterns even if they are not monitored on a recurring daily basis. In the case of the forest divisions and ranges it is not so much unexpected field-visits by superior officials that are the anticipatory mechanism, but rather the more continuous incentive to follow the strategy of compliance with bureaucratic inscription and reporting. There is awareness that the reports, files and ledgers may and will be reviewed at a higher level, and that recurring debriefing meetings are part and parcel of the working culture.97 This obligation serves as the anticipatory mechanism and also helps contribute to further consolidation of the resource exchange arrangement, as it adds an institutional element of possible sanctioning.

The organic evolution of collaborative networks

Let us now zoom out a bit from the internal relationships of the forest department to look at the incentives exhibited by the officials at the operative field-level. From the sections above we know that they display incentives on three different but related policy areas, which leads them to develop a preference for collaboration. We also know that they are able to obtain autonomy from their superior officials, enabling them to pursue substantive strategies in ways they see fit and appropriate for the local context. As we shall see their incentives for collaboration derive from perceived problems that are not cursory or likely to vanish overnight. On the contrary, their incentive structures are quite deeply rooted and they repeatedly find themselves in a situation where collaboration is the rational and preferred strategy. In the following chapters we shall see how they interact and coordinate with institutionalised arrangements, the collaborative networks, to avoid having to start new negotiations each time they are faced with a mutual problem.

The aim of this book is partially to understand the substantive actions and strategies officials employ in order to translate their incentives for collabora-

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97 Interviews 32, 35, 37 & 38; DFOs; Interviews 53, 60 & 66, RFOs.
tion into a goal they seek to attain. In the forest divisions of Kerala this predominantly occurs within networks, making *action within networks* a primary focus of empirical examination, rather than examining how those networks arose in the first place. Network evolution (or formation) constitutes a literature in itself (see Danielsson et al. 2018; Heikkila and Gerlak 2005; Hertting 2007; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016) and my intention in this book is not to engage with it to any considerable extent. Yet, something short may be said about the way in which the networks initially arise and grow in an organic manner. This evolution is common to the three different varieties of networks for which they are addressed here. As I discussed in the methods chapter the initial discovery of the collaborative networks took me by quite some surprise, keeping in mind what the extant literature on the Indian forest administration indicates and had led me to believe; not least the infrequent mention of terms such as interagency coordination in the forest department’s own manuals and guidelines. Though the choice of Kerala was conscious, I had not expected partially institutionalised networks to be the way local forest officials organise themselves.

When it became more evident – not least through observations of meetings and interactions across jurisdictional boundaries – and I myself started thinking about the phenomenon as networks, I began probing a bit about their origins and the process in which they become regularised features in the official’s mundane work and mind-sets. It is important to observe that during the time that I conducted my ground-level fieldwork in the forest divisions in 2014 to 2015, the collaborative practices were spoken of as a more or less natural phenomenon in which the officials were engaged. They recognised and were well aware of this *modi operandi*, though not using the exact term collaborative networks, but rather just collaboration, cooperation, resource-sharing, networks and slightly curiously, partnerships. I distinctly remember a dinner I had with a DFO after having spent two days with him. Thrilled by having made the mental linkage between how he and his staff work and the theoretical literature on collaboration, I asked with naïve eagerness how long they had been operating in networks and how the formation process was structured. He looked up from his stainless steel *thali* and appeared confused. It took me a while to explain what I meant, after which he smiled and stated that he never had thought of it all in such ‘scholarly language’, but confirmed that that was most likely how they work and also that he wanted a copy of my book to see it from that angle.

It was methodologically challenging to get an understanding of how the officials perceived the way in which they had come to work collaboratively through networks. On a few occasions I tried to get an idea of their estimated age and whether any one single event had triggered their emergence, or if they had arisen more organically due to more long-term processes and changes in their policy environment. I also considered producing some form of timeline chronicling the lifecycles of the networks but this became quite the challenge as they lack any obvious starting-points or endpoint and are
rather continuously reformed. For instance I asked questions if they perceived that the past decade or two had become more difficult as there are more tasks and activities they are charged with undertaking. Overall, the responses speak in favour of this, while no one pointed to one particular externally imposed event that had tipped the scales and led to an increased preference for coordination. A handful went into this in more depth. One RFO for instance related that when he started working for the forest department in the late 1980’s the working environment was markedly different from today with the key difference found in the workloads they have in present time, emphasising that the old structures (of the forest administration) do not fit well into the contemporary policy sphere. He stated that the collaborative practices have “…developed this way; we have made good partnerships with other departments and it has continued that way.” The reference to increasing workloads was also acknowledged by a DFO who stated that they “started doing things differently when we discovered that our resources and our time was too limited” and that he was proud to have been part of championing that in his division. But he also maintained that it was not like starting a movement such as the People’s Planning Campaign which the CPI (M) did in the 1990’s, but rather that they “…needed to rethink how we work, it started small and then grew”. At the IGNFA in Dehradun I met with an official who had served in the Kerala Forest Department for a number of years before becoming a senior instructor at the IFS training facility. He was of the academic kind and more explicit, stating that

I am not sure if there is one event or change that led to things being done in the way they are in Kerala, in my opinion it is a combination of how things in the forest areas have become in recent years. As you rightly observed, more demands and necessities are there now, so working more inclusively becomes natural…When I was DFO in 2007 to 2010 things just became that way, it made more sense considering the policy landscape.

The essence of most responses was simply that there is no masterplan detailing how a collaborative network should be established: the steps towards collaborative practices occur organically at the operative field-level without external direction or intervention from higher administrative levels. They are essentially a bottom-up product of many combined incentives structures, fitting the theoretical ideal-type of network formation as informal self-organisation (see Hertting and Vedung 2012; Scharpf 1994). This is not to say that informal self-organisation lacks management or structure; as we shall see later there is in fact a reported order within the networks, with cer-

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98 Interviews 14 & 17, ACFs; Interviews 30, 31, 34, 36, 37 & 38, DFOs; Interviews 48, 50, 63 & 66, RFOs; Interview 65, SFO; Interview 90, Senior Forest Official, IGNFA).
99 Interview 51, RFO.
100 Interview 38, DFO.
101 Interview 90, Senior Forest Official, IGNFA.
tain individual officials playing managing roles, but once again without external direction.

Generally, officials spoke at length about what they substantively do in the networks, but had a harder time accounting how they believed they had come to work in them. Yet the combined narratives seem to suggest that they start off as relatively small enterprises, usually just a pair or handful of officials who find it in their common interest and incentives to strike out a slightly new way of doing things on one-time occasions. At a later point in time they find themselves in the same situation, and will seek to coordinate or deliberate with the actors they have a prior experience of doing so with. A SFO I spent a day with shared an anecdote that serves as a good illustration. He told me that a few years back he had cooperated with an official of the tribal development department on a small project that they managed to complete in just a few days, but afterwards they had begun to speak regularly to trade information and suggestions, or news on what was going on in their different departments. When they have the chance to meet, each of them often travels with other people and colleagues, and so a small but tight-knit group of familiar faces has developed for him which he is happy to enlist for assistance when needed. He stated that the tribal department official was now “a close ally and support when we work with those tribal hamlets.”

Another official, a RFO, attested to the relative simplicity of the whole procedure by stating that

If there is some problem or some difficulty that I imagine a colleague in the other range may help me with, or one of the Church-groups, I will go and talk to them straight…Sometimes it goes well, but it is not harder than that.

Network evolution, to use that specific term, is something which my fieldwork did not shine clear light on in the empirical setting at hand. Yet, I do not see this as a limitation and I instead think of the networks as more dynamic vehicles of institutionalised coordination without any one final configuration, and which the officials themselves see as the appropriate outlet for promoting their agendas, trading perceptions and ideas, and realising their goals (see Bryson et al. 2015; Danielsson et al. 2018; Hertting 2007).

Summary of Chapter

After the first descriptive background the content and argument of this chapter has been as follows: frontline forest officials are formally mandated to carry out tasks of four overarching kinds; tree plantation and forest restoration, forest vigilance and protecting, wildlife management, and human livelihood enhancement. In addition they have to spend time on excessive in-

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102 Interview 54, SFO.
103 Interview 62, RFO.
scription and reporting duties to their superiors, which they have a personal incentive to comply with to avoid reprimands and punishments. Senior officials also need them to comply as they are in search of deniability so that they can secure good transfers and thus want to keep clean records of performance and subordinate conduct. Next, frontline officials develop incentives to collaborate on issues related to long-term strategic planning and information sharing, immediate response action, and community capacity building. This derives from perceived shortfalls in the formal institutional setup (not least the jurisdictional boundaries) and multiple demands from the grassroots: two different kinds of perceived interdependencies. These incentives are reinforced by a willingness to work with current policy ideals and to try something new, in turn reinforced by the prevalent political culture of Kerala. Yet, to embark on collaborative strategies the frontline officials need autonomy and thus follow a strategy of informality. Within the forest department the autonomy is granted in exchange for blame-avoidance (as subordinates comply with formal duties) and a self-reinforcing mechanism arises. I also touched upon the way in which the forums for collective action—the collaborative networks emerge endogenously in the field without external direction and also highlighted the difficulty of accounting for this.

The chapter has also pointed to a number of important insights related to how officials perceive a gap in the formal institutional framework and try to establish an informal institution for collaboration to remedy the perceived shortfalls. This is returned to in more length in the last chapter of the book. For now, a few short things should be said about the dual role officials have in the boundary zone of the formal hierarchy and the informal networks.

**Reflections on roles**

In one perspective the incentives and strategies of routine compliance with bureaucratic duties, almost to perfection, is consistent with the image of the classic *Weberian bureaucrat*: rule-abiding, professional, and a necessary cog in larger machinery (Hysing and Olsson 2012). In this perspective, the vast majority of frontline officials hold this role, although some may be additionally distinguished as *street-level bureaucrats* (SLB) as their strategies (formally) involve representing the forest department at the grassroots, even though their discretionary power may be slightly higher as they shape policy to some extent (for instance assisting with micro-plan formulations within the PFM program) and interact more directly with policy recipients (forest users) than the predominantly office-based superiors. Discretionary power and the lesser amount of political control is yet integral to the ideal-type SLB and her primary loyalty lies with the bureaucracy rather than the grassroots, and she takes actions within the bounds of her lawful authority (Kaufman 1960; Lipsky 1980; Tummers and Bekkers 2014).

As for the senior officials they too hold the role of a *Weberian bureaucrat* as their primary interest lies in a reverence to formal protocol and doing things by-the-book. In one perspective the search for deniability may digress
from the traditional *Weberian* role, but only if the search leads to active rule-violations, which after all was not the case above. They have an ultimate goal to secure transfers to a desirable posting, and the reverence to formal routines is in that perspective only instrumental and not based on loyalty to the organisation. Yet I suggest that as long as they do not actively violate formal rules, they still hold the role of *Weberian bureaucrats* (see Hysing and Olsson 2012; Svara 2006).

However, these roles may be deduced from reading the formal guidelines and manuals of what strategies and tasks forest officials are mandated with. The interesting aspect is shifting the gaze to how officials *de facto* work. The frontline officials develop incentives and act on influences deriving from their immediate field-level reality: demands from the grassroots and perceived problems in the formal organisation, in addition to more abstract incentives to adopt contemporary policy ideals. Their subsequent strategies diverge from what the formal guidelines prescribe, but do not derive from the influence or direction of any political superior or party (as would possibly be the case in corrupt or clientelistic relationships). Yet their strategies reflect something more than a SLB with substantial discretionary power.

For now I term this role the *activist bureaucrat* (a term I borrow from Olsson and Hysing 2012) as they develop incentives and prioritise interests and actions other than those of the organisation they belong to. In addition, the same officials also engage in interactions and collaborations beyond the formal organisational boundaries as network participants (or managers in the case of several DFOs). Yet the *activist* term is also quite blunt and obfuscates the potential diversity of roles held within the frame of inter-organisational collaboration. An *activist bureaucrat* who never interacts beyond the hierarchy might hold just that role, but stepping outside a new spectrum of roles may come into consideration.
5. Strategic Planning and Sharing of Information

By the time we set off from the hamlet the sun is in zenith and the heat is excruciating. My shirt and cap are already drenched with sweat and the warm breeze does little to cool me down. As we close in on the town where the local forest division office is located an increasing amount of large billboards announce the abundance and proximity of various tourist resorts and lodges. In this region of the Western Ghats large numbers of tourists (overwhelmingly domestic ones) arrive in the dry season each year to see the tea plantations, visit the wildlife sanctuaries and go on day-treks in the national parks. The town itself is far from agreeable, consisting mainly of countless five-story buildings, hotels and hostels packed together around a few main streets. More billboards showcasing the tours and excursions on offer are equally packed together. Here and there tattered posters from the past year’s national election campaign still cling to the walls of the buildings. In a country where the incumbent Prime Minister swept the polls with his Hindu nationalist rhetoric, Kerala stands as a curious exception, remaining loyal to the otherwise waning Congress and Communist parties.

We speed along the streets until we reach the office. As we shuffle out of the jeep and into a large auditorium I try to count the number of officials present. There appears to be at least twenty in the customary khaki uniforms with red-green details, a dozen more in civilian clothing (officials of other line-departments), and two in khakis with yellow-green details; representatives from the Tamil Nadu Forest Department. George, my accompanying RFO, lets me know that at least seven other forest ranges from different divisions are represented here, with accompanying subordinate officials. The meeting commences as the local DFO enters and assumes the role of chairman. It is conducted in a mix of Malayalam, Tamil and a little English, and I thus have to rely on the accounts of the officials I am familiar with. When we break for tea and samosas, George and two other RFOs relate what has transpired. The presiding DFO has called the meeting as he wishes to orchestrate a small coalition of officials working on forest and wildlife management in the area. Challenges have been increasing in recent months and there is a lot of functional overlap in initiatives being planned and too little communication between the various stakeholders involved. This is reportedly a much planned effort to change the way of working in the region.
Content of the chapter

This chapter first examines in more depth the (collaboration-oriented) incentives forest officials develop in relation to long-term strategic planning, policy harmonisation and sharing and diffusing information and knowledge. It looks at what they hope and seek to accomplish, and then turns to the strategies they follow in order to translate their incentives into substantive output. It then repeats this procedure regarding incentives and strategies involved in building up an adaptive capacity for learning. The reason that this comes after an account of what I term Strategic Planning and Informational Networks (SPIN) is that it was a comparatively smaller and more unusual observation than the wider planning and harmonising activities, and also occurs quite seamlessly within the frame of the same kinds of networks. As for the strategies, these involve both tangible actions (such as harmonising overlapping programs), and efforts to keep other actors collaborating, or incentivising them to do so.

Incongruous Boundaries and Functional Overlaps

To introduce this topic and empirical illustration is in place. Any given taluk (the administrative unit below the district, roughly the same size as forest ranges) in rural Kerala with some amount of forest cover may house several non-indigenous and indigenous communities (the latter possibly requiring various types of livelihood support), private agroforestry farms, tourist resorts, ordinary tree plantations as well as department forestland, endemic species and threatened wildlife, multiple micro-level ecosystems, and watersheds supplying drinking water to urban areas. Even a short one or two hour drive through an area someone living along the coast would consider rural or remote takes you through a diverse and mixed social-cultural landscape, and defies the conventional image of rural areas as empty or sparsely populated.

Across the state forest cover is scattered in numerous, non-contiguous areas and although a few large tracts exist, most of the forest is found in a mosaic pattern in proximity to commercial agroforestry and cash-crop plantations, small wildlife sanctuaries, protected wetlands and watersheds, towns and urban markets, stone quarries and mines, and expanding tourist facilities. In other words, numerous subsystems of diverse kinds coexist in parallel within a limited area, each managed or represented by various public agencies, local governments, advocacy groups and NGOs. This diversity is reflective of the emphasis on the multifunctionality and multi-interests of the resource in contemporary policy discourse (Messier et al. 2013; Nagendra and Ostrom 2012), and in principle expands the required skillsets and capacities of officials who need to be able to address numerous tasks and goals simultaneously, often in cooperation with other actors (Sevä and Jagers
Yet the perceived ground level reality for frontline officials in Kerala points to a quite different starting position.

**Perceptions of mismatching boundaries**

In the literature on both common pool resources and more complex resource governance systems, the idea of policy relevant and clearly-defined boundaries is central (McGinnis and Ostrom 2014; Ostrom 1990). Writing on the issue in relation to forest governance specifically, Nagendra and Ostrom (2012) state that

> One of the most important types of rules is boundary rules, and the definition of boundary rules poses perhaps the most important challenge to polycentricity. They determine who and what is in and out of a provision organization. Provision units face considerable biophysical constraints when the good is a natural common-pool resource…Such resources have their own geographic boundary. Matching the boundary of those who benefit and those who contribute with the boundary of a resource is a major challenge (2012: 118).

In the case at hand the reported problem rests in the fact that the boundaries of the forest department seldom match the functional or biophysical boundaries of the natural resources: where forests actually stand, where critical ecosystems are found, or where wildlife roams around. As highlighted earlier in the book, the bureaucracy is organised in quite coarse silo-like tiers that do not capture the *de facto* socio-ecological landscape. Discussions with frontline officials, not least RFOs, would yield the aggregated picture that working in silos burdens their workload, while also leading to what they perceive as inefficient or suboptimal procedures and outcomes. Respondents were often critical of how this constrains them. For example

> [Very assertively] We cannot be organised as pillars where one officer and the villages in his area know only what occurs in that area, it is not helpful at all. The setup of this department is outdated since long. Look at [omitted] range here; it includes less than one quarter of this important forest tract, while [omitted] range next to it has more than three quarters of the same forest. Tell me, why are these ranges not one single unit?

The way we are organised makes little sense sometimes, mostly so when we have to deal with wildlife challenges but also ordinary forest protection and monitoring, no point having a boundary that does not correspond with reality…They have to change this at some point, especially in this Kerala as it is so densely populated.

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104 Interviews 31, 35 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 46, 48, 60, 62, 66 & 67, RFOs; Interviews 40 & 68, SFOs.

105 Interview 35, DFO.

106 Interview 63, RFO.
Officials would state that contemporary policies and programs go some way in highlighting ecological services and the importance of biodiversity in addition to the more traditional forestry activities. Yet simultaneously they would express a concern that the increasing demand for land-use conversion, and the expansion of non-forest activities adjacent to the department forestlands (for instance mining and quarrying, urban settlements, and cash-crop plantations) was a significant and growing problem.\(^{107}\) A few stated that the protected areas and parks are becoming more and more like ecological islands in an ocean of human habitats.

We try to see it as a landscape, rather than one range here and there. The elephants do not see these borders so why should we...The situation is very shaky, every year the reported man-animal conflicts increase and get worse. We need to start thinking in terms of both land and forests and manage both simultaneously; addressing the wildlife issue straight on. What we need is an expansion of the protected area networks, not in numbers, but in area. They have experimented with this in [omitted district] and it needs to be tried in more districts too.\(^{108}\)

Forests and animals were here before cities and people. Roads connect cities and people, but what connects forests and animals? Nothing. Something must change on how these areas are connected...Yes, larger sanctuaries is a start, but also involve people in the area. This expression landscape approach must be made more important.\(^{109}\)

Forest officials have to some extent started visualising and conceiving forestry in terms of a landscape perspective – an approach which looks beyond site-based management and conservation initiatives (for instance national parks or forest reserves) to take a broader, more integrated grip and include not only any adjacent area under forest cover, but also socio-economic considerations among the local communities (Sayer et al. 2013).

In the language of the IAD framework the formal setup of the numerous jurisdictions may be visualised as a collection of adjacent action situations (McGinnis 2011a). Within these there is a close conformity between the boundary rules (here those that establish the geographical extent in which actions may be taken) and the choice and scope rules (establishing what may be done and to what potential outcomes), while being closely aligned with the position rules (which actors are allowed to take a certain course of action). Put differently, each jurisdiction has a defined number of individuals who are charged with specific tasks in very precisely delineated areas, which should not be overstepped. The conduct of those tasks are spelled out in the formal guidelines, codes and division working plans (many gathered in the

\(^{107}\) Interviews 29, 31, 35 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 44, 50, 60 & 62, RFOs; Interviews 40 & 68, SFOs.

\(^{108}\) Interview 36, DFO.

\(^{109}\) Interview 68, SFO.
voluminous Manual of Forest Laws in Kerala, GoK 2013). These specify in
detail what individual officials in each forest beat, section, range and divi-
sion should do during a given period (typically multiple years), within sharply
defined jurisdictions.

This booklet states exactly what I and the other staff in this range must do
during this year. All the information is there, very precise and great detail.
When you meet with [omitted] next week, he will show the booklet for his
range. Exact same assignments but for his particular range…No, little over-
lap, as these are different ranges.110

In training we learn what we have to do in the field, like silviculture and res-
toration. There are so many technical things to learn. But at the same time we
learn so much about the setup, how each level work and function on its own.
[Laughing] It’s more like 200 different forest departments, each working side
by side!111

This management style is highly reminiscent of a traditional top-down heavy
hierarchy and was overall favoured by the oldest bureaucrats I met, as well
as retired ones, possibly illuminating the predominant working culture for
much of the department’s history.112 One senior stated for instance that

A range forest officer need only apply himself and his work to the range he is
responsible for. Only in exceptional situations, like when we have a problem
with fires should the forester go to another area. Too much criss-crossing can
lead to nothing good.113

As we shall see below, criss-crossing of boundaries is a regular pattern of
behaviour among frontline officials, almost on an everyday basis. Yet the
simultaneous precision with which almost every forest official I encountered
could state and describe the exact formal boundaries of the jurisdictions in
their vicinity is remarkable. They were able to outline these with ease and
would often pull out highly detailed maps in which the boundaries are clear-
ly laid down. In the field the boundaries are typically marked out by sign-
posts or fences alongside roads and farms, and the forest department has
started making increasing use of advanced GPS technology to demarcate
them.114 The areas in which the KFD has formal jurisdiction is also visually,
albeit quite subtly, noticeable when travelling throughout the state. In most
cities and towns I visited during fieldwork, the forest department maintains
very large compounds in which their office-buildings, storages and staff-
quaters are located. Typically behind high walls with occasional barbed
wire, they are given away by dauntingly large signposts in the recognisable

110 Interview 55, RFO.
111 Interview 59, SFO.
112 Interview 2, CCF (retired); Interview 3, CF (retired); Interviews 6 & 7, APCCFs.
113 Interview 2, CCF (retired).
114 Interview 28, DFO.
red-green colours of the department, stating who it belongs to. Similarly, when moving around in rural areas, especially in the eastern areas, country roads are decorated every tenth or so kilometre with equally large billboards either noting the vicinity of a department-compound, or conveying some public statement about the importance of the work they carry out locally. At first this did not draw my curiosity; it was only after a few months that I started to discover that no other department (for instance agriculture, fisheries, or tribal development) made its omnipresence so physically visible and noticeable.

Functional overlaps in policy activities
Another perceived problem relating to boundaries has to do with (again perceived) functional overlaps in policy tasks and activities. Actors such as the tribal development, agriculture, rural development, and revenue departments, the local governments at the gram and block levels, NGOs and various religious charities are often involved in activities and projects that share many procedural similarities as well as intended outcomes as those that the forest department is engaged in. While tree plantation and forest vigilance are activities which the forest department has more or less singular jurisdiction over in de jure terms, tasks such as forest- and other ecological restoration projects are also undertaken by both the local governments and other departments, who furthermore often engage in human livelihood enhancement. In upland Kerala, projects to provide alternative livelihoods or strengthen socioeconomic capacities almost always include the forests in some way. In addition, NGOs and charities of varying size and budgets – from small voluntary ones organised by a local church to large multisite projects funded by the Japanese government as part of its foreign aid package – also implement programs aiming to foster human development, conserve wildlife and ecosystems, and provide environmental education and sensitisation.

The stated reason for this overlap lies in the incentive structures built into each department, government unit and indirectly, NGO or donor organisation, with regards to their budgeting and planning. In order to maintain or increase their budget-allocation from the state or national government the following year, agencies will initiate multiple programs and projects in which they are the lead authority and are oriented around some policy issue carrying relevance and appeal at the time. Following the advent of what I term contemporary policies since the 1990’s, projects revolving around local participation, democratisation in forest areas, and ecological restoration and enhancement have increased markedly. When seeking new funding the actors are able to show the range of new projects launched and how funds have

115 Interviews 31 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 44, 50 & 60, RFOs.
116 Interview 80, Official, Department of Tribal Development; Interview 81, Official, Department of Rural Development.
117 Interview 32, DFO.
been spent, commonly by purchasing large volumes of equipment or tree-saplings, employing people on short-term contracts, or initiating (not equal to completing) the construction of for example schools, community centres, granaries and storage houses, or large brick kilns.\footnote{Interview 90, Senior Forest Official, IGNFA; Interviews 29, 34 & 38, DFOs; Interview 17, ACF; Interview 73, MK Prasad, academic/activist.} \footnote{As chapter four highlighted the 1980 Forest Conservation Act restricts the ease with which any forestland may be diverted to non-forest land use. In most observed cases, construction did not occur on notified forestland, but in the few cases that did involve such land I was told that the department has to put together an application which is then submitted to the Centre for approval and instructions about compensatory afforestation. However, the frontline officials I met did not speak much about this process and seemed uncertain of the formal procedure, suggesting it occurs at a higher administrative level in the headquarters.} For instance

It’s the same in each of the public departments. A clever idea is spawned by officials in Trivandrum; they decide that it will look good and bring good standing and reputation for the department and of course also larger budgets. So the officials in the field start implementing the program and the ones in the capital sit and wait for good results and numbers that are hard to reach...But everyone knows there are so many other programs just like it everywhere.\footnote{Interview 17, ACF.}

I tried to tell the directors [referring to the department headquarters] that there is no need for one more project that attempts to diversify incomes and offer alternative employment. In this district there are already several, and there is only a limited amount of people who could benefit from the project and it will not work out well...But they did not listen, they think only of writing the annual activity report to Delhi.\footnote{Interview 38, DFO.}

This behaviour is clearly reminiscent of Niskanen’s (1975) classical model of the budget-maximising bureaucrat, whose primary rational interest it is to increase agency budgets and power, with less regard to the public interest or what is \textit{de facto} needed or sought after. Consequently, upland Kerala sees countless similar projects and programs running side-by-side under the more or less exclusive jurisdiction of one agency or government office. In one district main town where I spent a few nights I was told that no less than nine different projects were running in the vicinity, each focused on different aspects of motivating and activating forest-dwelling youths to take a greater part in environmental conservation and education.\footnote{Interview 32, DFO.} In terms of the IAD framework, we may see this as multiple action situations, occurring quite independently in different locations, under different agency mandates. Excepting the set of participants, the structure and intention of these situations are in many cases exceedingly alike: they aim to reach similar goals and also operate in comparable ways. This ultimately leads to a situation of functional
overlap and redundancy in the range of programs ongoing at any point in time.

According to all the plans and regulations there is nothing that encourages us to coordinate with other projects or use our resources together which would be useful as many of the charity-organisations have excellent ways of reaching out to people. The correct procedure in the regulations is basically to ignore whatever is going on next doors…to just concentrate on your own project. That is why they often fail to reach goals.123

A comparative example
Before proceeding, a useful parallel may be made here to an insightful comparative study by Oakerson and Parks (2011) on two well-known protected areas in the US; Yellowstone National Park and the Adirondacks. The authors argue that the former is organised on largely monocentric principles as it has one clearly defined boundary which constitutes one single jurisdiction, within which no permanent residents are allowed and no other intrusive activities may occur. The land is entirely under public ownership and is managed by one single park agency, even though the ecological boundaries of Yellowstone’s ecosystem stretch far beyond the park administrative boundaries. The latter protected area, the Adirondacks, is significantly larger and comprises portions of multiple counties and townships, has at least two separate agencies with management responsibilities, several voluntary associations, and a resident population of 130,000 on private lands within its borders (2011: 157-63). The authors argue that “in place of a unified management structure, the Adirondack Park features a highly complex set of institutionalised arrangements that include nested state and local jurisdictions and multiple public agencies” (2011: 157). Moreover, they define the Adirondacks as a polycentric park as there is collaboration between various agencies and authorities, but also that it has a formal boundary – known there as the ‘Blue Line’ – demarcating the full area to be protected, which largely corresponds to the biophysical boundaries of the Adirondack Mountains. They state that such a boundary is a key feature of what distinguishes polycentric systems from monocentric ones. On this they suggest that:

…it may be important to define a larger region of common interest, such as an eco-region. When such a unit becomes the basis for comparative study, it becomes clear that virtually all protected areas depend on multijurisdictional or multi-organizational arrangements. It will become equally clear that multiple sets of interests are implicated in the governance of protected areas – interests that include the values associated with human settlement. Governance will reflect trade-offs among partially competing values and interests, not simply the dominance of a single set of interests as defined in the organic statute of a single agency (2011: 164).

123 Interview 38, DFO.
Applying the same logic to the empirical context at hand, we may conceptualise the entire Western Ghats as one distinct eco-region, or alternatively as a number of adjoining, lesser ecoregions. Such delineation exists in the region in the case of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve shared between Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, but is only an ecological demarcation and is not governed or managed as one contiguous unit. However, the Gadgil Commission Report (2011) mentioned in chapter four proposed something quite similar. The Western Ghats would be classified into three different ecologically sensitive areas with clearly defined boundaries, with the numerous village grama sabhas as the key decision-making body, only coordinated by an autonomous authority transgressing state and district boundaries. Yet it failed to mobilise enough political support. Instead, forest management in the Western Ghats follows the more monocentric model with jurisdictions that are less reflective of the biophysical reality with one single public agency in charge; the state forest departments (see also UNDP 2012). What is formally lacking here is the equivalence of the ‘Blue Line’ of the Adirondacks; an encompassing boundary delineating forest governance activities more broadly, including both areas under forest cover and human settlements.

Incentives for collaboration

Summing up the above sections, frontline officials perceive two problems or challenges in their immediate policy environment. First, the jurisdictional boundaries do not reflect the de facto forest landscape they are charged with managing, and often want to manage differently; recall the appeal of contemporary policy ideals focusing on something broader than just territorial forests. It imposes an organisational structure which limits desired communication and dialogue between actors, and inhibits some form of birds-eye perspective of what is occurring beyond the single jurisdiction. Second, the boundaries also lock officials (and those of other agencies) into their jurisdictions and the larger drainpipe-structure of the hierarchical organisation. As this narrow and vertical order is the established practice, functional overlaps of similar, and simultaneously running programs becomes a reality officials see as a classic ‘too many cooks spoil the broth’ situation, with unnecessary duplications of interventions. Overall, the two problems lead to what they perceive as suboptimal outcomes: in theory they may manage to carry out their activities within the confines of their organisations – in other words they do not lack all implementation capacity – but provided the discretionary power to do things differently, that is what they prefer to do.124

To manage this work we need to share…It may be helpful, how should we know this if we say no meetings, no support, no sharing.125

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124 Interviews 31, 32, 35 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 46, 48, 55, 60, 62, 63 & 66, RFOs; Interviews 40, 65 & 68; SFOs.
125 Interview 48, RFO.
More generally, the simultaneous coexistence of several agencies and jurisdictions undertaking similar tasks in the same geographical area should not be seen as something inherently dysfunctional or chaotic. The early literature on polycentricity (see Ostrom 1973; Ostrom et al. 1961) in fact argues quite the opposite, as long as the different actors are able and willing to communicate between themselves, either for healthy competition in service delivery or for coordinating their individual actions to something of a broader scope and impact. However, it is the relative lack of formal requirements or channels for dialogue and coordination that constitutes the reported shortcoming here, locking officials into a formally monocentric model of governance. As we shall see, the network arrangements become the platform in which this shortcoming may be mitigated.

The problem is that we are required to do very, very many various jobs and tasks, and a lot of paperwork too…If I can manage to share some work with other official or agency just once or twice it helps, and then I will do the same back another time.126

Strategic Planning and Informational Networks

Much simplified, the primary characteristic of this category of networks is boundary spanning. This is a well-established concept in public administration and refers basically to the efforts seeking to connect and intertwine the tasks and activities of different organisations, not least by promoting the exchange of information and knowledge and facilitating dialogue by actors on policy issues they have in common (see Leifer and Delbecq 1978; Pautz and Schnitzer 2008). Though the literature usually refers to individuals that exhibit such characteristics I expand the definition here to include the observed network arrangements undertaking boundary spanning activities. These networks predominantly focus on mid to long-term planning, informational exchange and building up an environment for adaptive learning (tasks which in practice occur quite seamlessly, of which the last is addressed separately below), although more tangible efforts to reduce overlaps occur too.

Planning and harmonising

The main and central components in these networks are regularised meetings between a diversity of actors operating at the field-level in rural Kerala. Providing a precise demarcation of the networks’ span and range of inclusion is not my stated research task, but it should be noted that it would have been quite difficult due to the fact that they are quite fluid and dynamic. Yet, at a minimum – based on my own observations of these meetings and what

126 Interview 69, RFO.
respondents recounted 127 128 — they would include the sets of actors listed below. The first are forest officials of the adjacent-lying KFD jurisdictions, not least the forest ranges and their RFOs but usually two or even three DFOs from the division level. Echoing the earlier discussion of boundaries, the *de facto* forest cover usually transgresses formal jurisdictional lines, which often make little practical sense to frontline officials. For that reason they often think of their ‘next-door neighbours’ in other jurisdictions as natural strategic allies.129 At one observed meeting a CF was also present, and I was informed that this is quite unusual, but not entirely unique as that is the position DFOs almost always are promoted to. Hence the comparatively younger officials were reportedly interested in keeping an eye on field activities they had previously been engaged in.130

In addition to KFD officials, the meetings would see officials of other line-departments working in the adjacent area with tasks relating to forest management. The constant participants were officials of the tribal development department and the rural development department, with occasional visits from the public works-, revenue-, agriculture- and even health departments. At one gathering described in more depth below officials of the Tamil Nadu Forest Department (TNFD) were present, though this was also described as unusual, and a point of criticism returned to later. Next, local government representatives from the *gram panchayats* and *block panchayats* were present at most meetings and on one observed occasion the District Collector (DC) and District Magistrate (DM), though I was told that they rarely get engaged in the everyday aspects of forest management.131 The local government officials were present in varying numbers at the meetings I observed, ranging from a minimum of three to more than a dozen at another. Last of all, NGOs or Church-driven charities working on forestry-related tasks would be recurrent participants at the meetings focused more specifically on harmonising programs and projects running in parallel.132 Among the two latter, respondents suggested that they are comparatively more skilled in acting as a mediating and facilitating actor in interactions with local communities, not least indigenous ones, citing amiable relationships as a resource they hold which the KFD conversely lacks.

127 I had the chance to observe four larger gatherings of this kind during my fieldwork.
128 In particular interviews 14 & 17, ACFs; Interviews 28 through 32, 34, 36 & 37, DFOs; Interviews 48, 50, 51, 55, 58, 62, 63 & 66, RFOs; Interviews 54, 65 & 68, SFOs; Interview 89, Senior Forest Official, IGNFA.
129 Interviews 29, 31, 35 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 44, 50, 60 & 62, RFOs; Interviews 40 & 68, SFOs.
130 Interviews 32 & 36, DFOs.
131 Interview 62, RFO.
132 Not all NGOs or charities are run by the Christian church (of whichever denomination). Given the religious diversity of Kerala (Moser and Younger 2013), several Islamic and Hindu charities exist too, but were far less encountered during fieldwork. One respondent suggested that they seldom focus on issues relating to forest and wildlife conservation, or human livelihoods in forest areas (Interview 10, CCF).
I tried to get a rough idea of how often these types of meetings are held, seeing that they primarily focus on mid to long-term planning and informational exchange that is not urgent. One respondent stated that “we meet when we need to. Sometimes many days straight, sometimes only once a month” while two others claimed that the gatherings are a monthly occurrence.\textsuperscript{133} The four I had a chance to observe were held in different forest divisions though there was some overlap among RFO and DFO participants, indicating that the networks do not have one fixed boundary rule predetermining the range of actors that may be included. Of these four, three were held at the local division forest office, typically a quite big compound with some larger auditorium on the premises, and one was held at a local school. I was told that the local DFO is the person that calls to the meetings, which would suggest that he has an indirect role in determining access and group composition, but in their own opinion the DFOs were simply the person who more literally called other actors, stating that they should meet.\textsuperscript{135} Last, and importantly, the forest officials pointed out that they meet and interact with other actors (KFD, non-KFD and non-state) regularly for a variety of purposes; some falling under this category of networks, some under the other two, and most of them continuously with a smaller number of individuals in their immediate vicinity.\textsuperscript{136} This reaffirms the observed nature of the networks as relatively organic and loose confluences without predefined participants and institutionalised structures.

Yet the larger (approximately monthly) meetings were a slightly institutionalised feature, seemingly constituting something of a consistent core in these networks. The first central task at these meetings is to harmonise policies and reduce functional overlaps and redundancies caused by projects and programs running in parallel in different jurisdictions which formally have few channels for communication in between themselves. In practice this involves sharing and providing information on what activities are being started or planned in the jurisdictions represented at the meetings, evaluating where there is a risk of overlap or duplication, and where there is a pre-existing scarcity or abundance of resources and interventions. A few respondents suggested that the fairly insulated organisation of the department causes this practice; with the reported explanation that frontline staff should obtain the information they formally require on regular meetings with their superiors (and increasingly by email) but that this generally is far less in scope and content than they believe they actually need to know.\textsuperscript{137} DFO respondents related that they attempt to find out from their counterparts in other departments and the local government if funds have been allocated to their jurisdictions recently, if any project has been spawned higher up in

\textsuperscript{133} Interview 48, RFO.
\textsuperscript{134} Interview 34, DFO; Interview 55, RFO.
\textsuperscript{135} Interviews 31, 35 & 36, DFOs.
\textsuperscript{136} Interviews 29, 31, 35 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 44, 50, 60 & 62, RFOs.
\textsuperscript{137} Interviews 32 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 62 & 63, RFOs.
their hierarchies, and whether there is any scope for rationalising the way these projects could be carried out. One of them stated that

I believe that exchanging this type of information is fundamentally important, for two reasons... We will know more about what will happen in the future in this district, and we will know how the appropriate officials will plan to organise their assignments. Maybe they can assist us, and maybe we can assist them.

When enquiring about the substantial output of this – whether they can actually use this information constructively to rationalise or streamline policy activities – responses largely spoke of a situation in which they make limited progress, though it is not insignificant either. The general trend is that information and updates on planned activities and projects are readily provided by the other actors, who reportedly also value obtaining the same kind of updates from the forest department. But when it comes to committing to substantial action and synchronisation of projects, the difficulties begin. The consistent and most common explanation was that officials of other public agencies and the local governments are too constrained in what they can do and promise; a matter of simple autonomy and discretionary power. “They are unable to do so many things, always saying that they are not in a position to take decisions” one DFO related. However, the situation is not entirely without progress. As a few illustrative examples shortly below will show, actors do indeed manage to synchronise their work and reduce certain functional overlaps. Another DFO explained that

We solve what we can when we meet, if it is minor tasks. If we cannot we decide to bring it to our superior officials, to propose a new solution. [MW: Does that make a difference?] It can sometimes, if we are clever and clear.

This seems to indicate that progress – in the sense of moving towards substantive action, beyond the sharing of information and updates – does occur if actors manage to obtain the necessary discretionary power to configure and influence the implementation process, if only slightly. At a more general level, the perception of possible success and progress – even if it is infrequent – is incentivising enough for the officials to keep meeting and interacting; an important point returned to in the book’s concluding chapter. In one of the examples below NGOs and charities were the object of synchronisation and harmonisation, which appears to have been a comparatively easier task than dealing with other state agencies and bodies.

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138 Interviews 31, 34, 35 & 36, DFOs.
139 Interview 31, DFO.
140 Interviews 31, 34, 35 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 44, 55 & 62, RFOs.
141 Interview 29, DFO.
142 Interview 36, DFO.
Illustration 1 – forest restoration and job creation

In the case of forest restoration there is much scope for synergy between the mandated activities of the forest department and the interests and wishes of the local government. Usually this implies clearances of roads, ditches and canals after the monsoon season, when landslides typically occur and wash away fences, powerlines and tear down trees. However, such activities may also be conducted on what is considered degraded land; for instance abandoned factory sites and old quarries, though such land is not widespread in Kerala given the high land scarcity. It befalls the forest department to make sure that restoration and reparations occur within their jurisdiction, which typically requires a lot of muscle-power for short periods of time, ranging from a few days to several weeks. Oftentimes, they draw upon the human resources present in the VSS institutions they have a formal partnership with through the PFM program. Simultaneously, local governments are partially responsible for implementing rural job creation programs, with most of the planning and execution occurring at the lowest gram panchayat level, while the block panchayat offices fill some supervisory purposes. In the nationwide job creation program NREGA, which is carried out in a number of districts in Kerala, local governments are entitled to approach any government agency of their preference and have an official from that department provide and coordinate their work.

In one division I visited I had the chance to visit a rural worksite where a few dozen individuals (the vast majority being women) were busy digging new ditches, canals and ponds in an area that seemed to have been neglected for some time. It was part of a follow-up visit from the local DFO and I asked him about his experience of forest restoration and job creation in the jeep going there. He related an interesting account suggesting that the whole experience was a mixed bag. A few years ago when NREGA was yet fairly new to the state there had been much confusion over how it was to be implemented in the areas where his division is located. He told me that several line-agencies including the KFD, tribal development- and public works department had sought to benefit from the program by attracting relatively cheap labour and had gotten into conflict over how to divide a limited number of workers in between themselves. An attempt was made by the DFO at the time in an adjacent division to bring the different departments and the concerned local government representatives to table, to work out a solution that would not lead to unnecessary competition between the agencies. He explained that they met several times though; “Progress was very slow. Some meetings was just arguing and some officers left negotiations saying that they would appeal to the court and the magistrate...but they were unsuccessful, later they said that they wanted to find an agreement again.”

143 Interview 29, DFO; Interviews 56 & 58, RFO.
144 Ibid.
145 Respondent 34, DFO.
146 Interview 34, DFO.
far as I can tell from his recollection, the different concerned actors kept walking out on the negotiations (seemingly figuratively and literally) but would approach the others again after a few weeks and ask to make a new try. When enquiring if and how they managed to solve it in the end, the DFO explained that eventually a few of the block panchayat officials got together and invited an external mediator from the Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), an independent yet government-funded training and research organisation focused on promoting decentralised governance in the state. That person was able to propose a scheme in which the departments took turns in acquiring labour in a system of rotation based on the formal gram and block panchayats they belong to, so that there would be no confusion on which department would obtain labour from which area. Reportedly, the local government officials had been satisfied too, as the rotation system put in place enabled the swift allocation of workers, allowing the panchayat bodies to fill their required quotas of created jobs.

The KILA representative was very clever, he was more neutral than all the government officials; I believe no one had strong hesitations about him proposing how to allocate workers...Relationships between agencies are sometimes very strained, not willing to change position. They prefer their own agency first.

In the case at hand, an external mediator seems to have made all the difference. When I later met with one of the RFOs in the division I asked again about the perceived experience of working with a program like NREGA. He confirmed what the DFO had said about the utility of the KILA representative, and argued further

When it concerns matters of employing villagers there is much struggle between agencies; there are too few workers available at the wages of MNREGA...He [the mediator] was able to change perspectives, he comes back frequently to provide assistance and new research on MNREGA.

**Illustration 2 – environmental education programs**

In a division where I spent a few days I was offered the insightful account of how almost a decade earlier a large number of small NGOs and charities had begun to be formed and registered in the small and quite unassuming town housing the local forest range office. The community-oriented organisations were all focused on fostering and improving environmental education and sensitisation among Scheduled Tribes youths and children. The ranges overlap with taluks where a substantial number of indigenous hamlets exist, but is not one the most marginalised and deprived areas in the state as far as the indigenous population is concerned. Yet, this was reportedly only a few

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147 See their webpage at: http://kila.ac.in/node/2
148 Interview 34, DFO.
149 Interview 56, RFO.
years after the incident in Kerala in which five individuals were tragically shot to death by the police, during the mass evictions that ultimately led to the passing of the FRA in 2006 (Bijoy and Raman 2003; Kashwan 2017). My local KFD-hosts suggested that this led to an upsurge in various groups and organisations aiming to strengthen human development in indigenous hamlets, many by fostering better conservation practices and knowledge about the local forest and wildlife ecology; an attitude which was heavily criticised by activist respondents, who argued that indigenous groups have been custodians of the forests for centuries, and that efforts to now teach them the same knowledge but in more rational-scientific terms is belittling or even colonial. The scepticism towards certain NGOs was also manifest in the viewpoints of some of the most senior and retired officials I met with, who maintained that they often cause more problems than they actually solve; much due to their comparative short-lividness. One PCCF stated that

Such social organisations and groups and NGOs sometimes help us with projects and programs, but we make sure they do not violate any principles of sound forest conservation. But in the end, they are transient. Their budgets will only last five or ten years and then they run out of money and leave. [MW: Do they come back?] Not unless they find more money, which is unusual…we monitor them very closely during the partnership, to check they do not go too far or become too ambitious.

The two RFOs operating in the area soon learnt that the majority of the small grassroots organisations were focused on very similar issues and activities, for instance providing short courses on local botany and fauna, programs for more sustainable harvest of NTFPs, and sensitisation tours in adjacent blocks and districts. I was told that the last activity usually involved loading large amounts of indigenous youths onto buses and taking them on an excursion to what seemingly are model villages or plantations where they are walked around for a day, instructed on how to accomplish similar features in their own hamlets. The smallest NGOs had no more than four of five highly motivated youths packed into a small room, sharing one laptop and printer, while the largest enjoyed external funding from a philanthropist group of sorts based in Chennai in Tamil Nadu. While their dedication should not

150 Interview 73, MK Prasad; Interview 75, VS Vijayan; Interview 77, Madhav Gadgil, all three academics/activists.
151 Interview 2, CCF (retired); Interview 5, PCCF (retired), Interview 7, APCCF; Interview 16, PCCF.
152 Interview 16, PCCF.
153 Interview 50, RFO.
154 Local friends in Kerala informed me that creating a small NGO or community-based organisation in a more backwards area is an excellent merit to place on the CV, and even if the organisation itself accomplishes little it helps when applying for jobs. I had the chance to visit one of these in a small town; out of ten employees, six were finance- or medical students from

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be diminished, they overlapped substantially in their functional and geographical scope, and more importantly with the formal mandate of the tribal development department, the rural development department and also some minor activities of the KFD. I was informed that the RFOs saw this as entirely meaningless and also a waste of scarce resources, for which reason they assembled their subordinate SFOs who were in more daily contact with both the indigenous hamlets and some of the NGOs. They then went to the local DFO and asked him to call to a meeting with the local heads of the other two line-departments and some of the grassroots groups willing to join. One of the RFOs proclaimed that

I knew when I saw all these groups setting up shop that things would go chaotic, each group trying to be better than their neighbour, giving headache to themselves and the hamlets, who do not need one more group arriving with a new program and idea.

What reportedly happened next is that the DFO after much persuasion managed to get the concerned actors to a meeting where he spent the better part of a full day explaining the challenge they all were facing, not least in how none of them (the two other departments excepted) would be able to accomplish much if they did not choose their strategies and targets more wisely. The RFOs, who had been at the meeting, told me of the initial reluctance all the participants exhibited at first as they all had relatively detailed plans and ambitions and were not easily convinced at giving them up, which eventually took ‘many hard bargains’ which were ‘much exhausting’. But the ultimate arrangement is noteworthy – the DFO offered to assist the smaller groups with resources (certain tools and equipment but mainly ordinary office supplies) if they each would commit to focusing on a smaller amount of hamlets. To the other line-departments he promised that the indigenous youths already enrolled in different programs they run would be given priority when the KFD need to employ new forest watchmen. The DFO was given a list of local youths which he promised to consult when the time came. I was told that this bargain held for several months, during which time two of the smallest groups had to fold due to a lack of manpower (or possibly lack of sustained commitment), the Tamil philanthropists pulled out entirely, and at least two or three new grassroots groups were created. The subsequent response was a new meeting in which the DFO again had to

the Kochi metropolitan area, stating that they hoped to advance their career prospects through their six-month voluntary undertaking.

155 Interviews 50 & 51, RFOs.
156 Interview 50, RFO.
157 In one perspective this may be seen as a particularistic or even corrupt action, though it reportedly did not involve any bribery (as far as I was told) but was seen as a clever bargain. Yet, one can speculate that the youths not enrolled in any training program might need a temporary job even more.
strike bargains and offer various levels of support in exchange for promises to focus efforts on fewer indigenous communities, but with greater depth.

[Speaking of the DFO] He was very strong in bargaining and was successful in making deals...We know that some of those groups have very good connections and relationships with hamlets, sometimes having family there, which forest department does not…it took much energy but for the past years it works good, now we can handle this very easily. He taught us how to bargain and handle problem.\textsuperscript{158}

Word spread over time that the DFO at hand was particularly apt at bargaining and negotiating. I was told over lunch by the two RFOs and a few of their staff that after they managed to coordinate the NGOs, charities and other local agencies, a reputation spread that this was a set of officials that were skilled in getting things done, at least in terms of organising and coordinating actors. They recounted that after some time, colleagues and organisations they were familiar with started to approach them, even if they had nothing to do with environmental education in particular, mainly because they saw the DFO and his staff as capable individuals who might offer suggestions and support on other strategic planning problems.\textsuperscript{159}

\textbf{Illustration 3 – training for indigenous youths}
This is another instance of policy harmonisation and problem solution that I had the chance to observe during fieldwork. It was held at spacious forest department compound which consisted of eight large concrete houses spread out around a large roundabout with a well-kept lawn in the middle. High walls surround the compound and an oversized billboard with red-green writing over the entrance declares that this is the division forest office. The meeting itself was held in a slightly cramped assembly room packed full of chairs and roughly a dozen men and women. The local DFO is not present so one of my accompanying RFOs opens the meeting and acts as chairman. The gathered people include other KFD officials, tribal department officials, a few \textit{gram panchayat} representatives and a local church-run charity.

Travelling there my guiding RFO had explained that once again a project had been initiated by the tribal development department aiming to provide training to indigenous youths in restoring and repairing damaged forest areas in return that they commit themselves to working a certain number of days for that department when they need additional muscle-power for construction or infrastructure reparation in their concerned jurisdictions. I am told that the idea has been spawned high up in the tribal department, and is reportedly a favoured type of project as it is easy to implement locally and report back on. The RFO explains that in principle there is nothing wrong with the idea but in practice this has caused problems in the past. As there is

\textsuperscript{158} Interview 51, RFO.
\textsuperscript{159} Respondents 50 & 51, RFOs.
a limited amount of youths able or willing to be trained, there is reported annoyance in the forest department offices that the tribal department keep persisting with this, as it is not their area of expertise.\textsuperscript{160} Another RFO present at that meeting later told me that “Each department has certain functions and knowledge they are skilled at, it gives me frustration and anger when one department starts things they do not have good knowledge in.”\textsuperscript{161} Apparently, this is not the first time this type of situation has arisen and in the past they have gotten into protracted arguments at various meetings seeking to resolve the problem. I am informed that the officials in the division at hand all agree that the ultimate goal of providing training for indigenous youths is laudable and needed, but cannot agree on how to structure the process and procedure. A year or two ago some of the tribal department officials had ceased all communication and dialogue with their counterparts in the KFD, due to dissatisfaction with how the latter tried to interfere in their activities. My guiding RFO stated that

There was very much fighting and conflict, they complained that DFO in this division was controlling their work, trying to take over…they do not like the forest department, but it was mistake to stop sharing and meeting, they know they are required to.\textsuperscript{162}

Ostensibly, there was recent history of antagonism between the two departments, but at the observed meeting the tribal department was represented, though I could not determine if it was by the previously aggrieved officials. It lasted for about two or three hours and was at times very intense, at least judging by the amount of raised voices and shouting, though it was held in Malayalam. Afterwards I had tea with the RFOs and the local charity worker and was told of the solution they had worked out. The tribal department had been convinced to yield the training conduct to the forest department under the condition that the charity (a Catholic one to be precise) also would be a part of it, as they reportedly had some individuals with skills in forest restoration. The tribal department and the \textit{gram panchayat} offices would be responsible for organising transportation of the youths from a larger catchment area, beyond the previously targeted \textit{taluks}. That would allow the tribal department to report higher numbers of trained youths to their superiors, which they saw as a priority. Finally, the forest department committed to increasing the scope of the training program, which they said would contribute to more long-term development goals, on the condition that some of the indigenous youths later could be hired to work on KFD projects if the need should arise.\textsuperscript{163}

\textsuperscript{160} Respondent 67, RFO.
\textsuperscript{161} Interview 66, RFO.
\textsuperscript{162} Interview 67, RFO.
\textsuperscript{163} Respondents 66 & 67, RFOs.
Being told about it then I recall commenting on the ingenuity of the arrangement and enquired whether the RFOs and the charity worker were satisfied with the solution. The latter proclaimed that it had been difficult but eventually they had reached what he called ‘acceptably limited accord’, a statement I interpret as reaching just enough consensus in order to strike a deal; an important point returned to in the concluding discussion. One of the RFOs was less enthusiastic, explaining that the issue had been resolved for the time being but that he had small hopes that this would be a lasting arrangement, claiming that “Next month or next year there will be new conflict, on this undertaking or other issue, and then new solution again…No one is pleased but better than conflict all the time.”

Capacities for Learning

Each of the network arrangements falling under the SPIN category had regularised meetings seeking to trade information and knowledge with the purpose of synchronising and coordinating substantial policy activities. Yet a few divisions saw efforts that go one step even further; seeking to not only exchange information for the sake of knowing what is occurring in the wider policy environment, but rather move towards what the literature terms a conducive environment for (adaptive) learning, which is held as a way of strengthening collaborative endeavours and finding creative solutions when actors cannot do so on their own (Armitage et al. 2007; Gerlak and Heikkila 2011; Koontz et al. 2015). While the empirical setting at hand is a far cry from the developed contexts where much of the research on adaptive learning has been conducted and officials themselves never thought of it in these terms, a few notable similarities exist, outlined in the text below.

First, the divisions and regions where this was observed during fieldwork were also administered by some of the most active, forward-thinking and industrious DFOs that I met (relative to the bureaucratic context and culture they work in), suggesting that individual leadership skills and commitment might be essential for facilitating capacities for learning. Respondents stated that the root cause for this type of activity and efforts was to be found in the way the formal training of foresters in India is conducted. As discussed in chapter four, candidates for forest service programs and schools are required to possess at least a bachelor’s degree (and a master’s for the IFS training in Dehradun) in a natural science subject, and training is reportedly still heavy on technical aspects of forest management, though socio-economic and human development issues are increasingly being acknowledged (Fleischman 2012, 2014; Ramesh 2015). For the IFS-officials (those at DFO level and

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164 Respondent 67, RFO.
165 Interviews 30, 32, 36 & 37, DFOs; Interviews 55 & 62, RFOs; Interview 89, Senior Forest Official, IGNFA.
166 Interviews 89 & 90, Senior Forest Officials IGNFA.
higher), general organisation studies and administration is an additional, dominant part of their training curriculum. In combination this leads to a perceived limitation in what some forest officials believe that they are skilled in doing with regards to field activities, and thus seek out dialogue and interaction with other actors to simply broaden their skillsets or acquire new competencies they lack. Some also highlighted that the quite insulated and silo-like structure of the department does little to reward or promote sharing of information and new learning opportunities, reinforcing the image of technical forest management as *the* best practice.\(^{167}\)

The structure of the whole forest administration is from the Britishers; Brandis and Schlich and those gentlemen…That was more than hundred years ago; there were less people in India and nobody had heard of climate change and ecosystem services…but the structure has not changed, but the mind-set of some officers have.\(^{168}\)

The quote is reflective of certain elements of the current working culture observed during fieldwork; even in conversations and interviews with much younger officials, names like Dietrich Brandis, Henry Baden-Powell and HV Connolly – key figures in the early forest administration – would be mentioned with some measure of pride, to thereafter ask me whether I could help them access the latest electronic version of *Science* or *Nature*. One retired ACF made an articulate comparison on this point, stating that

> Each department and government office is like a library, full of knowledge about one or two fields of study. But access to the other libraries is closed, if we want that we have to apply for a new course and further training…and that may take many years. I want to think of it as having open doors, having access to the knowledge of all my partners and all their fields.\(^{169}\)

The fact that forest officials are all trained in a natural science subject with less emphasis on human aspects of forestry was a point of critique among certain academics and environmental activists who argued that the foresters are poorly equipped to deal with forest communities and hamlets, and disregard the value of indigenous ecological knowledge and practices.\(^{170}\) Those officials I got a chance to ask why they had joined the forest service (either the IFS or the state equivalent) expressed a genuine interest in forestry\(^ {171}\), as well as the alluring prospects of a stable and safe government career.\(^ {172}\) Yet, one old and retired CCF confessed frankly and humorously

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\(^{167}\) Interviews 27, 30, 32 & 38, DFOs.

\(^{168}\) Interview 27, DFO.

\(^{169}\) Interview 26, ACF (retired).

\(^{170}\) Interview 75, VS Vijayan, academic/activist; Interview 77, Madhav Gadgil, academic.

\(^{171}\) Interview 17, ACF; Interviews 27, 28, 35 & 38, DFOs; Interviews 42, 46, 50 & 62, RFOs.

\(^{172}\) Interview 14, ACF, Interview 18, CCF, Interview 30, DFO.
I joined the Indian Forest Service to get a secure title and posting. With the competition for those types of jobs in India I would have been happy with the Administrative or Police Services too... If I had previous experience of forests? No, I had hardly set foot in one. But those joining the Police Service have never seen a prison either. It is natural to learn these things in training.173

The handful DFOs who were set on mitigating these challenges did not have any more elaborate plan than focusing parts of the larger gatherings of actors on exchanging ideas and perspectives going beyond the immediate policy tasks at hand.174 The common approach is that the DFOs simply invite other participants to share their views and insights on how the field of forest management is functioning, what they imagine to be the important goals, and what limitations and obstacles they perceive. The stated hope and ambition is that actors will learn from each other and trade insights on what practices and strategies work for them and why.175 One DFO stated that

In a best case scenario a lot of expertise and knowledge can be pooled together. We are all trained in different professions and bring something different to the table. It gives more perspective than if we [the KFD] went along ourselves.176

Another official explained that the reason for his commitment is that the default condition of the Indian administration is to predetermine policy problems, goals and procedures in a very fixed way, without leaving much or any scope for learning and experimentation along the way. He maintained that some measure of protocol and order is needed when implementing and enforcing policies and programs but also that the system is too rigid, constraining the capacity for configurations fitting the local context. “It is a frustrating environment if we look only at the specified, detailed plans. It gives too little flexibility, if a problem happens everything stops; no space for changing the procedure without starting from the beginning.” 177 A RFO working in one of these divisions claimed that this whole undertaking is helpful for trading perspectives and ideas, even if it leads to little substantial output in practice; a point returned to just below. He explained that he

As much as possible I will try to communicate with colleague[s] in other departments, sometimes also the community-based organisations working here. We share solutions and discuss what is happening...by discussion[s] I learn things I did not learn in our training.178

173 Interview 2, CCF (retired).
174 Interviews 32, 35 & 36, DFOs.
175 Ibid.
176 Interview 32, DFO.
177 Interview 35, DFO.
178 Interview 50, RFO.
Asking the involved officials what they imagine it may lead to beyond the exchange of knowledge and ideas, or simply having a forum for deliberation and debate; the responses echoed the earlier findings. Most actors are unwilling to make any commitment to carrying out substantial policy activities along the lines they discuss, and also that the meetings regularly lead to conflict and arguments over different perceptions on what the goals of forest management should be and how they are to be reached. Two of the DFOs claimed that they found this quite tiring, stating that there is too much agency prestige in play, including that of the KFD, and that actors have difficulties reconciling with diverging perceptions, emphasising entirely different (but in principle compatible) values regarding forest governance. They related that meetings may get ‘out of control’ in which other agencies and officials declare their intentions to leave the joint arrangement and often do, leading to a period in which they avoid participating in further meetings and coordination efforts for any purpose. Yet interestingly, they never break off their ties and relationships entirely; seeking to join or be invited again when they need to obtain new information and knowledge, or coordinate on some specific task.

I believe that they are unhappy with the way the forest department looks at an issue like tribal livelihoods, or cash-crop plantations. Some of our rangers and foresters [SFOs] are unhappy with how they think of the reserve and protected forests. So arguments happen but when we need to we can cooperate, even with past arguments, it is expected.

Illustration 4 – introducing landscape approaches

I had the opportunity to observe a meeting during fieldwork where the above issues stood in focus. It catches on to the event outlined in the chapter’s opening vignette and was by far also the largest gathering I had the chance to observe, seeing that it brought together more than 40 individuals from a number of various agencies and jurisdictions of the forest department. It was held in one of Kerala’s largest forest divisions, which also holds a very large tract of forest transgressing another forest division, two administrative districts and numerous blocks, reaches into Tamil Nadu, and is well-known for rich biodiversity and endemic wildlife. Yet, the natural landscape is not the only one of importance; in terms of a socio-cultural landscape the area sees multiple towns and urban settlements, a hydroelectric dam and countless private farms and agroforestry plantations. It is by all means what scholars term a multifunctional forest landscape (Nagendra and Ostrom 2012).

The DFO who had called the meeting and then chaired it was an individual I met with a few times while I was visiting the region where he works. He related that much of his working time was spent interacting and deliberating

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179 Interviews 32, 35 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 50, 60 & 62, RFOs.
180 Respondents 32 & 35, DFOs.
181 Interview 35, DFO.
in these types of meetings, and that he considered himself ‘open to new impressions’. He further stated that he enjoys trying and learning about new approaches to forest and wildlife management, and had recently undertaken an out-of-state training course where he had rediscovered several ideas and perspectives on what is known as a landscape-approach to forest conservation. He told me that he and his counterpart in the adjacent forest division, and their subordinate officials, already were thinking along the lines of a landscape when they planned and implemented projects, not least in terms of wildlife management and the inclusion of villagers in protection activities. He suggested that this was fairly simple and without too much effort; “I believe that we forest department officials speak the same language. Sometimes it is complicated but we have similar education and training, we understand what we need to do.” 182 The reported difficulty was rather enticing non-KFD actors to adopt a similar mind-set and perspective. He explained that he had made many attempts in the past to meet with representatives of the local block panchayat offices as well as officials from the agriculture-, rural- and tribal development departments to inform them about his and his colleagues preferred method. He lamented that this is far from easy, as those individuals usually tend to think much more site-specific; seeing their jurisdictions and programs as all that matters, even if they usually end up working with the forest officials in some way or another.

His plan for the gathering I visited was twofold. The first was to try once again to make the assembled non-KFD actors step up their efforts to communicate and coordinate with the forest officials when carrying out projects in their respective jurisdictions, and also attempt to change their frames of mind towards the landscape-perspective. One of the RFOs that accompanied me to the gathering stated that “This is an important meeting; Shri [omitted name] is prepared to negotiate and bargain, to convince them to interact with us more.” 183 The second part of the plan was slightly more daring and proposed that the DFO himself could function as the coordinating actor; being the unifying authority in the envisioned arrangement that others would turn to for logistical support and information. When I later asked the DFO why he took on the role as informal leader he explained that

I have worked for the forest department since I graduated college, first as range officer and then as division officer, in several different locations…It has given me a lot of ideas and insights about what works and what doesn’t work in the system of management we have. [MW: What is the main challenge do you think?] The way we are organised, we work in our own offices but miss the bigger picture, that forests are one part of something more, a whole ecosystem, and now with threats from every angle…I respect the organisation but we have to communicate with each other, we cannot wait

182 Interview 38, DFO.
183 Interview 62, RFO.
while things go up one department, move over to another and down that department...That's why we have meetings like the one you came for.  

The meeting, which lasted close to six hours with only a short break for a quick lunch, was heavy on deliberation and arguments, manifested by the amount of shouting and raised voices. I sat down with a few RFOs who related what had happened. The gathered non-KFD actors – in particular those from the tribal development- and agriculture departments and a few of the block panchayat officials – had complained and felt that the DFO’s proposed arrangement was much too heavy on environmental and ecological aspects, at the expense of other important issues. They had argued that the DFO had initially framed the whole venture in an overly technical language which they reportedly did not understand, and that he had missed aspects relating to livelihood interventions and economic aspects concerning agro-forestry plantations and animal husbandry – key policy tasks and priorities of these actors. The RFOs further recounted that the first half of the meeting had consisted of a long discussion of what was meant by a landscape-approach, and what it actually implies in practices. One of the local government officials had been upset and stated that the DFO was too academic, and had threatened to leave the meeting. One RFO informed me that this was actually quite common; they attend the gatherings and often “complain a whole lot, causing long arguments” but keep coming back whenever summoned because “if they do not arrive, they will be left out the next time, and then they have less friendship.” Simply reaching some consensus on what a landscape approach means took the better first half of the meeting. The DFO later told me that the important break-through came when he made them realise that the concept is broad enough to include multiple goals and perspectives; a landscape-approach is not just about one policy problem but rather to take a holistic perspective, incorporating multiple demands. He explained that:

Of course they will have many problems and arguments with what I suggest, but as I said, they miss the bigger picture if they look too much at their own ideas and programs...I do not think I changed their minds but they have another place to go for debate, they will be useful to be friends with; I know it and they know it. I think it was good that we avoided setting one definition, although that is what I wanted...Yes, I will look into their suggestions [which were mainly oriented around animal husbandry and procuring goats and chickens for villages] but I will not give them any promise. 

Once this breakthrough had occurred it was also easier to move on to discussing how they would start interacting more in practice. The non-KFD

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184 Interview 38, DFO.
185 Including respondents 60 & 62, RFOs.
186 Interview 60, RFO.
187 Interview 38, DFO.
officials had reportedly remained cautious about making any commitment and wanted to give it time to see how the arrangement developed. The DFO stated that he convinced them that his intention was not to establish specific goals or criteria right then – he realised that no present actor had the authority or autonomy to do so – and that these could well emerge over time.

I was able to make them see that much can be fluid, but I think they were worried about this at first… I just wanted to inform them of a new way of thinking and sharing information, not decide what to do this year or next year or ten years from today.188

As for the second part of his proposal, there were comparatively fewer objections to the idea that the will act as some form of network manager for the whole enterprise. The RFOs highlighted that the local government officials had been slightly hesitant, asking why the KFD in particular should perform this function, claiming it was more logical that the District Collector or District Magistrate (DM) do so, if it was needed at all. The DFO had responded with a long answer that those two positions have no skills or knowledge of forest management whatsoever, and made the tactical choice to refer to the gathered crowd as ‘the real experts of forests and forest communities’. The RFOs acknowledged that the DC and DM are capable individuals in the concerned district, both IAS-officers, but were not suitable to involve in daily management as they were not trained in a technical profession relating to either ecological conservation or rural development. On the seemingly pivotal role played by the DFO, the forest rangers claimed that

He is respected and listened to… Some of the younger staff see him as inspiration. He has a good vision and knowledge of what occurs in this part of the Ghats, has served here for long and knows people… Yes, very much a natural leader.189

Someone has to do this job, to assemble all those officers and make sure we work towards the same goal…and with the same ideas. Shri [omitted] does that very successfully, makes sure that those who make promises then live up to their word.190

The meeting eventually concluded and I was dropped off at my hotel in the late afternoon. A week later, when I was in New Delhi, I called the DFO (to ask for a telephone number to a contact in Dehradun) and we talked for a while. Inquiring what he thought would come out of the meeting I had participated in he informed me that he would soon be arranging another meeting, to keep the non-KFD officials engaged and motivated. If he could keep

188 Ibid.
189 Interview 62, RFO.
190 Interview 60, RFO.
the discussion going he said they might eventually become more convinced of his visions and start using their respective competencies together.

Illustration 5 – connecting practice with science
A final short but illustrative example of a local but sustained attempt to build a capacity for adaptive learning was offered by an enthusiastic Conservator of Forests whom I met with twice. He had only held the position of CF for a year or two and was inclined to speak largely about events and processes occurring in at frontline, rather than his current more administrative position. He related that he was much interested in ecological sciences and mentioned that he sought to undertake graduate studies sometime in the future. His impetus was not only the doctoral degree, but also an expressed ambition to make forest officials better trained and knowledgeable about current science and practice as it is taught outside of India, beyond the curriculums of the IGNFA, which he claimed were heading in the right direction but still persisted with outdated, narrow conceptualisations of forest management, rather than ecosystem management.¹⁹¹

He went on to explain that when he had been DFO up till recently, he had made multiple efforts to connect his immediate subordinate staff with local research institutes located around Kerala, and some in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka too. He would try to invite representatives from such organisations to come speak to the forest officials in his division and the surrounding ones, and would usually extend the invitation to other public officials in the same district, as well as to local government representatives. The ambition he said was to

…connect the practice with the science. These groups are excellent researchers and they can explain their findings and latest knowledge in a language and format that the foresters understand…It will give us vision of how very different things like plant botany, tree physiology and carbon storage are studied in modern science.¹⁹²

The CF reported that the turnout for these meetings would usually be quite high; the invited actors seemed to enjoy the idea of a free lecture and chance to meet other officials. But then he went on to also lament on the fact that few of the novel innovations and solutions they were informed of would be attainable or even feasible in the field of forest governance, much due to the abovementioned problem of limited autonomy among the involved actors. He claimed that other line-departments and the local governments lacked the flexibility and capacity to change their practices as they reportedly are even more constrained in terms of discretionary power than the forest department officials are. Regarding his own organisation he complained that what ulti-

¹⁹¹ Interview 22, CF.
¹⁹² Ibid.
mately matters is what is written in the formal guidelines, codes and plans, and less what contemporary policies and scientific reports say. He suggested

We can listen and study the research groups and learn, and I really believe that the officers who visit the meetings learn …but the problem in India is not the officers; it is our organisation culture and mind-set. No matter what we learn at meetings, everyone goes back to filling out statistics in ledgers, like we always have.\footnote{Ibid.}

His statement resonates with findings in the literature that attest to a quite narrow conception of ecological knowledge and practice among Indian foresters (see Fleischman and Briske 2016; Gadgil 2007; Gadgil 2008). Yet the CF was also optimistic about the future, stating that at some point ‘an overhaul of forester training’ would occur, which he said would not only bring their training up to date, but also be accompanied by a change in the formal guidelines and plans. “It is all a matter of time, some reform will happen in Delhi and then it is helpful in field staff are prepared…to learn now is a clever investment for when things change.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Summary of Chapter

This chapter has focused on the theme of strategic planning and information sharing. It first discussed the way in which officials perceive incongruous boundaries and functional overlaps, which leads them to develop incentive structures oriented around collaboration. The goal they seek to accomplish is twofold. First they want to mitigate what they in slightly abstract terms referred to as ‘suboptimal outcomes’.\footnote{Interviews 31, 35 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 46, 48, 60, 62, 66 & 67, RFOs; Interviews 40 & 68, SFOs.} This was something of a catch-all term purposively intended to reflect a generally inefficient \textit{modi operandi} as they formally are locked into sharply defined jurisdictions with few mechanisms for coordination and communication in between, which increases their workload and limits the chance of developing a wider birds-eye perspective. Second and more tangibly, they wish to reduce functional overlaps and facilitate a policy environment with more rationalised and harmonised activities and service-delivery to communities. Next, the formal structure of the department and the way forester training in India is conducted also gives rise to an incentive to collaborate and trade information and knowledge. This has the dual goal of broadening their perspectives and understanding on what it is they \textit{de facto} are working on and for what wider reasons (ecosystem management rather than just (timber) forest management for instance), and building an environment more conducive to learning and experimentation.
The way in which they attempt to translate their incentives into substantive action and attain their preferred goals is through interaction within the arrangements I term strategic planning and informational networks (SPIN). These were referred to in each of the eight divisions where I did fieldwork, though statements and observations about networks aiming to foster capacities for learning were only made in half of the divisions; a fact I attribute to the commitment and efforts of the local DFOs, an important point returned to in the concluding chapter.

Reflections on roles

In the last chapter I made the suggestion that all forest officials who act outside the strict confines of their position or jurisdiction following an incentive not directly derived from the formal institutional framework may be seen as an *activist bureaucrat*. These individuals pursue agendas and goals that are not formal, but not either tied to that of a political principal (a role I will term *particularistic bureaucrat* in the discussion in the final chapter).

In one sense all of the officials described above are *activist bureaucrats*, but this role may be disaggregated slightly more. The first one of concern I refer to as a *policy entrepreneur*, an established term in the contemporary literature (Heikkila and Gerlak 2005; Mintrom and Norman 2009). The defining characteristic of this role are incentives, goals and strategies related to advocating and orchestrating change. It is a role that must not necessarily be found only within networks; quite the contrary they often use the authority and legitimacy of their position within a comparatively well-resourced and influential public agency to advocate and promote change on continuous basis, or when a policy problem arises that they perceive may be solved in different way by collaborating. The role is not aimed at managing or regulating other actors, but rather activating them and persuading them to think in a different way, to perceive a problem differently, and most of all to pressure them to engage in collaboration and negotiations. In each of the empirical illustrations above we find indications of officials holding the role of *policy entrepreneur*, as they take the first important steps towards collaboration once they have identified a specific problem. Their outreach spans across boundaries and they are apt at determining which other actors to activate and approach in order to build support and momentum for a specific policy solution. However, the DFO and CF in the last two illustrations perhaps illuminate this role the most.

Yet once they have managed to get other actors to the negotiating table – in practice interacting within the collaborative networks, an additional set of strategies and goals come into play, focused more on horizontal negotiating and cooperating with other actors by trading information and resources, and driving bargains by employing sermons and carrots (informative and economic) instruments. This role I term *network agent* and is an individual who represents his own agency in collaboration, even if his incentives and goals do not derive from the formal institutional framework. Each of the first three
illustrations clearly reflects such a role, as does the fourth one in part, as they rely on their own leadership and interpersonal skills to be successful, as well as their expertise and experience of the policy field. Last, we also saw indications of a role that is more managing or coordinating, not least the DFOs who appear to be in charge of the regularised SPIN meetings, and also the two officials who pushed for creating learning capacities in the last two illustrations. This role I refer to as network manager, which is ostensibly a broad term that is well-entrenched in the literature (see Agranoff 2006; Agranoff and McGuire 2001; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016). The role is partly of a meta-governing character (Sørensen and Torfing 2007a) and reflects incentives and goals of a more far-reaching character as far as collaboration is concerned. While the individual network manager still represents the agency she belongs to, she also focuses on conflict mediation, aligning policy perceptions and framing policy solutions to unconvinced actors – in other words taking overall responsibility, and fostering the strength and cohesion of the network arrangement. Again, the viability of this role is much dependent on individual leadership skills, as well as expertise and experience relevant to the policy environment at hand (see also O'Leary et al. 2012).

An additional empirical observation returned to in the final chapter should be mentioned. It has to do with the fact that the involved network participants never appear to reach full consensus on whichever policy task at hand, and often remain slightly dissatisfied with the agreed-upon process, but still prefer that over nothing or no collaboration at all.
6. Immediate Response and Action

It is late in the morning, the sun is high in the sky and it is getting increasingly warm, despite us being quite far up in the hill areas of the Western Ghats. We are traveling by open-top jeep on a stunningly beautiful route. On each side of the newly tarmacked but rolling road lie endless fields of verdant tea plantations, imbuing the whole landscape with a rich green hue. Here and there small speckles of blue, orange and gold stand out: the colourful saris of the women working as tea pickers on the estates, an arduous occupation yielding low wages and much physical discomfort. Still, it is near impossible to not be stirred by the natural splendour after each hairpin bend, even if we are driving at a pace that puts me at much unease. Six of us are packed into the vehicle: Vaibhav, the local forest range officer, Ravi, a disconcertingly reckless driver, three forest guards whose names I never gathered, and me. Like most other days spent in the field I was picked up from my guesthouse at the break of dawn and driven to the forest department compound. The first two hours today were spent sitting in Vaibhav’s office as he had to attend to a variety of administrative duties, which essentially involved him reading through, stamping and signing a large amount of files stacked on his desk. I made the observation that during the time I sat there he processed and handed over some six separate files to an office clerk, but simultaneously received another eight files from a different clerk. As we leave he looks tired and tells me that he will have to return to the compound later in order to finish up. Walking towards the jeep he informs me that the agenda for today involves visits to two forest stations he has not been to for a long time. These small jurisdictions play a critical role in combatting illegal activities and the officials stationed there function as something of a combined forest police, fire brigade and trackers of wildlife. We get into the jeep and set off into the heartland of the tea-growing region.

Content of the chapter

This chapter is by far the shortest of the four empirical ones, for two predominant reasons. The first is that the incentives and goals related to what I term immediate response and action were much less explicitly referred to during fieldwork, and also that field observations and accounts of collaborative strategies taken within the corresponding networks (IRAN) were less frequent than those in SPIN or CBN. The second reason is the same per-
ceived problems that lead to incentives developing for collaborative strategic planning and information sharing apply here too: the issue of incongruous boundaries, and the extreme land-scarcity and population density of Kerala. The discussion and illustrations in the first quarter of chapter five also holds for the incentives in focus below, and there is no need to excessively repeat what was said there, though some minor references and overlaps are unavoidable, not least in the empirical illustrations below. Two types of policy tasks stand in focus in this chapter: mitigating urgent wildlife issues and preventing forest fires, and curbing illegal activities. Forest vigilance and protection is one of the core activities forest officials are formally prescribed to do and few frontline officials did not identify this as an important part of their work when asked to describe their typical working week. One respondent stated that “on days when we have nothing very urgent and pressing on our table, we will set out on walks to search for illicit activities, it often gives results.”

Local Knowledge and Time Lags

As chapter five discussed at some length the formal jurisdictional boundaries in upland Kerala seldom match the *de facto* boundaries of the natural forest landscape and its diverse sub-ecosystems. In that chapter the main focus was how frontline officials perceive that the boundaries lead to what they termed suboptimal outcomes and functional overlaps, and rather wish to see a policy environment based on long-term planning and harmonised activities. In this chapter the root causes – the incongruous boundaries and the narrow silo-like setup of the forest department – are much the same, but a different set of incentives and goals are in focus.

To briefly summarise this section, the two factors in the subtitle above – local knowledge and time lags – are the key micro-level drivers of collaboration in this specific policy context. During conversations with frontline officials in the areas that see the most severe mismatches between formal and *de facto* functional or biophysical boundaries, the theme of immediate response tasks was a recurring issue. A rough distinction may be made between wildlife issues and forest fires on the one hand, and outright illegal activities on the other, though these two often interrelate in practice.

In the former category the typical problem was tigers or elephants that had been wounded, usually by natural causes but occasionally from a non-fatal shot by poachers. Most of the time these animals steer clear of human settlements, keeping to the denser forest tracts and elevated areas where there is much less settlement, either due to the difficult terrain or due to re-

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196 Interview 65, SFO.
197 Interviews 28, 30, 34 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 44, 48, 50, 55, 62 & 64, RFOs; Interviews 61 & 65, SFOs.
restrictions imposed by the forest department in the case of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Yet when wounded these animals get scared and highly dangerous as they then wander from their usual habitat; onto farms and plantations, and into small villages and hamlets adjacent to the forest. 198 One respondent stated that they “become very unpredictable and dangerous, unlike anything you could possibly imagine…they raid farms and attack people, often children who do not stand a chance of escaping.” 199 This risk also seems to be heightened as human population density increases and urban settlements spread out in areas adjacent to national parks and sanctuaries, even if the formal buffer zone is strictly monitored by the forest department (Gadgil 2011; UNDP 2012).

The next related problem has to do with forest wildfires, which are an annual occurrence, reportedly on the increase too (KFD 2015). During the very dry season (December through March, though it can extend up till the monsoon begins in late May or June) one can find reports on forest wildfires in the newspapers on an almost weekly basis. The causes of the fires vary, with media and academic reports attributing the problem to severe droughts, scarcer rainfall and delayed monsoons, in turn a result of climate change and climate variability (Gadgil 2011; Kasturirangan 2013). Forest officials also acknowledged the changing weather patterns, stating that it takes only a tiny mistake or accident for a wildfire to start and grow to uncontrollable proportions. “It is a tinderbox, one tiny spark and hundreds of hectares of verdant forestland can turn to ashes in a very short time.” 200 Additionally, a handful of officials attributed the wildfires to the illegal activities going on in the forest; not least illicit bush-breweries that they stated cause small explosions due to the poor and makeshift equipment they use, and also that they often set their camps on fire to remove any evidence if they are suspected of getting caught. 201

Some years ago there was a big forest fire up in the hills…after it had burned out after two full days, only because some rain came, we went to do routine inspection of the area, to establish the cause. At the likely origin we found the traces of a distillery and something that had exploded, burning down all this pristine forestland. 202

The second category of activities concerns those that are outright illegal and banned in both forest regulations as well the criminal law of the state. Here we find issues such as illicit bush-brewing and ganja cultivation (both addressed in more depth in an empirical illustration below), as well as wildlife poaching and illegal logging. The two latter problems were often highlighted by officials across the organizational spectra and were also a recurring news

198 Interviews 28 & 30, DFOs.
199 Interview 30, DFO.
200 Ibid.
201 Interview 36, DFO; Interviews 46, 50 & 62, RFOs.
202 Interview 50, RFO.
item in the media. A retired ACF I met in Dehradun, who had spent his career with the department, illuminated the issue. He claimed that the usual perpetrators are gangs – or bandits as he referred to them – who roam the dense forest areas between Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, where there a few major roads and several larger pockets of forestland which are more or less impenetrable unless arriving by foot, and using machetes to cut out a path through the thick underbrush. They reportedly live in makeshift camps, which they are able to pack up and move along with in a matter of minutes, sometimes hiding in indigenous hamlets the forest department and police seldom visit or interact with.

The bandits can shift places in such short time, they have scouts which inform them if the police or forest guards are approaching, and then they disappear. But they also carry out their illicit activities very quickly, often at night. A forest guard may return to the same area after a few days to find that large tracts of sandalwood trees have been removed, with little trace of the bandits…We organised checkpoints along roads with the police, but that only gives results now and then…I think two options are possible; using satellite surveillance and making the forest communities into vigilantes.

As to his first solution, advanced surveillance techniques using satellites was reportedly becoming more common during the time I did fieldwork, albeit at a slow pace. The stated idea is that specially trained officials located at the headquarters or at department compounds in larger towns should sit at monitors more or less all day, scanning forest areas where both wildfires and illicit activities are likely to start and occur. If something suspicious is detected, text messages are sent to the police and the forest officials in the vicinity, who are then intended to deploy rapidly, before the fire spreads or the bandits abandon their camps. This approach was overall favoured by frontline officials, but at the same time multiple officials, not least RFOs, argued that it only offers half a solution.

We like this idea of using technology for forest vigilance, they say it has worked to very good results in the north [of India] and I want to learn more about it. But we must also engage the people here as the eyes and the ears in the forest. They are the satellites of the forest!

Let us now turn to the two specific issues that lead frontline officials to develop a preference for collaboration around immediate response tasks. The basic perceived problem that the frontline officials spoke of, predominantly RFOs and SFOs, but also their immediate DFO superiors, was that they are

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203 Interviews 4 & 18, CCFs; Interview 16, PCCF; Interview 26, ACF (retired); Interviews 28 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 48, 55, 62 & 64, RFOs; Interview 65, SFO.
204 Interview 26, ACF (retired).
205 Interview 28 & 34, DFOs.
206 Interviews 44, 46, 48, 50, 58 & 64, RFOs.
207 Interview 48, RFO.
constrained by the hierarchical system of unidirectional reporting and transfer of information upwards in the department. They claimed that when something sudden and unforeseen (of the above problems) occurs in the field, they are required to notify their superior, who in turn notifies his commanding officer; usually a CF or CCF who might not be at his posting, but rather at the headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram. This they suggested causes a substantial time lag as the formal decision on what to do is taken at a level far beyond the local one, and when two or more departments or agencies are involved the time lag may increase yet more – a topic that has been explored and theorised both in the context of non-urgent inter-organisational collaboration over natural resources (Messier et al. 2013; Thomas 2003), and in the context of natural disaster management (Hermansson 2017). While the silo-like hierarchical organisation of indeed most bureaucracies in India in one sense may facilitate immediate responses as the chain-of-command is blatantly clear, the frontline officials perceived this as a limitation (see also Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). Two officials argued that

It may take too long time before I receive instructions on how to handle a problem that reaches my attention. It does not matter if it is two hours or two days, it is still very slow...I would prefer to see some system here, in this range, with the DFO and maybe DM, that goes straight to the problem.

The forest department is skilled in many things and has many useful resources and professionals. But responding rapidly is still an area for much improvement. When we hear of an injured tiger, or brigands smuggling wood it takes time before an effective decision is made. A better option would be that the appropriate government officers closest to source of the problem address it immediately, and then notify the higher tiers.

The incentive to collaborate in this context is thus to circumvent the rigidity and time lags inherent to the administration; something they perceive may be done by cutting out the upper levels of the hierarchy to instead work together locally. Next, the system that the RFO quoted above referred to is precisely what the frontline officials wish to see, or put differently, their goal of collaboration. More specifically, they desire a routinized procedure involving actors in the local area (such as the division or district at hand, or even the range or block), who are more closely and horizontally connected, and know each other quite well. When something urgent occurs that requires an immediate response, the group of actors may be mobilised on a short time horizon and put to work addressing the arisen problem. As might have been understood already, the way in which they prefer to orchestrate such immediate response and action is through institutionalised network arrangements at the

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208 Interviews 46 & 48, RFOs.  
209 Interview 50, RFO.  
210 Interview 36, DFO.
local level – what I term immediate response and action networks in this book, IRAN.

Immediate Response and Action Networks

IRAN arrangements were observed and referred to in three of the eight divisions where I did fieldwork. This is not to say that they only occur there – in all eight divisions issues related to forest wildfires, injured wildlife and illegal activities were mentioned, though they were overshadowed by the inclination to talk about incentives, goals and strategies relating to the SPIN and CBN arrangements to a much higher degree. Unlike the two other types of networks, these ones appeared to consist of a much smaller range of actors. Based on the aggregated accounts and narratives related to me by frontline officials, the leading or coordinating official was typically a DFO or RFO, again indicating something about the approximate span of the network arrangements. None of the respondents explicitly stated that the interactions they engage in occurs only within the formal department boundaries, again suggesting a cross-jurisdictional nature as far as their envisioned activities are concerned. In addition to forest officials, local government officials were often mentioned, as was the district collector and district magistrate. Yet, the feature that sets the IRAN arrangements apart from the other two is that local forest users were occasionally called in to participate in meetings, or were requested to host visitors from the forest department for discussions on immediate response issues (typically a SFO).

The respondents informed me that they meet regularly to discuss matters relating to immediate response procedures, typically soon after some event has occurred they perceive they could have addressed to a better outcome, or at least attempted to solve. Two of the DFOs reflected that

If there is a big forest fire, or an elephant wrecking farms, or news of poachers that the police have apprehended on the highway I begin to consider and talk with my local staff, ‘how could we work to stop this from happening again?’…When we find the time I invite the panchayat officers, sometimes the IPS officer [Indian Police Services] and maybe someone from the VSS executive committee. We use our reasoning and perspectives together and try to think hard…but the problem is that we cannot do much ourselves; there is a strict formal procedure for preventing fires and so on.212

My favoured approach is to instruct the range officers to assemble the section officers and then go and meet with the executive bodies in the PFM program, and the gram panchayat officers. I instruct them to ask the villagers how they could have stopped the violation, if they knew about it or had heard some

211 Interviews 31, 32 & 38, DFOs; Interviews 46, 48, 50, 51, 60 & 62, RFOs; Interviews 52 & 61, SFOs.
212 Interview 31, DFO.
rumours…And if they had, why did they not contact us?…You see, the department has a formal protocol for addressing criminal activities and emergencies, a long chain of command which we have to follow…but I believe that chain of command should be the other way: the villagers should contact us, the local range officer, they have his phone number, and he can leave the compound at the same instance.\textsuperscript{213}

Two important things stand out in these quotes which a few officials came back to repeatedly. The first is that forest users are identified as something of partners as far as mitigating emergency situations and curbing illicit activities are concerned. As an above quoted official stated; “making the forest communities into vigilantes.”\textsuperscript{214} This they suggested requires a good deal of persuasion, and building nothing less than trust and sound relationships with the villagers, much like the earlier mentioned case with the DFO who had managed to mitigate illegal poaching by introducing projects focused on for instance basket-weaving, which had far-reaching livelihood implications for the villages in that area. The ACF in Dehradun further illuminated that

If a man in the village knows who the bandits are, he can choose to give them shelter and food, or he can choose to contact the police or the forest department…I spent much of my career making sure that they contact us first, by building a relationship where they trust me and I trust them.\textsuperscript{215}

The second and more interesting observation is the constraint they perceive the formal bureaucratic protocol for handling emergencies gives rise to. This problem reiterates what chapter four discussed at some length: that in order to obtain the autonomy and discretionary power frontline officials need to carry out certain localised activities in the way they prefer, they need to dutifully comply with the formal bureaucratic process and its many obligations.

Forest vigilance involves a set of activities that has a strong anchoring in the formal institutional framework, leaving quite little scope for more local, informal solutions as was the case in SPIN, and as we shall see in CBN. In turn, this connects back to the concept of deniability or blame-avoidance. In this specific case there is the fact that there are protocols in place for dealing with emergencies requiring immediate responses, even if many of the frontline officials perceive that they come with severe time lags and obstacles. Considering the amount of attention issues like forest fires, injured wildlife, and illegal logging get in the everyday media reporting, the rational thing for the senior officials to do is make sure that the formal protocols and routines are followed, despite the possibility that the urgent problem may spiral out of control, and the fact that a more localised, immediate solution could potentially contain it. Again, one of the more vigilant DFOs provided his input on this aspect.

\textsuperscript{213} Interview 38, DFO.
\textsuperscript{214} Interview 26, ACF (retired).
\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.
If you read the newspapers while you are here, you will see many statements by forest officers; I make them once in a while and the officers in K. and Trivandrum more often...then we have to declare what steps have been taken, what resource were deployed and in what time, each by the official codes, that is what matters to the leadership...But as I told you before, I believe we have stronger solutions here in the division.216

My interpretation of the situation is that the incentives of the seniors to keep a clean record of performance, and ultimately secure deniability, ‘trumps’ the incentives and ambitions of frontline officials to devise more collaborative solutions and approaches locally. To be more precise, the incentives and the goals are still oriented towards collaboration, but the autonomy is sufficiently restricted so that any substantive strategies to translate those incentives are subdued. This point will be returned to briefly at the end of the chapter and again in the final concluding chapter. Before moving on, three short empirical illustrations follow below, highlighting three different accounts of activities related to forest vigilance, and immediate responses. The first shows a possibly unusual case where a RFO devised a local solution of his own accord and has managed to implement it over time. The next is a case where a superior official intervened to prevent such a solution, and the third, something of an outlier, points to the effort to collaborate across state boundaries, sometimes on forest vigilance issues, but without any long-term result.

Illustration 1 – preventing ganja cultivation and arrack distillation
The first example concerns ganja cultivation and arrack distillation.217 These are both highly prohibited activities the forest department spends considerable time and effort preventing by patrolling the forest in order to locate hidden plantations and workshops, or trucks moving the contraband down towards the coast (KFD 2015). In one of Kerala’s more popular tourist districts we find two ranges where I spent a couple of days. There I met with and shadowed a RFO who exhibited what we would term extreme vigilance and a high degree of activism. He told me how illicit cultivation and brewing was widespread in his area, due to the presence of quite secluded forest areas in a generally very hilly region. He had been in service for only a few years at the time and expressed frustration at how much contraband could be produced and traded within his jurisdiction. The challenge he stated was one of the classic monitoring-kind (Ostrom 1990); he did simply not have the resources or manpower to patrol the forest at all times and too few perceived instruments to incentivise villagers to become third-party monitors. Before he and his staff could even get close the perpetrators would pack up and vanish off into the forest with whatever equipment and produce they could

216 Interview 38, DFO.
217 An alcoholic drink commonly produced from the fermented sap of the coconut or cashew tree, banned in the state since 1996 for leading to numerous fatalities and blindness. Not to be confused with arak, the anise-flavoured drink common to the Middle East.
carry, leaving the KFD officials to find only abandoned shacks that had functioned as distilleries or storage units.218

After some time on his posting the RFO started to devise a plan in which he procured mobile phones for people in the local villages. As his office could not do that alone, he approached the DFO in an adjacent division whom he knew personally and knew to have good connections with other agencies, and more importantly the police force. He told me that he managed to acquire a few dozen cheap phones which he eventually distributed to the villages under the frame of the PFM program. He struck a deal with the presidents of the VSS executive committees in which that individual would be allowed to hand out phones as he saw fit, with the understanding that villagers use them to call and report any observed instances of illegal cultivations or brewing. I was surprised at first and asked how he could trust that the phones would be used for the intended purposes and not just be sold back or used solely for personal errands. The RFO stated that he met with the VSS committees regularly and that he was certain that they would not abuse his generosity. Once again trust and prior relationships appear to play a key role. He went on to tell me that in further exchange he said he would help villagers who called in observations that led to an arrest with small services and requests they might bring up the next time he visited, or at least make an attempt to meet their demands and requests.219

I had suspicions that some of these people knew well who the undesirables were; there is a lot of talk and gossip in the villages. It was hard to make them report, they might be scared. But after some months they started making phone calls. I think they felt included and enjoyed the participation. The attitudes and spirits at the VSS meetings grew better for each time.220

When I a week or two later visited another division I again heard about the RFO during a lunch. Apparently, he was reputed to be a very active voice in increasing forest vigilance and involving the grassroots in this effort, and also had many connections in different jurisdictions, ostensibly making him a strategic contact. When the topic of combatting illicit activities came up again during a conversation with the local RFO, I asked whether the vigilant RFO functioned as a role-model or inspiration of some sorts. I was told that

He knows many people and knows how to arrange things, he has been fighting illegal activities and criminals for many years now and I do not believe that is possible alone, without getting support from the police…He is skilled in getting attention of the DFO and District Collector; he works up and down the organisation.221

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218 Interview 46, RFO.
219 A decision which could be seen as questionable regarding impartiality in service delivery, but is again part of the micro-level agreements they seem necessitated to enter.
220 Interview 46, RFO.
221 Interview 53, RFO.
Illustration 2 – fighting forest wildfires

This short account was related to me by a DFO located in an area where fires are a recurring problem each dry season, mainly due to the elevated terrain which catches strong winds and spreads the fire quite easily. Two wildlife sanctuaries are found in the area, compounding the gravity of the situation as the resident elephants may panic, escape the sanctuary and cause havoc in adjacent hamlets. The DFO told me over lunch one day that a few years back he had worked closely with the local communities and hamlets through his own forester staff to encourage them to become more proactively involved in mitigating wildfires, mainly by digging firelines (in practice ditches across which fires cannot spread easily) and clearing out certain types of shrubs that serve no ecological purpose yet are highly flammable, allowing fires to travel rapidly. He had also urged the forest stations in the vicinity, the vigilance outposts scattered around the forest landscape, to get more involved with local communities, telling them to start interacting with the VSS committees, an activity which they otherwise do not undertake. He related a system in which the two sets of actors would serve as a kind of first-responders, sharing information and resources (such as motorbikes, the occasional jeep and water tanks) in order to take immediate action should a fire begin.222

Yet his expectations and plans were quickly dashed to paraphrase Pressman and Wildavsky. He informed me that the then serving CCF in that forest region (the administrative tier) had found out about his plan and paid him an unusual visit in the field. The CCF was curious to see in practice what the DFO had been planning.

I took the chief conservator on a tour of the division, to some forest stations and to one fine VSS meeting, explaining how this wildfire model would be able to work already next summer…He commended me for a fine mission but informed me that this would not be possible, too many risks and dangers of mistakes.223

The DFO went on to explain that although the senior official seemingly had been impressed and would try to promote his model at the headquarters for evaluation, he had also instructed the DFO to not pursue the local model, for the very reason that it had not been tried out before and thus came with the risk of not working out, or even aggravating the situation. In particular, the CCF had been concerned about the enhanced involvement of the communities, citing the risk that they could contribute to the wildfire spreading if they were not properly trained – precisely the kind of risk the DFO had been trying to mitigate by encouraging more interactions between the VSS committees and the forest stations.

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222 Interview 32, DFO.
223 Ibid.
Illustration 3 – crossing state boundaries and the limits of collaboration

Finally, we have an example of a situation where repeated efforts and offers to coordinate activities typically fail time and again: interactions across state boundaries with the Karnataka and Tamil Nadu Forest Departments. Kerala shares borders with these states, and is in areas quite heavily forested, with the same forest tracts covering both or all three sides of the borders. The earlier mentioned interdependency problem caused by incongruous jurisdictional boundaries extends to this level too, though it for obvious reasons would be much more difficult (if not outright impossible) to redraw state boundaries on the basis of where forest cover actually exists, than it would be to reorganise the states’ internal forest jurisdictions. A number of officials who I met with claimed that more inter-state cooperation would be highly useful at times, not least when it comes to vigilance, and especially preventing timber smuggling and tracking down wildlife raiding local farms.224

This illustration involves the Tamil Nadu Forest Department (TNFD), although that organisation was rarely cited as an actor with whom the KFD officials interacted. Two respondents, a CF and an RFO, did however make specific mention about the neighbouring forest department, suggesting that it might not only be a matter of having few substantial policy issues in common. The CF described how he had been assigned to two divisions earlier in his career, both along the Tamil border, and that various policy tasks occasionally led him to reach out to his DFO counterparts in that state. He told me that this usually ran quite smoothly if it concerned a substantive issue that was urgent; most of the time wildlife intrusions onto farms. In such cases both forest departments have protocols they follow and officials at the rank of CF or even higher usually get involved too, mainly because rumours of wounded and scared elephants or tigers spread and become a big story. But for any cooperation stretching beyond these most urgent actions the CF maintained that it was a lost cause. He related that he did get to know some of his colleagues in Tamil Nadu but stated they were much more apprehensive to forming any kind of lasting collaborative partnership, even if their short-lived joint actions on wildlife issues worked well. He attributed this to a difference in organisational culture, proclaiming that

That department is different; they have a different management style, very conservative and harsh. I have no good answer for this but when we meet them they are very reserved, they do not like the proposal of sharing ideas and plans… I tried several times after we met in joint task-forces but they were always foot-dragging and referring to their superior officials.225

One RFO also brought the same kind of problem. He stated that he enjoyed working across organisational boundaries when the situation required it, and also including non-KFD actors if that could lead to what he perceived as

224 Interviews 32, 35 & 38, DFOs; Interviews 46 & 60, RFOs.
225 Interview 8, CF.
swifter or better outcomes. The reason he even mentioned the TNFD was as a response to my enquiry if he and his colleagues ever encounter actors who are unwilling to work together or share information with them. He recounted a situation in which the two forest departments had made a joint effort some five or six years ago to restore and build new wells in a number of indigenous hamlets that existed deep in the forest, almost literally on the border (which due to the inaccessible terrain is far from well-marked or signposted). The RFO had had a logistical role in the project and became acquainted with the forest officials on the other side of the border. A year later he stated that he had travelled to visit those officials together with a fellow RFO, simply to follow up on the project, and to discuss some solutions they had heard of on collectively tracking wildlife across the border. He described the situation as one of reluctance on part of the Tamil foresters; they were unwilling to circulate their assembled reports, telling them that they had no authority to do so, and were disinclined to hear about their tracking plans. Some additional months later they had travelled again; this time to a TNFD division office to inquire about an inventory of NTFPs traded along the border, and to propose the tracking ideas again. Once again, the RFO was reportedly met with hesitation and disinterest, summarising the situation as “Very frustrating, in Kerala this is never a problem. In that state they always see us as a problem.” 226

Obviously, these are the opinions of just two KFD officials who brought up the issue of interstate cooperation themselves, and I do not know if they had any particular grievances against the TNFD and was not able to talk with the TNFD officials I met at one larger gathering (see ‘introducing landscape approaches’ in chapter five). Yet it does shine light on one type of collaboration attempts that does not seem to lead to anything substantive, even when the incentives are strong on the KFDs part. My interpretation based on the respondents’ accounts is that the organisational working culture of the two departments plays a role here, with the TNFD having a yet more top-down management style that does little to foster new practices, or even suppresses local innovations and endogenous solutions. Issues of trust and reciprocity may also play in, keeping in mind that we are dealing with two fairly different states with their own languages and socio-cultural compositions.

Summary of Chapter

This short chapter has examined the themes of immediate response and action on forest vigilance tasks. Similar to the problem outlined in chapter five, frontline officials perceive that the mismatching boundaries pose a constraint on their capacity to communicate and collaborate more horizontally on vigilance issue. But more so, the silo-like organisational structure of the forest department constitutes a greater perceived constraint, as the routine of unidi-

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226 Interview 66, RFO.
rectional reporting upwards in the hierarchy and the conversely unidirectional downwards transfer of orders creates a significant time lag which frontline officials claim aggravates the emergency at hand. Their incentive is thus to collaborate locally, with actors closer to the source of the problem, and thus circumvent the restrictions and time lags of the hierarchy. Collaboration also plays a role in motivating villagers to function more as partners where forest vigilance is concerned, requiring the department to share resources and work more horizontally with them and the local government bodies. The ultimate goal is localised models and solutions for immediate responses; an institutionalised local emergency routine which may be activated on short notice when needed, setting the involved actors in motion to respond directly to whatever issue has arisen. In order to plan and work out such models the officials interact in the IRAN arrangements, which in practice may overlap with the local response models in terms of membership and duties. Yet for analytical reasons I treat the network arrangements as the desired output, and the response models or solutions as the desired outcome. However, the IRAN arrangements are in practice quite constrained in employing any substantive strategies beyond planning (though one exception was reported in the first illustration above), for the main reason that superior officials tend to intervene and curb local innovations and solutions, in favour of upholding the formal emergency protocols and routines, even if those are perceived less than effective by the frontline officials.

Reflections on roles

Again, we find a relative diversity of roles held by the forest officials. Adhering to the perspective that the frontline officials are all activist bureaucrats, we can then break down that role into slightly more fine-grained parts. In the case at hand, they are all policy entrepreneurs in the sense that they wish to change the ways of carrying out activities locally, here when an emergency arises. The first empirical illustration provides a good example of this. The local solutions, routines or models – their goal of collaboration – also reflects the dual roles of policy entrepreneur and network manager, as the forest officials want to orchestrate something new or alternate, and strive to be the coordinating authority among the actors involved, usually local governments as well as the local communities. The strategies employed are largely limited to planning, framing perceptions and ideas on what to do, and to some extent activating and motivating villagers in the community to play the role of partners.

This illuminates another, hitherto unmentioned role, the facilitator. I treat this role as one whose incentives, goals and strategies are focused on building better conditions for future collaborations. They engage in enhancing trust, reciprocity and social capital, and trade information and knowledge as well as resources, all in order to motivate and entice other actors to collaborate or keep doing so. As we shall see in the next chapter, this must not always have to do with efforts directly related to the primary policy environ-
ment – here forest management – but may focus on secondary ones (for instance providing diverse non-forestry services and goods to rural communities) that indirectly affect the incentives of other actors to collaborate on forest matters. The officials who hold this type of role – again the first illustration above is a good example – usually draws upon the legitimacy endowed in her formal position in the administration, but simultaneously enlists prior strategic contacts and networks, as well her personal leadership skills to build long-term grassroots support.

Last, we also saw how the senior forest officials fulfilled the role of the classic Weberian bureaucrat in this case, or more accurately, exerted the authority vested in their superior position in the hierarchy to curb local, informal initiatives, in order to make frontline officials comply with the formal routines and procedures. Again my interpretation, supported by the statements of two of the vigilant DFOs, is that the senior officials are driven by incentives of blame-avoidance and deniability, and thus have to ensure that the subordinates keep in line with the formal procedures. Yet importantly, in doing so they do not actively violate the formal rules, even if the frontline officials sees the formal rules as the core problem, spurring them to seek out collaboration.

\[227\] Interviews 32 & 38, DFOs.
7. Capacity Building

As we are riding Rajesh tells me that we are going to a indigenous hamlet set right on the border with Tamil Nadu, in a densely forested corner of the state where few people from the coastal cities ever travel. Once more, the news has tragically reported two cases of infant deaths in this area, again caused by malnutrition. Rajesh states that the news reached him five days ago and as DFO in this division he feels obliged to pay the hamlet a visit and also try to meet with the local forest staff and hopefully someone from the Tribal Development Department’s local medical clinic. This is the most recent infant death in a long string of tragedies and Rajesh claims that he wished he could have gone earlier but also laments that this is unlikely to be the last disaster to strike these poor and remote hamlets. I ask him what he thinks could be done to prevent this in the future; if the solution lies in more interventions and livelihood support, or if maybe the Forest Rights Act with its ultimate intention of establishing property rights for the indigenous population is the answer. He looks uncertain and explains that he thinks the problem runs deeper than policies and programs can resolve; that it comes down to changing the mind-sets of the indigenous population, which might take generations. I come to think of what a distinguished professor at a university in one of the coastal cities had told me a few weeks earlier. He stated that Scheduled Tribes lack all forms of leadership and networking-qualities and that they mainly look to enjoy themselves whenever possible. What few organic leaders they manage to produce typically move out to lead a new life, turning their backs on their old communities. His statement is reflective of the attitudes many comparatively privileged individuals and officials hold towards these communities, reinforcing the image of them as a lost cause in the otherwise widely praised Kerala model of development. As we arrive in the hamlet Rajesh tells me that this will be an uncomfortable visit which he hopes will be short, but also points out that this is part of their professional responsibility nowadays. We park the modern jeep among a few mud-thatch houses and climb out.

Content of the chapter

This chapter focuses on the incentives and motives the forest officials develop in relation to collaborating on interventions directed towards rural forest communities and indigenous hamlets. This has to do with efforts to augment
socioeconomic development and to provide alternative livelihoods, something I broadly capture under the rubric of capacity building. Part of the incentives derive from the stated obligation to meet demands and pressures from the grassroots, but also from the more normative incentives and perceptions held by officials regarding human development in more marginalised forest areas. I first look at the grassroots demands and pressures in some more detail and examine how these influence the officials, and how they perceive their own obligations to respond. As the forest department is unable to address these demands on their own, they are required to enlist the support of other actors, and thus engage in further collaborative interactions, in what I term Capacity Building Networks (CBN). Again, the strategies involved have to do both with tangible, substantive action as well as efforts to motivate and influence individuals representing other organisations. The case of indigenous marginalisation stands in particular focus in this chapter, touching upon the implementation of the FRA law and the pervasive difficulties on how to align perceptions and ideas on how to ‘solve’ indigenous backwardness.

Grassroots Demands

Rural areas in much of the developing world suffer from a political culture characterised by limited public mobilisation and a lack of civilian activism. The limitation is often caused by deep poverty and rural marginalisation, although the lack of activism and mobilisation also prevents any sustainable upwards mobility and poverty reduction, trapping these areas in a difficult deadlock. Moreover, public institutions of accountability are usually weak and public officials may often lack strong incentives for upholding functioning service delivery, instead being co-opted into more nefarious ties and relationships (Corbridge et al. 2005; Gupta 2012; Kohli 2012; Krishna 2010). In contrast, the political culture and modern history of Kerala is one of considerable social mobilisation, public participation and deliberation (Heller 2012; Singh 2016), yielding a demand-driven and well-informed citizenry (relative to the wider South Asian context). This was observable and referred to throughout fieldwork and is the focus below, looking first at demands arising from the forest communities and their local management institutions vis-à-vis the department, and second at demands from the local gram panchayat government bodies, sometimes speaking on behalf of the communities. In interaction, this leads forest officials to find themselves in a situation where they have to be responsive to demands for both instrumental and moral reasons.
Demands from forest management institutions

In each of the eight divisions in which I did fieldwork, and in particular followed officials around throughout their working day, routinized visits to forest villages and hamlets were a frequent occurrence. The forested areas of Kerala are co-managed by the forest department and countless VSS committees; the management institutions established under the state-wide PFM program. On several field-days I had the opportunity to travel with the local Division Forest Officer (DFO) or Range Forest Officer (RFO), and an entourage of their subordinate officials to the forest villages. The DFOs stated that they try to undertake these trips themselves once a month, though RFOs go out more regularly, and the yet lower-ranked officials even more often. Visiting the VSS on a somewhat frequent basis is expected of them, and that not doing so is considered poor form and may lead to degraded relationships, an issue returned to below.

Close to all the meetings witnessed in the forest communities kept roughly the same format. Upon arrival there was a bustle and commotion as the meeting was prepared for – in practice bringing out plastic chairs and a small desk to the village square – and people came out, several armed with various folders and files containing documents and deeds, visibly eager to speak with the DFO or RFO. The president of the local executive committee would open the meeting and attempt to bring the assembled crowd to order, ensuring the villagers that each of them would have a chance to ventilate their concerns and queries with the visiting guest. After that the forest official would speak to each of the gathered individuals in turn, often calling their assistants or the president over to get their opinion and ideas. Some issues were resolved in minutes, others caused protracted arguments. Before leaving, or in the jeep heading to the next village, I would ask my hosting official to recount what had been discussed and why villagers were eager to speak to him. The responses may be ascribed to one of the three following categories: demands for inclusion in program implementation activities, employment and decision-making; demands for goods and services; and lastly demands for information and knowledge.

Inclusion

The majority of Indian forest laws, policies and programs over the past decades have increasingly emphasised enhanced participation and inclusion of forest-dwelling people. The implications of these provisions and entitlements were often well-known to people in the villages, who frequently sought to benefit from them. For many, the programs offer a source of labour, varying

\[\text{228} \] It should be noted that the description in the sections below refers predominantly to demands and pressures from non-indigenous communities. The case of indigenous hamlets is markedly different, with much weaker demands and civil activism, and is addressed separately further on in the chapter.

\[\text{229} \] Interviews 31, 32 & 35, DFOs; Interviews 50, 51, 58 & 62, RFOs.
from daily employment to more regularised positions as forest guards or beat officers. A typical and recurring task involves rehabilitation projects in the forest, for instance clearing up paths, roads and public spaces after landslides during the monsoon season, or removing fallen trees after particularly violent storms and floods. Other tasks involve more traditional enforcement and protection activities, especially against forest fires and wildlife intrusions (typically elephants) onto the forest farms. Firelines and wildlife fences traverse the landscape and boundaries of the forest areas in upland Kerala, of which the majority are constructed and maintained by local forest dwellers. The various tree-planting activities and projects carried out by the KFD often require a good deal of simple muscle power, and offer another source of employment for local people, a matter they regularly enquire about. Moreover, and importantly, the PFM program entitles the villages – through the local management institution – to various forms of training and sensitisation activities, in addition to a share of the profits from the sale of timber and non-timber forest produce (NTFPs) extracted from the local forest (GoK 2009b). These include nuts, roots, medicinal plants, spices berries, insects, wildflowers, honey and wax – commodities that provide a supplementary income and dietary complement.

At several meetings, the villagers enquired what projects were in the pipeline and would request to be included themselves, or ask on behalf of a family member. During the meetings I came to learn that many of the documents brought out were parts of the local micro-plan, a memorandum drafted up between the VSS committee and the secretary (usually a low-ranking KFD official), outlining the scope of the management activities carried out locally. The micro-plans are thought to function as a bottom-up channel of communication for the forest department and compose the written backbone of participatory forestry. They are written on ten-year horizons and detail more or less everything that is to be conducted (GoK 2009b). These were frequently cited in the meetings with the visiting officials, to emphasise their legal entitlement to inclusion in forest management activities.

As you saw earlier, they are clever and knowing about what they have the rights to, and how to ask for it. If we are clearing roads after a storm some always want to work, and if we are organising a bamboo auction they want to know where and when it is held, and how the revenue will be redistributed.

They are small-scale entrepreneurs. They read or hear about a project and come with the micro-plans and say that the project in question connects to the micro-plan and that they should have part of it.

In addition to the demands for participation in actual activities or even employment, villagers also demand to be included in the decision-making pro-

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230 Interview 29, DFO.
231 Interview 37, DFO.
232 Interview 55, RFO.
cess and the formulation of the micro-plans. A common point of critique against programs like PFM/JFM is that it often runs as a one-man show by the forest department official (Springate-Baginski and Blaikie 2007; Sundar 2000). As noted in chapter four a majority of these studies have been conducted in states of a very different social fabric than Kerala, which grew evident during fieldwork. The DFOs or RFOs explained that during the village meetings, the entire VSS executive committees are present, along with multiple heads of households, often causing extended discussions and debates. They are reportedly drawn-out affairs as people seek to make their voice heard and seldom shy away from expressing themselves, regardless of the topic at hand.233

Given the relatively strong female empowerment in Kerala (Drèze and Sen 2002), many villages also have deliberative bodies for women, formally separate from the forest management institutions but in practice overlapping a lot, especially if composed by the same individuals.234 These are often the product of a state-initiated female empowerment program known as Kudumbashree, which establishes women’s neighbourhood groups at the village level in order to strengthen their voice and group priorities, with the ultimate aim of eradicating household poverty.235 At a number of observed meetings, these groups would provide additional input and voice to the decision-making, even if they lack the formal authority with respect to the VSS structure. Enquiring about the output of these meetings, some respondents suggested that actual decisions and plans of some form almost always materialize, and that they are followed up on by the villagers,236 a point returned to below, while others stated that it provides important but non-binding input.237

[Laughing] There is not much chance of cheating anyone or doing things quickly, even if it would be needed sometimes for efficiency…The VSS are very much involved in making decisions, also when it takes long time.238

Goods and services
Officials are not only pressured to deliver on the entitlements and rights provided in the forest policies and programs, but also to arrange directly or indirectly with a range of goods and services relating to the welfare and livelihoods of forest dwelling communities. These were for instance requests for seeds, fertilisers, tools and equipment, and smaller livestock, but also requests to sell NTFPs they had gathered a surplus of, and opportunities to set up a family-run shop (in practice a tiny booth) along the adjacent main road to town. Others would seek to have new wells dug out, or to repair old ones, and some would ask for more permanent facilities like a tiny health clinic or

233 Interview 31, 32 & 35, DFOs; Interviews 39 & 48, RFOs.
234 Interview 26, ACF (retired); Interview 31, DFO.
235 See http://www.kudumbashree.org/
236 Interviews 29, 31 & 38, DFOs; Interviews 48 & 62, RFOs.
237 Interview 37, DFO; Interview 67, RFO.
238 Interview 38, DFO.
veterinary service. Additional requests came in the form of complaints about late payments of wages for work they had undertaken recently, or complaints that ganja cultivators in the nearby area were giving the village a bad name.

What is remarkable and interesting here is that a majority of the sought after goods and services actually fall outside the authority and scope of forest department activities (contrast with for instance GoK 2009b, 2009a; GoK 2013; MoEF 2014b). Among the examples above, we find activities that are formally the purview of the tribal development-, animal husbandry-, agriculture-, health- and rural development departments, as well as the state police force. Yet, these requests and complaints are lodged at the local forest department officials, for two main reasons. First, because they are the most staffed department with the highest number of frontline workers in the form of beat-, section-, and range forest officers at the local level and the type of government bureaucrat they meet most frequently, and second that they are perceived to be able to procure, or fix the requested resources. Frontline respondents recounted the various, and sometimes unrealistic demands people in the villages would come up with, but simultaneously mentioned that they cannot ignore them entirely, or not make some effort to see what may be done about it.239 For instance:

I cannot organise half of what they desire in some cases. I tell them ‘notify the police services’ or ‘file a complaint with the gram panchayat’ or ‘notify the agriculture department official’…If I am able to, I will also do so myself because I meet them much, and they do not.240

**Information and knowledge**

The last form of demand articulated at the village meetings was one concerning information and knowledge about events and processes occurring within the forest management sphere. While it overlaps with the first kind of demand above, respondents informed me that villagers often want to be updated on matters occurring beyond their particular community and area.241 Some would relate directly to forestry, such as upcoming auctions or markets for medicinal plants, sightings of poachers and illegal cultivators, planned expansions of larger agroforestry plantations, a retraction or expansion of wildlife corridors, and occasionally also statistics on the extent and quality of forest cover in adjacent areas. Other enquiries would concern news about coming work opportunities, planned construction or rehabilitation of roads, and any new projects being discussed at the forest division level, or in the District Collector’s office. A last type of request was for knowledge rather than information, and more specifically training opportunities in which the villagers would be able to enhance or diversify their skillsets. This too was divided between forestry training the KFD is responsible for, such as forest

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239 Interviews 48, 50, 58 & 61, RFOs; Interview 59, SFO.
240 Interview 58, RFO.
241 Interview 36, DFO; Interviews 58 & 60, RFO.
restoration, but also short courses on for instance rural marketing and commercialisation of NTFPs, a responsibility of a handful other departments.

Demands from the local governments

In addition to the communities, an important if yet less frequent source of influence on officials is found in the local government bodies of the panchayati raj system. Given the very high population density of Kerala, local government units, the gram panchayats, further divide into wards; the very lowest unit, which usually hold a number of villages in the dictionary sense of the word. As such, a single gram panchayat in a forested area may often include handful forest villages and several VSS institutions. The latter bodies are the main channel for input into forest management issues as it runs under the forest department (GoK 2009b). Yet the local governments (at the gram, block and district levels) also hold jurisdiction on a number of closely related issues, including transport infrastructure, rural development and the earlier mentioned biodiversity management committees (BMC) under the 2002 Biological Diversity Act.242 In short, there is a close-cut division in the authority and mandates between the forest department and the local governments. During the field-days when I followed forest officials around, routine stops at various government offices was a recurring feature, most commonly when travelling with RFOs and their subordinate officers.

The procedure at these was similar to that in the villages, but also relatively swifter. We would arrive at the office building — structures ranging from tiny whitewashed four-room bungalows in the more remote areas, to multi-storey buildings housing additional officials of different agencies in the case of block panchayats — and walk straight to the room where the local elected official sits. A number of people would pack into the office, usually other members of the village council, and at the block level, occasional clerks and assistants. While the village meetings could take well over two hours these ones were usually over by the time we had finished our cups of tea, before a peon would appear out of nowhere to refill them. Yet the format was similar; the forest official would listen, take notes and pose follow-up questions as he sipped tea, allowing the chairman to do most of the talking. As with the village meetings, I would ask my accompanying official to recap what had transpired. In principle, two themes were recurring at these visits.

The first are demands and pressures from the governing councils of the gram or block panchayats themselves. The lion’s share of these related directly to forest restoration and rehabilitation, two activities that in practice overlap significantly with what the councils are charged with doing more broadly, such as maintaining roads and ditches on public land adjacent to the forest. To illustrate; when travelling by motorbike in the upland areas we often had to stop temporarily as roadworks were under way. Characteristic

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242 Interview 9, CCF; Interview 17, ACF.
of India, a colourful makeshift billboard at the roadside announces who is responsible for, and financing the project at hand. I recounts seeing as many erected by the KFD as by the local panchayat or block development office. The latter two are also responsible for rural job creation programs such as NREGA.\footnote{The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, which entitles every Indian to at least 100 days of labour per year, often in local natural restoration projects.} While this is not as widespread in Kerala as in other states (Jenkins and Manor 2015) it provides an important opportunity for marginalised forest dwellers to diversify their household income and there is potential for synergies with the forest department. As such, the governing councils sought to find out what was being planned in the KFD, and how they could synchronise their activities with those needed in the local villages or block; again a situation of functional similarities and overlaps.

The gram panchayats have a long agenda of tasks and responsibilities, many very similar to our work. They seek to be included and will ask us to focus on selected components in the programs and projects we organise...If a new wildlife fence is being built they will have a list of requirements and details about it. [MW: Are you required to do as they request?] Not at all, but I have to meet and listen to them.\footnote{Interview 58, RFO.}

The second category was advocacy on part of forest-dwellers who had approached the governing council as an alternative outlet for concerns and opinions they felt that the forest department had to attend to. In India, filing a written complaint to the local government office is a common procedure, which in the majority of cases leads to nothing at all (Gupta 2012). I distinctly recall a meeting at a block panchayat office where the chairman brought out a thick bundle of complaint forms and dropped it effusively on his desk, stating that they were grievances filed by villagers over the past few months, relating to non-delivered services by the KFD. Afterwards the RFO suggested that it was slightly annoying as it was not his personal fault, but also that this was a recurring practice.\footnote{Interview 67, RFO.} Last, note that in much of rural Kerala the head of the VSS and the chairman of the local council are related or know each other well, forming tiny coalitions that enable aggrieved or particularly active villagers to use the grama sabha and the council as an additional channel of influence on forest officials.

Yes, without doubt, Kerala is special. Things work in a very different way and that changes the way I have to work. People are very much active in what affects them, they organise and create unions, they strike and they lodge written complaints...They demand a lot from the department and we must respond.\footnote{Interview 27, DFO.}
Incentives for collaboration

The sections above show how officials are at the centre of multiple demands and pressures from the grassroots, both from communities and local governments. The repeated visits to the villages and the local government offices, and the interactions observed there, may be usefully seen as a sequence of action situations (McGinnis 2011a) structured around the same policy task: receiving input and feedback from the forest users and their elected representatives. Immersing into these action situations over several weeks’ time led to the identification of the demands as an important source of influence on how local forest officials behave and think. Put differently, it emerged as a significant source of rules which they feel obliged to follow. The interesting thing here is that the formal rules-on-paper, for instance the KFD working plans or the PFM guidelines (GoK 2009b, 2013), do not require the bottom-up input I witnessed. While they prescribe a certain degree of interaction, such as formulating the village micro-plans and undertaking inspection tours, it is nowhere near the extent they de facto interact with the forest communities. When I enquired how officials perceive the demands being made, and why they might want to respond to them, an interesting insight was revealed.

It is largely of an instrumental nature and has to do with the fact that if they fail to include the villages and forest management institutions in decision-making or at the very least in deliberation and dialogue, their work situation may become quite untenable. They reported that this takes the form of extended arguments and complaints when revisiting communities, or small protests at the department offices. Anecdotes spoke of occasional violence between villagers and frontline officials, though I did not witness any during fieldwork.

…we have a strong relationship with the villages. They trust me to arrive twice every month, and I trust them to come to meetings then. [MW: What happens if you don’t visit them?] Disappointment and frustration. They will make life hard for me and treat me differently in the future.

You see, without their approval and support my job would be very difficult. I would be burdened with complaints and people sitting outside my office waiting to complain.

It is impossible to do anything without support from the villages. We must support them so that they later support us. In that way we avoid unnecessary

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247 Interviews 31, 35 & 38, DFOs; Interviews 44, 46, 48, 50, 58, 60, 63 & 67, RFOs; Interview 68, SFO.
248 Interview 50, RFO; Interviews 47 & 52, SFO
249 Interview 48, RFO.
250 Interview 58, RFO.
conflicts…The complaining is not so much the problem, rather the shame if I break the friendship.  

Officials were keen to avoid getting into conflicts with villagers as it makes their working day all the more challenging and frustrating. As the quotes show, they find that trust and reciprocity – both highlighted in the CPR and collaborative governance literature as key ingredients of durable collaborative arrangements (see Ansell and Gash 2008; Ostrom 1998, 2005) – is imperative to their work, and is seen as a resource they may enlist or deploy when needed. Building trust and a functioning relationship thus becomes something of a critical incentive in itself; in order to handle an encumbering workload they need to keep sound relations with the villagers; partly to avoid time-consuming complaints and debates and partly to keep them as more technical partners for actual management tasks. This is similar to findings reported by Joshi (2000) from the implementation of JFM in West Bengal, where officials enthusiastically adopted the program to alleviate already violent conflict and frayed relationships with villagers, while the situation here might be more proactive on part of the officials.

Yet at the same time, the quotes above reveal that there is a normative aspect to inclusion and sound relationships too, with a small number of often younger frontline officials suggesting that they derive satisfaction, pleasure and moral standing in maintaining good relationships, similar to findings from rural China as reported by Tsai (2007). For instance one RFO stated

I am lucky to have a government job with good salary and security. These people are poorer and we should help them develop. I think about them a lot and I do not want to make them angry, I like to see them develop.

However, such declarations should be contrasted to what a few retired senior officials stated on the same topic. They too suggested that the department holds an obligation to foster development among forest-users (especially Scheduled Tribes), but in somewhat more paternalistic terms and with less emphasis on active inclusion. To illustrate

Tribal development can only occur at the hands of the Forest Department, they have to be provided for from birth to death…They lack the skills to do it themselves.

While there is a slight chance that the frontline officials exaggerate their perceived moral obligation, their commitment to including villagers is par-
tially corroborated by the many observed village meetings; if not for normative reasons, then for instrumental ones in order to maintain trust.

Next, the incentive for collaboration and reaching out to other actors lies in the fact that the officials cannot meet all the demands and requests with the resources and infrastructure available to them within the framework of the forest department: they are reliant on securing resources (mainly material goods but also information and knowledge) that other actors, predominantly other agencies, possess and might not be willing to yield without some form of counterperformance, usually getting some other resource in return. One RFO explained this process in the following way, again highlighting how indigenous communities indirectly become something of a ‘resource’ used for reaching consensus and agreement.

No department will just give away goods or provide services without charge, they say you share this with us and we share this with you, like a good trade. As you saw before, they [an NGO] wanted to access fertilisers the forest department has, so we say ‘you train and encourage the adivasis to work with us more, show evidence that they want to be forest guards’…they are stronger at that than the forest department.256

In this case, the interdependency situation exists at the action level and is of the resource dependency kind (Hertting 2007). But the stated obligation to respond is also connected to the other type of perceived interdependency discussed earlier; recall the emphasis on interrelated incentives. In order to support forest communities and the villagers, officials need to coordinate themselves across their own organisational boundaries, harmonise simultaneously occurring policy activities in other jurisdictions, and convince other actors of doing things differently. As such, searching for collaboration within network arrangements becomes a rational strategy for meeting grassroots demands too. Yet, it should be observed that the enthusiasm for collaboration was predominantly expressed by the current frontline officials, while the most senior and also retired officials exhibited a less favourable perception of collaborative practices. I see this as a largely generational issue, as the latter category of officials have been trained and inculcated in a working culture centred much more on the singular dominance of the forest department. One respondent highlighted the extreme land-scarcity in Kerala as the justification for less collaboration and resource-sharing, arguing that

Of course social and economic development is desirable for Kerala, as it is for every state in India. But do not forget how small Kerala is. This is not Karnataka or Maharashtra. Here the Western Ghats have to remain under forest cover and untouched, we cannot have all forty-something departments interfering in every taluk and village with their own programs. No, where there is forest cover the others should keep away.257

256 Interview 55, RFO.
257 Interview 2, CCF (retired).
In contrast to the frontline officials, these handful officials believed that too much integration and cooperation between different agencies would lead to ineffectiveness in reaching policy goals, again a ‘too many cooks spoil the broth’ situation.\textsuperscript{258} But instead of trying to reduce overlaps and search for potential synergies, they prefer to limit external collaboration, promoting the agenda of the forest department.

**Capacity Building Networks**

Similar to the SPIN networks, these ones also span across formal jurisdictional boundaries and include roughly the same kind of actors (KFD officials, officials from the conventional line-departments in rural areas, local government officials, and the occasional NGO or charity organisation), but have a comparatively smaller scope in geographical terms, usually spanning no more than a few forest ranges, although these may be from separate divisions.\textsuperscript{259} Again, larger joint meetings are a regular occurrence but they were not spoken of with the same measure of institutionalisation as the SPIN networks. Instead, officials in these networks appear to meet more frequently, but on a more spontaneous, case-by-case basis. One official who was involved in both types explained that

> When it concerns meeting demands from villages and VSS, or if the gram panchayat has some issue, I will deal with it right then…If they maybe want to be day labourers I see what demand there is for work, if they want to repair wells I call PWD [public works department], if it is forest produce, several calls, the easiest solution is to be flexible.\textsuperscript{260}

This is not to say that the concerned actors start each interaction anew when they need to negotiate or solve a joint problem – on the contrary they appear to have a relatively institutionalised routine in place, even if the network structure in itself is only partially institutionalised (as the concluding section will discuss). During fieldwork, these types of meetings were among the most common alongside the routinized visits to the forest communities themselves. They were seemingly spontaneous in the sense that the forest official I was following around on any given day could receive a phone call late one evening or early one morning, that they informed me had to do with some issue they had to attend to during that day or the next, which a number of times led them to change the planned schedule for the day and we set off to participate in a meeting of this kind. While the SPIN meetings appear to be held at forest department compounds, the dozen or so CBN meetings I

\textsuperscript{258} Interviews 1 & 3, CFs (retired); Interviews 5 & 12, PCCFs (retired); Interview 7, APPCF.

\textsuperscript{259} Interviews 31, 34 & 36, DFOs; Interviews 46, 50, 51, 55, 56, 58, 63 & 66, RFOs; Interviews 54 & 68, SFOs.

\textsuperscript{260} Interview 55, RFO.
joined for were held wherever the involved actors found suitable. A number were at KFD compounds, but also at local government offices, at a school, at a NGO office, and the offices of the rural- or tribal development department. One was held at a small restaurant in a rural town. Also unlike the SPIN networks, where the local DFO acts as the coordinating official, it was less clear at these meetings who was in charge or had the more commanding position. My accompanying RFOs would generally do most of the talking at the meetings but did not seem to wield the same authoritative influence as the DFOs I observed as chair – a matter I speculate has to do with their relative position in the wider administrative hierarchy. While the DFO is among the more prestigious positions at the district level (together with the DC and DM) seeing that they are IFS-officials too, RFOs appear to be slightly more comparable in rank to frontline workers of the other rural line-departments and the block panchayat president.

The procedure of these meetings, as related to me by my accompanying officials, was relatively straightforward and typically involved discussions and negotiations on the exchange of more tangible resources and goods; in the majority of observed cases as a response to demands and requests made by the forest communities, or alternatively the local governments speaking on their behalf.261 As outlined above, the requests were of a diverse kind and focused partially on inclusion in job creation programs or programs to enhance vocational skills, or even direct employment as day labourers, but also for material resources such as seeds, fertilisers, tools and equipment, construction material, medical supplies, smaller livestock and supplies needed to process NTFPs. Other requests focused on the construction of small shops, new wells, tiny health clinics and brick-kilns, or the reparation of the same. Once again, the ability to meet these demands and requests, and before that negotiate with other actors, is enabled and constrained by the degree of autonomy and discretionary power the concerned officials have. There is a de facto limit in what resources and goods may be transferred between departments or handed over to local communities and hamlets. Monetary transactions, for instance supporting a local NGO or charity financially, or providing additional funds to the VSS or gram panchayats, were more or less off the table entirely.262 On the other hand procuring the material resources listed above and trading these in between actors was more common and frequent. In these cases, frontline officials hold enough discretionary power to exchange resources, even if it lies beyond the formal protocol and correct procedure. Two officials shed light on how this is possible and happens in practice. He explained that small resources and goods are never formally transferred to other departments, NGOs, or the local villages as that would require a long and tedious bureaucratic process that was also likely to turn down their request. Instead, resources and goods are simply borrowed or lent

261 Interview 38, DFO; Interviews 46, 50, 58, 63 & 66; RFOs.
262 Interviews 50, 58 & 66, RFOs.
to other actors who then make use of them; for instance taking seeds to grow plants in rural communities, or construction material used for building minor infrastructure. That way, the forest department can report in their files and plans that various resources have come to use, as the inscription largely focuses on their simple utilisation, and not who and for what reason they were used.263 One of them illuminated that

If the DFO thinks that another agency or group may do something better, he will allow them to use our capacities and infrastructure, or borrow material, or allow a charity group to conduct some training if they have skills…the importance is that tasks happen, if it is forest department or tribal department less important.264

A DFO respondent justified the exchange arrangements they engage in as one of strengthening the capacities of forest communities so that they remain motivated to assist the forest department with forest protection and restoration tasks. He offered the insight

I firmly believe that the VSS institutions have a significant role to play, and a role we have not seen the full potential of yet. It’s a long process but we slowly create a movement and capacity in the villages which will be an asset in the future…For that purpose we need to help them acquire goods and things they might need, for their children and the women’s groups.265

Overall, the attempts by forest officials to strengthen capacities and human livelihoods in forest communities are comparatively less infectious than the efforts to synchronise policies and reduce functional overlaps as in the SPIN networks, and also reaching consensus on how to address the issue of indigenous marginalisation and backwardness, described further below. Yet, exceptions do exist. Below are three illustrations demonstrating capacity-strengthening efforts that took three quite different paths, due to the ability or disability of the involved actors to cooperate.

Illustration 1 – NTFP production
In one of the more inaccessible upland districts of Kerala where I did fieldwork, two forest divisions share a common large tract of forest through which the jurisdictional boundary crosses right through, without any natural features (for instance a forest stream or even a larger road) to provide a more reasonable border. The head offices and compounds of the two divisions are close to three hours apart by jeep (and much longer during the monsoon season or when landslides have occurred), for which reason the local DFOs

263 Interview 33, DFO; Interview 53, RFO.
264 Interview 53, RFO.
265 Interview 33, DFO.
and especially the RFOs on either side stated that they find the extent of the forest tract a much more logical or natural boundary than the formal ones.\textsuperscript{266}

I had the chance to spend a few days in this area in early February 2015 and follow the two DFOs around during their working day. They related the story of how they a number of years earlier had become aware of local forest communities producing high-quality wild honey for household consumption, using more or less traditional methods without any value addition whatsoever. Interventions seeking to introduce modern equipment and practices in NTFP production are increasingly common in Kerala and maybe all of India,\textsuperscript{267} but in this area it had not yet occurred at the time. The DFOs got excited over the prospect of trying something new like augmenting the honey production, and instructed their RFOs and other subordinate officials to look into the matter. I was told that the villagers had been confounded at first since they saw the honey as little more than a dietary complement, but soon caught on to the idea and grew more assertive about obtaining support from the forest department. “They brought up the wild honey matter on every single meeting once we had suggested that we might be able to help. I think they saw the potential before we did.”\textsuperscript{268}

The DFOs thus decided to bring in the services of a local NGO who had in their staff a few expert beekeepers who came out the villages for a few days to teach the forest-dwellers about the latest and best practices. Reportedly the beekeepers had travelled out of state several times for conventions on honey production and were held in high regard. The experts not only instructed the villagers but also informed them about the high market value for this quality of honey, suggesting that they scale up their production. One of the DFOs revealed that that prompted a sequence of events; “The families who had been collecting the honey wanted to trade it at the markets and KFD auctions, and all other households started asking about the ways they could collect wild berries and forest mushrooms and make the same profits.”\textsuperscript{269} Accounts, rumours and even gossip spread and soon additional villages in both the same and the adjoining ranges started making demands and inquiries to the forest officials whenever they visited the villages and reportedly some had brought the idea to the block panchayat office too. The two DFOs and their immediate subordinate staff realised after a while that they lacked the capacity and resources to assist all of the villages and so informed additional range offices of what was going on, and took the decision to also bring local agriculture department officials into the fray. They suggested that their extension workers often were more skilled in NTFP production and commodification and had the needed equipment, and could thus help the villages more efficiently while also teaching the forest staff new techniques and practices. Simultaneously, they also started to encourage nearby forest depart-

\textsuperscript{266} Interview 35, DFO; Interviews 62 & 66, RFOs.
\textsuperscript{267} Interview 81, Official, Department of Rural Development.
\textsuperscript{268} Interview 35, DFO.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid.
ment offices to attempt to initiate partnerships with the community-based organisations in their vicinities, and also the concerned gram and block panchayats; each a small effort to get some rough inventory of what NTFPs or other livelihood options were yet unexplored there.

We learned from the case of the wild honey how quickly clever ideas could travel far and be tried out. At one point I travelled up to K. [large town in another district] and was told by the foresters there that they were also very busy with meeting with community groups, the gram panchayats and various officials…and it was not only NTFPs.270

I was told that over time small partnerships and arrangements focused not only on NTFP production and commodification, but also on rural livelihood support and interventions more broadly spread in the forest ranges of the adjacent upland districts, tying various actors together. Interestingly, in this case, a game-changer of sorts came about when the original officials began to be approached by individual officials and groups on matters not relating directly to NTFP augmentation. Issues of forest protection and especially the prevention of wildfires using local forest dwellers was of relevance and actors started to contact the original individuals for suggestions, practical assistance or just information. One of the RFO stated quite proudly:

Yes, forest fires had been a big problem here the past dry season, but that is not one of my direct tasks, we have special officials for that activity. I think that they had heard good things about all those forest products going to the market and saw us as clever people to contact for anything…We tried to help, often by just informing of officials with connections in other places, those working with fires…The best conclusion of this was that we got to know many new people, we became a group.271

One of the original DFOs related that the early NTFP enterprise had been a success, but indirectly he also downplayed the significance of it slightly, by stating that the people and organisations that approached him and his colleagues, or whom they approached first, were individuals and groups they were familiar with since before. In other words, they had some prior experience of cooperation or interaction. Yet, the DFO acknowledged that he nowadays was something of an unofficial coordinator for other forest officials also and other less resourced or industrious actors, but did not make any explicit linkage himself between that role and the success of the wild honey undertaking. He recounted that:

One day I realised that I was not just division forest officer but also leader for many others. They would call me and write me, asking for support or complaining about others…thinking I could solve the argument. Yes, at some

270 Interview 62, RFO.
271 Interview 66, RFO.
point I decided that I could do this, but it would have to be with order and some procedure.²⁷²

Illustration 2 – NTFP markets

Another slightly fascinating account was related by an older RFO close to retirement who had served with the forest department for close to three decades.²⁷³ Over lunch at his home he recounted how he some five or six years ago had been posted in a different range where much effort was made on enhancing small local NTFP markets, especially those trading in local spices, medicinal and edible plants, and various oils and resins extracted from local trees and plants. The area was naturally endowed with the raw materials and there was reportedly strong agreement between the forest range offices of the area and the villages that efforts should be made to scale up the commodification and trade of these locally.

The original suggestion had been to host the markets under the supervision of the local forest department, but allow the villagers to do most of the actual trading themselves as they had more knowledge about the various species and varieties of NTFPs being sold. The RFO went on to relate that a few weeks before a first larger market was to be held and just after it had been announced in the newspapers, he got multiple calls and visits, first from private traders in the region, and soon thereafter from local government representatives, mainly at the block panchayat level. He explained that they had raised severe objections to the way in which the markets were to be organised, with the private firms complaining that it was an inefficient approach as they might as well buy the produce directly from the villagers and then sell it at a higher rate in larger towns and to specialist buyers, not least various tourist resorts specialising in ayurvedic treatments, which uses a lot of NTFPs in their products. The local government officials complained that the original solution attempted to bypass trade regulations and tariffs, and that the whole endeavour should be orchestrated under the supervision of the gram panchayats, though the RFO stated that he suspected that they had been lured by the traders who favoured this arrangement more than the KFDs, possibly indicating something illicit. The government representatives reportedly threatened to file formal complaints and bring the matter to the District Collector if the forest department went along with its plans. The RFO had approached his DFO who in turn contacted the CF to seek support and conflict mediation.

It was very tense and infected for some time. The block officers made threats about reporting to the DC and the police and Shri [the local DFO] made threat to do the same... The conservator of forests told us to solve this ourselves, little support. For some months no markets were held and much forest

²⁷² Interview 35, DFO.
²⁷³ Respondent 51, RFO
produce was spoiled in storage units, making the forest people complain too!274

According to the RFO the deadlock continued for several months as no one seemed to find an agreement on how to resolve this problem. He reported that the local governments ‘shouted much’ about approaching the DC for resolution but never went ahead with the threat, while he and his DFO could not do much as the CF did not wish to get involved (for reasons I assume has to with their search for blame-avoidance, reported in chapter four). He told me that they kept meeting with the local government officials for some time as villagers persisted with complaining about the overdue market, but no one was certain of what to do. However, an important breakthrough occurred when a new block panchayat official was appointed who was allegedly more ‘open-minded’. What transpired is somewhat fascinating in my opinion. The RFO and his DFO reportedly got along with the new official and initiated what was seemingly a small competition aiming to devise alternative ways of organising the NTFP markets. They presented an alternative option themselves (which I never caught the specificities of) and urged the different private firms and the local government offices to do the same. They then went back to the forest communities and introduced the different options, stating that they would try each of them over the coming year in different locations, and then decide which one to settle on once and for all.

The solution of thinking about these new options became very helpful, it made it possible to bring produce to the market, which in the end is the most important goal…I was pleased with that and the traders and block officers were also pleased, though tension is there still.275

The RFO concluded the account by suggesting that this is the type of arrangements they often have to make so that a comparatively small and local conflict does not spiral out of control and become larger than they can handle. He indicated that no actor was highly satisfied with the solution and would have preferred their own approach, but that the tension and agony that remained was manageable. “If no solution had been made, there would be more difficulty for everyone; for us, for block officers and for villages. Right now, we can manage other difficulties we also have.”276

Illustration 3 – replicating a ‘model village’
Let us turn to one last empirical illustration reflecting an attempt to build capacities among rural forest communities. This narrative was related to me by a DFO and one of his local RFOs, located in an upland district that has seen a lot of external interventions from NGOs and charities, as well as the

274 Ibid.
275 Ibid.
276 Ibid.
different government agencies over the past decade. I was told that a few years ago a large international aid organisation (from a traditionally large donor country) was conducting a scoping study in southern India to investigate how their development aid could be refocused towards the conservation and enhancement of critical social-ecological systems. They had already examined a district elsewhere in Kerala and the DFO in the division at hand had received subtle encouragement from his superiors (reportedly the CF as well as CCF) to make an effort in his division, together with surrounding jurisdictions, to devise something they referred to as a ‘model village’. They were urged to be inspired by the efforts made in the other district and use that as a template of sorts. The DFO and his subordinate informed me that they had travelled there to learn what process had been followed, and to see how they essentially could replicate (or blueprint) that effort.

In that place foresters, agriculture department, health department and local administration [local government] had cooperated under the order of the district collector…They shared the very fine program they had used and gave us many good instructions…They said it would be easy and rewarding work. The attempt to replicate the process in their home division was anything but easy and rewarding. They had first approached the local DC who declined to supervise the project as he reportedly was too busy working on other tasks and would not have time to orchestrate this as well. Thus, the DFO volunteered to be the coordinating official and invited the above cited actors from the other government bodies to a series of meetings. The intention was to determine a course of action on how to concentrate their different interventions and strategies on one larger forest community in the area which they agreed would be suitable to promote as the model village in that district, hoping to attract the interest of the foreign donor organisation. The problem that arose here, almost instantaneously, was one of leadership conflicts. The two forest officials recalled that

It was most tragic and discouraging those meetings. We were all in accordance on how the model village would be organised, what each department and local government office would contribute…each would implement their program and direct their best staff and resources to the village. I had so high plans…But they would not accept my leadership, questioning why the forest department and not some other department should lead the project.

They did not want to have forest department leadership; they said this is not a forest project…but what is it then? It is not health or agriculture, that donor was looking at forest villages. So we say no to their leadership.

277 Respondent 30, DFO; Respondent 44, RFO.
278 Respondent 44, RFO.
279 Respondent 30, DFO.
280 Respondent 44, RFO.
The officials went on to inform me that they tried numerous times to reach some form of agreement on who would take the lead role and coordinate the project. The DFO offered various solutions on how he could have the general responsibility (though he did not mention one to me in which he offered to yield all influence and authority) even while the other actors had much leeway in carrying out their part of project, focusing on their areas of specialisation (health, cash-crop plantations and so forth). But none of these solutions worked out and eventually the time limit for devising the model village ran out, without any substantive interventions having been carried out at all in the designated community. The DFO lamented that

A great misfortune, that project could have been exceptional. In retrospect I wish the district collector had taken his responsibility. He is not trained in forestry but he could have overseen implementation and made it occur…I think the original problem is a lack of faith or trust in the forest department among some others.281

The Special Case of Indigenous Hamlets

Finally, the particular case of the indigenous forest-dwelling groups merits its own part of the chapter. Scheduled Tribes constitute just over one per cent of Kerala’s population, even though that corresponds to about 360,000 people in absolute numbers. This is a vanishingly small figure in the Indian context and incomparable to the central states (for instance Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh) where Scheduled Tribes in some regions account for well over thirty per cent of the total population. Their small numbers notwithstanding, they are found in the relatively more backward areas of the state and are almost entirely dependent on the forest for subsistence needs, and on the state for auxiliary livelihood support (GoI 2008; Sathyapalan and Reddy 2010).282 283 I had the opportunity to visit a few indigenous hamlets (the word used, rather than villages) during fieldwork, and there are considerable differences between these and the non-indigenous villages. The lower socioeconomic conditions in the hamlets are visible, such as simple mud-thatch houses rather than concrete ones, their clothing, and the lack of modern phones, motorbikes and TV-antennas which are frequent in non-indigenous communities. Much more poignant indicators like the stunted growth of

281 Respondent 30, DFO.
282 Interview 18, CCF; Interview 38, DFO; Interview 80, Official, Department of Tribal Development.
283 In fact there are isolated pockets in the most densely forested areas of the Western Ghats where indigenous groups of no more than a few thousand people each live entirely as hunter-gatherers, cut off from both roads and the rest of society. They are referred to as ‘Primitive Tribes’ and literacy is allegedly less than ten per cent in these communities. Visiting such areas was unfortunately off limits for me during fieldwork as forest officials themselves rarely go there themselves as the communities are cut off from all kinds of roads where any motorised vehicle can travel.
children, poor dental health among adults and the very simple meals they offered also attest to very different circumstances in these areas. As the chapter’s opening vignette outlined, infant mortality and deplorable maternal and neonatal health is vastly higher than in the rest of the state (GoI 2008). One particular taluk in central Kerala in fact made the national headlines repeated times during the years I spent in India, on the basis of tragically high infant mortality, reporting a staggering 58 infant deaths due to malnutrition only in the year 2014.

Attending to the welfare of these groups was an important activity reported by the officials involved in CBN networks in a total of four forest divisions which have a somewhat larger proportion of indigenous communities (of the eight I studied). Yet, it is also one of the most challenging activities discussed during fieldwork, for two interrelated reasons. The first is that the perceptions of how to mitigate and reduce indigenous backwardness and marginalisation, and who is to be in charge of this, diverge substantially both within the forest department and between different frontline actors. The second has to with the comparatively weaker demands made from the indigenous hamlets vis-à-vis the forest department, which are consistently much simpler and smaller than those from the mainstream population communities. Taken together, these two factors lead forest officials to develop few and weak incentives to take any concerted efforts to collaborate on indigenous livelihood enhancement.

Differing perceptions and weak demands

The first dividing line regarding perceptions runs between the frontline officials and the senior and/or retired officials, again pointing to deep-rooted generational differences within the department. Indigenous communities were in general spoken of in somewhat derogatory and patriarchal terms, commonly among the retired and very oldest officials I met with. Some expressed a sense of mistrust and lack of faith in their ability to manage forests sustainably, portraying them as workshy, lazy, misusers of ganja and arrack, and a burden for the forest department. An offered account by a retired CCF early on in my fieldwork captures the prevailing sentiment well, though it should be noted that the event he referred to is likely to have occurred more than twenty years ago. But even so, the attitudes remain and might be passed on to younger generations of foresters, ingraining this general perspective in the working culture of the department.

284 Interview 40, RFO.
285 While significantly higher than the rest of Kerala, it is yet lower than indigenous areas of central India (GoI 2011)
286 Interviews 1, 3 & 15, CFs (retired); Interview 2, CCF (retired); Interviews 6 & 7, APCCFs; Interview 12, PCCF (retired).
At the time I was working as DFO in [omitted] division. Most of the time we would have good relations with the *adivasi* groups, we would often hire some as day labourers in the parks or when we were building some new structure. There was some understanding between us. But one early morning I received a call from one of the RFO’s who even earlier had spoken to one of the foresters. Apparently there were several contractors from a building company moving around in a village, transporting material there by small trucks. We travelled there as soon as we could and reached by midday. By that time they had already started drinking and were lying around outside the houses, causing mischief. We were only seven from the department, but managed to stop the contractors from entering the village and then locating the headman. We later learnt that the village had been offered twelve bottles of brandy in return for that company getting to build up some business enterprise there. That’s how it happens you see; we have to remain vigilant all the time.  

Though overall speaking quite derogatively of the indigenous population, the senior and retired officials also spoke of the responsibility that they perceive the forest department has for taking care of them, but again in a slightly paternalistic tone. One former PCCF who I interviewed at his gigantic apartment in downtown and seaside Kochi spoke at length on this issue, declaring that; “Tribal development can only occur at the hands of the Forest Department.” He was of the opinion that tribals can manage little on their own, for which reason they have to be provided for “from birth to death”.

He also described the deeply distressing but not unusual problem of ‘phony marriages’. What happens is that men from the mainstream population secure a marriage with women from the indigenous communities and makes sure that there is some piece of land included in the dowry or wedding arrangement. This gives the women some short-term benefits, such as improved housing or just a substantial amount of cash, which also benefits her hamlet, at least in the short term. However, after a few years the man will come up with some pretext to divorce his wife and by doing so co-opts what land they might have. The man is usually more endowed and has more political connections, and can do so with relative ease. He subsequently brings up his mainstream population family to the hills if he has one, evicting his former indigenous wife.  

A number of officials also spoke of the fact that many indigenous youths seek to leave the hill areas for jobs in the coastal cities or in Coimbatore, the large industrial (textile) city across the border in Tamil Nadu. They reportedly end up living in squalor and with addictions, no better off than before or even worse. This points to another debate occurring more broadly in Kerala, focused on whether the Scheduled Tribes should assimilate into the mainstream population or be allowed to lead their traditional lifestyles, only with more external interventions and support from the state. The issue lies beyond

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287 Interview 2, CCF (retired).
288 Interview 12, PCCF (retired).
289 Interview 2, CCF (retired); Interview 6, APCCF; Interview 26, ACF (retired); Interviews 32 & 36, DFOs.
the scope of this book but was intensely debated also outside forest circles, at universities and among practitioners (see also Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam 2004, 2007).290

Most of the tribals, they have little schooling. Each year they will send their children to schools but often they will be called back after a few weeks or even days. The remaining families do not manage livelihoods on their own; making ends meet…This is a vicious cycle as they do not gain skills or qualities, or any leadership skills. It is very clear when we try to engage them. Literacy is lacking.291

Among the currently active and younger forest officials, strong and derogatory opinions and accounts were much rare, and they kept a comparatively more neutral tone with regards to indigenous marginalisation and livelihood enhancement, at least avoiding outright belittling comments. As earlier parts of the book have pointed out, some frontline officials expressed a normative interest of including forest-users (also indigenous ones) in forest management and spoke of their commitment, at least in principle, to helping them develop and discover more sustainable livelihoods.292 At the same time, they acknowledged that the matter of indigenous marginalisation carries little weight when different activities and resources must be prioritised, and that they do not perceive substantial support from the higher administrative levels of the hierarchy for this cause. Two officials explained that

Matters such as plantations, forest restoration, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks are important to the department leadership. Some forester-villager interaction and sharing but not really tribal groups…I think they do not see it as very important, and then it becomes less priority for me and my staff also.293

To me, tribal development and support is very important, to give them better opportunities and chances…but that mind-set is not very common. Some older officials do not agree; very different opinions and mind-set. Does not make me encouraged.294

290 In sharp contrast, several social and environmental activists I met expressed the opposite opinion; that Scheduled Tribes are integral to any effort to conserve the forests, not least on the basis of their extensive local knowledge (Interview 75, VS Vijayan, academic/activist). One formulated it like this: “In my opinion these adivasis are the best managers of the forests and of the biological diversity India harbours. They are essentially the barefoot ecologists of our nation, having walked, lived and seen every single inch of India’s expanses. They have an ecological knowledge about the forest second to none” (Interview 77, Madhav Gadgil, academic).

291 Interview 38, DFO.

292 Interview 26, ACF (retired), Interviews 27, 32, 33 & 34, DFOs; Interviews 48, 51 & 67, RFOs.

293 Interview 34, DFO.

294 Interview 48, RFO.
This is slightly peculiar in the sense that many frontline officials differ in opinions from their superiors on how local-level forest management should be carried out more broadly, and take a different course of action thanks to the autonomy they hold. As I will return to shortly below, the lack of support or commitment from the senior levels is not the only reason indigenous welfare is perceived to be challenging and down-prioritised.

The difference in perceptions on the whole issue was also manifest among the various other line-departments operating at the frontline. Forest officials, those of other agencies as well as academics and activists acknowledged that there is one significant dividing line running between the different actors. It has to do with who is responsible for the many historical injustices acted upon the indigenous communities, and therefore who is now obliged to make the lead efforts to remedy the problem, or simply stay out of it all. The issue is intricate and complex and lies beyond the scope of this book and what I focused on during fieldwork, but it did reportedly constitute a strain on relationships between frontline actors when the idea of working together on indigenous development came up at CBN meetings. In my own impression, one department or another is not solely responsible or guiltier than another, and see it as a collective responsibility of the whole Indian government, both past and present. This idea was also put forward by a senior forest official I met in Dehradun, who used the following striking metaphor

Imagine if you kicked and beat your dog every day for fifteen years, then one day tried to start cuddling and playing games with it. It would run away terrified of old habit. Now, imagine the Indian State. For over 150 years it has abused the tribal population in one way or another since the British. And all of a sudden we’re talking about participation, active citizenship and demand-led development. How on earth is anyone expecting that to work out?

Yet, the historical debate played a role in the recent implementation of the Forest Rights Act (GoI 2006), described in chapter four. At the time of my fieldwork, implementation had been underway for six years and I was told that the critical periods of it were over, and the law was in fact quite seldom mentioned in interviews. Yet looking at the most recently available KFD administrative report (KFD 2015) implementation appears to still be in progress, though at a comparatively small scale. Again, the opinions of the seniors stand out as a contrast to what the current frontline officials stated, who generally had little to say about the FRA. For example

The Forest Rights Act will work fine in the central states, there they have very big and vast forest areas to live and farm on. While here in Kerala, no land is too scarce and fragile for giving away big pieces to the tribals; it

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295 Interview 14, ACF; Interviews 27, 28, 30, 36, DFOs; Interviews 74 & 80, Officials, Department of Tribal Development; Interview 75, VS Vijayan, academic/activist.
296 Interview 89, Senior Forest Official, IGNFA.
297 Interview 18, CCF; Interviews 36 & 37, DFOs.
would be a catastrophe in Kerala. That’s why we are averse to implement it.  

Next, and in sharp contrast to the meetings between non-indigenous forest users and officials, the handful meetings I had the chance to observe in indigenous hamlets speak a different story as far as grassroots activism and mobilisation is concerned. When I would ask my accompanying officials what had been discussed at the meetings, the answers almost always reflected a demand for very simple goods and services, and seldom any deeper engagement in actual forest management. It would be basic supplies for the community kitchens or equipment made out of metal rather than the wooden tools they make themselves. I recall a meeting in an impoverished hamlet where the elderly village headman was talking to me in Malayalam. When I asked the RFO to translate what he had said, I got the response “He says that they need milk and eggs for the children”. That statement has stuck with me to this day and still moves me profoundly when I think of it, not least its austere simplicity in contrast to the extensive demands and requests made from people in non-indigenous villages. Frontline officials also spoke of the difficulty in motivating or enticing the indigenous hamlets to participate in forest management activities. While a handful of areas have been moderately successful in involving indigenous youths as forest watchmen and guards (usually as daily wage labourers in national parks and wildlife sanctuaries), officials suggested that this has been contingent on job creation programs they have encouraged members of the Scheduled Tribes communities to participate in, and not demand-driven from the grassroots. As such, the indigenous hamlets stand out as a clear exception to the otherwise highly active grassroots. A RFO put it in the following way

You see the difference in how they speak and act…The adivasi [indigenous] groups are more apprehensive even though we are trying to support them. They make demands and complaints about things when needed but it takes much effort and time to build relationships…It is different with non-adivasis, they are educated, have travelled and worked in the towns and are members of organisations…Every person in Kerala is member of many organisations and groups…they are familiar with speaking to officials.

**Weak incentives and lack of goals**

The lack of alignment of perceptions on how to solve indigenous backwardness – both within the forest department and between frontline actors – together with the few and weak demands from indigenous communities does not spur the forest officials to develop incentives and motives to go to any length to help them beyond the very minimum, which is usually short-term employment in different programs and projects, as well as offering training

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298 Interview 17, ACF.
299 Interviews 32 & 35, DFOs; Interviews 39, 46 & 55 RFOs.
300 Interview 63, RFO.
courses of different kinds. Yet such interventions are said to have few long-term impacts which may lift them out of poverty and marginalisation,301 and were criticised by social activists for doing little to foster sustainable development in the hamlets.302 But what is notable (and disheartening) here is that the many of the otherwise active and enthusiastic forest officials I met with and followed around seemed to lack an idea of what approach to take on this particular policy issue. Over the months I spent with them I gathered the impression that they felt quite uncertain on what strategy to follow, even in a hypothetical scenario where they would have full discretion and power to shape their goals and courses of action as they prefer. One RFO answered my question rhetorically, replying “What I would do? Very difficult question, where to even start? Will take generations and great commitment...I do not think I will experience that ever.303 A high-level CCF respondent expressed a sentiment that was even more downcast

I honestly do not know that answer. Maybe indigenous groups are a lost cause, maybe not. It is the hardest question someone working with forest management in India can get...If all government bodies get together there is no unity, if this department makes a great commitment and really wants to change things we still have endless challenges, we are not trained to do this. Making full decentralisation and all provisions of Forest Rights Act will just lead to their exploitation by private investors and firms...I do not know.304

In sum, there were few incentives to make an effort to address this difficult matter, much due to the fact that they did not have a clear vision of what it is they should actually do or accomplish. It reinforces an overall lack of motivation among officials, and consequently leads to few incentives and initiatives to even consider collaboration as a viable strategy.

Summary of Chapter

This chapter has focused on the theme of capacity building among rural forest communities. It first discussed the way in which forest officials stand at the centre of multiple demands, pressures and requests from the grassroots communities and the local governments, which interact with some of the officials’ more normative ideas and opinions about inclusion to develop an incentive structure orientated towards inter-organisational collaboration. This has to do with the fact that they find themselves in a resource-dependency situation, as they are unable to secure multiple resources, goods and services

301 Interviews 74 & 80, Officials, Department of Tribal Development; Interview 89, Senior Forest Official, IGNFA.
302 Interview 73, MK Prasad, academic/activist; Interview 75, VS Vijayan, academic/activist; Interview 77, Madhav Gadgil, academic.
303 Interview 48, RFO.
304 Interview 18, CCF.
on their own and thus need the support of other actors to meet grassroots demands. The incentive for collaboration has a quite instrumental nature as well; if forest officials are unable to meet or at least try to address grassroots demands, their working environment can become very challenging as forest-users file written complaints and mobilise against the department, over time contributing to a untenable and infected situation. But again, separating the statements that spoke entirely of an instrumental purpose and those that were made on a normative basis is difficult, and most likely the two categories interact in an intricate way. The goal of collaboration here is thus twofold; mostly to avoid conflicts with the grassroots that further burdens their working environment, and moreover to actually support and help forest communities develop socioeconomically for that reason alone.

In order to realise these goals and translate their incentives into substantive action, they interact with other frontline agencies, NGOs and charities in what I term capacity-building networks (CBN). The strategies involved have to do both with tangible action (which is more outcome-oriented) as well as efforts to motivate individuals representing other organisations to collaborate rather than work alone (more output-oriented). Last, I discussed the particular case of indigenous marginalisation, which stands out as an exception to the otherwise progressive and innovative *modi operandi* at the frontline of forest governance. The deeply ingrained divisions in perceptions on how to resolve this challenge, and the very weak demands and pressures emanating from the indigenous hamlets leads to weak incentives to collaborate on this specific issue beyond simple interventions such as offering short-terms jobs and training courses. Underlying this is a more widespread lack of visions and goals on what development in indigenous communities should look like, and how it may materialise at all.

**Reflections on roles**

In this last empirical chapter we find indications of forest officials holding multiple different roles. First, the majority of the frontline officials may be interpreted as holding the role of *facilitator* broadly, as capacity-building (here directed towards rural forest communities) is one of the defining characteristics of that role, or put differently, facilitating the conditions for future collaboration. Yet we saw some variation in the way capacity-building and facilitation is organised; some centred directly on forest management issues, whilst others were aimed at secondary policy issues and included providing goods and services as well as information on things not directly related to forestry. Simultaneously, a large portion of the frontline officials also hold the role of *policy entrepreneur* as they seek to change the way forest communities are included in forest management and decision-making, whether it is for instrumental or more normative reasons. To that end, they advocate changes and employ strategies that may augment livelihoods in communities in the long run, exemplified quite well in the first illustration.
Within the CBN arrangements, the question of leadership is not as clear as in the SPIN arrangements, but we saw examples of officials attempting to gain or hold the role of *network manager* using different styles of negotiation and conflict resolution. Again the first illustration points to this, as does the second one, although that was more of a borderline case as responsibility and authority had to be shared with the local government. Moreover, in the third illustration, the officials held the role of *network agent* and attempted to secure the role of *manager*, but failed to do so as the other involved actors threatened to withdraw, then making the potential *manager* role redundant.

As for the particular case of capacity building in the indigenous hamlets, the set of roles held are somewhat different. As earlier chapters have shown, frontline officials are able to provide or secure some minor goods and services to the indigenous communities, then in the dual role of *facilitator* and *network agent*. But in my interpretation the role of *policy entrepreneur*, as I see them holding as far as non-indigenous groups are concerned, does not apply in this case, as they confessed to lacking any clear and coherent goals of what they want to change or how they would collaborate to address the matter of indigenous marginalisation. In that regard, they are more like *Weberian bureaucrats* or *SLBs* (depending on how they work and where in the hierarchy); they do what they formally are obliged to do or what they can, but little more.
8. Concluding Discussion

By the time we head back to the forest range office and town where I am staying the sun is on its way down and the tea plantations have been cleared of people. Instead, buses jam-packed with migrant workers roar past us. Almost on a weekly basis one can read in the papers about accidents in which overfilled buses go off the road, killing a disheartening amount of people. I desperately wish the jeep had safety-belts. We reach the office after sunset and Vaibhav has a generator turned on – a power outage again. He reminds me that there is a lot of paperwork to be done and is slightly astonished that I actually wished to come along. The fairly large room feels cramped with all the folders, ledgers and thick manuals filling the wooden bookshelves and the rusty filing cabinet. When Vaibhav decides that he is finished it is almost ten at night and he declares that it has been a long and tiring day. He stacks together the various reports and forms and places them in what appears to be the tray for outgoing documents. Tomorrow the clerk will pick them up and then they will be her responsibility, at least for the short time until they are dispatched to the next instance. I ask Vaibhav what the program is for next morning and he looks surprised, have I not learnt the routine by now? They will pick me up, then a short stop at the local government office and then a few VSS-meetings not far from here. The wheels of forest governance on the frontline keep on turning.

Content of the chapter

This chapter consists of six parts. The first part below summarises some of the core arguments, the followed approaches and the rationale for this book, paving the way for the second part in which I first reproduce my three interrelated research questions and then provide concise but clear answers to each of them. Yet, certain aspects of the answers are worthy of additional theoretical comment and stand in focus in two additional parts. The first of these two addresses the necessity and rationality of informality, both at a more general level in which collaborative incentive structures develop, and also as a micro-level strategy employed by officials. The second shorter part further examines the micro-level strategies occurring within the institutional network arrangements, discussing collaboration as a least negative strategy and the importance of individual leadership. In a fifth part I discuss the methodological contribution of this study and highlight the value and merit of taking
an immersive ethnographic approach in this type of study and context. I also outline a few practical lessons for conducting ethnographic field research on public bureaucracies in India. In the sixth and last part I turn to the matter of roles, providing some reflections on them with regards to what prior literature has said (or not said) about the roles public officials may play in this type of empirical setting, and briefly propose a few directions for future research on this topic.

Summary of the Book

The aim of this book has been to understand the perceptions, motives and incentives of public officials to work collaboratively, the goals they want to attain, and the substantive strategies they employ in order to do so. The core, underlying reason and justification for this focus lies in transitions occurring in the policy discourse on natural resource management in the Global South. Over the past few decades, policies, laws and programs have come to emphasise and promote ideals of collaboration, public participation and decentralised management, which now form the backbone of a new policy generation. Similar to the trend that has been ongoing in most liberal democracies around the world we may speak of a shift from government to governance in regards to the management of natural resources.

Located within this broader macro-level transition are public officials; the countless individuals charged with carrying out contemporary resource policy under increasing pressures to collaborate and work together with other public agencies and the grassroots resource-using communities. Yet the public officials are seldom found in an institutional environment particularly conducive to collaborative ideals and practices. On the contrary, they are often part of monolithic and hierarchical bureaucracies, tracing their roots to the colonial era. This has bestowed them with a deep-rooted legacy of top-down, command and control practices, often at odds with the more inclusive and horizontal ideals of contemporary policy discourse. At the same time, they play a central role as they are ultimately responsible for the implementation of policies ensuring the welfare of millions of poor rural citizens, and for safeguarding the sustainable use of fundamentally important ecosystems and natural resource stocks.

Yet, this critical set of actors comes with a considerable knowledge gap in the literature on natural resource management: surprisingly few studies have focused in any depth on these individuals, and their roles has been under-studied and undertheorized in the context of the Global South, including India which this book focuses on. In the highly influential common pool resource literature as well as its subsequent developments (McGinnis and Ostrom 2014; Ostrom 1990), individual public officials have overall been given limited attention in favour of local resource-using communities. The literature focusing explicitly on bureaucracies and administrative systems in
the Global South has on the other hand focused on either broader, macro-level institutional factors with less attention to the individual official (Andrews 2013), or adopted a quite narrow perspective portraying officials as a stereotype corrupt and malfeasant actor (Gupta 2012). Overall, the internal world and logics of public bureaucracies in a country like India is more or less a black box that is rarely opened up and explored in any greater depth from the subjective viewpoint of the individual agents that populate them, and we know little of the way they perceive the policy environment they work in.

In the context of this study it has to do with the way in which these officials respond to pressures to work more collaboratively, whether by external policy directives, popular grassroots demand, or just their own preferences. This is a topic which has been more or less side-lined in much previous research on both the natural commons in the Global South and development administration more broadly. Put differently, it has to do with understanding the drivers of collaboration at the individual level; their incentives, goals and strategies in relation to collaborative ideals and practices. Yet more specifically, I do this from the explicit and subjective viewpoint of the individual officials themselves, a decidedly agency-oriented perspective which puts their worldview at the centre of enquiry. Filling this knowledge gap by offering a nuanced and vivified in-depth description of how this plays out in practice at the micro-level is the main contribution of this book.

In the second chapter I engaged with the two literatures mentioned above, providing concise but thorough reviews of them. I argued that this scholarship provides rich contextual insights into natural resource management and India in particular, but relatively few ideas which may help us understand the micro-level incentives, goals and strategies individual officials hold and utilise. To mitigate these limitations I suggested turning to a much wider literature on collaborative- and network governance as developed in a largely western setting. This body of research offers a richer and more nuanced source of ideas to help us start thinking about the topic at hand. A condensed review of this literature generated a roster of the resources and strategies officials may have, and also considered the key drivers of collaboration at the individual level. I also made the claim that this is all a matter of crafting and enforcing rules and that we should be more attentive to understanding individual behavioural patterns in light of the rules-in-use (Ostrom 2005) followed when we study individual actors, and also examine how they are constrained by formal and informal institutions.

Last, I also elaborated on the concept of roles and how we should understand the role(s) a public official has as a summation of her incentives, goals and strategies. I suggested that roles are an auxiliary and more nuanced way of describing the behaviour of individual officials, and more particularly how they transform their incentives into substantive action in order to reach a certain goal. As a later part will discuss, a more diversified understanding of roles also becomes an empirical contribution to previous research which
has yielded a quite narrow and limited view of the roles officials may hold in the type of setting in focus here.

As elaborated in chapter three, I base my enquiry and main contribution on immersive, ethnographic fieldwork on forest governance in the state of Kerala in South India. While Kerala is not a case per se it was selected as an empirical setting highly favourable to what I seek to study. In short, I argue that it is an auspicious setting to study the drive towards collaboration, for at least three reasons. First, it has a highly active and vibrant civil society which might incentivise or force officials to be more responsive to grassroots demands and work more collaboratively. Second, it has a relatively progressive and well-functioning bureaucracy in general, which in combination with a complex and demanding field-level policy environment might spur officials to adopt the collaborative ideals and practices in contemporary policy discourse more readily. Third, it could be the case that officials perceive the hierarchical management system to work well as it is, giving them few incentives to change their practices. Taken together, the state is a suitable setting in which to study the tensions between a policy discourse emphasising increased collaboration, a traditional top-down hierarchy, and an active and mobilised grassroots community, but again from the distinct subjective perspective of individual officials.

While Kerala is the empirical setting of concern, this book focuses on a case of individual-level bureaucratic incentive structures, goals and strategies in the face of pressures to collaborate. It is a single-case study, in which ground-level fieldwork was conducted in eight different forest divisions; the most important administrative jurisdiction in the forest management hierarchy. The book is also a political ethnography (Kubik 2009; Wedeen 2010) in which I have based my data-collection on in-depth interviews and immersive field observations. Over the course of seven months in India I conducted a total of 90 interviews with 75 individuals, and spent 36 full days observing forest officials during roughly three months spent in the rural forest areas. As chapter three described, an ethnographic approach proved suitable for this study as I sought to study and make sense of a diversity of behavioural patterns as they occurred in real time, and also to understand the incentives and goals of individual forest officials in relation to the wider institutional context they are located in.

When I started my ground-level fieldwork in Kerala in early 2014 I was quite unsure what to expect of the incentives, goals and strategies of the forest officials in relation to collaboration. As there was hardly any literature available on forest management in the state I based my few expectations on what a broader literature on Kerala had revealed: that it was a state much different from the rest of India, more comparable with countries elsewhere in the Global South enjoying higher human development levels than most of India. At the same time, I was setting out to study public officials belonging to an organisation – the Kerala Forest Department – which is one of many descendants of the colonial forest administration. It could possibly have been
the case that it struggles with the same structural and cultural limitations a wide literature has made its task of criticising, sometimes on good grounds, but seldom from the more individual agency-oriented perspective advocated in this book. The process of fieldwork was an insightful journey in numerous ways and most certainly, full of surprises. In the second half of the book, in chapters four through seven, I laid out the results from the months spent interacting with forest officials in remote corners of Kerala and at the headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram, the state capital. As the next part below outlines, my fieldwork led to a number of surprising findings and novel discoveries, which in turn might encourage us to challenge our expectations and notions about the role of the individual official in a developing country.

Answering the Research Questions

In the introduction I posed three interrelated research questions, reproduced below. The fact that they are formulated as three questions rather than one longer should not lead one to believe that they are separable – as the empirical analysis has demonstrated, the incentives, goals and strategies of collaboration the forest officials develop, pursue, and employ are closely connected, and thus the considerations below should be seen as three interrelated answers to one wider research problem.

What incentives for collaboration do public officials refer to? What goals do they want to accomplish? What strategies do they employ?

As the empirical chapters also demonstrated, there is a significant difference in what frontline officials (those located at the forest division level and below) reported regarding incentives, goals and strategies, to what the senior or superior officials reported. In the sections below I will address each in turn, although the larger part of the answers concerns the drivers of collaboration as experienced by the frontline officials.

Incentives for collaboration

In short, the frontline officials made reference to three incentives for collaboration directly derived from constraints they perceive in the formal institutional framework they operate within, and to one incentive deriving from the more abstract appeal of a new policy generation and discourse, in which collaboration is a central feature.

As for the first three, the stimulus to action has to do with perceived constraints in the formal setup of the forest department. As we know by now the forest administration traces its roots to the colonial bureaucracy established during the mid-nineteenth century and has seen few if any structural reforms over the course of its history. Moreover, the foundational legal framework
for forest management derives from that same era, imposing a constitutional-choice level rule system (Ostrom 2005: 58-59), within which all subsequent acts, polices, programs and various local management initiatives must be ordered and configured. For the frontline officials, the practical manifestation of this framework is the narrow, silo-like structure in which they are employed: the state forest department. It much resembles a Russian doll, with multiple jurisdictions locking almost perfectly into each other, but with little relevance to how the de facto natural forest landscape is laid out.

The organisational setup is not only incongruous with field-level realities, but also offers very few opportunities for communication and interactions across jurisdictional boundaries, both within the department sphere but also with other agencies working in the field. In contrast, the formal bureaucratic working culture is one centred on the unidirectional transfer of information upwards in the hierarchy, and the unidirectional relay of orders downwards.

The first incentive for collaboration officials referred to concerned long-term strategic planning across boundaries, the reduction of functional overlaps, and the sharing and diffusion of information, knowledge and ideas on best practices; three activities the formal setup is perceived to impede. The second incentive concerned the ability to take immediate local-level action on suddenly arisen emergencies and problems requiring flexibility and responsiveness: again something the formal setup makes difficult in the perception of the frontline officials, citing considerable hierarchical time lags as the main limitation. The third incentive for collaboration had to do with meeting demands from the grassroots communities, and contributing to capacity building in the same. In this case the formal setup (in terms of boundaries) is less the problem than the fact the department is unable to provide officials with the tools and resources they believe that they need. A fourth and additional factor also contributed to incentives for collaboration, namely an interest and willingness to adopt (at least in part) the ideals and values of contemporary forest discourse, and the possibility of simply trying something new. But again, frontline officials reported that the formal setup and framework constrains their ability to work in a novel way, and also holds back the potential of implementing a new policy generation in full.

However, when we shift the gaze to the senior officials located at the department headquarters and other high-ranking administrative positions, the incentives they referred to shift in character. For some of the very oldest and the several retired officials I encountered, there were few if any clear incentives for collaboration. Quite the contrary, they were of the perception that collaboration in broad sense offers little added value to the work of the forest department, much in line with the possibility addressed in the introduction as well as in chapter three: that they find the formal institutional setup to work quite well and efficiently. They have been socialised into the hierarchical management style and mind-set through training and their entire professional careers, and held that collaboration across boundaries and agencies would do
little good, or even lead to unfavourable outcomes. As such, it is more appropriate to speak of a disincentive for collaboration.

Yet, the generational factor should not be forgotten, and the strong rejection of collaboration was less prevalent among the comparatively younger, currently active senior staff, such as the several CFs and CCFs. While not openly embracing the idea of working collaboratively, they would occasionally criticise the formal institutional framework and in some measure point to perceived limitations. Yet these perceptions were not strong enough for them to explicitly refer to any incentives for collaboration. The way I interpret this is that their incentives for obtaining administrative blame-avoidance and deniability is comparatively stronger, and thus they discard any motives for collaboration on a largely instrumental or even self-interest basis. Yet the pattern is not universal; recall for instance the CF in chapter five who went to great lengths to foster capacities for adaptive learning across boundaries.

Goals of collaboration

In short, the answer to the question of what they want to accomplish is two-fold. The first has to do with the collaborative networks as a necessary forum for negotiation, and the second has to do with how frontline officials believe that forest management may or should be carried out.

As for the collaborative networks, they are a type of intermediate goal, or an output rather than outcome to use those words. In order to translate their incentives into substantive action and strategies which might eventually lead to the outcomes described below, they need some forum for deliberation and negotiation, and a space where they may employ their different strategies, or simply ventilate concerns and arguments for or against collaboration. The networks are crucial vehicles for institutionalised coordination and a way of overcoming or alleviating the interdependency situations they perceive they are locked in; a matter returned to in the part on informality further down. Yet, three aggregated categories of collaborative networks were identified, based or defined on their function to the officials. These were the Strategic Planning and Informational Networks (SPIN), the Immediate Response and Action Networks (IRAN), and the Capacity Building Networks (CBN).

Turning to the goals of collaboration in the outcome-sense of the word; what they envision forest management could look like or how they believe that it should be carried out, the threefold classification of their reported incentives has a direct connection here. First they wish to see a policy environment characterised by more broad-based planning, deliberation and learning, in which the scope and boundary rules – the coverage or span of their collective activities – are defined on a biophysical or functional basis. Recall for instance the emphasis made on landscape approaches to forest management (Sayer et al. 2013) and the efforts to create an environment for adaptive learning, connecting science with practice. The second goal is a policy environment in which they may respond to sudden problems and emergencies –
such as forest wildfires, injured wildlife, and illegal activities – with more flexibility and responsiveness, drawing upon local resources and routines, rather than going through the more time-consuming hierarchical and formal procedures. The third goal is a policy environment without conflicts, or at least more harmonious relationships with the forest communities, a condition which they believe would much facilitate their ability to carry out their work. Yet a few officials went one step further, declaring that they wish to see the forest-users as more equal management partners, and to see sustainable livelihood developments. Implicitly connected to this is a working environment in which they are able to respond to grassroots demands and pressures more flexibly and more easily.

However, the range of goals is not universal among all frontline officials; some may perhaps be considered more progressive and forward-thinking from the perspective that their stated goals are somewhat aligned with those of contemporary policy discourse, whilst others were more conservative and mainly wished to experience a less cumbersome workload. Yet, the specific case of indigenous hamlets stands out as an exception here. The majority of frontline officials implicitly expressed some abstract ideas and visions about supporting Scheduled Tribes, but simultaneously lacked any clear vision or plan for how that would happen or what the end goal was.

Turning to the senior officials, the stated goals are again quite different from those related by their subordinates in the field. As for the very oldest and retired officials, the predominant goal was the continued dominance and influence of the forest department. That is not to be interpreted as downplaying the importance of routines for forest vigilance or generally sound relationships with forest communities – in many cases they posited this as important, but differed from the frontline officials in terms of what actors should be involved. The same holds for the younger, current active superior officials who did not speak outright of goals with different end outcomes, but did not either yield any narrative resembling broad-based collaboration. For them, a status quo or organisational homeostasis (Wilson 1989) was the intermediate goal, as that would – all other things equal – allow them to pursue their ultimate goal of securing a good transfer to a desirable posting.

Strategies for collaboration

Turning to the last research question, the strategies forest officials employ or utilise, we may again make a twofold distinction, both of which will be returned to in more depth in the two following parts of the chapter. Yet, for answering the research question, the strategies for collaboration may be interpreted in two different perspectives: one kind that is more deep-lying or fundamental and one kind that is more tied to individual micro-level actions and everyday patterns of behaviour. To echo Ostrom (2005), strategies occurring at the collective-choice and operational levels, respectively.
The first has to do with strategies enabling collaboration to materialise or arise in the first place. By this I do not refer to deliberate strategies of network formation, but rather the more fundamental approach public officials follow when translating their incentives into substantive action. The predominant and most important strategy in this regard is one of informality, and more precisely the adherence to crafting informal institutions to fill the perceived gaps in the formal institutional framework. In the empirical setting at hand, officials feel constrained and limited by the formal hierarchy, but are yet an integral part of it. To mitigate the perceived limitations and take any initiatives towards collaboration, they have to partially step out from their formal position, into the interface of the formal and informal realms. As the next part below will elaborate, this puts them in a slightly difficult dual role but simultaneously enables them to craft informal institutional rules. As such, the first strategy for collaboration is one of informality.

The second types of strategies for collaboration are the more mundane ones, those taken by individual officials on a more daily basis, in order to facilitate and foster collaboration, predominantly within the collaborative networks. These are also revisited in the longer parts below, but it should be noted that informality once again stands out as a highly important strategy. In this perspective of strategies it has to do with things such as not inscribing or reporting the activities they undertake in their cross-jurisdictional and inter-organisational work, in order to obtain the autonomy and discretionary power they need from their superior officials. Yet informality is not the only one of relevance here. Numerous micro-level strategies occur within the network arrangements, both to prevent them from going dormant and to facilitate substantive, collective action. Among these we found concerted efforts to align policy perceptions, activating and mobilising actors, building capacities, advocating change, mediating conflict and influencing decision-making processes. In each of the empirical chapters above these activities were closely connected with strong individual leadership, an important issue revisited below.

Last, we have the strategies employed by the superiors. Once again they stand in sharp contrast to those employed by the frontline officials. Theirs was predominantly a strategy of upholding the formal bureaucratic routines and procedures, ensuring that these are not openly violated or overly transgressed by frontline staff. But as chapter four discussed, they are willing to grant their subordinates some degree of autonomy and discretionary power if they in return are guaranteed blame-avoidance and deniability. Thus, to them a strategy of sufficient compliance with formal routines and protocol was the defining feature. Yet this comes with variations too; recall the difference in autonomy in the IRAN arrangements in comparison to SPIN or CBN. This finding is revisited in the next part.
Final comment
The part above has sought to offer concise answers to the three interrelated research questions. However, further discussion and theorising is warranted in order to explicate the contributions made in this book. In the next two parts I dig deeper into two areas of theoretical interest, while the following one considers the methodological contribution made using an ethnographic approach. In a last part I turn to the matter of roles, which is predominantly an empirical contribution, with some implications for future research too.

The Necessity and Rationality of Informality
To open this discussion we should return to the concept of interdependencies (Hertting 2007; Scharpf 1978). In the case at hand each of the three incentives may be interpreted as reactions or responses to the perceived interdependencies officials reportedly find themselves in. The first two are dependencies that produce strategic externalities, while the third reflects a typical resource dependency. It is the dependency on other actors that drive the forest officials to look beyond their own organisational boundaries, and to initiate steps that eventually lead to collaboration, and ultimately the collaborative networks themselves – though these dependencies are also reinforced by the reported appeal of a new policy generation.

To begin to account for the issue at hand the tools and the terminology of the IAD framework is helpful, and in particular the three analytical levels; the constitutional-choice, the collective-choice, and the operational level (see Kiser and Ostrom 1982; Ostrom 2005). First, the foundational-legal structure and setup of the forest administration builds on rules established at the deepest constitutional-choice level, which frontline officials are unable to change, or even have an interest in doing, at least during the time-frame this book concerns itself with. The interdependency situations are thus rooted at that level and are out of reach for any change, at least using formal channels and tools. Similarly, I would argue that the wider political culture of the state as well as the bureaucratic culture of for instance transfers and meticulous inscription (all discussed in chapter four) is also norms and rules established at the constitutional-choice level: they are unlikely to change any time soon.

These rules set the outer perimeter of what officials have to relate to; the boundaries within which they might be able to craft rules and institutions. But this cannot happen using formal channels: they are constrained by the formal rules and obligations they have to adhere to, and are monitored by the senior officials on an indirect but almost daily basis through the enforced compliance with inscription and reporting duties. As pointed out in chapter four, this mechanism can be likened to Scharpf’s (1994) notion of the shadow of the hierarchy, as it builds on the anticipation of sanctions if rules are violated or infringed – here neglecting bureaucratic routines. As such, officials are necessitated to pursue an overall strategy of informality when craft-
ing the institutional arrangements they need in order to seek out collaboration, and to mitigate the interdependencies.

This informal crafting occurs at the collective-choice level, but is located or nested within the outer boundaries of the formal (constitutional-choice level) institutional framework. What is important to note is that unlike much of the classic CPR literature (Ostrom 1990), we are dealing here with a situation where the individual actors crafting the informal rules also are members and representatives of the formal setup and organisation they attempt to circumvent. This puts the public officials at the interface of the formal and informal realms, and bestows them with the dual role of hierarchical bureaucrats and network participants, to use that simple dichotomy for now. They find that the formal framework constrains them (the first two incentives for collaboration) and also lacks the resources they are in need of (the third incentive). Yet at the same that framework provides the base and authority for most of their actions. If they step out from their formal position in the forest administration entirely, they have significantly less opportunities to translate their incentives into substantive action, if any, and will be harder pressed to reach the goals they wish to accomplish. But then again, they have to depart slightly from the confines of the formal hierarchy in order to address the interdependency situations they perceive themselves to be in.

In the wider literature we find a number of propositions shining more light on this matter. Throughout the book I have referred to institutional gaps to describe the situation in which individual forest officials develop incentive structures and subsequently attempt to collectively translate them into substantive action. The concept and idea is referred to with different terms in past research. While Helmke and Levitsky (2004, 2006) speak of the gap, Franzén et al. (2016) refer to it as an institutional void, and Bjarnegård and Kenny (2015) term it an institutional soft-spot. Regardless of preferred term, the idea is the same: individual actors perceive that something is insufficient, ineffective, broken, or simply lacking in the formal institutional framework they are located in.

Helmke and Levitsky (2004, 2006), while primarily focusing on the issue of corruption and clientelism (see also Bjarnegård 2013), offer a useful four-way typology providing some conceptual clarity on this theme. They make a distinction between effective and ineffective formal institutional frameworks as the root cause of informal institutions, and also whether the latter leads to outcomes that are converging or diverging from what the formal framework intends to accomplish. While they appear to determine the values of the dimensions as objective outside observers, recall that I focus on the studied individuals’ own subjective perceptions, and I do not evaluate if the forest department is effective or not, or what the outcomes actually lead to.
Yet, in the mind and viewpoint of the frontline officials, the formal organisation is found to be inefficient and lacking, which leads them to develop incentives for collaboration, and subsequently to employ collaborative strategies aiming to remedy the perceived shortfalls, in other words to ‘fix the problem’. Thus, the incentives to collaborate (and also the networks) are of a substitutive or complementary nature, rather than competing. While several officials were highly critical of how the department is organised and structured, they do not seek to replace it or work to diminish its influence. Rather, they employ mundane micro-level strategies of informality, such as not inscribing their collaborative cross-jurisdictional activities, ensuring that they maintain their granted autonomy, while also contributing to durability of the informal institutional arrangements.

As such, the informal institutional arrangements they create to translate their incentives into substantive action – the collaborative networks – do not exist in isolation from the hierarchy or run parallel to it as autonomous organisms: they very much coexist in integration with the forest department, the several other public agencies, local governments, and established NGOs. Yet, a formal position within the department (for instance as RFO or DFO) is what determines the access and membership to the networks; the position rules to speak with Ostrom.

However, the overall strategy of informality is not only an empirical necessity the officials are faced with employing, it is also a highly rational strategy. This was highlighted in chapter two and has to do with the fact that coordination or collaboration between hierarchies often is difficult as the transaction cost of reorganisation or restricting might be too high, or simply politically unfeasible, as would the appropriate description in the case of Indian state bureaucracies. In such situations the rational strategy for individuals is to step out of the confines of the hierarchy and search for informal solutions and coordination on the problem they face. The same rational principle holds as much in rural India as in the developed West where much of this literature has directed its empirical gaze (Hertting 2003; Hertting and Vedung 2012; Huxham and Vangen 2005; O’Leary and Vij 2012; Schapf 1994). As a later part will come back to, the frontline forest officials who hold the general role of activist bureaucrat are individuals located at the interface of the formal and informal: they use their position in the hierarchy to simultaneously advocate and orchestrate change, influence other actors to

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<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Effective formal institutions</th>
<th>Ineffective formal institutions</th>
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<td>Convergent</td>
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<td>Divergent</td>
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*Figure 3. A typology of informal institutions* 
(Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 728).
collaborate, but ultimately remain loyal to the department, as that formal position is what enables all other activities, collaborative or not.

Last, it should be noted that within the forest divisions there was considerable variation in the degree or extent of the informal institutional arrangements – or put differently how far beyond the formal institutional framework frontline officials could diverge before their discretionary power came to an end. In the case of the SPIN arrangements, we saw that they enjoyed quite substantial autonomy and were able to both plan and coordinate policy activities across boundaries (though with some difficulties), and also accomplish substantive goals in terms of harmonising programs and reducing functional overlaps. In the CBN arrangements, planning was also quite feasible, but in practice their discretionary power only enabled the trade of certain resources between actors, after which the formal rules ‘took superiority’ and inhibited any further exchange. Last, in the IRAN arrangements, planning and deliberation was again possible but when it came to taking any collaborative action related to immediate responses, their abilities were greatly curtailed as such actions and strategies would go beyond what their autonomy allowed.

Collaborative Networks Revisited

This part briefly returns to the networks to examine two additional issues I deem interesting. The first issue catches on to the discussion of informality above and looks at how reportedly asymmetric actors prefer to interact within the collaborative networks even if they have no assurances of reaching their desired goals, often fall into conflict, and rarely reach full consensus. Yet it is their least negative strategy. The second and interrelated issue concerns the role individual leadership efforts played in sustaining the networks.

Recall the empirical illustrations that demonstrated how officials repeatedly came together at the negotiating table only to find that they could not agree on numerous issues, such as what the policy problem at stake actually meant, what the optimal solution would be, what the process should look like and who should take the lead authority. In multiple cases negotiations broke down and actors opted to leave the network arrangement entirely. Yet after some time they chose to restart negotiations and cooperation again, due to the reported reason that they simply were forced to for lack of alternatives. This shines light on two things. The first speaks to Schärf’s (1978) thesis that actor dependency is based on the perceived importance an actor attributes to a resource held by another actor, or the value of actually securing collaboration with them. If this may be substituted for another resource or partnership with a third party, the mutual interdependency may be quite asymmetrical. In the empirical setting at hand, the various actors were rarely able to reach full consensus on all issues that need to be negotiated, but still managed to keep the networks a viable strategy. This has to do with the simple fact that they lack a better option for the foreseeable future, compelling
them to return to the negotiation table. Seeking out coordination and collaboration is their least negative strategy as it does give some opportunities to trade information and knowledge, express grievances and concerns, deliberate on policy goals and just possibly, lead to collective, substantive action. The frontline actors have no guarantees or assurances about obtaining their goals or successfully promoting their agenda, but given their situation they are forced to (Klijn and Koppenjan 2016). Moreover, in the cases where they were able to reach some form of substantive output, they were rarely in full consensus either before or after. The trick was seemingly to reach what one individual aptly described as ‘acceptably limited accord, in other words just enough consensus.

The second point here connects back to the importance and rationality of informality, and informal strategies of collaboration. This has to do with the voluntary nature of the collaborative networks: though they often are incentivised to collaborate and may face pressures to interact with each other, they are not formally obliged to do so. Participation in the networks is in principle voluntary, and so is also the ability to leave the network if they are dissatisfied or wish to pursue another strategy. As the theoretical chapter discussed, this has to do with having an exit-option: the freedom to leave the arrangement and simultaneously participate in it without surrendering all of their autonomy (Hertting 2007; Hirschman 1970). Leaving the arrangement was not always favoured by other actors and they spoke of the lasting infected relationships and the varying levels of mutual trust due to this behaviour, but importantly the metaphorical door to the networks does remain shut in perpetuity. When they perceived that the need for collaboration became unavoidable, they returned to the negotiating table. This de facto practice reinforces the image of the collaborative networks as dynamic vehicles of institutionalised cooperation, continuously evolving rather than having one stable form at all times (Herttting 2003, 2007).

The importance of leadership
Finally, something should be said about the critical role that individual leadership and interpersonal skills played in the context at hand, not least in keeping the collaborative networks sustained and afloat, and in orchestrating any substantive outcomes of the networks. As several of the empirical illustrations showed, the reported success had largely to do with the commitment and dedication of a small number of frontline officials, predominantly DFOs but also a handful RFOs. While many of the reported outcomes indeed were a collective accomplishment, the stated reason, and also my interpretation in the cases I observed personally (such as the large gathering focused on landscape perspectives), was the dedication the presiding official displayed. This finding certainly resonates with a wide body of literature (see Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson et al. 2012; O’Leary et al. 2012), and one stated hypothesis in particular; namely that the importance of strong organic leaders emerging from the local grassroots context is critical when power distribu-
tion is asymmetric and incentives to participate are perceived to be weak (Ansell and Gash 2008: 555). In the case at hand it was not so much the incentives of the frontline forest officials that was perceived to be weak, but reportedly those of other actors in their vicinity, propelling certain individual officials to take on the critical leadership role.

The Value of Political Ethnography

I find that there are a few methodological implications of this study for future research on bureaucracies and individual officials in a developing country context. The first has to do with observing rules-in-use and exposing aspects of informal practices, as they occur and unfold in real-time. The second and related point has to do with the time-frames I believe one has to commit oneself to in order to obtain the data and insights a study with similar aims and aspirations to mine necessitates.

Studying rules-in-use and capturing informality

First of all, I believe that future studies of public agencies and officials in a context like India may benefit from focusing yet more explicitly on the rules which individual actors follow. In this book I have interpreted and studied rules in the Ostrom (2005) and Bloomington School tradition, focusing on rules-in-use. As earlier chapters have argued, this particular approach has many advantages, not least a well-established and coherent terminology, but the precise research program used is less important than what one actually focuses on in the field. The important thing is to obtain an understanding and insights into how the studied individuals de facto act and how they motivate their actions and behaviour. This may be possible to obtain through a series of ordinary interviews, but I believe that would require intimate knowledge of the organisation at hand from the outset, as is the case in what is known as at-home ethnography (see Ybema et al. 2009). Yet, most ethnographic work is carried out in contexts that are initially unfamiliar to the researcher.

In the case at hand, had I only conducted ordinary interviews at the department headquarters during a short time-period, the empirical chapters are likely to have looked vastly different. This might also hold true if I had settled for meeting with the numerous DFOs and RFOs just the occasional time in their own offices. It is possible that they had mentioned or told me about aspects relating to the collaborative networks they engage in, but I am unsure whether I had been able to make sense of it then. This has to do with the limited information I had available on the forest department when starting fieldwork; it gave only the formal, very narrow image of how they work through a top-down hierarchy. Put differently, the discrepancy between the formal and informal institutions had been difficult to comprehend if I had only been told about it in an ordinary interview.
What made the difference was to be able to observe the forest officials as they engaged in interactions within the collaborative networks in real-time. For instance, this meant having the opportunity to travel with them to the rural forest communities and hamlets, sitting in on their strategic planning meetings, and coming along on visits to the local government offices. While grassroots officials mentioned the different actors involved during interviews, the patterns of events became much clearer when I observed them interact and got more or less real-time accounts of what they were discussing and negotiating. As such, field observations became a form of corroboration of interview statements, but also a good opportunity to further configure and sharpen my questions for subsequent interviews. The process was largely cyclical and iterative: the more I observed, the more accurate my interview questions became and the more insightful the respondent answers, which then helped me to make more sense of subsequent observations. Over time, this iterative process helped me develop a picture and coherent narrative of how they work through informal collaborative networks, and also connect those empirical observations to theoretical propositions.

The collaborative networks and the whole matter of informality became interesting and notable since they deviate from what the formal codes and guidelines officials must adhere to state. If I had had no prior knowledge or understanding of the formal organisation and its rules, the (informal) networks would in my opinion have been less noteworthy. The dual understanding and simultaneous observations of the formal institutional framework and its informal counterpart is what ultimately highlighted the rules-in-use and what they meant to the studied officials. In the end, conducting ethnographic fieldwork is much like laying a jigsaw-puzzle; connecting different pieces of evidence and insights as we find them. For instance, the close relationship between the deniability senior officials seek, the autonomy frontline officials need, and the informal strategies they have to adopt were three pieces that I was given somewhat independently of each other, but which took quite a bit of effort and time in the field to connect.

**The necessity of long time-frames**

The second point is closely connected to the first and concerns, in a broad sense, the longer time-frames inherently involved in ethnographic fieldwork. This mainly has to do with having sufficient time and patience in the short term – on a day to day basis – but also in the long term, allowing fieldwork to take up a significant proportion of the time spent working on a doctoral research project. One of the most important things fieldwork in India taught me was the virtue of patience and adjusting to the reality that things will take longer than one is accustomed to, especially if coming from a western country. As discussed in chapter three, the process of obtaining formal access and also research permissions took quite a lot of effort, patience and persistency. But access is not something that is gained once and then held secure for the duration of the fieldwork; it took a considerable amount of time every week
to email, text or phone the respondents I had met or wished to meet (again), simply to keep up correspondence and good relationships with them. Leaving aspects of social etiquette aside, it filled two purposes.

First, it helped uphold access to the field in a broad sense. The world of forest management in Kerala is not particularly large and I got the impression that word of my presence in the state travelled fairly quickly. When I met with a new respondent for the first time, he had often heard of me from a colleague, or I could pass my regards from someone who knew I was meeting him. This often helped tremendously and I have the strong sense that this made the officials speak a bit more openly to someone who objectively was an outsider. Second, it led to a handful additional insights and experiences. A few times, responses to my ordinary emails or messages led to the officials inviting me to come along for some event or meeting they were attending and they knew I had an interest in observing. I am confident that this was a reward of sorts for staying in touch and keeping up correspondence, also during the time I was outside of India between fieldwork spells. In summary, the time and effort invested in upholding good relationships with respondents allowed me to maintain access to the field, and ultimately the micro-level data and evidence I sought and needed for my study. As an outsider (from a western country, white, an academic and so forth) I believe in retrospect that this was all the more important (see also Feldman et al. 2003).

Committing to an ethnographic study of an organisation that is generally considered difficult to access and study – the Indian bureaucracy (see Fuller and Harriss 2001; Sharma and Gupta 2006) – will unavoidably take time and will at occasions be a very frustrating endeavour. Yet over time, the payoffs accumulate and become quite rewarding. The longer I spent in the divisions and ranges, the more I learnt and the easier it became to conduct an insightful interview or ask appropriate questions after a day of field observations. While I never picked up more than a few words and phrases of Malayalam, I eventually became accustomed to aspects of the jargon, jokes and terminology the frontline officials used, even though it was in our own crude translations. Not only did it make my fieldwork more pleasant, it also helped sharpen my ethnographic ‘sensibility’ (Pader 2013); seeing the world and policy environment at hand from the perspective of the respondents. Ultimately, it helped me interpret and analyse the gathered material in more fruitful ways, not least in elucidating the importance of informal strategies in an organisational environment that much reveres strict, formal protocols and procedures.

In a more long-term perspective, an ethnographic study of the Indian bureaucracy and its many formal and informal aspects also takes considerable time in the amount of months (or longer) one reasonably has to commit to in order to study it in any depth. In total I spent well over a year only preparing for fieldwork and conducting it, and when I left the last time in early 2015 it was with the feeling that I had barely scraped the surface of this vast institution. Though some relatively similar insights and revelations became quite recurring towards the final weeks of fieldwork, I am certain that had I had
another seven months or longer, many more initially hidden practices and customs would have been revealed and also further nuances of the roles the officials hold. In retrospect I am satisfied with the amount of time spent in India and the empirical findings and conclusions I eventually ended up with, and I believe that they go some way in answering the research questions I posed in this book.

Finally, it should be observed that political ethnography may be an excellent approach when we are in the early stages of a relatively new research program – assuming that we consider a within-perspective study of the Indian state bureaucracy a somewhat novel field (but see for instance Fleischman 2012, 2014, 2016). I find that it proved useful in helping us build knowledge and understanding from the bottom up, but at a later stage additional theoretical advancement might be gainfully made using other methodological approaches, directed more towards explaining collaboration rather than understanding its individual-level drivers, which has been the case in this book. As long as that is our ambition, I would dare argue that few other approaches will generate the same kind of in-depth, rich and vivified data and evidence as immersive political ethnography is capable of.

Suggestions for future ethnographic research on the Indian bureaucracy
In this short subsection I outline a few brief, somewhat practical suggestions for future work following an ethnographic approach in the study of public bureaucracies in India. They are made in light of what I learnt and experienced while doing fieldwork in Kerala, but I believe that they may hold applicability beyond any one particular geographic setting, and also make a small contribution to the extant methods literature on doing political field research in developing countries, including that on the developing state (see Aronoff and Kubik 2013; Fuller and Harriss 2001; Hertel et al. 2009; Kapiszewski et al. 2015; Sharma and Gupta 2006). Some may be repetitions of what prior literature has already stated but I believe they may be reiterated once again.

- Focus explicitly on the interplay between formal and informal institutions and the rules-in-use the studied individuals cite. Pursue any and all indications of discrepancies between what the formal institutional framework states and what actors de facto do. This is likely to be the most rewarding path to follow in a little studied environment. Keep in mind that all informal practices must not be illicit and may be quite natural to the studied actors, yet reveal highly interesting aspects of for instance an organisational culture.
- Incentives, motives, reasons, goals, strategies and similar concepts are useful aspects to structure an investigation on individual public officials around. They may contain much of the duality between formal and informal institutions and rules, and keeps the world of the studied actor at the centre of enquiry, something an individual
may be more inclined to speak about than for instance how a given program is implemented or not. It also helps sharpen the desired ethnographic sensibility: seeing the world from their perspective, in the best of our ability. The within-perspective or opening the black box is an instructive route to follow.

- Spend time on outlining and defining the field to which one needs to secure access: is it for instance a delineated jurisdiction, a group of actors, a particular policy or program, or an institutional phenomenon (such as corruption, blame-avoidance or autonomy)? The Indian state bureaucracy is a vast and complex institutional organism and it is imperative to delineate what one will focus on. An initially limited aspect in strictly formal terms may yield a wealth of hidden, informal aspects.

- Allow and prepare for long time-frames in all aspects of fieldwork; in terms of obtaining formal permissions and documents, but more so in terms of securing the informal, relational access to the actors of empirical interest. Flexibility, patience and persistency are all of paramount importance, not least where public agencies and their officials are concerned, but the gains and rewards materialise over time, sometimes quicker than anticipated. The importance of maintaining and nurturing access to the field should not be understated.

- Do not underestimate the considerable importance of gatekeepers to the field. This may be particularly relevant in a cultural context where personal connections and ties may be more important than formal titles, especially when one is an outsider. At the same time, the importance of hierarchical position and rank in India should not be neglected, and it may be worth spending considerable time nurturing a relationship with a high-ranking official who holds the power of both opening and closing doors in the field.

Roles of Public Officials

Let us now turn to the matter of roles, and more specifically the roles the forest officials under study have held. Echoing chapter two, I see roles as a summation of the incentives, goals and strategies an actor exhibits, pursues and employs – a refined statement capturing those three components. The deliberate intention to speak of particular roles officials hold, rather than just individuals having certain incentives or utilising various strategies is partly that it adds another layer of nuance and diversity to the analysis. Yet more so it offers an empirical contribution to the sizeable literature that has focused on the very same contextual setting, but had quite different starting points or arrived at quite different conclusions. By this I imply the CPR literature and its advancements, focused almost entirely on resource-using communities,
and the motley literature on development administration in the Global South, almost always portraying public officials as the stereotype corrupt civil servant.

**An empirical contribution**

As the introduction outlined I saw two empirical contributions this book may make. The first was to open up the black box that is the internal world of Indian state bureaucracies, and more so from the distinct perspective of public officials; an endeavour I believe I have gone some way in fulfilling, contributing to a small and important as well as growing literature focusing on this enigmatic but compelling web of organisations (Fleischman 2012, 2014, 2016; van Gool 2008). The second was to focus on a setting where public officials perceiving a gap in the formal institutional framework opt for something else than corrupt or rent-seeking behaviour. In this regard, Kerala retrospectively turned out a quite suitable choice. Here we found a situation where public officials (rather than communities or NGOs) perceive a gap in the formal framework and, without external direction or intervention, make a conscious and concerted effort to address it with the aim of remedying the perceived problem. I dare speculate that if this study had been focused on the developed West, this finding would have been less notable or passed off as a simply confirmatory one.

This is certainly not to say that the officials I met with and followed around are saints or without faults. Yet, if we set them in contrast to what much of the extant literature on bureaucrats in India has focused on, the contribution gains additional edge. The prevalent image is that officials at best muddle through (see Lindblom 1959) external pressures to change their behaviour, or at worst exploit institutional gaps towards more illicit and nefarious purposes. They are often highlighted, perhaps for good reason, as a root cause of misgovernance and malfeasance, and public agencies are often held as a fertile breeding ground for corruption and patronage politics (see for instance Corbridge et al. 2005; Gupta 2005, 2012; Lele and Menon 2014; Robbins 2000; Springate-Baginski and Blaikie 2007; Wade 1982, 1985; van Gool 2008; Véron et al. 2006). Moreover, the above-cited literature tends to portray the role of the public official in a quite narrow conceptualisation; as a plotting rent-seeker who aims to maximise his own gain and power, or that of a principal he is tied to (see Mosse 2005 for a critique of this literature).

In addition and further contrast, we have the CPR-literature and its more current developments, which pays little attention to officials overall yet still holds a quite narrow image of them, typically reducing them to ‘state officials’ as an external factor in the perspective of communities (see Cox et al. 2010; Mansbridge 2014). But in that scholarship too, there has been a heavy focus in several insightful studies, again probably for good cause, on officials engaging in corrupt and dubious practices (see Poteete and Ribot 2011; Ribot et al. 2006; Sundström 2015).
Against this wider backdrop, I find that a more nuanced conceptualisation and a grounded empirical description of the spectrum of roles officials may hold is instructive for future research and may offer useful indications of what to focus on in studies in similar empirical settings. In chapter two I sketched a table of eight different types of roles, reproduced below. These are each quite well-established terms drawing on concepts and role formulations in prior literature. Importantly, they are also ideal-typical and only abstracted descriptions of what a real-life official does. Yet, what I have attempted to do in this book is empirically substantiate these ideal-types; bringing them ‘to life’ by closely examining and vividly describing the extent in which the behaviour and reasoning of the officials I studied reflect the ideal-typical roles. My intention has not been to exhaustively systematise or categorise all the imaginable roles officials in this type of setting may hold, or to generate entirely novel roles. On the contrary, I have focused on these eight general but different roles, about which a few additional things may be said.

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<th>Title of Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Weberian Bureaucrat</td>
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<td>The Street-Level Bureaucrat</td>
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<td>The Particularistic Bureaucrat</td>
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<td>The Activist Bureaucrat</td>
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<td>The Facilitator</td>
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<td>The Policy Entrepreneur</td>
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<td>The Network Agent</td>
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<td>The Network Manager</td>
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Table 4. A list of roles officials may have

Different types of roles and their nuances

The table above contains eight fairly traditional and conventional roles found in a broad literature on public administration, and network- and collaborative governance. The first two are perhaps the most common of all. The ideal-typical *Weberian bureaucrat*, regardless of geographical setting, abides by the mandates prescribed in her agency’s formal guidelines and codes, following universalistic administrative norms of fairness, impartiality, objectivity and rule-of-law, though different groups will have additional professional norms (Hysing and Olsson 2012). Together with the *street-level bureaucrat* (*SLB*) they exhibit incentives in line with what the formal guidelines and protocols prescribe, and the wider mission of the agency also shapes their goals. Their strategies are rule-abidance, objectivity and actions based on formal expertise and competence (Hysing and Olsson 2012; Olsen 2006; Svara 2006), with the difference that the *SLB’s* strategies are based more on what they manage or cope with under time and resource constraints, yet occur within the bounds of their lawful authority (Lipsky 1980; Tummers and Bekkers 2014). Both roles are however likely to be deduced from reading the formal guidelines and manuals of any public agency; they certainly were in
the case of the forest department, with most hierarchical positions down to the RFO level reflecting the Weberian bureaucrat, and those below the SLB.

Yet there is also the strong possibility that officials abide by and follow informal mandates, norms and rules beyond that of their agency. One possibility is that officials are subjected to a high degree of political control by elected officials (Meier and O'Toole 2006), and thus follow their agendas. In developing countries, this behaviour has been associated with particularism; actions benefiting a more narrow selected constituency rather than the public interest (see Blomkvist 1992). I term this type of role the particularistic bureaucrat, and they might exhibit incentives in line with what their political principals also do, for instance exploiting perceived gaps in the formal institutional framework for their own gain. The goal of this official is likely to be favour in the eyes of the political principal, who might reward them with benefits such as promotions and desirable transfer (based on loyalty rather than merit). A particularistic bureaucrat must not necessarily be associated with something normatively undesirable or unjust, yet in the empirical setting at hand the role is the one most closely associated with the stereotype corrupt civil servant, and has been dominant in the literature cited above. However, recall that this role was not observed during fieldwork among the studied forest officials.

Next, there is the activist bureaucrat, a term I borrow from Olsson and Hysing (2012). This is an official whose incentives are shaped by something they perceive or identify in their policy environment and prefer to act upon, but in contrast to the particularistic bureaucrat they do not follow the agendas of a political superior. In the case at hand it was the need for interaction and collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries, but it could be any cause that shapes an agenda which is different from that of the formal institutional framework, and which they prefer to follow. In principle this could also be something normatively undesirable and unjust, yet the way in which Olsson and Hysing (2012) summarise the role, it is more commonly an official using his position within the bureaucracy to promote a political agenda or cause he personally believes in, citing ‘green’ activism among environmental inspectors for instance. The goal is to see that agenda or cause grow in influence and standing, whilst the strategy may be any one that is deemed appropriate for accomplishing the goal. In the case at hand, the (activist) forest officials’ wider set of strategies was engaging in informal interactions and negotiations beyond their own jurisdiction.

Unpacking roles for further nuances
At the end of chapter four I suggested that the activist bureaucrat role could be disaggregated or unpacked further, to provide additional nuances to what the forest officials revealed in terms of incentives, goals and strategies. Four further roles were identified and formulated as the facilitator, the policy entrepreneur, the network manager and the network agent in order to describe the mind-set and behaviour of the frontline forest officials.
The facilitator is an official who has the primary goal of enabling a more conducive and favourable environment for collaboration, both presently and in the future. Their incentives derive from the perception that more can be done to pave the way for interactions and negotiations between themselves and other actors, or between any other set of actors. Their strategies are focused on building and enhancing trust, reciprocity and social capital broadly, which in the empirical case at hand involved ensuring that information and resources were traded across boundaries, and that other actors were motivated to start or keep collaborating. Moreover, the facilitators in the forest divisions of Kerala also made efforts to build capacities in the rural communities and not only to more equal horizontal partners. For my tentative definition here I include any activity and strategy aiming to enhance capacities, regardless of the target. Yet, similar roles have been identified in the western network literature, where boundary spanners (Leifer and Delbecq 1978; Pautz and Schnitzer 2008) share similarities to that of the facilitator. In the context of rural India, the term fixers has also been used to describe individuals who assist ordinary poor people in securing access to certain government services (see Krishna 2011; Kruks-Wisner 2011; Manor 2000).

The policy entrepreneur is also a well-established role in the literature (Heikkila and Gerlak 2005; Mintrom and Norman 2009) and refers to an official who uses her position within the formal administration to advocate and orchestrate change. The goals in the case at hand were the collaborative networks themselves, and ultimately a policy environment characterised by other features, notably capacities for learning and long-term planning. The incentives derive from the perception that things are working at a suboptimal level or that something is lacking, triggering them to employ strategies seeking to encourage others to engage in collaboration and developing the same kinds of policy perceptions. In the literature this role shares similarities with that of an activist as Olsson and Hysing (2012) describe them, and also policy brokers (see Jenkins-Smith et al. 2014).

Last, the two roles of network manager and network agent derive from a vast literature on collaborative-, network- and metagovernance in the West (see for instance Agranoff 2006; Agranoff and McGuire 2001; Hertting and Vedung 2012; Isett et al. 2011; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016; Koontz et al. 2004; O'Leary et al. 2012; Scharpf 1994; Scott and Thomas 2017a; Sørensen and Torfing 2007a). They are similar in their incentives in that they both perceive a limitation or shortfall in the formal institutional framework and prefer an informal strategy of collaboration in order to address those limitations. While they represent their own agency and might put that loyalty first hand (or at least they are not more loyal to any other organisation), they also see an incentive in ensuring that negotiations and collaboration is upheld. Yet they differ slightly in their goals and strategies. While the agents are

305 Hertting and Vedung (2012) also discuss facilitators but then as a function an external actor such as a government body may have vis-à-vis a horizontal network.
more engaged in mundane horizontal negotiations and resource sharing, and seek to push his agency’s agenda forwards in the short run, the manager sees more far-reaching goals in which the endurance of the network arrangement is a priority. She needs to take overall responsibility by focusing on conflict mediation, regulating actors and influencing group structure to name a few strategies.

Suggestions for future research
Yet, it is important to recall that the roles above are only four possible roles that I have disaggregated from the slightly broader activist bureaucrat, and importantly, from the empirical setting at hand in this book. My ambition has not been to classify every single observation as a fine-grained or unique role, though in theory, countless more could possibly be extracted. As the empirical chapters discussed, there was variation in the types of strategies different officials used to reach the same goal, or conversely they employed similar strategies but had different underlying incentives. As such, it might be possible to deduce several additional roles, differentiated on the basis of variation in incentives, goals and strategies. Yet at the same time it should be kept in mind that ideal-types are intended to be abstractions of the empirical world and it might not be instructive to formulate numerous ideal-types with a limited correspondence to the real world. But if we consider that the empirical literature cited earlier has yielded a much narrower image of public officials, the eight general roles dealt with here is already a step towards a more diversified understanding and appreciation of roles.

This might have implications for future research on similar types of contexts. My argument is that scholars may gainfully focus their empirical investigations on incentives, goals and strategies, the three components of a role. On the basis of these they may formulate ideal-typical roles relevant to the empirical setting at hand. Again, it might not be necessary or even helpful to aim for entirely new roles or as many roles as possible. On the contrary, it is likely a better strategy to focus on a handful more general roles and then aim for fleshing them out and substantiating them with solid empirical descriptions; what I earlier referred to as ‘bringing them to life’. Put differently, a rich and vivified description of empirical nuances and variations is probably a more rewarding path than trying to extrapolate every observation to a new ideal-typical role.

Some roles are likely to be found in most if not all settings, at least where public bureaucracies are concerned. These are the first four outlined above; the Weberian bureaucrat, the street-level bureaucrat, the particularistic bureaucrat and the activist bureaucrat. Recall that the last two describe an official who deviates from the formal protocol or guidelines in some way; a reality I believe all public agencies are confronted with some way or another. In this particular study the empirical interest laid on further disaggregating or disentangling the activist bureaucrat role, for the predominant reason that a majority of the officials followed incentives, goals and strategies occurring
beyond the formal institutional framework; principally in collaborative networks. In a different setting it could in principle be much more interesting to disentangle the *particularistic* role or the *street-level bureaucrat*, or starting at the other end, with a general *network manager* or *policy entrepreneur* role and then disaggregating that into more specific sub-types.

This is largely an empirical question. Yet, even so, useful comparisons may be made between quite different contexts. Recall the discussion from chapter three on ideal-type mechanisms serving as a connecting bridge between very different empirical settings (Bengtsson and Hertting 2013). Following the notion of *thin* rationality we may imagine that rational actors in any setting, facing similar drivers to change their behaviour (though not necessarily collaboration) will develop incentives, envision goals, and employ strategies as a type of response or reaction. Using the method of ideal-typical roles and also seeing roles as a summation of incentives, goals and strategies (fruitfully drawing on the same original literature) then gives us a way of comparing and contrasting findings from diverse contexts. This may facilitate theoretical advancement and go some way in developing our understanding of the roles officials may hold and play in policy environments where they previously have been analytically side-lined. In the developed West where much of the best research on collaborative public management has been conducted, the literature proposes numerous roles which have been empirically examined, though not frequently with ethnographic approaches. In the Global South, the current research landscape is different. Here, much remains to be explored and theorised with regards to the roles of individual officials, whether they face pressures to collaborate or some other driver of change. And to echo an earlier section, an immersive ethnographic approach might then be quite appropriate. In this book I have taken a step in that direction, by disaggregating one type of role and demonstrating the nuances and variations that may exist within it.

**Concluding Remarks**

It has been my ambition in this book to shine light on the type of policy environment in which public officials across the Global South work and operate when managing the world’s natural commons. In India the forest administration still plays a central role in the governance of the forests and for the welfare of the many millions of people that rely on the resource for a source of livelihood. Prior literature has largely focused on the shortcomings and obstacles at hand, illustrating the many challenges to sustainable forest governance. In contrast I have highlighted a case where officials try, at least to their best abilities, to break with deep-rooted traditions and to search for an alternative, more collaborative and inclusive way of carrying out their work.

Yet the road to sustainable resource governance in India might be something of an uphill challenge. While global policy discourses are picking up in
influence and international organisations produce annual rankings of how developing countries perform in the environmental and natural resource domains, little has occurred with regards to the organisational structure and the very essence of the forest administration. When meeting the former Union Minister for Environment and Forests, Jairam Ramesh, he related that

The main problem lies in the mind-set and perspectives of the MoEF and foresters. Not in individual people but in the deeper fabric and setup of the whole establishment. The 1927 Act makes it hard for many to see people as partners and not criminals, and the forests as pristine areas to be kept untouched. The problem is at the system level. 306

Though Ramesh is an internationally lauded figure who perhaps stands out from the general pattern for his efforts to promote environmental sustainability in India, he was unable to push through any far-reaching reforms. At the time of writing in early 2018 no large-scale reorganisation of the forest administrations setup or legal foundation is being debated and political-cultural legacies do not transform overnight. Corruption and bureaucratic mismanagement might not either vanish entirely in the short term, and the current political commitment to sustainable resource management in India is far less than desirable.

Yet I suggest that there are reasons to stay hopeful and optimistic. Many officials do their best and develop innovative ways of circumventing and coping with the challenges posed by the formal organisation. In the case of Kerala, some of the most progressive and forward-thinking officials I met with just a few years ago are now in positions high up in the hierarchy and will in time lead the forest department. Whether they are able to break with tradition and maintain their relative reform-mindedness remains to be seen, but we should keep in mind that no institutions stay unchanged over the course of time. At some point, the centuries-old forest administration in India will also adapt and transform, and for the sake of the forests and the people who depend on it, hopefully to something in line with what contemporary policies promote. I agree with Ramesh that the root problem does not lie with individual officials, but I am confident that the solution does. Whichever path India takes towards sustainable resource management, I am certain that the joint efforts of innovative, motivated and forward-thinking individual officials will play the decisive role.

306 Interview 87, Jairam Ramesh, former Union Minister of MoEF.
Kerala Forest Department Officials

Senior officials

1. Conservator of Forests (retired), Kochi, April 9th 2014
2. Chief Conservator of Forests (retired), Kochi, April 11th 2014
3. Conservator of Forests (retired), other large city, April 14th 2014
4. Chief Conservator of Forests, other large city, April 21st 2014
5. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (retired), Thiruvananthapuram, April 30th 2014
6. Assistant Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Thiruvananthapuram, April 30th 2014
7. Assistant Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Thiruvananthapuram, May 1st 2014
8. Conservator of Forests, Thiruvananthapuram, May 2nd 2014
9. Chief Conservator of Forests, other large city, May 5th 2014
10. Conservator of Forests, other large city, May 15th 2014
11. Conservator of Forests (retired), other large city, May 28th 2014
12. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (retired), Kochi, May 30th 2014
13. Assistant Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Thiruvananthapuram, June 6th 2014
14. Assistant Conservator of Forests, Thiruvananthapuram, June 7th 2014
15. Conservator of Forests (retired), Thiruvananthapuram, June 8th 2014
16. Principal Conservator of Forests, Thiruvananthapuram, June 10th 2014
17. Assistant Conservator of Forests, Thiruvananthapuram, June 11th 2014
18. Chief Conservator of Forests, Thiruvananthapuram, June 12th 2014
19. Conservator of Forests, other large city, June 15th 2014
20. Chief Conservator of Forests (retired), Kochi, second interview, July 7th 2014
21. Conservator of Forests (retired), other large city, second interview, July 8th 2014

The number given is that used for reference when quoting an interview in the text, for example 'Interview 27, DFO.' The order used here follows the order in which I conducted the interviews, including second interviews.
22. Conservator of Forests, other large city, second interview, January 26th 2015
23. Assistant Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Thiruvananthapuram, second interview, January 27th 2015
24. Chief Conservator of Forests, other large city, second interview, February 16th 2015
25. Chief Conservator of Forests (retired), Dehradun, March 1st 2015
26. Assistant Conservator of Forests (retired), Dehradun, March 2nd 2015

Division Forest Officers
27. Division Forest Officer, Division 7, May 8th 2014
28. Division Forest Officer, Division 6, May 26th 2014
29. Division Forest Officer, Division 7, second interview, June 15th 2014
30. Division Forest Officer, Division 2, July 14th 2014
31. Division Forest Officer, Division 8, January 12th 2015
32. Division Forest Officer, Division 4, January 19th 2015
33. Division Forest Officer, Division 6, second interview, January 22nd 2015
34. Division Forest Officer, Division 5, January 28th 2015
35. Division Forest Officer, Division 7, second interview, February 2nd 2015
36. Division Forest Officer, Division 1, February 2nd 2015
37. Division Forest Officer, Division 3, February 11th 2015
38. Division Forest Officer, Division 1, second interview, February 19th 2015

Range, Section and Beat Forest Officers
39. Range Forest Officer, Division 7, May 9th 2014
40. Section Forest Officer, Division 7, May 9th 2014
41. Section Forest Officer, Division 7, May 11th 2014
42. Range Forest Officer, Division 6, May 27th 2014
43. Section Forest Officer, Division 6, May 27th 2014
44. Range Forest Officer, Division 2, July 15th 2014
45. Beat Forest Officer, Division 2, July 15th 2014
46. Range Forest Officer, Division 8, January 12th 2015
47. Section Forest Officer, Division 8, January 13th 2015
48. Range Forest Officer, Division 8, January 15th 2015
49. Section Forest Officer, Division 8, January 15th 2015
50. Range Forest Officer, Division 4, January 21st 2015
51. Range Forest Officer, Division 4, January 21st 2015
52. Section Forest Officer, Division 4, January 22nd 2015
53. Range Forest Officer, Division 6, second interview, January 23rd 2015
54. Section Forest Officer, Division 6, January 25th 2015
55. Range Forest Officer, Division 6, January 25th 2015
56. Range Forest Officer, Division 5, January 28th 2015
57. Beat Forest Officer, Division 5, January 29th 2015
58. Range Forest Officer, Division 5, January 31st 2015
59. Section Forest Officer, Division 5, January 31st 2015
60. Range Forest Officer, Division 1, February 3rd 2015
61. Section Forest Officer, Division 1, February 4th 2015
62. Range Forest Officer, Division 1, February 5th 2015
63. Range Forest Officer, Division 3, February 12th 2015
64. Range Forest Officer, Division 3, February 14th 2015
65. Section Forest Officer, Division 3, February 15th 2015
66. Range Forest Officer, Division 2, second interview, February 17th 2015
67. Range Forest Officer, Division 2, February 18th 2015
68. Section Forest Officer, Division 2, February 18th 2015
69. Range Forest Officer, Division 1, second interview, February 19th 2015

Other Respondents and Informants

70. MP Parameswaran, academic, Thrissur, April 15th 2014
71. Michael Tharakan, academic, Vembanad Lake, April 22nd 2014
72. RVG Menon, environmental activist, Thiruvananthapuram, May 1st 2014
73. MK Prasad, environmental activist, Kochi, May 7th 2014
74. Official, Department of Tribal Development, Division 7, May 10th 2014
75. VS Vijayan, environmental activist, Thrissur, May 16th 2014
76. PK Ravindran, environmental activist, Kochi, May 30th 2014
77. Madhav Gadgil, academic, Pune, July 22nd 2014
78. MK Prasad, environmental activist, Kochi, second interview, January 8th 2015
79. VS Vijayan, environmental activist, Thrissur, second interview, January 9th 2015
80. Official, Department of Tribal Development, Division 8, January 14th 2015
81. Official, Department of Rural Development, Division 2, February 16th 2015
82. NC Saxena, academic, New Delhi, February 23rd 2015
83. MoEF senior official, New Delhi, February 24th 2015
84. MoEF senior official, New Delhi, February 25th 2015
85. MoEF senior official, New Delhi, February 25th 2015
86. MoEF senior official, New Delhi, second interview, February 26th 2015
87. Jairam Ramesh, former union minister of MoEF, New Delhi, February 27th 2015
88. Senior Forest Official, Dehradun, March 3rd 2015
89. Senior Forest Official, IGNFA, Dehradun, March 3rd 2015
90. Senior Forest Official, IGNFA, Dehradun, March 4th 2015

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