

STATUS OF JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT IN TRIPURA

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Introduction

Joint Forest Management (JFM), as a formal programme, started in Tripura State since the beginning of the current decade. The programme was initiated with the issuance of a Notification in December 1991 by the Government of Tripura, Department of Forests. There has been some reasonable progress in the implementation of JFM programme. The programme enshrined involvement of the local people living in and around the forest areas and they, in turn, were supposed to protect and improve the forests in lieu of sharing of benefits from these forests. In other words, the kind of movement the JFM was supposed to generate is not seen among the people or the forest personnel though, there is definite but gradual shift in recent months in favour of JFM. People and their representatives are more aware now and the interest in JFM is increasing.

Present status

The first attempt towards adoption of JFM in Tripura was made in Melaghar in West Tripura District. The Forest Department started a project under the Research Division for Participatory Forest Management (later came to be commonly known as Joint Forest Management) involving rural families living in four villages surrounding a plot of 100 ha of

Proposed Reserved Forest in Melaghar in Sonamura Sub-Division of West Tripura District as a trial under the Forest Research Division. In 1991, the Government of Tripura drafted an enabling resolution for the introduction of Participatory Forest Management in the State. The first attempt on JFM has been by and large successful. The degraded barren land had already developed into veritable forest, mostly from coppicing of Sal arising out of the still viable rootstock as a result of protection by the organised villagers. Simultaneously, the JFM programme was also undertaken in other parts of the State. Forest Protection and Regeneration Committees (FPRCs) have been formed. To give exposure to some of the successful JFM programme outside the State, public representatives and Forest Officials were sent on a tour to West Bengal. Intensive training is being imparted on the art of microplanning in field. Field personnel having right aptitude are being identified for future implementation of JFM in selected sites/localities at least in the next 2 to 3 years. Establishment of JFM Network is being developed along with interaction with other line departments of the Government.

A total of 165 FPRCs have been formed up to December 1999 covering 18,566 ha of forest area. The Division-wise position is presented in Table 1.

*Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Tripura

Table 1

Progress of JFM upto December 1999

Division	Number of FPRCs	Project Area (ha)	Plantation area (ha)	No. of families involved			
				ST	SC	General	Total
Sadar	8	1506	231	48	37	289	374
Teliamura	42	2867	1456	1488	76	65	1629
Research	1	400	105	92	32	106	230
Manu	12	1900	460	591	9	3	603
Ambassa	4	725	112	46	56	13	115
Kanchanpur	13	2035	380	754	8	8	770
Kailashahar	2	600	54	82	-	33	115
Gumti	18	4600	1080	912	67	31	1010
Bagafa	33	1963	1963	961	120	65	1146
Udaipur	26	1735	1165	514	123	1113	1750
Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary	6	235	95	115	51	-	166
Total	165	18,566	7,101	2,502	361	1,209	4072

Source : Department of Forests, Tripura

Microplans for all of the JFM sites are not ready. So far only 6 Microplans have been prepared. These are yet to be thoroughly examined and tested. The progress to prepare Microplans for the remaining sites is slow and in some cases not at all attempted.

The main categories of activities are :

- *Aided Natural Regeneration (ANR)* : Advantage is taken for encouraging the growth of rootstock, which is abundant, by carrying out weeding and other operations and sometimes supplementing natural growth with artificial planting. It has helped in regeneration of Sal, Teak and other miscellaneous species. A good cover of

vegetation has come up over large areas in Garjanmura, Joykatpur, Tepania and many other localities;

- Raising and maintenance of plantations of bamboo and other species;
- Under planting of canes;
- Raising and maintenance of mixed plantations of medicinal value;
- Soil and moisture conservation;
- Extension and training works : A number of workshops, conferences and training programmes have been conducted at the level of State, Circle,

Division and village. Almost all of the forest staff upto foresters have attended such a programme. Similarly, a large pool of JFM trained individuals and NGOs is available in the State. More such programmes are planned in future. Selected people and officials are being given specialized training on the methodology of microplanning. There is almost total sensitization of the leaders, people and officials about JFM. They are ready to take the programme further.

Plenty of benefits are available to the people in the areas where JFM has been adopted. The main items derived from forests are bamboo, fuelwood, small timber, thatch, sand, tubers, leaves, honey and other minor forest produce. They also get employment, and thus earn wages, through many forestry activities such as nursery, planting, weeding and other silvicultural operations, construction of dams, etc. Some benefits, though illegal, are also available to people through illicit felling of trees and extraction of timber either for local consumption or smuggling. The benefits are crucial for survival of these people. But

there has been no proper record keeping in almost all the places. Timber is yet to be harvested. If the plantations and natural forests are provided protection by the FPRCs, the gain will be substantial.

The benefits available from one forest area under JFM programme are given in Table 2. It shows only minor products. The major products are not yet available.

As discussed earlier the JFM programme is in its infant stage in Tripura. Efforts are on to popularise it and people are being motivated accordingly. Some results are already available. A few localities, which are likely to become successful, are Tepania, Garjanmura Raibari, Rani and Harbatali.

Issues and problems

As Joint Forest Management is adopted in so many different places with different ecological, socio-political-economical and cultural settings, a number of issues are coming up in its way of implementation. Some of these issues are related to a particular locality or situation

Table 2

Minor forest products available from JFM site at Melaghar (kg)

Year	Fuelwood	Thatch	Fodder	Edible herbs/tubers	Medicinal plants	Broom	Bamboo
1993-94	1060	500	400	20	7	45	3000
1994-95	1050	650	300	35	10	26	4500
1995-96	1200	480	280	28	-	30	3700
1996-97	800	700	400	50	8	55	1500
1997-98	1250	350	250	25	6	70	800
1998-99	900	570	300	18	12	60	2500

Source : Department of Forests, Tripura

but others have State or National implications.

Legal Status of FPRCs : The Forest Protection and Regeneration Committees (FPRCs) in JFM areas are formed on the strength of Resolution(s) passed by the Government. The FPRCs have no vertical organization like that of the Panchayat Samities or Zila Parishads. They are simply the functional bodies without any legal and statutory force like the Panchayats. The want of legal force makes the FPRCs vulnerable in many respects. Their actions can not stand if challenged in court of law.

Primacy of MFP : Minor Forest Products (MFPs) are important source of income of the members of FPRCs. Some of the minor forest products are fruits, tubers, palms, fishery, oil yielding and medicinal plants, species, stones, 'bajiri', fibre, etc. The people, for providing them immediate and regular income desire their cultivation. Also, there is plenty of scope for enhancing their productivity without effecting seriously the improvement of the forest cover. This kind of activity is also crucial for motivating and involving people in JFM particularly in the initial years till the time returns start flowing from thinning or timber harvest. But their cultivation for any purpose other than reforestation excepting few forestry and wildlife activities have been categorised as non-forest purpose activities by the Forest Conservation Act, 1980.

Constitution/Byelaws of FPRCs : Though the FPRCs have been formed but their constitution and by-laws have not been framed. There is no provision to deal with offenders in JFM areas except the Indian Forest Act. Mechanism of distribution of benefits is yet to be evolved. In its absence, the beneficiaries feel uncertain of their

share of benefits. Families who opt not to become members of FPRC may also claim a portion of benefits as the residents of area because the forests may be treated as a common property resource. If the non-members are not given share of the booty, then it may be possible that they encourage illegal activities.

Paucity of funds : One of the reasons for poor response and low participation of the local communities in JFM programme is paucity of funds. The funds are not available in sufficient quantity and, if available, then generally not in time. Many of the activities such as nursery, planting, weeding, cultural operation and seed collection are time bound activities. It is experienced that the schedule of those activities could not be maintained due to late receipt or non-receipt of funds. In some cases, initial activity, such as planting, completed but subsequent operations such as weeding could not be carried out. These events deflate the confidence of public as the people think that the Forest Department is involved more in rhetoric and less in actual work.

More flexibility required : The DFOs and other staff feel that there is little flexibility for taking up works that required urgent attention for promoting people's participation. There are sites which are highly suitable for JFM but the staff posted there do not have aptitude or are not motivated enough to boost the programme in right earnest.

Smuggling : The problem of smuggling of forest products across the international boundary between India and Bangladesh is a cause of concern for taking up works under JFM. In some of the places the problem is so acute that even small twigs and dry leaves are removed from forest

areas and the local people are not in a position to do anything. The pressure for forest produce from across the border is tremendous.

Coordination with other agencies : At some places, various developmental programmes by the Panchayats, Block Development Officers and other Departments act as a disincentive to the people in favour of JFM. The benefits from these agencies are much higher and easier than the benefits available through JFM. There is more money in some of the schemes with less quantity of work whereas JFM activities such as plantations, nursery, earth excavations, etc., are labour intensive requiring hard work.

Non-Compatibility of Territorial boundaries : The area to be assigned under a particular FPRC is not clearly defined. There are situations where the forest land near a village is put to use traditionally by a community residing at a far off distance. There is also difference in jurisdiction of forest administrative units such as Beat, Range and Division, and the civil administrative units such as Block, Sub-Division and District. Such non-compatibility of territorial boundaries of the Forest Department and the Civil Administration units sometimes creates confusion in liaison with other governmental agencies, mainly the Panchayats.

Law and order situation : Due to prevailing law and order situation, the field staff is unable to move freely in field. Security coverage is normally not available to them to go to field. Other problems are lack of monitoring and evaluation, improper site selection, low productivity, clash of prescriptions in Working Plans and Microplans, poor benefits, lack of support

activities, lack of innovation, lack of clarity about JFM, aptitude, poor marketing of forest products, and so on.

Management strategy

Experience so far indicates that JFM is not an easy task. There are a number of issues, which have to be addressed in order to make the programme successful. It is quite possible that every issue or problem has a solution; but it is also possible that some of them do not have ready-made answers. Such problems will have to be handled in an innovative manner. There may be instances where the stakeholders will have to be convinced to accept a situation of no-solution. In this chapter, a management strategy for JFM is presented. It takes into account a holistic view of a site.

(i) *Begin with few selected sites*

Since the concept of JFM is still evolving and majority of forest personnel are not yet conversant with the process, it may, therefore, not be possible to take up this programme everywhere in the State in one go. Even the people, after seeing the conventional style of forest management for over a century, are not prepared for it. Talking of JFM creates doubt in their mind as whether the Forest Department really means it. For this simple reason, we have to proceed gradually step by step. Take up the programme initially in few selected places. Work in the these selected sites with full dedication. The various activities (Microplan) should be planned meticulously and their implementation as to be sincere. Once these sites are established and some positive results are available, bring in more areas under the fold of JFM and then try to work upon them accordingly with full

enthusiasm. Thereafter, go on to sites until all degraded forest areas come under participatory management regime. Step by step successes will convince people in the long run and the JFM programme will become a moment and a vehicle of not only forest protection and improvement but also an effective tool of rural development.

For the selected places taken up for JFM, suitable staff having right attitude and aptitude will have to be posted for a reasonable period. The reasonable period can be between 3 to 5 years because this much time is required for starting and giving proper shape to a programme involving natural resources. The selected staff will be given intensive training on various aspects of JFM.

As we know that JFM is an integrated holistic management approach, participation of people is an essential prerequisite of this programme. People's representatives and leaders are crucial in people's participation. Hence it is important to involve these influential persons at all stages of JFM programme. Members of Parliament and Legislative Assembly, Panchayat members and other local leaders are the persons who remain in contact with people. These are the persons who are listened to by the general public. The JFM strategy has to involve them.

(ii) ***Formation of JFM Coordination Committees***

Two Coordination Committees on JFM are to be set up, one at the State level and the other at the District level. These Committees will periodically review and guide on JFM matters. They will also ensure the participation of different government departments. A group of people's

representatives, government officials, professionals, NGOs and eminent persons may form a JFM Consultation Forum whose role will be advisory in nature. It will keep track of the latest trends in social, economic and scientific fields and on that basis will give its recommendations to the State Level Coordination Committee, which in turn will pass on the information/instructions to the District Level JFM Coordination Committee for guidance and follow up action.

(iii) ***JFM Networking***

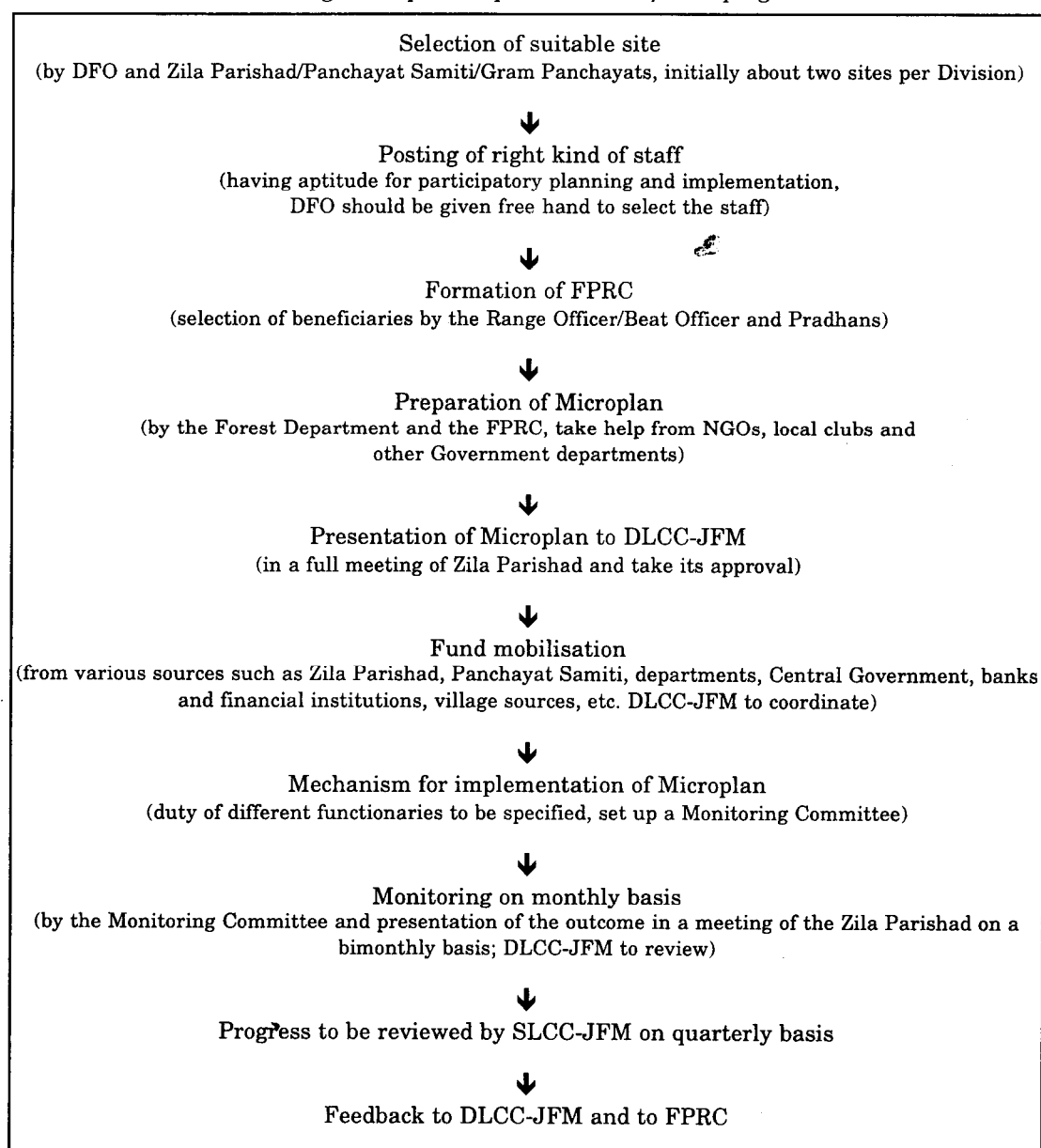
In order to make JFM an effective tool of forest conservation and rural development, a continuous flow of information from bottom-to-top and vice versa is absolutely necessary. This will help the different functionaries in getting the latest information on JFM in various parts of the world. It will also become a tool for regular monitoring and evaluation of the programme. Any shortfall or shortcoming or problem observed anywhere can be addressed immediately in an efficient manner.

(iv) ***Operational Methodology***

Role of different bodies and persons has to be specified for smooth planning and implementation of JFM programme. The details of individual processes are described elsewhere. Here only the necessary steps in a sequence are shown Figure 1.

(v) ***Tackling miscellaneous issues***

Co-ordination between Gram Panchayat and FPRC : The relationship and co-ordination between a Gram Panchayat and a FPRC can be made formal by inducting one of the members of the local Gram

Figure 1*Methodological steps in implementation of JFM programme*

Panchayat into the FPRC's Executive Committee. Representation from Panchayat Samiti or Gram Panchayat will

help in smooth implementation of various schemes. For monitoring and evaluation of work implemented by FPRCs, the

Panchayats should be involved. Though close liaison with the Panchayats is desired but the FPRCs should never be considered as part of the Panchayat. There is some concern that if FPRCs were aligned with the Panchayats, the vested interests might exert control over decision making. Since small user communities may comprise of less powerful groups, they may lose authority to elite people if the management becomes indirect adjunct of Panchayat. Experience of social forestry over the last two decades indicates that in many cases the Panchayats have difficulty in effectively managing community woodlots due to their inherent political nature. The Panchayats are political organizations based on electoral system whereas political conflicts can be quite harmful for the effective functioning of the FPRCs.

Fisheries : In the context of Tripura, there is huge potential for fishery, coconut, pineapple, species and medicinal plant cultivation in the existing forestry composition itself. For instance, lakes and small water harvesting structures are created in forest areas mainly as a moisture and soil conservation measure. There is a tremendous economic potential on this account because of the hilly terrain and high rainfall. These water bodies can be utilised for fish rearing for the preferentially fish-eating population of Tripura in a controlled way. The conditions are so conducive that this activity alone could be a great source of income to FPRCs. Similarly, coconut can be planted along the bank of the water bodies to provide additional income. Back pepper and medicinal herbs can also be cultivated under shade of some forest trees. Pineapple can be cultivated in patches near habitations. These activities of course should not be allowed unrestricted.

Aspects of the JFM Resolution : The condition in the JFM Resolution that at least one wage earner should be present in a family to become member of a FPRC should be removed. All the families in the area may be allowed to become the beneficiaries in a proposed FPRC. The condition of homogeneity of a population group should also be looked into. It is a desirable situation but is highly rare, so the heterogeneous population should also be considered for forming a FPRC.

Working Plans : The Working Plans will have to be revised and re-modeled to remove incompatibility between long term recommendations of Working Plan and short term recommendations (area specific) of Microplans. Necessary provisions in the Working Plans may be introduced for harvesting of Sal-coppicing plantations on short-rotation of 10 years with necessary provisions of thinning and multiple shoot cutting. This will ensure flow of usufruct benefits to the beneficiaries on short rotation.

External funding : Some money for forestry related activities come from Centrally Sponsored Schemes, the balance requirement has to be mobilized from other sources such as Department of Rural Development, Tribal Welfare and the Panchayats. Other sources of fund should also be explored for it. Since the enactment of the Panchayat Act, lots of money is made available to the Panchayats for developmental works. Thus, for carrying out developmental activities on JFM sites, it is imperative to draw money from the Panchayats and other bodies. The Panchayats Act has in fact included social forestry, farm forestry and minor forest produce as part of their numerous activities.

Own funding : For sustaining activities in

long run, the FPRCs should create its own fund. this fund can be used for further investing into various developmental works or for helping the poorer sections of society as and in the manner FPRCs decide to utilise it. Given the current scenario where most of the beneficiaries are hand-to-mouth, it may be difficult to persuade them to contribute to this fund. Innovative methods will have to be evolved for enhancing income through marketing strategy of forest products, value addition to products, fines and fees, etc. A certain percentage of the proceeds may be made mandatory to be deposited in this fund. For utilisation of this fund, it is very necessary to ensure equitable distribution to all the beneficiaries. The Tripura Government Resolution of December 1991 may be amended accordingly.

Raising level of awareness : As is experienced, the level of awareness is low both among the people as well as the public representatives and government employees. Regular training programmes,

visits to different sites, meeting for discussion and exchange of ideas are must in JFM. The existing forest personnel, particularly at the level of DFO and Range Officer, find it very difficult to do much about it. They are overburdened with routine forestry works. To do justice to publicity and awareness works, it will be highly appropriate to create a Publicity Wing in the Forest Department. In the beginning a separate DFO (Publicity and Monitoring) can be posted. He should be provided with necessary infrastructure to carry out his job. Gradually, it can be expanded further.

Registration : In order to strengthen the JFM programme, the JFM Committees should be registered under the Registration of Societies Act, 1860. It will give the Committees necessary recognition and make them more responsive and responsible. By becoming registered societies, the JFM Committees can take projects independently and can have access to credit.

SUMMARY

The Joint Forest Management programme was initiated in Tripura in December, 1991 and since then there has been reasonable progress in involving the people living around the forests to protect and improve the forests and in their share the benefits therefrom. It was at first initiated in Melaghar, West Tripura District and resulted in turning the barren lands into verdant forests with protection made available by Forest Protection and Regeneration Committees. Upto Dec. 1999, 165 such committees have been formed which protect 18,566 ha of forest land. A few microplans have been prepared which intend to provide aided natural regeneration. Plantation of bamboo and other species, underplanting of canes, plants of medicinal value etc. have been undertaken. Benefits have come as bamboos fuelwood, honey, minor forest produce, leaves etc. although the programme is still in its infancy. The committees formed are vulnerable as they have no force of law. Moreover forest produce is required to be cultivated to increase income of the members of the committees, but there are no such plans so far. The constitution and the byelaws of the committees are yet to be framed. Forest offences in such managed areas are not covered by laws except the Indian Forest Act. Mechanism for the distribution of benefits is still to be worked out and there is the paucity of funds for this programme. Flexibility in taking up works is also needed. Smuggling across the border is cause of concern. Coordination with other agencies is necessary because the benefits from such management are usually lower than benefits available from other agencies programmes. Territorial confusion with administrative unit exists. Law and order problems also handicap free working in the field. Such issues need to be looked into to attain success. The programme should commence from selected areas as Joint Forest Management is still evolving and neither

the staff nor the people are ready to take it up everywhere. Positive benefits in selected areas are likely to enthuse all concerned. The staff should be trained in this new concept. Coordination committees should be formed at all levels and ensure participation of different govt. departments, professionals, NGOs and eminent persons. A network, if formed, will definitely make JFM an effective tool for forest conservation and rural development. Operational methodology should be worked out satisfactorily e.g. coordination between Panchayats and FRRCs. The Committees should also create own funds for the sustained working of the programme when govt assistance will not be available to them.

त्रिपुरा में सयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध की स्थिति

पी.एन. रे

सारांश

सयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध कार्यक्रम त्रिपुरा में दिसम्बर 1991 में आरम्भ हुआ और तब से इसमें पर्याप्त प्रगति वन के आस-पास बसने वाले लोगों को अपने साथ वनों की रक्षा और उनका परिष्कार करने के लिए लेने में हुई है और उसके बदले में उन्हें भी उसके लाभों में हिस्सेदारी मिली है। सबसे पहले इसे मेलाघर, पश्चिमी त्रिपुरा जिले में शुरू किया गया और इसके परिणामस्वरूप जो जमीनें यहाँ बंजर पड़ी थी वे परिवर्तित होकर अब वस्तुतः वन बन गई हैं, इनकी देखभाल वहाँ पर बनाई गई वन रक्षण व पुनर्जनन समितियों ने की है। दिसम्बर 1999 तक ऐसी 165 समितियाँ बनाई जा चुकी हैं जो 18566 हेक्टे. वन भूमि की रक्षा कर रही है। कुछ अणुयोजनाएँ भी बनाई जा चुकी हैं जिनमें सहायित प्राकृतिक पुनर्जनन कराया जाएगा, बांस और अन्य वृक्ष जातियाँ लगाई जाएंगी, बेंत का अधोरोपण किया जाएगा, औषधि महत्व वाले पेड़-पौधे लगाए जाएंगे इत्यादि। अब तक जो लाभ इनसे मिले हैं उनमें बांस, ईंधन काष्ठ, शहद, गौण वनोपज, पत्तियाँ आदि मिलने का उल्लेख किया जा सकता है यद्यपि यह कार्यक्रम अभी अपने शैशव काल में ही है। जो समितियाँ बनी हैं वे पराजय हैं क्योंकि उनकी कोई कानूनी शक्ति नहीं है। गौण वनोपजों की कृषि कराने की आवश्यकता है ताकि समिति के सदस्यों की आमदनी बढ़ाई जा सके परन्तु ऐसा करने की अभी कोई योजनाएँ नहीं हैं। समितियों का संविधान और नियमावली भी बनाई जानी बाकी है। ऐसे प्रबन्धित वनों में किए जाने वाले वन अपराधों को निपटाने के लिए भारतीय वन अधिनियम को छोड़ कोई अन्य प्रावधान नहीं है। वनों से होने वाले लाभ कैसे बँटेंगे इसकी कोई प्रक्रिया भी अभी बनाई जानी शेष है। और, कार्यक्रम के लिए धनाभाव तो है ही। कामों के करने के बारे में लचीलेपन का अभाव है जो होना चाहिए। सीमा पार की जाने वाली वनोपजों की तस्करी भी चिन्ता का कारण है। अन्य अभिकरणों के साथ समन्वय होना आवश्यक है क्योंकि सयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध से मिलने वाले लाभ उनसे मिलने वाले लाभों की तुलना में प्रायः कम हैं जिससे श्रमिक मिलने में दिक्कत होती है। प्रशासन के साथ क्षेत्रीय अधिकारों में भी उलझने हैं। कानून और व्यवस्था की वर्तमान समस्याएँ भी कामकाज को क्षेत्र में काम करने जाने में बाधा बनती हैं। इस तरह के अनेक मुद्दे हैं जिन पर ध्यान देने और उनका समाधान निकालने की जरूरत है जिससे इस कार्यक्रम को सफलता मिल सके। यह कार्यक्रम पहले चुने हुए क्षेत्रों में चलाया जाना चाहिए क्योंकि सयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध अभी विकसित होने की अवस्था में चल रहा है। और न तो सरकारी कर्मचारी और न जनता ही इसे सभी अपनाने के लिए तैयार हो पाए हैं। चुने हुए क्षेत्रों में सकारात्मक लाभ मिलने पर सभी का उत्साह बढ़ने की संभावनाएँ हैं। सरकारी कर्मचारियों को इस नई प्रबन्ध प्रणाली में प्रशिक्षित किया जाना चाहिए। सभी स्तरों पर समन्वय समितियाँ बनाई जानी चाहिए और विभिन्न सरकारी विभागों, पेशेवर लोगों, गैरसरकारी संगठनों और प्रसिद्ध जन नेताओं की भागीदारी इसके लिए सुनिश्चित की जानी चाहिए। यदि एक जालकर्म-सा इस विषय का बन जाएगा तो उससे सयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध को वन संरक्षण और ग्राम विकास का अधिक प्रभावकारी उपकरण बनाया जा सकेगा। इसके कार्य करने की रीतियाँ भी सही-सही तैयार कर ली जानी चाहिए। कुछ फुटकर मुद्दे और भी हैं जिन पर विचार कर उनके समाधान निकालने चाहिए। उदा. पंचायतों और वन रक्षण एवं पुनर्जनन समितियों के दरम्यान समन्वय। ऐसी समितियों को अपनी निधि भी स्थापित करनी चाहिए ताकि जब सरकारी सहायता मिलनी बंद हो जाए तो इन कार्यक्रमों को निरन्तर चलते रखा जा सके।