

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS : THEIR ROLE IN FORESTRY RESEARCH AND EXTENSION

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### Introduction

There has been a profound change in the understanding of and concern about the forests of the developing world. It is now amply clear that forests play an even more important role in the economic, social, ecological and environmental health of nations than had been recognized earlier. They also have a vital role in mitigating the impact of energy crisis, contributing to rural, development and increasing agricultural production (Agroforestry). The importance of various forest products in providing employment, incomes and sustenance to people living in and around forests, along with the rural populace is now fully appreciated. In fact, forests are a vital component of the survival economy of these underprivileged communities. The significance of forest ecosystems in maintaining biological diversity (specially tropical forests) and their role in the carbon cycle and global climate change are now better recognized than ever before.

These new and emerging priority areas of concern call for a rethinking and reorientation in forest management policies and development programmes both with regard to the crucial role that forests play in ecological/environmental security and maintenance of biological diversity and in

increasing the forest resource base and its productivity. Equally important, if not absolutely essential, is the effective involvement and participation of the local communities in establishing sustainable forest management systems. Thus, like all other sectors the three major requirements needed to ensure sound development and growth of forest resources are appropriate policies, strong institutions and sustainable operations (Tejwani and Lai, 1992). The emerging trends and the concerns only reflect upon the urgent need to have people's social, economic and cultural requirements reflected in the policies, institutions and operations related to forest management. This anthropocentric model has been presented in Fig. 1.

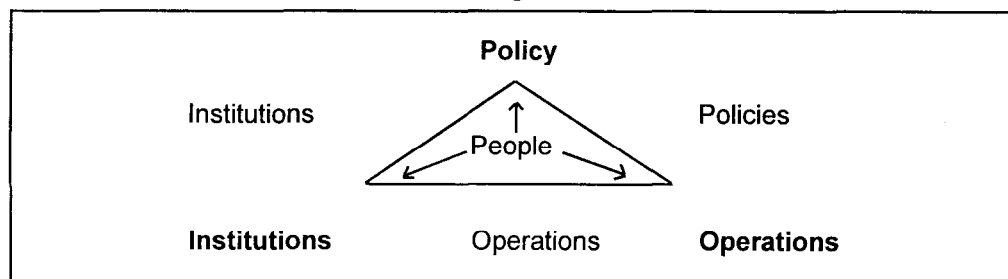
### People and forests - Changing relations

Many analysts have identified certain basic/key elements that need to be addressed in order to reverse the trend that has accelerated the degradation of forests. These elements include :

- \* Interactions between people, forests and the environment;
- \* Financial and economic incentives for sustainable land management including forestry and tree crop development;

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**Fig. 1**

Policy-institutions-operations : An anthropocentric framework

(Source : Tejawani, 1991)

- \* Technological factors that limit the yields that can be obtained;
- \* The institutional framework including the respective roles of the public and private sectors in forestry.

Though in the long history of forestry in India, people and their needs were not central to management, in an unambiguous way the National Forest Policy 1988 is more anthropocentric and environment friendly than forest policies in the past. Its concern for people is clearly reflected in the following extract - "The life of tribals and other poor living within and near forests revolves around forests. The rights and concessions enjoyed by them should be fully protected. Their domestic requirements of fuelwood, fodder, MFP and construction timber should be the first charge on the forest produce".

Consistent with the 1988 National Forest Policy, Government of India, on June 1, 1990, issued policy instructions to all State Governments to support greater participation of village communities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the regeneration, management and protection of degraded forests. The implications of this document are far-reaching and assertive in support of people's

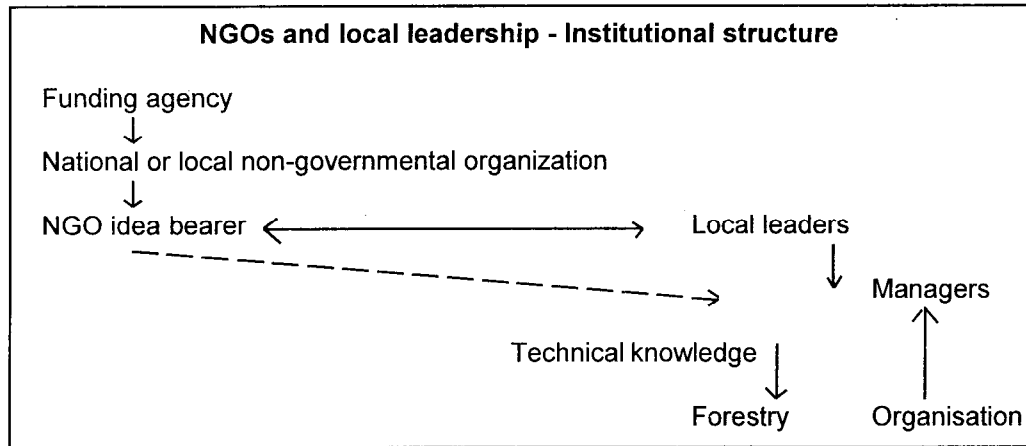
involvement in forest management as equal partners with the Forest Departments. Though these policy and institutional changes have had a positive disposition towards the Forest Department-NGO-Local Organisation collaboration and joint management of the forest resource; issues of incentives essential to encourage and sustain this participation are still to be worked out.

This essentially would require NGOs and farmer/farmer associations to further the farmer-centered research to a much greater extent to reflect the social, economic and cultural requirements of people such that this research could feed into the policies, operations and institutional changes of the Forest Department in order to encourage and sustain peoples participation in forests and forestry programmes.

### **NGOs - Their Current Role**

In the context of local organizations, Esmam and Uphof (1982) state that some linkages to Government were to be preferred to the extremes of either complete autonomy or strong Government direction. Too much government direction can destroy local initiatives and selfreliance, on which depend the success of local organisations. In this

Fig. 2



NGOs in the Forestry set-up

Source : Palin, 1983

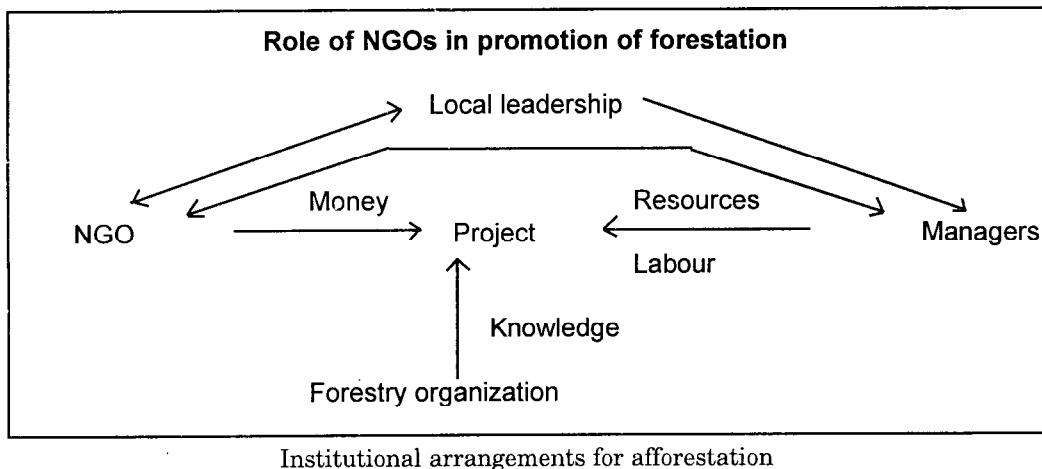
scenario it would be interesting to look at the role of NGOs in the Government-local initiative linkage (Fig. 2). An institutional framework which involves NGOs as the agencies in contact with the people could help in greater success (Palin, 1983).

The Social Forestry and the Joint Forestry Programmes have led to the development of a more people-oriented forest service and the role of cooperatives. NGOs and private institutions in forestry has also increased over the past decade. That probably describes the role of NGOs in the current forestry context as reflected in Fig. 3 (Palin, 1983).

NGOs have essentially been playing the facilitators role in bridging the gap between forest dependent communities and the Forest Departments in different States. They have hitherto catered to the sociological aspects of project implementation owing to their long presence in the programme areas dealing with

poverty alleviation. This is amply reflected in the two instances of the Joint Forest Management and the Eco-Development Programmes that are underway.

Under the Ecodevelopment project of the World Bank, NGOs are envisaged to have a critical role to play in the micro-planning and implementation process. Frequently, NGOs have entered the arena of Protected Area (PA) management through activities to alleviate poverty and improve livelihoods of populations in and around the PAs. Their experience and approach will be a necessary addition to the efforts of PA authorities and bring to the project enhanced social skills and sensitivities. Furthermore, the NGOs would enhance the monitoring and evaluation process which would require high degree of participation. Under the JFM programme which envisages the involvement of local user-communities in the protection and management of degraded forest areas, NGOs have been involved in bridging the gap between the

**Fig. 3**

Source : Palin, 1983.

officials of the Forest Department (FD) and village communities through a number of strategies including meetings, trainings, workshops and have been facilitating the programme implementation by assisting the FD with process documentation, conflict resolution, micro-level planning, etc.

### Forestry Research - Role of NGOs

It is now generally agreed that Forestry research in India needs to be strengthened to provide solutions to the problems and support to forestry programmes. Among the recommendations for improving the situation are increasing the status of research, prioritization of research tasks, involvement of field staff in research, undertaking sociological research in parallel to technical and economic options, developing an extension mechanism in coordination with existing research and extension systems and promoting NGOs, private and contract research. This research would solve problems with an effective extension mechanism which would reach and involve local people. Forestry research

will essentially require relevant government agencies. NGOs, universities, grassroots organisations to collaborate on action research, training and information sharing activities. The advances made in forestry and its promotion will essentially be dependent upon superior/effective information sharing of research results etc. and exchange activities which is possible through effective extension mechanism. The major strengths (Taylor, 1992) and constraints (Grainger, 1991) of NGOs are presented in Table 1.

### Need of the Hour

The National Forest Policy 1988 proposes a much greater involvement of NGOs in development and management of forest resources. Involvement of these actors will only work if they are motivated to participate. While NGOs have provided valuable services in many of the successful joint management experiments, there are relatively few NGOs with experience in forestry programmes. NGOs strengths are generally not in substituting for the Forest

**Table 1**  
*Strengths and Constraints of NGOs*

Strengths	Constraints
Intimate knowledge of local conditions and close communication with the local communities	Poor general awareness of the problem
Flexibility to develop, test, and carry out innovative approaches to working with communities	Lack of coordination between NGOs and agencies of governments and intergovernmental organizations
Commitment to involving poor and women	Lack of research and development support
Ability to integrate forestry with other sector	Lack of technical support
Policy advocacy role	
Information gathering and applied research	
Extension - raise public awareness, provide technical assistance and other extension activities.	

Departments in afforestation efforts but as a complement to government activities. Considerable promise has been shown in involving NGOs in environmental education, forest committee organisation, joint management facilitation, training of forestry disciplinary applied research.

Intermediary NGOs are increasingly providing critical technical assistance and training support to local NGOs. Constraints to effective NGO involvement in forestry development programmes stem from misunderstanding of NGO strengths and weaknesses, contractual and funding hurdles such as finding a way to channel funds to NGOs in advance, mutual distrust, and the lack of managerial and technical

skills among many NGOs. Special programmes are needed to strengthen NGOs to enable them to play a greater supporting role in the Forest Sector. Government also has limited mechanisms for identifying and channeling technical and financial resources to the more grass-roots based organisations that often have a crucial rapport with local communities and a good knowledge of local socio-economic dynamics. Some States have developed creative mechanisms such as jointly-formed societies to overcome procurement and contractual hurdles to non-government entities. Use of private consultants in furthering forest policies and programme is not common although this could allow Forest Departments to obtain specialized expertise which they lack.

For furthering forestry research in India, it is desirable that the FD redefines its own responsibilities and tasks. Also important would be to identify the other tasks that other actors including NGOs, peoples' organisations, individuals and also the industries could undertake with appropriate support. Aspects of regulation, monitoring, protection, some aspects of technology development and extension are already being undertaken by NGOs and other actors. NGOs could help in complimenting government activities, particularly as a link at the grassroots. NGOs could be involved more in on-farm and farmer-coordinated research, NGO-government collaboration in technology generation and transfer and build institutional and technical capabilities of farmers. Also there is need for greater involvement of NGOs in policy formulation, programme planning, collaborative research, networking etc. (Anon., 1993).

For NGOs to play an effective and meaningful role, coordination and collaboration for forestry research and extension could be at different stages (Tejwani and Lai, 1992) like international/regional collaboration, National-level collaboration among NGOs, National-level collaboration between Government and NGOs, and District level collaboration. Further the establishment of a network which would link scientists and institutions that are committed to sharing information or working together to solve common problems (Faris, 1991). Networks promote efficiency through pooling and sharing of scarce resources, create common pools of information that can be used to avoid duplication and repetition, encourage technology and information transfer

between countries, improve quality of science by linking isolated researchers/institutions to the national, regional and global research community (Eyzaguirre, 1996).

### Conclusion

The importance of a rational and prudent approach to the management of forest resource and concomitant need for effective conservation of biotic communities and their habitats, focuses attention on the stresses created by the rapidly increasing demands of the goods and services that the forests provide and their direct impact upon forest resource depletion and environmental deterioration. Some of the major management concerns are in increasing productivity of natural forests and plantations; meeting the wood requirements of the local population and the industry; controlling over-exploitation of forests which leads to loss of biodiversity; ensuring long range environmental security; and preventing the degradation of land and water resources.

In view of the foregoing, balancing conservational and developmental objectives in forestry is indeed a major challenge facing the country. This calls for evolving a well thought out imaginative strategy for action that enjoys public support with fewer environmental costs, where production and development are sustained and reasonable income generated so that the poorer sections of the society do not become ecological refugees. This is possible only by ensuring the involvement of the people in the real sense where NGOs have a real role to play. People, NGOs and the Government have to develop an equal stake.

## SUMMARY

The priority areas of concern call for reorientation of forest management policies and development programmes in the context of environmental security and maintenance of biological diversity. What is increasingly evident is the need to expand the forest resources base and productivity, besides effective involvement and participation of local communities in establishing sustainable forest management systems. NGOs have essentially been playing the role of a facilitator in bridging the gap between forest dependent communities and the Forest Departments catering so far primarily to sociological aspects of development projects. Forestry research will essentially require relevant government agencies, Universities, NGOs and grassroot organisations to collaborate on action research, training and information sharing activities. A good networking of organisations coupled with effective extension mechanisms would be a successful combination. Constraints to effective NGO involvement in forestry development programmes stem from misunderstanding of NGO strengths and weaknesses, contractual and funding hurdles such as finding a way to channel funds to NGOs in advance, mutual distrust, and the lack of/in many cases non-recognition of managerial and technical skills among many NGOs. Special programmes are needed to strengthen NGOs to enable them to play a greater supporting role in the Forestry sector. For NGOs to play an effective and meaningful role, coordination and collaboration for forestry research and extension could be at various levels from the grassroots to the policy making level.

### गैर सरकारी संगठन - वानिकी अनुसंधान और विस्तार में उनकी भूमिका

वी० वरलक्ष्मी व ओ०एन० कौल

सारांश

चिन्ता के पूर्वता वाले क्षेत्र पर्यावरण सुरक्षा और जैवविविधता को बनाए रखने के संदर्भ में वन प्रबन्ध की नीतियाँ और विकास कार्यक्रमों का पुनर्निर्धारण आवश्यक बना रहे हैं। जो बात अधिकाधिक स्पष्ट होती जा रही है वह लम्बे समय तक चल सकने वाली वन प्रबन्ध प्रणालियों को स्थापित करने में स्थानीय समुदायों की प्रभावशाली भगीदारी और सहभागिता के अतिरिक्त वन संसाधन के आधार को बढ़ाने की आवश्यकता है। गैर सरकारी संगठन निश्चय ही वनों पर आश्रित समुदायों और वन विभाग के बीच पड़ी खाई को पाटने में सुविधाकारक भूमिका निभा रहे हैं और मुख्यतः विकास परियोजनाओं के समाजशास्त्रीय पहलुओं को पूरा करते हैं। वानिकी अनुसंधान को तो अवश्य ही कार्यगत अनुसंधान प्रशिक्षण और सूचनाओं में हिस्सेदारी के कार्यों के लिए सुसंगत सरकारी अभिकरणों, विश्वविद्यालयों, गैर सरकारी संगठनों और धरती की जड़ों से जुड़े संगठनों से सहयोग की आवश्यकता पड़ेगी। प्रभावकारी विस्तार यन्त्रसमूह से जोड़ा हुआ संगठनों का अच्छा जालसमूह सफल संयोग सिद्ध होगा। गैर सरकारी संगठनों की प्रभावकारी ढंग से वानिकी विकास कार्यक्रमों के साथ जुड़ने की बाधाएँ इस कारण सामने आती हैं कि गैर सरकारी संगठनों की शक्तियों और कमजोरियों के बारे में गलतफहमी है और करार करने व निधि पोषण में कुछ दिक्कतें आती हैं जैसे कि गैर सरकारी संगठनों को अग्रिम धनराशि देने के लिए किसी धारा को खोजना, आपसी अविश्वास और अधिकांश मामलों में बहुत सारे गैर सरकारी संगठनों में प्रबन्धकारी और प्राविधिक योग्यताओं की पहचान न हो पाना। गैर सरकारी संगठनों को मजबूत बनाने के लिए विशेष कार्यक्रमों की आवश्यकता है ताकि वे वानिकी क्षेत्र में अबसे अधिक सहायकारी भूमिका निबाहने के योग्य बन जाएँ। गैर सरकारी संगठनों की प्रभावकारी एवं अर्थवान भूमिका सुनिश्चित करने के लिए वानिकी अनुसंधान और विस्तार में जड़ों से लगाकर नीतिनिर्माण तक के विभिन्न स्तरों पर उनका सहयोग और सहकारिता ली जा सकती है।

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