

STRATEGY FOR AWARENESS CREATION AMONG RURAL MASSES IN THE ARAVALLI PROJECT : AN EVALUATION

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Introduction

In May 1990, the project viz., ecological rehabilitation of degraded common lands in the Aravallis was launched for improving the productivity of the depleted forest resources over an area of 33,000 ha in 293 selected villages in southern Haryana.

The Aravalli Project deals with enrichment of degraded forests on common lands to which community has access for collection of firewood, fodder, other non-wood products and grazing their livestock. In eco-restoration project such as the Aravalli Project, it is necessary to replace the existing management of free access by a community controlled regulated access system (Kaul, 1993). This required concerted efforts on the part of the Project personnel to create awareness among the villagers about the project activities and about the short and long-term benefits that will accrue from the Project.

The Strategy

The villages in the Project area are inhabited by a number of castes where social, economic and gender inequalities are predominant. The Project area, therefore, presents complex socio-economic characteristics which necessitates a careful approach to enlisting peoples' participation in the task of eco-restoration. Apart from

raising general awareness of the community about the Project, special emphasis is being placed on awareness creation amongst women as they play a major role in the use of biomass and its management. Further, reorientation of staff also merits attention on account of departure from its traditional policing role to working in close partnership with village communities.

Village Communities

In order to acquaint the village communities and members of the Village Forest Communities/Panchayats with the Project objectives, activities and the short and long-term benefits that will accrue from the Project, dance and song shows, cinema shows, Mahila melas and exhibitions were periodically organised. To break barriers of gender related inhibitions, Women extension workers were also locally appointed.

One-two days training on nursery raising and plantation management were held for villagers including members of Panchayats and Village Forest Committees (VFCs). Each participant was given Rs 24/- per day to offset loss of wages. Field visits were also organised.

Project Staff

Regular training courses in peoples'

participation and micro-planning are conducted to improve (i) their listening and communication skills, (ii) their understanding of rapid rural appraisal/participatory rural appraisal methods, (iii) their capacity to form Village Forest Committees and preparation of micro-plans with peoples' participation.

School Children

Essay, painting and debate competitions are regularly organised in village schools to create environmental consciousness among young children of villages and towns who are highly receptive to ideas.

Evaluation of the Programme

A survey was undertaken in 36 randomly selected villages using semi-structure questionnaire. In all 578 villagers were interviewed by Project staff and women extension workers. The data on sex, age, profession and land holding of the sampled respondents is given in Table 1.

The important findings of the survey are :

Participation in Extension activities : Seventy eight per cent of the respondents attended one or other activity organised for awareness creation. They even showed their *inter-se* preference of the programme viz., dance and song show was found to be the most popular programme undertaken by the Project (Bokil, 1993).

Awareness Creation : Of the total number of respondents, 97 per cent were found to be aware of the implementation of the Project and its different components for restoring the ecology in their and other neighbouring villages.

Consciousness about Benefits : Ninety seven per cent respondents exhibited a fair degree of consciousness about the benefits that are currently accruing or will accrue in future due to project activities. The respondents listed benefits like employment, increased availability of fodder, fuelwood and small timber, non-wood forest product, better environmental conditions etc (Varma, 1994). About 72 per cent of them indicated their willingness even to plant seedlings on their private field and near their homesteads.

Participation in Project activities : Eighty

Table 1
Composition of Survey Sample

Sex	Total	Age (Yrs)		Profession			Land holding (ha)			
		20<A<40	40<A	Agri-culture	Labourer	Others	Land-less	0<L<5	5<L<10	10<L
Male	362 (62.6%)	206 (35.6%)	156 (27.0%)	210 (36.3%)	146 (25.2%)	28 (4.9%)	121 (20.9%)	189 (32.7%)	41 (7.1%)	40 (6.9%)
Female	216 (37.4%)	113 (19.6%)	103 (17.8%)	111 (19.2%)	78 (13.5%)	5 (0.9%)	61 (10.6%)	95 (16.4%)	20 (3.5%)	11 (1.9%)
Total	578 (100%)	319 (55.2%)	259 (44.8%)	321 (55.5%)	224 (38.7%)	33 (5.8%)	182 (31.5%)	284 (49.1%)	61 (10.6%)	51 (8.8%)

Note : Values given in paranthesis denote percentage of total number of respondents in a particular class.

one per cent of the respondents spoke of extending their cooperation to the Project staff in protection of rehabilitated common lands by not allowing their own livestock to graze and an equal proportion of the respondents even stopped other animals and persuaded their owners to desist from damaging the juvenile plantations. In many places, the villages were boastful about their plantations and took pride in showing them to the visitors (Bokil, 1993). In respect of peoples involvement in the Project activities, about 34 per cent of the respondents spoke of having actually worked in one activity or the other. About 40 per cent of them even evinced interest in raising and supplying seedlings to the Project, thereby indicating a sense of belongingness that has been created among the villagers.

Future Management of Common Land Resources : When questioned how they propose to manage the common land resources when the rehabilitated common lands are returned to panchayat, about 87 per cent of the respondents wanted panchayat/Village Forest Committee (VFC) to take up this responsibility and upto 68 per cent of them favoured active participation of the project authorities to assist them in this task. This indicates the

need for making further efforts in explaining to the village communities, members of the panchayat/VFC how the current management system, namely, open access free-for-all use has resulted in severe degradation of common land resources and how a regulated use managed by the community which owns the common land will help meeting their biomass need on sustained basis, at the sametime maintaining vegetative cover on the hills so essential for maintaining the productivity of these common lands.

Creation of Village Fund : About 60 per cent of the respondents expressed their willingness for contributing a nominal fee to village fund in lieu of fodder and other biomass taken by them free of cost from rehabilitated common lands. This is an indication of the potential of the community to cooperate among themselves for a common cause. Some more extension work among the villagers would provide them much needed confidence and would enable them to shoulder the responsibility of managing the rehabilitated common lands along the lines suggested to them by the Project during course of Project implementation.

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SUMMARY

The success of an eco-rehabilitation project, particularly when common lands are involved, largely depends upon eliciting cooperation of the local communities in providing effective protection to the treated area. A strategy for awareness creation among village communities, members of Village Forest Committees/Panchayat, project staff and school children was, therefore, designed and implemented with particular emphasis on women's involvement. An evaluation of the strategy was undertaken by a survey. The survey revealed that (1) a majority of the villagers had participated in the extension programmes, (2) they were aware of the project-interventions and concomitant flow

of benefits, (3) a substantial proportion of the sampled population cooperated in protecting the plantations and were even keen to raise seedlings for the project, besides participating directly in the project activities. A welcome attitudinal change manifested in willingness to shoulder the responsibility of managing with the help of the Project staff the treated land when transferred to Panchayat. The acceptance of the idea of a Village Fund further shows that villagers are ready to contribute to the common cause of eco-restoration of the Aravallis.

अरावली परियोजनाओं के ग्रामीण वनों में जागरूकता लाने की रणनीति - एक मूल्यांकन

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सारांश

परिस्थिति पुनर्संस्कार परियोजना की, विशेषतः यदि वे पंचायती जमीनों पर हों, सफलता अधिकतर उपचारित क्षेत्र की प्रभावकारी सुरक्षा कराने के लिए स्थानीय समुदायों का सहयोग मिलने पर निर्भर होती है। ग्राम समुदायों, ग्राम वन समिति/ पंचायत के सदस्यों, परियोजना के कर्मचारियों और स्कूली बच्चों में जागरूकता लाने के लिए एक रणनीति बनाई गई और स्त्रियों की भागीदारी पर विशेष बल देते हुए उसे क्रियान्वित किया गया। एक सर्वेक्षण द्वारा रणनीति का मूल्यांकन कराया गया। सर्वेक्षण से पता लगा कि 1- अधिकांश ग्रामीणों ने विस्तार कार्यक्रमों में भाग लिया, 2- उन्हें परियोजना के हस्तक्षेप और उससे मिलने वाले लाभों की जानकारी थी, 3- नमूने निकाले लोगों के काफी बड़े भाग ने रोपवन लगाने और उनकी रक्षा करने में सहयोग दिया था तथा परियोजना कार्यों में सीधे भाग लेने के अलावा वे परियोजना के लिए पौध तैयार करने के लिए भी उत्सुक थे। एक स्वागत्य दृष्टिगत परिवर्तन उनकी इस रजामंदी में दिखाई पड़ा जो उन्होंने उपचारित भूमि पंचायत को हस्तांतरित किए जाने के बाद परियोजना के कर्मचारियों की सहायता से उसका प्रबन्ध करने की जिम्मेदारी अपने कंधों पर लेने के लिए प्रदर्शित की। एक ग्राम निधि बनाने का विचार मान लेना यह दिखाता है कि ग्रामीण जन अरावली क्षेत्र की परिस्थिति पुनः सुधारने के सार्वजनिक कार्य में योग देने के लिए भी तैयार हैं।

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