

JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT - SOME FUNDAMENTALS REVIEWED

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Introduction

One of the basic objectives of India's National Forest Policy has been creating of a massive people's movement for stability of the forest ecosystems. As a follow-up to this, Govt. of India, vide its circular No. 6.21/89/FP dated 1.6.90 wrote to all States and Union Territories setting out new guidelines on involvement of village communities in forest rehabilitation through Joint Forest Management (JFM).

Amongst contemporary forest management strategies JFM is both a positive and bold initiative. This programme besides holding promise to enhance sustainability and productivity of the forest ecosystems could, to an extent, lead to fulfillment of the following long-term social objectives :

- (a) Enabling and empowering local communities (women and men) in sharing the management of the forest, thus enhancing their sense of ownership and commitment to the forest. This will also help the communities to gain more in confidence and self esteem.
- (b) Building of communities institutions for enhancing grassroot level management capabilities for local resource management.
- (c) Relieving the pressure of Forest Department personnel from day to day management/repetitive protection duties so

that their time could be utilised in other aspects of forest management (which otherwise get neglected).

- (d) Bringing in more transparency in working of the Forest Department.

Possible Counterproductive Dimensions of JFM Programme

An attempt is made here to analyse some of the possible risks of JFM if it is propagated as a panacea, without an objective look at possible counter productive dimensions, and taking remedial measures thereof. The essence of the Forest Policy is that basic needs of local communities living near the forests should be met from nearby forest. In the short run, the increased access to forest has given positive results in many places as there is a sense of gratification among local communities for gains from the forest which were otherwise not available to them in the past. Hence active participation of the community has been received in these areas through the Forest Protection Committees (FPCs).

The hard question that needs to be addressed however is : *What is likely to happen when this access gets institutionalised?*

The sense of gratification is likely to be transformed into a psychology of taking the access for granted as the time passes. This may, in due course result in diminishing,

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positive cooperation from communities in terms of their time and effort gone in protection and management of local forest resources.

Historical Evidence

If we look in hindsight there is certain historical evidence to indicate that due caution as well as tight monitoring is necessary when people are given more access/involvement in forest management. Some examples are given below.

The encroachment of forest land and destruction of plantations by taungya workers in Gorakhpur in India. In Kenya also Taungya had to be banned because indiscriminate grazing was carried out in the forests and licenced cultivators subleased their plots to outsiders at a price (Kirinya, 1995). Similar is the failure of certain Cooperative Forest Societies that were formed as a follow up to recommendations of Punjab Forest Commission in 1937-38 in Kangra District. For example, Cooperative Forest Society of Khohala had to be terminated in 1955 "owing to continuous mismanagement ever since its inception" (Sharma, 1996); the politicisation of timber rights in Kullu and other districts of Himachal Pradesh and in actual practice, the delinking from exercise of rights of statutory obligations in protecting forest against fire etc. are some of examples which should as well be kept at the back of the mind and not brushed aside. JFM as being practiced today is similar, if not identical, in approach to the examples quoted here and if it fails in certain area, the critics will not lose any time in blaming the Government for "abdicating its responsibility" by involving the communities in forest protection and management.

In the first instance participatory forestry programmes are widely seen as a means to meet basic needs of the poorest who live near forest areas. For some better-off sections of the modern society, forests are fascinating and romantic living museums with ancient communities in place for the elite to dole out sympathy, probably for more than anything else, to meet their own "social" and "esteem" needs (see 'Maslow's Need Theory' below).

It will perhaps be a gross over simplification to assume that these indigenous communities will like to remain perpetually in an archaic state - as forest dwellers. "A strategy focusing exclusively on biomass products to meet basic needs of fuel, fodder and food is not enough as it fails to satisfy the need for higher incomes and increased expectations of people" (Jodha, 1995). It would be therefore both shortsighted as well as insulting to genuine long term aspirations of the later to think that in perpetuity members of the forest dwelling communities will be satisfied just by meeting of their basic need and not aspire for their other, higher needs.

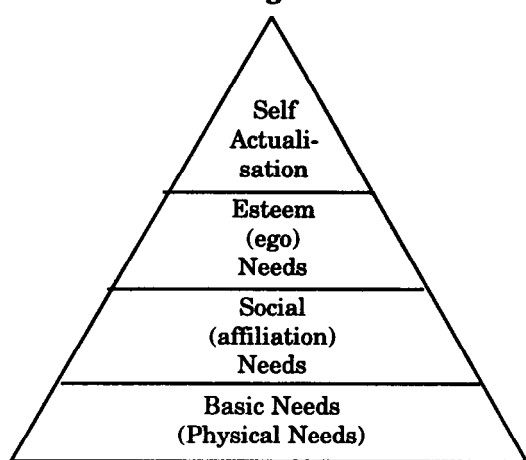
Maslow's (Hierarchy of Needs) Theory and JFM

As per Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs, the needs of a person keep on changing from basic needs to next higher sets of needs (Fig. 1). (Very few people are able to reach the stage of self actualisation detachment).

As the aspirations of people change and access is taken for granted there is a real possibility of misuse of institutionalised access to forest resources to meet increasing aspirations, especially if no concrete

alternatives are available to these people from other segments of the economy. The issue may get further complicated with politicisation of JFM committees in future. As indicated earlier, already similar things, resulting in social tension, encroachments and deforestation have taken place.

Fig. 1



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
(Shows that needs of a person are ever increasing or ever-changing)

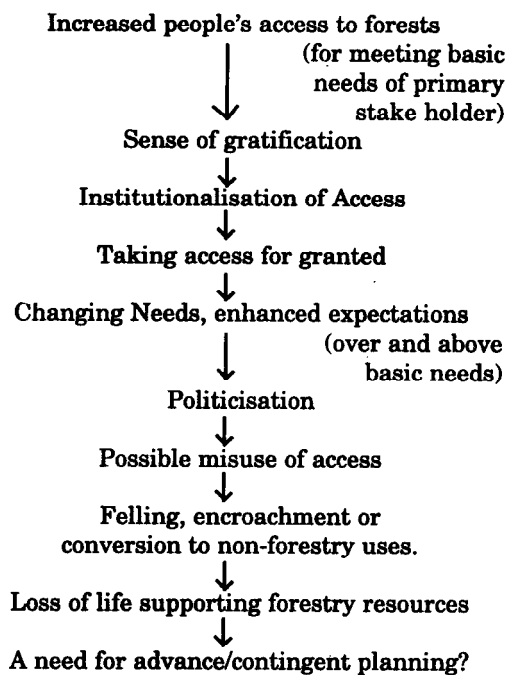
The Worst Case Scenario : It has to be kept in mind that India has just above 20% of the world's area, 16% of the world's population, largest concentration of poverty, largest (and ill fed) cattle population, and is barely able to meet its food requirement.

In terms of statistics, per capita land in India fell from 1.31 ha in 1901 to 0.48 ha in 1981; per capita availability of land for growing food, fodder, timber, fuel and fibre decreased from 0.48 ha to 0.2 ha from 1950 to 1980. Food production grew merely by 2.68% in 1980s, compared to Planning Commission projections of 5% in 1984-85. Land Productivity for crops, inspite of all ecstasy about green revolution, is among

six bottom countries in Asia (Puri, 1992). 56% of agricultural land is already degraded in one form or the other.

The scenario that could emerge from the interaction of various factors discussed above is presented in the following flowchart (Fig 2) :

Fig. 2



Possible ill effects of large scale, indiscriminate JFM.

The view presented above paints the worst-case/pessimistic scenario. It underscores the need for some kind of contingent scenario planning in the event of failure. Now let us try to examine the Better-off Scenario in the light of faster and hopefully more equitable growth of Indian Economy.

The Better-off Scenario : Indian economy is already set on a fast path of growth. Annual GDP and industrial production is progressively increasing. India needs to change from being overly bureaucratic and insular. No country can exist in isolation any longer without harming its interests. Social justice and other signs of a progressive country could occur only if India's economy grows faster (Puri, 1992). If the economic liberalisation and reforms enhance the opportunities in other sectors of economy to absorb the presently poorer population, the process of availability of personnel to manage forest committees and to protect the forests may start decreasing as the option of doing hard work for forest protection committees may not be any more lucrative and motivating enough for people. In view of decreased presence of Forest Department personnel, there is again a possible threat to existence of forests.

The evidence being generated from West Bengal already suggests that in some places, local communities have started feeling the pinch of hard work in protection of forests vis-a-vis the returns from the forests (Ahmed, 1996).

Thus if the economy grows faster, the possibility of local people moving away from protection committees can also not ruled out.

In both types of possible scenarios, it is clear that extreme care is needed to be exercised while multiplying the areas that are coming under way of the JFM. Over-advocacy of any idea, can lead to its death. The propagation of JFM to new areas should therefore be done with objectivity and caution and temptation to join the "bandwagon" without careful thought should be resisted.

This also justifies, the future option being retained in JFM agreements by the Government to take back the control of forests from the Committees in case they are unable or unwilling to discharge their responsibilities properly. Since there is no guarantee that villagers can be tied up, or for that matter, should be tied up in perpetuity with forest protection committees, it would be premature to suggest that Governments should not have option to revise the management strategies under any eventuality in future.

Research needs in related Policy Areas

Research is needed in a number of important policy related areas that will effectively help in monitoring the success/failure and need for remedial action. These are :

- (a) Identifying factors facilitating/retarding people's participation in different geographical areas and socio-cultural contexts. Identify potential of people's participation in a given situation through evolving appropriate models.
- (b) Properly understanding the socio-anthropological dimension and historical genesis of conflicts in man-forest interface and also rationalisation of man-forest interactions in the context of changing socio-economic needs of the society.
- (c) Addressing gender issues through forestry programmes.
- (d) Systematic programmes in all the States for genetic improvement and silvicultural management of the tree and non-tree species which are of most direct importance to the local communities.

Potential Conflicts and Transmission of Biotic Pressure

Under JFM, conflicts between local communities have already started emerging in different situations (Krishna Mohan, 1996). More conflicts are likely to arise in future needing strong conflict resolution mechanisms in place. Some of the groups of statutory and informal nature among whom conflicts could emerge in future are listed below (Table 1) :

There is also the emerging issue of transmission of biotic pressures from areas protected by FPCs to areas not protected by FPCs. This needs to be carefully addressed in a holistic manner.

Conclusion

The change in forest policy to focus

more on people's needs in forestry provides a valuable opportunity to reorient the forest management with people's participation. Utilising people's potential and Forest Department's technical backup, a new kind of synergy can be created in forest management. This opportunity should be utilised to try and come out with replicable yet sufficiently flexible models for healthy people-forest interface and sustainability of forest resources. Carefully designed pilot projects, process documentation and suitable policy research can be used to learn useful lessons for optimum management of forest ecosystems in the twenty-first century. There is also need for an open mind and contingent alternative plans keeping in view possible future scenarios. It is also imperative to see that "the cart is not put before the horse" and pace of JFM programmes is not artificially hastened under extraneous pressures.

<i>Statutory groups</i>	<i>Informal Groups</i>
Village Panchayats	Forest Protection Committees (FPCs)
Van Panchayats (in Uttar Pradesh)	— do —
Panchayats/Van Panchayats	Mahila Mangal Dals
Right-holders and non FPC members	FPC members (Right holders or otherwise)
Right-holders and FPC members	Non right-holders non FPC members but living in vicinity of the forest area.

SUMMARY

This paper looks at ecological and social objectives that could be achieved through implementation of JFM programmes. It also examines the likelihood of changing needs and responses of the local communities in different types of possible socio-economic scenarios in which participative forestry programmes will have to operate in future. Need for research in various important policy related areas for JFM programmes as well as areas of potential conflict are also highlighted.

संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध - कुछ आधारभूत विचारों का पुनरीक्षण

जितेन्द्र शर्मा

सारांश

प्रस्तुत अभिपत्र में उन पारिस्थितिकीय और सामाजिक उद्देश्यों की ओर ध्यान दिलाया गया है जिन्हें संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध कार्यक्रमों को क्रियान्वित करके प्राप्त किया जा सकता है। इसमें विभिन्न प्रकार के संभाव्य सामाजार्थिक परिदृश्यों में जिनमें भागीदारी वानिकी कार्यक्रमों को भविष्य में काम करना होगा, स्थानीय समुदायों की बदलती आवश्यकताओं और उनके प्रतिचारों की संभावनाओं को भी जांचने का प्रयास किया गया है। संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध के विविध महत्वपूर्ण नीति संबंधित क्षेत्रों में अनुसंधान की आवश्यकता तथा मत विभिन्नता के संभावित क्षेत्रों पर भी प्रकाश डाला गया है।

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