

## A DECADE OF JFM IN INDIA : LOOKING BACK FOR BETTER FORESIGHT

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### Introduction

The adoption of Joint Forest Management (JFM) as a strategy by 22 States and UTs comprising 78.7% of geographical area, its institutionalization through 36,000 Committees, and its acceptance by various stakeholders, whether they like it or not, within a decade, have resulted in a paradigm shift in forestry management in India. The forestry sector is all set to have a new face of decentralized people-oriented forestry with key players having new roles to perform. The proponents of JFM have gradually succeeded in bringing policy, attitudinal and structural changes in the long tradition and history of forestry in the country.

### The philosophy

India being a vibrant parliamentary democracy, has guaranteed people's supremacy in her Constitution, and any planning or policy has to be formulated on this base. The degree, extent and level of peoples' involvement however depend upon the readiness, willingness, competence and suitability of the communities. Although there can not be any debate that for effective common property resource management, people - especially the local communities and institutions - should be involved to the maximum; yet there are many issues to

address and settle before decisions are translated into action. Ideal conditions for a perfect result seldom exist and all pros and cons are to be evaluated.

### Basic Problems

One of the arguments put forward in favour of JFM by its proponents is that earlier efforts to curb degradation of forests had not yielded results because of insensitive, indifferent State machinery towards people, needs deeper scrutiny. It is a fact that forests have degraded much over a period of time but it was mainly because local communities continued to draw biomass much above carrying capacity, for their subsistence requirements irrespective of whether State governmental agencies accorded them usufructuary rights or not (Kumar and Kaul, 1997). A country that supports 16% of human and 14% of cattle population in 2.4% land area of the globe, whose economy is in the process of rebuilding not yet ready to provide basic needs to half of the population, is bound to put her natural resources under constant stress and exploitation. Forests have played vital role for almost one thirds of population to support their livelihood for ages, and due to lack of viable and affordable alternative they would continue to remain burdened in foreseeable future. Large scale diversion of forest land for agricultural and other non-

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forestry purposes between 1952 and 1980 numerous encroachments which got regularized and traditional practice of shifting cultivation were some other reasons for further depletion.

### Initial Ambiguities

The Government Resolution of 1990, which marks a watershed in the history of forest management, suffered from a few ambiguities; such as :

- (a) Areas selected for introducing JFM were to be forest lands only, not mentioning about other potentially reclaimable non-forest areas like cultivable wastes which could be afforested well through peoples involvement.
- (b) The guidelines envisaged preparation of Working Schemes for the sites but did not clarify how to make it compatible with existing Working Plans in case of differing prescriptions.
- (c) As per the guidelines, the areas to be selected should be free from claims (including rights, concessions) of any person; overlooking the reality that in the majority of the states people were enjoying such rights as individuals traditionally for long.
- (d) The sharing of usufructs was envisaged without mentioning about restructuring of existing legal framework. Due to these anomalies, the enormous variations in the type and extent of vegetation meant that the structure of JFM institutions could not be uniform across the country. While some kind of unifying framework does exist in these institutions, such

as the formation of a committee, the existence of rules, regulations and membership norms of committees of these institutions have taken on a bewildering variety of forms and functions across the nation (Agarwal and Sahgal, 1997).

### 73rd Constitutional Amendment

The enactment of 73rd Amendment in 1992 i.e. within two years of JFM guidelines was a development which should have been given more importance. The empowerment of Panchayats to prepare plans and implement schemes of economic development and social justice (section 243 G) in the matters listed in Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution which included watershed development (item 3), social forestry and farm forestry (item 6), fuel & fodder (item 12) and minor forest produce (item 7). Instead, parallel local institutions viz. Village Forest Management Committees were continued to be created under JFM without realizing that there might arise conflicts between the two once Panchayati Raj took proper shape and constituents were different for the two. The Panchayat Act, being superior statutory law, would nullify the weak subordinate legal provisions of JFM, if challenged.

### A New Approach

The main aim of JFM movement is to create a massive people movement in the development and protection of forests. For any movement, however, a driving force is needed. Also for movement to be smooth and targeted certain checks are essential. In our context, the driving force de facto is economic benefits and not environmental concerns or social causes as argued by many environmentalists. Forests can be managed

optimally only if rules of economics are given top considerations. Economic benefits do not mean revenue generation or production forestry. It means comprehensive macro-picture, its accounting, valuation. As the National Forestry Action Programme states "In order to fully and realistically recognize the value of forests it is necessary to take all the direct and indirect benefits of forests into account through a system of Environmental Economic account" (Anon., 1999). The JFM message will spread faster and deeper if the beneficiaries are explained in terms of monetary gains which they would have through participation. The extra availability of fuelwood, fodder, small timber, minor forest produce for them will contribute how much to their income and economic independence should be first put on record. Other issues will then easily be taken care of.

It is equally important to devise better legal tools and mechanism than what are available with JFM Committees today for quick dispute settlement, better enforcement of rules and terms of agreements etc. The much publicized and quoted Arabari model is flooded with litigations.

### Future Strategies

1. *Prioritize areas for JFM* : Areas having open degraded forests with scrub, high soil erosion incidents and moderate human activity should be given high priority. On the other hand reserve forests or good canopy forests should be left out.
2. *Basis of adoption* : JFM adoption should be on voluntary basis and not be made a forced programme. Most States are implementing JFM because of the conditionality imposed by external Agencies. The rigid target driven push will result in likely failure (Anon., 1999).
3. *Willingness of participants* : Willingness on part of both beneficiary as well as the State to join hands with open minds is also important. The parties have to reconcile to their new roles.
4. *Integration with other programmes* : JFM may be integrated in the Rural Development Programmes as already done in many States. Many States have made provision for the incorporation of the watershed approach to JFM with multisectoral integration and nodal implementation.
5. *Interface with other forestry programmes* : Joint Afforestation Programme (JAP) and Joint Protection Programme (JPP) could be made sub-programmes of JFM and run in maximum decentralized and democratized way. But, total Forest Management which includes technical and administrative aspects also, should run with not more than essentially required involvement of the people.
6. *Area demarcation* : Zoning may be done for various level of protection from no use to multiple use areas in full consultation with local communities and should take into account their own existing practices and belief.
7. *Determining shares* : Determine the precise sharing of benefits usufruits of the area and its resources with local communities.

8. *Devising alternatives* : Devise viable alternatives for local community activities which are demonstrably detrimental to conservation objectives.

### Conclusion

Joint Forest Management is a right

strategy for decentralized peoples oriented forestry management in India. It is also a process empowering people and strengthening democracy. However, the need of the hour is to analyze the ground realities and then take decision to make JFM programme a long term sustainable movement.

### SUMMARY

**Joint Forest Management (JFM)** is a strategy in the right direction for decentralised people-oriented forestry management in India. It is also a process for empowering the people and strengthening democracy. However, the need of the hour is to analyse the ground realities and then take a decision to make the JFM programme a long term sustainable movement. The basic problems should be reviewed and a new approach is to be made, putting economic parameters at the top of the agenda. A few strategies like categorising, zoning of areas, precise sharing of benefits, etc. need to be chalked out. JFM is not like a wide-spectrum antibiotic drug to cure many ills at a time. Rather, it is a symptom specific specialised medicine to be prescribed with due care and caution.

भारत में संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध का एक दशक – श्रेष्ठतर दूर – दृष्टि पाने के लिए पीछे मुड़कर देखना  
अजय कुमार  
सारांश

संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध भारतवर्ष में विकेन्द्रित जनोन्मुखी वानिकी प्रबन्ध करने की सही दिशा में अपनाई गई एक समर – नीति है। यह एक प्रक्रिया भी है जिसमें जनता को शक्तिशाली तथा जनतन्त्र को मजबूत बनाया जा रहा है। तथापि, समय की भाँग यही है कि जमीन की वास्तविकताओं का विश्लेषण करने के बाद ही संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध को लम्बे समय तक टिक सकने वाला आन्दोलत बनाने कि लिए निर्णय लिया जाए। आधारभूत समस्याओं की समीक्षा की जानी चाहिए और आर्थिक परिमापों को कार्य सूची के शिखर पर रखकर एक नई दृष्टि इस दिशा में अपनाई जानी चाहिए। कुछ समरनीतियाँ जैसे श्रेणीकरण, क्षेत्रों का विभाजन, लाभों का सही – सही बंटवारा आदि के तय किया जाना चाहिए। संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध कोई बड़े वर्णपट वाली प्रति जैविक औषधि नहीं है जिससे एक ही समय अनेक बीमारियों को ठीक किया जा सके। बल्कि यह एक लक्षण विशिष्ट विशेषीकृत औषधि है जिसे बहुत सावधानी और सोच – विचार करते हुए निर्धारित किया जाना चाहिए।

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