

IS HANDING OVER FORESTS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES A SOLUTION TO DEFORESTATION? - EXPERIENCE IN ANDHRA PRADESH - (INDIA)

S.D. MUKHERJEE*

*"People's participation is based on the democratic conviction
that there are Extraordinary Possibilities in Ordinary People"*

- Late Dr. D. Urvali, F.A.O.

Introduction

The National Forest Policy (NFP), 1988 marks a new era in the management of State forests as it is for the first time when rights of the people, living in and around the forests, were recognised as an essential requirement in the governance of forests. It was also considered necessary for the first time to make local communities as partner of Forest Department (FD) in the protection and development of forests. Although examples of communities protecting the forest existed even before the new Forest Policy was announced, but such instances were few and far apart. In new NFP demand of the people was recognised as the first charge on the forest produce, depending on the carrying capacity of the forest on sustained yield basis. Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests guidelines of 1st June 1990 set this Forest Policy into motion. Till now 15 State Governments have passed official resolutions to involve the people in the protection and development of degraded forests, while allowing them to enjoy the usufruct. Citizens of this country, who were concerned with rapid degradation of the forest, hailed this decision. Number of Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) have

come to the forefront to support the FD in this new arrangement and to form a bridge between the people and FD. World Bank and other donor agencies have made it a point to put a condition, to provided for people's participation or Joint Forest Management (JFM), while sanctioning loans/grants for forest development. JFM has given a human face to forest management.

In the State of Andhra Pradesh, the first Government Order on JFM was issued on 28.8.92. This was modified on 11.11.93, giving more decision making power to the people and reducing the unilateral powers of the forest officers to de-recognise protection committee formed by the people or to alter the micro plan. The Government Order dt 11.11.93, provides to form Vana Samarakshana Samithi (VSS) by taking a cluster of villages, a village or village hamlet, situated on the fringes of forest. VSS should have at least 50% of the households as members. Two members from each household are to be enrolled, out of them one must be a woman. This is to ensure that women are not excluded, who are the biggest user of forest and maximum sufferers due to degradation of forests. The Managing Committee, consisting of 10 to 15 members,

* Prl. Chief Conservator of Forests, Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad.

is elected by the VSS general body, out of which 1/3rd representation of women is compulsory. Membership to S.C. and S.T. households is compulsory so that by no means they are left out from the benefits of the forests. A micro plan is prepared in consultation with the people, who decide the type of treatment to be given to the degraded forests and identify the species to be planted. Major attention is paid to natural regeneration through strict control on fire, grazing, hacking and smuggling with the help of VSS. Soil conservation forms essential component of the treatment. VSS members are given 100% rights to collect Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP). They are entitled to collect fallen twigs, dry firewood grass, thorny fencing material, fruits, flowers etc. VSS members are entitled to small timber obtained through silvicultural treatment from the beginning itself to meet their immediate requirement. Committees have been formed at the State level, District level and Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) level to review the progress of JFM quarterly and provide interdepartmental linkages to ensure overall development of the villages formed into VSS. For operationalising the development of forests, a joint account is opened between the VSS President, elected by the Managing Committee, and local Section Officer of the FD. Amount required to carry out the operations, as per the approved micro plan and estimate of work, is deposited into joint account. A copy of the estimate is supplied to the Managing Committee who are supposed to get the work done through the VSS members, maintain muster roll for each work and pay to the people who have worked. The funds are drawn periodically (weekly) and paid. NGOs, wherever available, are associated to oversee all the functions of the VSS, including preparation of micro plan,

payment to the people and attend meetings at ITDA/District/State levels to air their views for improving the joint working for the betterment of forest and maximum benefit to the people.

JFM in AP Forestry Project

In a normal situation the JFM programme in Andhra Pradesh would have followed the same pattern as in all other States. However, the situation got totally changed with the launch of World Bank assisted AP Forestry Project (APFP) in 1994. The Project agreement was signed on 9.3.94 and it was made operative from 29.7.94 for a period of six years (upto March 2000) with an outlay of US \$ 89 million (Rs. 353.65 crores). The major component of the APFP is JFM. The Staff Appraisal Report (SAR) of the APFP made it clear that rehabilitation of degraded forest should be given highest importance through people's participation. They were convinced that degradation of forests in Andhra Pradesh, covering 60% of the recorded forest area, is mainly because the FD with its own effort could not protect the forests and stop the process of degradation. Therefore, any development initiative by the Department alone would meet the same fate as in the past unless the people are involved who have a stake in the forest. Forest in tribal area, when 65% of forest area is located, was given special attention by involving ITDA, whose mandate is tribal development, in JFM activity. It was considered necessary to take care of the poor tribals dependent on forest through a Tribal Development Plan (TDP) that would support/supplement the ongoing plan of the Tribal Welfare Department, implemented through ITDA. TDP is supposed to support the Tribals to ensure that there is no adverse impact of JFM scheme, by taking up suitable programme

for the affected tribal families that would ensure their sustenance till forest regenerates to provide enough income. APFP also stressed large scale training programme for the officers and staff of FD, other Departments, NGOs and villagers who are to be associated with JFM programme. Thus APFP brought a new thrust and urgency in implementing JFM in Andhra Pradesh.

Initiative of Government in JFM

In the year 1995-96 there was dramatic improvement because of the interest shown by the Govt. of A.P., with the support of Chief Secretary (C.S.) and Prl. Secretary (Forests) of Andhra Pradesh. It was decided in a meeting chaired by the C.S. on 30.3.95 that JFM should be extended beyond the scope of A.P. Forestry Project to cover the entire degraded forest of Andhra Pradesh. All the District Collectors were instructed to actively associate in JFM programme, provide integrated approach for village development along with JFM and report the progress to Government. Director of Tribal Welfare was specifically told to take up JFM in all the Tribal villages, located on the fringes of the forests, as Tribals have maximum dependence on forest and improvement in forest will be to their best advantage. All the DFOs and Project Officers in ITDAs were told to form VSS, conduct Participatory Resource Appraisal (PRA) in the VSS and implement TDP to ensure active participation of the Tribals in JFM. This was a total departure from the past, when tribal Welfare and FD could never work in good partnership. The introduction of JFM in tribal area brought another important development to control the encroachment problem in forest areas. In the year 1987 Government had issued instructions to survey the pre-1980

encroachments in Reserved Forests for regularisation, in favour of local tribals. A similar order was issued in 1968 when pre-1964 encroachments in forests were regularised. It had resulted in more encroachments rather than solving the problem, as tribals believed the future encroachments would also get regularised. Although order for regularisation of pre-1980 encroachment was issued in 1987, it could not be implemented because of the difficulty in determining the pre-1980 encroachments and fixing the boundary of encroached land in RF. Moreover, such regularisation attracted the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, where G.O.I. permission is necessary for any regulation after 1980. Introduction of JFM changed the Government thinking and a memo was issued on 3.11.95 to tackle encroachment problem in Reserved Forest by forming VSS. On the basis of Govt. memo Prl. CCF A.P., Hyderabad issued clear guidelines indicating that while there would be no eviction of tribals further encroachment would be stopped with the help of local tribals. Local tribals would be persuaded to rehabilitate the degraded forests, stop further encroachment and taste the benefit from JFM which may encourage afforestation of encroached lands. Because of Govt. decision about 5000 hectares of encroachments in RF made by non-locals have been evicted by local tribals who have formed VSS and such forest lands have been planted. Because of Govt. initiative JFM has developed firm root in Andhra Pradesh and developed a cordial relation has taken among forest dwellers, F.D. and ITDA.

JFM Initiative of Chief Minister

In October 1995 Honourable Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh took a review

of the state of forests. When it came to his notice that out of 64 lakh ha of recorded forest area in AP only 25 lakh ha is having good forest (+.4 density, as per Forest Survey of India Report 1993) and remaining is degraded (Anon., 1993), he decided to take up a massive programme to afforest the degraded forest to provide gainful employment to the rural youth, women and poor masses. In the initial stage Government thought of forming small group of 10 members (6 youth and 4 landless) and to allot them degraded forests land for afforestation, including raising of horticultural plantations. This raised public alarm. Series of reports started appearing in the press against the Govt. intention of giving away the forest land. However, when the provision of Forest Conservation Act, GOI guidelines on JFM and existing G.O. on JFM were brought to the notice of the CM, Government clarified that the intention behind the massive programme is to provide maximum possible benefit to the people while afforesting the degraded forests through JFM as per the existing GO. It was further clarified that there is no intention to distribute land or go against the Forest Conservation Act or JFM guidelines of GOI. The Chief Minister convened a meeting of the District Collectors and Divisional Forest Officers on 29.1.96. JFM was the first agenda item for discussion, showing the importance attached to this programme. District Collectors were told to integrate various Rural Development Programmes with JFM and take up rehabilitation of 4 lakh ha of degraded forests through VSS during 1996-97 and 14 lakh ha in 3 years period. The programme was renamed as Vana Samarakshana Udayamam (Forest Protection Movement). New JFM initiative commenced with the inauguration of Chintalpudi VSS in West Godavari district by CM on 11.2.1996. Simultaneously all the

legislators inaugurated VSS in their respective constituencies. For the guidance of the District Collectors, detailed guidelines were issued in Government Memo no: 315/FOR II, dt. 9.2.96. To counter the adverse criticism in the newspapers regarding land distribution and raising horticulture crop, Government issued clarification that no agriculture crops would be allowed in forest land, no land shall be allowed to any individual beneficiary and no villager would be eligible to the usufruct unless he is active participant in VSS. FD have identified about 8,200 villages located on the fringes of the forest for JFM programme. In a high level meeting held on 4.5.1996, the Chief Minister stressed the need to speed up the rehabilitation of degraded forests. In order to pool enough resources participation of wood based industries and Bankers is being sought apart from augmenting Govt. resources for this massive JFM programme. Even if enough resources are not available to take up plantation programme in all the VSS, the participation of the people itself is bound to improve the protection and induce natural regeneration.

Impact of JFM on Forest Protection

Although it is too early to give an accurate assessment of the impact of JFM in the protection and development of forests but certain trend can be clearly seen. Before the commencement of JFM, FD was facing the twin problem of smuggling and encroachment. An assessment made by National Remote Sensing Agency, Hyderabad, on a pilot basis on two map sheets (56 I/11 or 56 I/12) in Adilabad District, showed the following change in forest cover (Table 1).

Thus 45% of the forest area was lost in a period of 10 years. Loss of forests was

Table 1
Change in forest cover in Adilabad District

Type of Forest	Area (km ²)		Change (%)
	1983	1993	
Close Forest (+0.4 density)	282.26	153.992	(-)44.38
Open Forest (>0.1 density)	180.23	21.819	(-)87.76
Degraded Forest (0.1 to 0.4 density)	227.84	198.835	(-)12.70
Total	690.33	377.646	(-)45.29

mainly due to encroachment for cultivation. Another study made by a committee on forest protection showed that in the five Circles of Andhra Pradesh (out of 10 Circles) destruction worth Rs. 30.32 crores occurred in period between 1991-92 to 1993-94. In Adilabad Division out of 1,83,035 ha of recorded forest more than 50% was encroached. Contrary to this alarming trend of forest destruction, before taking up JFM, there is no report of further encroachment in Reserved Forests in the areas allotted to VSS. On the other hand some VSS have successfully evicted the encroachers from RF and planted the area.

As regards the smuggling of forest produce, it has come down drastically due to formation of VSS. There are numerous examples where VSS members have apprehended the smugglers, caught the illicit material and assisted the FD in collecting fine. For example Gundala VSS of Bellampalli Division Adilabad District have caught cases worth Rs. 80,000/- and handed over to FD. The highest collection of fine worth Rs. 2.00 lakhs done in Lawal VSS in Warangal North Division. Many of the VSS have made their own arrangements for regular patrolling. Generally two systems have been developed for protection - (i) In some of the VSS, with homogeneous group, VSS members go for patrolling by turn duty. A Bamboo Staff is placed before the house of the VSS members indicating their turn for the next day. Some of the VSS are

levying fine on those who do not attend their assigned role. (ii) In other VSS a nominal amount (Rs. 5 to 10) is collected from each household on monthly basis. With this money 2-3 watchers are appointed. The forest protection in VSS areas has improved drastically.

Improvement in Forest

It is a common complaint from foresters that low investment in forestry has been the major cause of poor productivity from the forest. However, JFM has proved that strict protection against- smuggling, indiscriminate fellings, fire grazing, mining, poaching, etc. which does not need any major investment - is good enough to regenerate the degraded forests and improve productivity. The maximum advantage is witnessed in the inducement of natural regeneration. Degraded forests with viable root-stocks have responded very favourably to tending and strict protection. The improvement is perceptible where degraded Teak forests have been coppiced. New coppice shoots are growing like plantation. In Rajamundry Circle VSS have been formed in the Teak Plantation area that was prone to heavy smuggling. The high cuts left by the smugglers were cut back flush to the ground. The Teak billets that were so obtained after coppicing were sold in auction and given to VSS. This simple treatment has given income ranging from Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 75,000 to each VSS. In all about 10

VSS have benefited with cumulative share of Rs. 5 lakhs. After the coppicing new shoots are developing fast, providing full stocking, with no further destruction. Natural Teak forests coppiced in Adilabad District, Nirmal Division, in March 1995 have already attained height of 2 m and above. In Nizamabad Division the protection by the people has given tremendous improvement to the once degraded forests. The open forest is transformed into dense coppice shoots. The coppicing to viable root stock is not only improving the forest but it is also providing sufficient firewood to the people to meet their yearly requirement. The fear in some quarters that if forest is closed it would create problem for the people to meet their legitimate and essential needs is found to be wrong. Scientific management of forests provides more intermediate yield than mismanaged forests. Another important observation has been that

wherever plantations have been raised with the participation of the people the survival rate is higher compared to the success achieved in departmental plantations. The World Bank supervision mission of October 1995 and January 1997 have assessed the survival rate at 80%. With better planning and systematic advance preparation of land, including better quality planting material, the survival is expected to go up further with the participation of the people.

The other major gain has been the increase in the grass yield in almost all VSS. In Anantapur District, which is chronically drought prone district and where fodder is always a scarce commodity, VSS members are taking keen interest in JFM because of the increase in grass yield. Whereas in the past most of the grass used to get burnt in summer season, the protection provided by the people have resulted in good yield of

Chengicherla shows the way

Chengicherla village is located at a distance of 20 km from Hyderabad city in Chengicherla forest block. Total forest area is 289.65 ha. Elders in the village recall the luxuriant forest that had existed in their childhood with species like *Madhuca latifolia*, *Butea monosperma*, *Tectona grandis*, *Alnus* etc. Spotted deer, barking deer, wild boar, rabbits used to roam freely. Expansion of the city, increase in population and unregulated removals had converted these forests into thorny scrub jungle. Till the year 1993, FD was selling the grass by auction for about Rs. 4000. During 1993-94 this village was selected to form VSS with the active involvement of an NGO (Smt. Subbalakshmi from Venkataramaiah Foundation). Ladies of Chengicherla came forward to protect the forest and develop it. VSS was formed on 10.2.94. Since then a sea change has occurred. There is complete protection from illicit fellings, fire and grazing. Soil conservation work and gap planting was done in last 2 years. The immediate advantage was increase in the yield of grass, which was totally given to the VSS. During 1994-95 the income from grass rose to Rs 32,000. During 1995-96 grass alone gave Rs. 50,000. Villagers earned additionally Rs 62,000 during 1994-95 and Rs. 1,05,000 during 1995-96 by taking up improvement works in the forests. Seeing the success of Chengicherla VSS, now there are 30 VSS in the Ranga Reddy District. Saplings planted during 1994-95 have already grown more than 3 m tall with about 95% survival. People and FD officials have developed friendly relationship and are helping each other.

grass which VSS members are cutting and carrying for stall feeding. Such instances are seen in most of the dry areas having fodder scarcity.

NGOs Participation

NGOs participation was almost absent when FD took up the programme initially. In the past FD method of working was such that it never felt the necessity to involve NGOs. In JFM Programme it was strongly felt to have NGOs who can act as interface between FD and VSS. They could also be associated in the formation of VSS, preparation of micro plan and ensuring transparency in all transaction. In the beginning NGOs had lot of apprehensions to work with FD staff. They had doubt and suspicion in the functioning of FD. Similarly FD staff did not appreciate the role of NGOs. NGOs had difficulty in communicating with FD officers and staff, especially at the grass root level. This resulted in poor participation of NGOs in JFM programme. However, a perceptible change has come in the last two years. Now as many as 150 NGOs are working closely with the FD in promoting JFM. Although the perception of NGOs about functioning of VSS and FD varies from district to district but one point is accepted by all that there is vast improvement in relation between FD and NGOs. Now the officers are open and willing to share their thoughts with the people and NGOs. However, NGOs still feel while the officers at senior level are open and frank, the lower functionaries are not yet very communicative and transparent. FD is trying to rectify this situation by regular interaction and training at all levels. On 29th and 30th Jan. 1996, a workshop was held with NGOs coming from the entire State. 27 NGOs participated in the discussion. While majority of the NGOs found a positive approach of the FD as

compared to past but some of them expressed that some more orientation is needed to change the mind set of the subordinate staff. They also felt more transparency is needed for the success of JFM. The suggestion of the NGOs have been welcomed and action has been initiated to provide opportunity to NGOs for frequent meetings with the field officers, where they can discuss the issues that would bring about better participation of the people. Efforts are also on to have a net-working of NGOs at District level and State level. Meeting was held with all the Conservators of Forests at Hyderabad on 23.2.1996 in order to find a suitable mechanism to have greater involvement of NGOs and maintain required transparency for the success of JFM. Unfortunately there is no strong NGO group available at State HQ (Hyderabad) who can take this responsibility. Moreover in major forested Districts like Adilabad, Karimnagar, Warangal, and Khammam very few NGOs are working for JFM programme. Efforts are being made to promote local NGOs who can sustain the JFM movement that is picking up. A workshop was held on 8th and 9th April 1996 where about 150 NGOs participated and deliberated on bringing a qualitative change in the people's participation for the success of JFM. The workshop was addressed by Prl. Secretary, Govt. of A.P., Additional Inspector General of Forests GOI and Prl. Chief Conservator of Forests A.P., Hyderabad. This type of continuous interaction between the FD and NGOs has created a very favourable situation in which NGOs are happily working with the people to promote JFM. On 03-2-1997 World Bank Mid Term Review (MTR) Mission held meeting with the NGOs and they were very much satisfied to see the change towards a healthy co-operation between NGOs and FD in promoting JFM. The FD is now trying to develop grass root level NGOs who live near the VSS and can

give continuous support.

Current Status

There is a dramatic transformation in the situation as compared to the period before JFM commenced. The villagers against whom foresters used to book cases for illicit fellings and encroachments are now protecting the forest and regenerating the degraded forests. The growth of VSS, area regenerated and protected by the people is given in Table 2.

Whereas in the initial years (1994-95 and 1995-96) FD had to go to the villages to motivate the people to form VSS, it is now almost a reverse trend. After seeing the advantage of JFM programme to VSS, the adjoining villagers are demanding the formation of VSS in their villages. They are attracted for twin reason - (i) getting employment in forestry operation close to the village, and (ii) village development is taking place because of the involvement of district administration.

MTR of APFP was conducted by World Bank from 23-1-1997 to 5-2-1997. A ten member team toured the entire State for a week to see the participation of the people in JFM programme. According to Dr. Satish, Sociologist of World Bank team the enthusiasm and participation of the VSS in JFM programme is unparalleled. There is also lot of transparency in the working.

Bengal, which is a good coppicer and responds to protection, Andhra Pradesh has Teak (*Tectona grandis*). Large extent of degraded forests in Telangana Region, where maximum degradation had occurred, contains Teak forests that have been subjected to annual hacking. Similarly, the bamboo bearing forests had been subjected to repeated cutting and browsing. The protection provided by the people and silvicultural treatment given to those degraded forests have resulted in the growth of new shoots which are catching the imagination of the people. It is a matter of another 3 to 4 years when the degraded forests in thousands of hectares would be changed into dense forest and provide sizable income to the VSS. Apart from the significant growth in Teak and Bamboo forests, the status of natural regeneration has improved in almost all forest under the control of the VSS. Hardwood species like *Lagerstroemia parviflora*, *Anogeissus latifolia*, *Terminalia tomentosa*, *Pterocarpus santalinus* etc., are showing equally vigorous growth. The trees yielding Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) - like Gum from *Sterculia urens*, fruits and seeds of *Madhuca latifolia*, fruits of *Buchnanania lanzan*, *Embllica officinalis*, *Terminalia*, *Zizyphus* etc. have started regenerating naturally. Earlier people used to cut the branches or fell the trees for collection of NTFP, which is now totally stopped. Yields of NTFP have gone up from the existing trees as the foliage is developing undisturbed.

Like Sal (*Shorea robusta*) in West

The Govt. of Andhra Pradesh have

Table 2

Growth of VSS, area regenerated and area protected

Year	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97	Total
No. of VSS formed	56	204	2090	2350
Area regenerated (ha)	2285	11505	100150	113940
Area protected (ha)	28000	81314	416545	595359

revised the Order on sharing the forest produce between the VSS and the Govt. Earlier G.O. had given 100% NTFP but 50% yield from Timber (including bamboo) to VSS. The revised order gives 100% NTFP and Timber to VSS with a rider that at least 50% of the income shall be ploughed back to improve the forests. This is a very significant development that would make the VSS self sufficient in managing their forests. We need to have outside funding only for the first rotation.

The whole monetary transaction is being done in an absolute transparent manner. Firstly a copy of the estimated expenditure on various works to be done in VSS, as planned jointly in the micro plan, is given to VSS. The amount required for the works is kept in the bank under a joint account between the VSS President and the Forester who acts as Secretary. The amount is drawn through joint signature. VSS Managing Committee distributes the wages based on muster roll maintained for the workers. Import of labour is not permitted. Therefore quantum of work is planned based on the capacity of the VSS members. Maximum importance is given to natural regeneration and soil conservation works. Fodder plots have been developed to inculcate the habit of cut and carry the fodder rather than allowing the animals to graze. Protection against fire and grazing has induced dense grass which are freely taken even by the adjoining villagers. Recently Forest Department has received request from Kerala Dairy Development Co-operative Society to explore the possibility of supplying fodder grass from VSS areas.

The result of peoples participation has cut down the smuggling activity to the minimum possible. VSS members keep vigil

round the clock on turn basis voluntarily. If they catch the smuggler with forest produce, 25% of the compounding fees is paid to the VSS as per Govt. Order. The motivation is of the highest order in the tribal belt. They feel extremely happy with this programme that has given back the forest that their fathers cherished.

In addition to forest development, FD is helping in village development, education, health, savings etc. by bringing the other Govt. Departments at the district level forestry committee meeting that is chaired by District Collector and participated by all district officers, VSS President and NGOs. Participation of women in the programme has markedly improved. Each VSS was supplied with smokeless chullahs that has saved 50% of the time of the women in collection of firewood. The fuelwood consumption has come down by at least 50%. The women feel happy as work is available close to villages and family can live together. Habit of saving through self-help group has started which is being supported by Govt. agencies by giving matching grant. The social dimension of the JFM programme is much more interesting than the development of forests.

The only matter of concern is the interference of the unsocial elements (Naxalites) in promoting JFM in some interior areas. As long as Govt. Departments were not bothering to develop these remote forest fringe villages, the Naxalites were acting as their protectors. People were allowed to cut forest and use the land for cultivation. In turn villagers were obliged to give food and shelter to these groups. However, with the promotion of JFM people are happy with the Govt. There is assured employment and hope for better future. This change in the attitude of the people

towards Govt. has reduced their dependence on the Naxalites. The Naxalites are not happy with this development. There are number of instances where Naxalites have forced the VSS chairperson to resign. Naxalites are asking the villagers to stop JFM programme. VSS members are being warned of dire consequences if they go against the wishes of Naxalites. Similarly, Naxalites have been threatening the FD staff. Recently DFO, Mancheri of Adilabad District (Shri P.K. Jha, IFS) was brutally beaten by Naxalites and ultimately VSS members saved his life. The Jeep of one Forest Range Officer in Karimnagar (East) Divn. was burnt and he was told not to come to VSS. Naxalites are afraid to lose their control on the people because of JFM programme. However, there are several instances where VSS members have successfully convinced the Naxalites about the usefulness of the programme and commenced the work in JFM area that was stopped. FD is not forcing the issue and giving time for the people to choose the future course by themselves. It looks the stoppage of work by Naxalites can not be sustained. It is hoped that JFM will succeed even in such Naxalite infested forests.

Future Directions

The way JFM programme is catching up and given the extent of degraded forest land in the State, the funding of future VSS is a major issue. Today the villagers are happy as there is enough work near their door step to earn Rs. 40-50 each day from different forestry operations. Until the forests start paying back, this flow of fund has to be maintained to ensure the continuous participation of the poor people.

Keeping this in view a dialogue has been started with the bankers to fund the JFM programme. Recently a joint team

from Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Rome and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) Bombay visited Andhra Pradesh to study the possibility of bankable project and examine the legal frame of VSS. The team members visited some VSS and were highly impressed with the natural growth of forest and quality of participation. A meeting was held with the nationalised banks who have indicated their willingness to participate. However, since the forest land is under the control of the Govt., Banks are demanding Government guarantee against the bank assistance. The matter is still in the discussion stage but this seems to be a viable solution to tie up the funds requirement. The other approach of funding is being attempted to tap the resources from Rural Development Programme. The Govt. of India have planned a massive investment of Rs. 600 million for Rural Development in the IXth Plan period commencing from 1-4-1997. Under this there is Employment Assurance Scheme to provide 100 days of employment annually to the rural poor. It is proposed to tap this source of funding for JFM programme in collaboration with Rural Development Department.

It is estimated that after about 10 years the first thinning itself may give a minimum of Rs. 1 lakh per hectare from the Teak areas. Bamboo forests are estimated to give about Rs. 10,000 per hectare from the sixth year on regular basis. Yield of NTFP, including grass is going to be substantially higher in years to come. The protection, regeneration and development of forests is expected to improve the productivity of agriculture crop due to soil and moisture conservation. Therefore, once initial funding is assured the future seems to be bright. As stated above, it is not only the improvement of forests that is important. The social dimension of uniting the people

and working together has immense potential. The villagers are now able to bargain for their rights that were earlier denied to them. Forest fringe villages are generally located in remote areas with poor communication. Because of remoteness these villages remained out of the main stream. Now with the formation VSS all developmental departmental officers, including the district collectors, visits have increased. This is bound to improve the general condition of the people and consequently less dependence on forests.

Lesson for other countries

For the success of the community participation in forest development the most important factor is the commitment of the Government through appropriate orders. The interest and involvement of the highest executive in the programme is a must. Regular interaction with the people, training programmes, seminars, workshops, visits to successful VSS, involvement of Non-Governmental Organisations, transparency are some of the essential ingredients for the success of the programme. Another major factor is the mind set of the people working in FD. The major hurdle faced in Andhra Pradesh was to change the habit of its employees from doing everything departmentally to involve the people as equal partner. Once forest officers start believing the people and are mentally prepared to help the poor half the battle is won. However, for this change of mind-set some dedicated officers at the helm of affairs must be available. The next important factor is continuity. It has been the experience in Andhra Pradesh that when a particular officer, who had been the motivating force, gets shifted and the new incumbent does not take interest, the programme fails. It is very difficult to revive community

participation again as once the credibility is lost it is difficult to bring back the conviction.

The best results have been obtained in villages which are homogeneous (same caste) compact (less than 100 families) and poor. The maximum problems are faced to start the programme. Once a few cases of success are visible, the future expansion does not pose a major problem provided other factors - such as funds, manpower with the Department, NGOs etc. - are constant. Therefore, it is better to have conscious selection of the villages in the beginning and make the programme successful. Politics and group rivalry must be kept away by giving opportunity of participation to all the families in the village. Generally the poorest of the poor and women avoid participation in the discussion and planning exercise. At best they come as wage labourer. A conscious effort is required to bring these neglected sections into the central stage. In the beginning separate meetings are required to be conducted for these groups keeping their convenience into view. Once they feel comfortable, start believing that their views would be heard and treated as equal partner in the whole programme, one can be assured of the success.

The last but most important issue is of equity. There should be fool-proof arrangement to see that all sections of the people are treated equally and paid at the same norm. Poor and backward people always suspect that rich and forward caste people will not allow equal distribution. Therefore, rules of distributing the gains from the programme must be formed to ensure the equity. The presence of the Govt. organisation is necessary to oversee this arrangement.

Conclusion

The experience in State of Andhra Pradesh, has shown that deforestation can not be stopped by the FD alone. The experience has also shown communities of their own can not do much. It is the combined effort of community and Govt. that seems to be the best solution under the prevailing circumstances where large section of the people are illiterate and poor, who are unequal to the dominant group. The

intervention of the Govt. is needed to ensure equity, transparency and to strengthen the voice of the poor. Similarly, participation of the people is absolutely necessary to keep constant vigil against all who indulge in the degradation of forests. NGOs play a very vital role in bridging the gap between the bureaucracy and the people. VSS should not be viewed only to develop the degraded forests but as an instrument for over all development of the village resources and its people.

SUMMARY

The deforestation can not be stopped without the joint efforts of community and Forest Department. Therefore the people should be motivated and involved for the better management of the forests. The success of Joint Forest Management in Andhra Pradesh has been described in detail.

क्या वनों को स्थानीय समुदायों को सौंप देना ही निर्वनीकरण रोकने का उपाय है ?

आंध्र प्रदेश, भारत से प्राप्त हुआ अनुभव

एस०डी० मुखर्जी

सारांश

निर्वनीकरण को समुदाय और वन विभाग दोनों के मिलेजुले प्रयत्नों के बिना रोका नहीं जा सकता। इसलिए जनता को प्रेरित करके वनों के श्रेष्ठतर प्रबन्ध में सम्मिलित किया जाना चाहिए। आंध्र प्रदेश में संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध कराने पर मिली सफलता का यहां विस्तार से वर्णन किया गया है।

Reference

Anon. (1993). *The State of Forest Report*, Forest Survey of India, Dehra Dun.