

JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT : EMERGING ISSUES

V.K. BAHUGUNA*

Introduction

The management of natural resources is posing great challenges to the policy makers, planners and resource managers in most of the resource-scarce nations of the world. In developing countries, the problem is more acute as the interests of a major population of poor and the growing economy's requirements are difficult to meet without fierce conflicts for the use and control of the shrinking resources. There has always been a competition between national needs and the local use of forest resources in India during the last few decades. In India, the phenomenon of population growth and lopsided approach to development dominated by peoples psychology of giving primacy to short term gains and near total disregard for the sustainability of resources had resulted in faster depletion of resources leading to natural calamities in the form of floods, landslides, soil loss and acute shortage of water. Forest lands in India constitute 23% of the geographic area and are considered as life support base for a vast majority of India's 950 million population of which around 70% lives in rural area. Notwithstanding, the token increase in the forest cover as reported by the Forest Survey of India in its report of 1995 (Anon., 1995) the pressure of demands on forests is ever increasing, threatening the stability of Indian society. The Govt. of India in pursuance to 1988 Forest Policy, initiated the process of involving local people in the

management of Govt. controlled forests by launching a programme of participatory forest management better known as Joint Forest Management (JFM).

The fundamentals of JFM approach

The success of JFM experiments in different parts of the country (especially in West Bengal, Orissa and Haryana) led the Govt. of India to adopt a resolution in June 1990. The resolution gave official sanction to these new experiments in the forest management which started with Arabari experiment in West Bengal in early seventies. Since then various State Govts. have issued notifications making explicit provisions in sharing the final and intermediary products available from forest varying from 25 to 50% depending on local conditions. In the process of resource management, the concept of Joint Forest Management is an intervention to evolve organised and collective thinking on the issues of forest management where all the ingredients of a sound management system i.e. scientific, professional options, social and anthropological dimensions and economic principles are synergised for drawing maximum benefits for the society keeping the sustenance of the resources in mind. It must be remembered that the resources to be managed are limited and claim over the resources are varied, no single solution or a particular practice of this management or control can satisfy the needs of all. The philosophy for JFM in

* Asstt. Director General, ICFRE, Dehra Dun (U.P.)

essence aims at involving the people in resource generation activities through motivation, active involvement in the process of management and sharing of benefits through adequate institutional arrangements. The conversion of a hostile population living in the fringes of forests areas into friends and ultimately into resource managers and resource users is the fundamental underlying objective of the JFM approach. These aspects have been a part of the Indian cultural ethos since ages but the process got diluted due to a series of changes in the pattern of administration of the country, resource use and control and ultimately degradation of resources due to mismanagement and over exploitation.

Conflicts in approach of JFM and dichotomy of options

The experiments being experienced being today on JFM in West Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Haryana, Tripura etc. reflect the need of developing and popularising the concept through refined and planned actions. But there are serious differences in approach between different groups, engaged in JFM activities on the nature of the programme. Some segments of society feel that JFM is an alternative to the scientific management practices. Foresters on the contrary in today's perspective would like to develop JFM as refined process of resource generation complementing the scientific management practices for realising the twin objectives of ecological security and meeting the resource needs of the increasing population.

However, unless institutional arrangements are made the fate of common

property resources can be well imagined. This is best exemplified by the poor regeneration in the forests of the country. That inspite of a well knit and qualified professional forest service with all the authority at its command, the dictum of scientific forestry could not be practiced smoothly and successfully over the years. The management of a vast chunk of our forests is posing a problem due to over use and resultant conflicts leading to failures in establishment of seedlings a regenerated naturally or planted.

The experience in the forestry sector for the past few years on this issue is such that JFM means different things to different people and various groups are sometime working in opposite directions. Each group has its own hidden agenda and hiatus between the foresters, administrators, NGOs and social scientists is widening as each group gives more importance to its own ideas and short term interests ignoring the vital points essential for success of the programme. The international funding agencies have their priorities and in the process on several occasions side with powerful lobbies rather than objectively supporting the programme. It has been observed that many NGOs engaged in this field are more concerned to get funds to develop their own organisational infrastructure rather than concentrating on networking their programme with other agencies in order to come up with balanced solutions. Similar doubts have been voiced about various other bodies interfacing JFM, be they politicians, administrators, manager etc. who are raising trifling issues. Nobody is concerned for addressing the key problem issues, for sustaining the productivity of the forests which is going down rapidly and without which JFM would be a pipedream or at best remain a romantic illusion.

How do we tackle the question of sustainability of unrecorded removals of forest products from the forest areas is not in the agenda of many groups. In Mandla and Sagar Districts in Madhya Pradesh; Sundergarh, Koraput and Ganjam Districts in Orissa and Sabarkantha District in Gujarat, a few villagers were surveyed by the author for forest dependency in 1992. The study revealed that on an average a family depends upon forests for their total income to the tune from 48% to 65%. What are the technical, administrative and social actions needed for sustaining such removals? Answers to these questions should be found for making JFM approach succeed.

Synergy of action is essential

The success of JFM programme depends upon the synergic action of political, social and anthropological dimensions, economic, administrative and other factors.

The primary thing that needs to be done is to evolve consensus on basic issues in conservation of soil water and forest resources and prioritise a planned action programme for the success. Another factor required to be dealt with is synchronising the different perceptions and to develop basic understanding of the concept in the interest of people and the resource stability. In highly polarised societies the grass root level political workers should be trained and motivated to act jointly for improving the base of the life supporting resources. All intellectuals and voluntary bodies must understand and recognise the fact that resources like water bodies and soil, are under tremendous pressure and only way to recuperate them is to exercise restraint in their use. The forest resources which are vital for the stability of these resources

needs the inputs of science in as much as the inputs of anthropology. Without increasing the regenerating capability of these resources no worthwhile progress can be made in transforming the society. Similarly, by ignoring the social issues and needs of local people, the scientific forest management would remain a distant dream for the foresters. It is a fact that for success of *JFM durable and mutually productive* relationships will have to be developed between the foresters and communities managing the forests. For ensuring this, the issues of legal and social dimensions must be solved simultaneously but cautiously, after observing the success for sufficiently long time and after ensuring cohesiveness in thinking and actions among the members of the committees. A certain degree of hardship must be accepted by the society in sacrificing the short term gains for the long term gains so that the future generations can live a decent life on the planet earth. Already experts have suggested that population if grows with its present trend is likely to double by 2025 A.D. It is a bewildering reality that our basic life supporting resource would be so scarce that society would be engulfed in social strife unless, we take steps to tackle the problem of population rise and resultant poverty and social equity and environmental conservation. In the context of present generation's predicament on forest conservation, it would be worthwhile to quote Sir Dietrich Brandis (the father of Indian Forestry who is regarded as the first environmentalist for his pragmatism) remarked "all the world over people living in the forests or in their vicinity, feel commencement of strict protection as a hardship, howsoever considerate the settlement of forest rights may have been. Old customs are more comfortable, the interests of present moments are more

powerful, than the care for the future. No where in the world has there been a real important progress without temporary dissatisfactions" (Brandis, 1897). Brandis laid stress on managing forests primarily for the soil and atmospheric amelioration (present day environmental concern) and meeting the basic needs of the local people. The efforts in ushering a new era in the management of India's forest through the JFM should evolve a viable pattern by taking these factors into consideration in the context of present day scenario.

Conclusion

An organised way of thinking is required for a balanced resource management. Taking people away from disorganised to organised thinking, from unidirectional to multidirectional approach, from conflicts and mistrust to complementary actions, from compartmentalism to integrated approach is a difficult task but not impossible. The successful implementation of JFM would be an attempt in that direction. The concept has over the years evolved from participatory management to joint management but the reflection of the philosophy is expressed more explicitly by the term collective management, which goes

much beyond the simple control and sharing of resources. For successful implementation apart from political and administrative commitment and training of participants, the issues requiring attention are sustainability, equity, legal status, marketing, product sharing, cohesion in participation by villagers, gender issues and conflicts resolutions.

But while solving these issues the views of different groups should be articulated in an integrated and purposeful manner so that the real issues in sustainability of the resources are not lost sight of. In this task foresters of the country have to shoulder a great burden of objectivity and fair play. They have to come out with visions, ideas and pragmatic philosophy and provide leadership and forge consensus with other groups. The NGOs and other activists will have to come out of their cocooned networking exercises and work at the grass root levels to understand the situation specific to each location so that a real JFM programme is launched. One of the important thing to be achieved is administrative cohesiveness in concepts and practices between foresters and administrators especially in the districts and State headquarters.

SUMMARY

Joint Forest Management is being practiced in many States now and these experiments are throwing up many challenging issues for decision for the policy makers, foresters, administrators, JFM activists and the planners. This paper discusses the philosophy of JFM as complementary to scientific forest management practices and focuses on the emerging issues for joint collaborative action by all groups engaged in promoting peoples participation in natural resource management.

संयुक्त वन-प्रबन्ध - उभरते प्रश्न

वी०के० बहुगुणा

सारांश

संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध इस समय बहुत से राज्यों में कराया जा रहा है और ये संपरीक्षण नीति निर्धारकों, वानिकों, प्रशासकों,

संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध के सक्रिय समर्थकों और आयोजकों के सामने बहुत सारे चुनौती भरे प्रश्न निर्णय के लिए सामने ला रहे हैं। प्रस्तुत अभिपत्र में संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध के सिद्धांतों का वैज्ञानिक वन प्रबन्ध व्यवहारों का अनुपूरक स्वीकार करके विवेचित किया गया है और इसे उन उभरते प्रश्नों पर केन्द्रित किया गया है जिन पर प्राकृतिक संसाधनों के वैज्ञानिक प्रबन्ध में जन सहयोग प्रोत्साहित करने में लगे सभी वर्गों को मिलजुल कर कार्य करने की आवश्यकता है।

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