

## JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT HERALDS A NOVEL APPROACH IN KULLU

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### Introduction

*Forests:* Forests in Kullu occur at all elevations between 1263 m and 3700 m above which immense glades interrupted and interspersed with massive rock and perpetual snow adorn the landscape. They stretch from the banks of river Beas and Parvati to tops of lofty mountains. They are found in all types of slopes, aspects and elevations and are rich in flora and fauna, a paradise of the botanist and bower of a mountaineer. The most important species amongst conifers are Deodar, Kail, Fir, Spruce and Chil and amongst broad leaved are *Robinia*, *Populus*, *Salix*, *Alnus* and the three *Quercus* spp.

JFM has been initiated in three Divisions viz. Kullu, Parvati and Seraj of Kullu Circle. These three Divisions cover 60 km<sup>2</sup> of Reserved Forest, 2935 km<sup>2</sup> of Demarcated Protected Forests (DPFs) and 1218 km<sup>2</sup> of Undemarcated Protected Forests (UPFs). Undemarcated forests often called as III class forests, are unmeasured and form major chunk of degraded forests where Joint Forest Planning and Management (JFPM) is being introduced.

The UPF is the focus of radically contrasting perceptions on the part of the Forest Department, the Revenue Department and various groups of local people. Forest Department view it as part of the forest estate to be protected from

encroachments and where possible, planted up and converted into DPF. Revenue Department view UPF as a bank of land to grant nautors, though nautors have been stopped after 1980. Other departments also think UPF as a source of land which could be easily diverted under Forest Conservation Act, 1980 for non-forestry purpose or developmental activities. Villagers continue to break such land for cultivation for planting up as orchards and consider Forest Department as the withholder of the privileges dear and at times essential to their very existence. However, both the extension of cultivation and increased area brought under plantations reduce the land available for grazing live stock, placing pastures and other forests under increased pressure. This affects both local flocks owned by villagers and in some areas, the flocks of transhumant graziers, including the Gaddi. A more coherent forest land management approach is required which harmonises at local level, the conflicting interests of the key departments and the various groups of local people who use or wish to use the land.

*Forest Rights:* Forests of Kullu are heavily burdened with rights as defined in Settlement Report of 1886 by Alex Anderson. The rights exercised by local people include:

- Grazing of cattle, sheep and goats;
- Timber for house construction and repair;

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- Grass and leaves for fodder and bedding;
- Leaf litter for compost;
- Timber for agricultural and domestic implements;
- Wood for fuel and cremation;
- NTFP (medicinal herbs, mushrooms) for own use and sale.

Of these Timber Distribution (TD) rights are most contentious as demand and actual distribution has been increasing particularly for valuable Deodar. Right holder still pay the rate for TD set in the last century e.g. Rs 3-7 per standing deodar tree (which represented 20% of the market value then) for trees which may be valued at Rs. 40,000 in today's market. So villagers have temptation to sell whole or part of the allotted timber or to remove more number of trees from the forest to supplement their income. Leaves for fodder or bedding are obtained unscientifically after lopping of conifer/B.L. trees sometimes even right up to the crown resulting in drying of trees, making them susceptible to fungus attack and doing considerable damage to the forest. Villagers also extract medicinal herbs and sell in the open market through middlemen to earn money and their greed for money has brought many of the medicinal herbs on verge of extinction. Heavy grazing by cattle have also resulted in degradation of forests, particularly class III forests.

*People* : The population of Kullu is 3,02,000 which forms 6% population of Himachal Pradesh. Population density is low, being 55 persons/km<sup>2</sup>. 90% of the population lives in rural areas and is predominantly dependent on natural resources for their means of livelihood. Unofficial estimates suggest that about 10% are cultivated, 40% are forested, 30% are grasslands and remaining 20% rocks and inaccessible slopes. Agriculture, including horticulture

and livestock rearing are the principal economic activities. Vegetable cultivation and dairy farming in the low hills along the roadside is also becoming popular because the people can easily sell them in the market. Cash crops and orchards have, undoubtedly, helped in improving the living standard and socio-economic status of the people.

### Apprehensions

Following H.P. Govt. Order dated 12th May, 1993 on Participatory Forest Management on barren or degraded land, it was decided by the Govt. to constitute Village Forest Development Committees (VFDCs) for Joint Forest Management in the villages of Himachal Pradesh for planning, protection, afforestation and judicious use for eco-development of aforesaid areas so as to arrest their further environmental degradation and to augment fuelwood, fodder and small timber production for use by local people through their active participation.

After the notification of this order there were sharp and varying reactions of the officers of the Department as well as the people who matter in the existing setup. Many of them were of the view that JFPM will not succeed in Kullu of H.P. where people are already exercising their rights in the forests. What else the people need when they have the right to graze cattle, to collect leaf litter/fodder and fuelwood, medicinal herbs and at the top of these have the right to get TD timber for construction/repair of their houses at nominal rates. The condition in Kullu or H.P. is different than other States like West Bengal, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat etc. where villagers have practically no rights in the forests. It was thought that villagers will not come forward to involve themselves in

forest activities when the department had nothing new to offer and to attract them.

According to H.P. Govt. Orders, one VFDC is to be constituted for one village but conditions in Kullu are surprisingly very peculiar and it is not feasible to constitute one VFDC for one village. A village comprises of a number of hamlets i.e. cluster of houses. Anderson's Settlement Report of 1886 clearly indicates which hamlet has what types of rights in a particular forest and it is just not possible to ignore any hamlet or to keep it outside the purview of VFDC because by doing so, the villagers of that particular hamlet can always create problems and sow the seed of dissensions amongst other members of VFDC.

### **Initiation of JFM**

It was onerous task to introduce JFM and to accomplish it successfully. However, with the advent of Overseas Development Administration (ODA) Project during Sept. 1994 in Kullu and Mandi Districts of H.P., the seed of JFM was sown which germinated and began to develop and with this, efforts to initiate JFM in Kullu Circle started in spite of all types of speculations.

*Creation of JFM Support Team*: A specially trained Joint Forest Planning and Management Support Team (JFPMST) was created at Circle HQ. This team comprises of 1 DFO, 1 ACF and 2 Range Officers. The main function of the team is to provide training and advice to the DFOs and their staff for the introduction of JFPM. This team provided framework for effective communications between field level forest staff and forest users and facilitated participatory activities at all levels. This team conducted field level training workshop for users, forest guards, deputy

rangers and range officers.

*Field visits*: Field visits were made to different villages by all officers and field staff during Dec. 1994 to Feb. 1995 so as to bring awareness about JFPM and to get primary and secondary information. Villagers who earlier used to run away on seeing uniformed forest officials lest they would be penalised for petty forest offenses started coming closer as they felt that forest officials were serious in solving their problems connected with forest and these visits bridged gap of misunderstanding. After field visits, JFPMST organised a two-day Circle level Participatory Training Workshops at Manali in March, 1995. The officers presented case studies of their visits and the experiences of field visits were critically analysed. A plan of action for Joint Forest Planning and Management in Kullu Circle was jointly developed. Parvati was selected as first Pilot Division for introduction of JFPM and Bhullang village in Parvati Division was considered to be the first Pilot location.

*Participatory Training Workshops*: As many people had their doubts in the success of JFPM so it had to be introduced in a cautious manner in those locations alone where local people were willing and local forest staff was dedicated and had shown interest. To reduce the risk of failure, it was necessary to impart skills to forest staff on communications and PRA skills to collect and give information in the villages, identify focus groups amongst forest users, their problems and priorities. Field level training was carried out through a series of participatory training workshops which were facilitated by the JFM Support Team. These workshops helped to build and develop capacities of the forest staff as well as local people for initiating an institutional change

towards new management approaches and also to understand and accept the need for JFPM of forest land resources. Attitudinal change within the Forest Department and the local people was a pre-requisite for the success of JFPM. So these workshops helped in reorientation and sensitisation of the staff and local people. Combination of training mechanism including workshops, practical field training exercises, study tours to West Bengal, Karnataka, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa in India and beyond, institutional and field attachments have been used for exposing staff to participatory forest management approaches and for providing an opportunity to visualise their own role in this new management paradigm.

*Villagers Reorientation Programme* : Apart from sensitisation and reorientation of forest staff, a supporting villagers reorientation

programme has also been undertaken through :

- Local Leaders workshops organised for village-level leaders, representatives of Panchayats and other village-level organisations and village elders in an effort to raise awareness about JFM policies, build and muster support for JFM in Kullu Valley.
- VFDC workshops organised for members of executive bodies for sharing and developing common understanding on the approach and strategy for JFM.
- Open days have been organised for students in schools of pilot and non-pilot locations in which on-the-spot painting debate and slogan-writing competitions were held to bring awareness about JFM amongst school children.

**Table 1**

*Different level of workshops facilitated by the JFM Support Team*

Workshop	Participants	Objective	Output
Circle-level (2 days)	CF/DFOs/ACFs Key RFOs	* Discuss aim and methodologies * Devise a Plan of Action for JFPM	Plan of Action for JFPM
Divisional-level (2 days)	DFOs/ACFs/ROs Key DRs & FGs	* Understand and accept the need for JFPM * Select Pilot Ranges and devise Divisional plans.	Divisional Action Plan for initiating JFPM
Range-level (2 days)	RFOs/DRs/FGs of selected ranges	* To bring together ecol., soc & econ. Info. about the range. * Understand what type of info. is needed to practice JFPM. * Help FGs design Beat profiles.	Selection of Pilot Beats and villages
Beat-level (7-8 days)	RFOs/DRs/FGs of selected ranges	* To acquire necessary skills. * To practice PRAs, Commun. skills * Acquire micro-planning skills. * Devise guidelines on approaches.	Finalisation of pilot villages. Agreed guidelines for JFM.

- Production of local extension material like printing of pamphlets and user information on JFPM policy and important species.

**VFDCs and Micro-plans:** The workshops at divisional, range and beat level were organised to finalise pilot villages as laid down in selection criteria and agreed guidelines for JFM. These workshops were conducted in Parvati Division during June-August 1995, in Seraj Division during Sept.-Nov., and in Kullu Division from Oct. 1995 - Feb. 1996. As a result of these workshops during 1995-96, two villages in each of the three Divisions were identified as pilot villages. Care was taken to include each household of a hamlet while forming VFDC and there may be 2-14 hamlets in a VFDC. One adult male and one adult female member of each household is included as a member in the general house of VFDC and about 50% representation is given to women in the executive body of the VFDC. Women being prime users of forest products have responded more positively compared to men.

Nine VFDCs have so far been constituted in three divisions of this circle following Govt. of H.P. Order Guidelines and JFM methodology. Focus group meetings, Household surveys and detailed PRAs were carried out by field staff. Six Micro-plans were prepared by Executive body and the range staff which have been discussed, finalised and approved by the general house of VFDCs and finally approved by the concerned DFO. 4 more Micro-plans are under preparation. Local people decided which land to be kept for grass reserves, which land to be utilised for growing trees and which species to be planted to meet their demand of fuel, fodder and timber. The instrument through which these works will be translated into action

will be the Forest Deptt. on whom the villagers rely for expert advice as well as for implementation of decisions taken in the Micro-plans.

### **Withdrawal**

It was thus a difficult task to initiate JFPM in Kullu but frequent visits by the staff and Support Team to different hamlets and keeping a constant touch with each household of VFDC to resolve conflicts, to bring them together at a common platform and reach consensus on the common programme of activities have, indeed, helped in successful implementation of JFPM. Sometimes, we had to withdraw where villages had adopted recalcitrant approach e.g. villagers of Hallan in Kullu Division did not agree to include women as members in executive body and villagers of Bradha in Parvati Division were adamant that Department should relax general conditions of TD rights. Such villages with hardliners will be taken at a later stage when they will be convinced about JFPM and the forest staff has not lost hopes and they are still in touch with them.

### **Success of JFPM**

Following few examples will make amply clear how far JFPM is successful in Kullu :

\* Most of the people in Bhullang VFDC are poor. They used to resort to illicit felling of trees and to sell timber for monetary benefit. After introduction of JFPM, the concerned Forest Guard made them realise their mistake. He advised them to grow tomatoes in their fields as a cash crop like other villages situated along roadside. This idea struck to their mind and they diverted their energy in growing vegetables to earn more

money. Illicit felling is not noticed in their forests now.

\* There is shortage of fuelwood in Bhullang and they found difficult to burn even the dead bodies. They have themselves suggested to grow Robinia along nullahs to meet their fuelwood and fodder requirement.

\* In Ossan VFDC, villagers requested Forest Department not to fence the newly raised plantations on the side facing their village. They assured that they would not let loose their cattle inside the plantation area and would ensure social fencing through mutual restraint.

\* Women members of Ossan VFDC decided to keep a vigil on illicit removal of fuelwood from their forest and not to resort to unscientific lopping of Kail.

\* Members of Ossan VFDC have requested Department to request the Deputy Commissioner to open kerosene oil depot so as to save their forests from further denudation.

\* Villagers of Deotha VFDC have realised that pockets of Gopalpur III forests near the habitation can no longer sustain pressure of TD timber. So they have earmarked certain pockets from where TD timber be granted to the right holders though these are located away from the habitation and they have to spend more time on carriage of converted timber adding to their inconvenience.

\* Villagers of Dashar VFDC have decided to improve their grasslands by introduction of improved variety of grasses like tall Fescue. They also want to execute eco-development works like planting of aesthetic trees around Yuvak Mandal building.

\* Members of VFDCs have assured the Forest Department to keep a watch on misuse of TD timber and to check genuineness of the grantee in whose favour TD is granted by DFO.

\* Women in general are more vocal than men. They immediately rush to the office of Range office/DFO or even to the office of Conservator to report instances of illicit felling or fresh illegal encroachments. They seek help of the Department in preventing such offences. This change in attitude is being noticed in non-JFPM areas too. An interesting example is of Diyar village in Parvati Forest Division where an influential person clear felled about 3 bighas of dense patch of natural regeneration of Deodar and even constructed one wooden house of one room over night to show his authentic possession of land. Gram Panchayat Pradhan, who was a woman, tried to stop that encroachment with the help of local forest guard but they failed. They approached the department and the illegal possession of land was removed with the help of police. The incident, though small, helped the Department to win trust and confidence of the people.

\* Department too, is not lagging in the new approach. Previously, the staff never consulted the local people and planted Chil, Deodar and Fir irrespective of their needs. Now, an attitudinal change has been noticed. The staff has started to find out the requirements of the local people and stress is being given to plant species of their choice in non-JFM areas.

\* Nurseries of broad leaved species like *Robinia*, *Populus*, *Salix*, *Alnus*, *Quercus* and improved varieties of grasses are being raised to cater to people's requirements.

\* To need to change from policing/adversarial body to one of the enabler and provider of technical advice has been recognised by the staff.

### Conclusion

If the Forest Department has been able to create awareness amongst local people about judicious use of forest resources and land, to bring people forward in helping the department to prevent forest offenses

including forest fires and encroachments, to reduce pressure on forests by optimum use of TD timber and fuelwood, to awaken them about planning, protection through social fencing and bring about an attitudinal change within the staff and local people to realise their respective roles and responsibilities in the changed scenario, it is hoped that JFPM in Kullu is successful and proceeding in the right direction slowly and cautiously as planned by the department during two and half years.

### SUMMARY

The JFM was started in Kullu during September, 1994. The staff took an initiative and the JFM Support Team through various participatory training workshops sensitised the field staff as well as local people to bring about an attitudinal change. Nine VFDCs have been formed and six micro plans prepared during last two and half years. The JFM approach has been successful inspite of many apprehensions expressed in the beginning.

संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध कुल्लू में एक नई दृष्टि का अग्रदूत

एस०सी० गुप्त

सारांश

संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध कुल्लू में सितम्बर 1994 में आरम्भ किया गया। कर्मचारियों ने इस दिशा में पहल की और संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध की सहायक टोली में अनेक भागीदारी प्रशिक्षण कार्यशालाएँ चलाकर कर्मचारियों और उनके साथ-साथ स्थानीय लोगों को भी उनमें दृष्टिगत परिवर्तन लाने के लिए संवेदित किया। गत द्वाइ वर्षों के दौरान नौ दृश्य क्षेत्र प्रदर्शन निगम बना लिए गये हैं तथा छह लघु योजनाएँ तैयार कर ली गई हैं। प्रारम्भ में प्रकट की गई बहुत सारी शंकाओं के बावजूद संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध दृष्टि बहुत सफल रही है।