

A NOTE ON JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

In contemporary forestry, Joint Forest Management (JFM) has become a magic word. There is considerable enthusiasm in every level of foresters, who are quite excited by the occasional success achieved by this technique. In fact a number of success stories emanating from the different parts of our country and abroad have boosted the sagging morale of practising foresters, who previously, in spite of their best efforts, were waging a losing battle against anti-forest, anti-conservation elements directly and indirectly.

This "Joint" effort of foresters and villagers in general has resulted in retarding the process of forest degradation in pockets - something which was considered impossible, when foresters alone tried. This has highlighted the point that forest protection can not be done in isolation and human forest interrelation is a very important factor which cannot be ignored. This is the essence of any "Joint management" effort in forestry.

JFM has provided a basis for the empowerment of communities to undertake community based resource management. Management involving Forest Department and local villagers working together has helped in striking a balance between the former's desire for self-determination and latter's need for assurance that forest resources are well managed and conserved.

In Indian context, the concept of JFM is still at a stage of experimentation. Most of the foresters, although they agree to the practical utility of involving people in achieving the difficult task of forest protection, appear less convinced regarding the various methods of involving people. Although majority of Indian States have come out with Government Resolutions which proclaim the policy of the Govts. to involve local people in management of their forest resources, little progress has been achieved due to initial hitches at every level right from policy making at Govt. level to grass-root level.

After seven years of adopting the New Forest Policy, there are a good number of sceptics even within the Forest Deptt. These forest officers are still not ready to believe that involvement of local people can solve forest protection problems. In fact some of them are of firm belief that more and more involvement of lay people (always very short sighted, guided by vested interests) in field like scientific forestry will become the cause of ruin of forestry. Their apprehension are not without reasons. We have examples of several Northeast States, which have traditional control of local community over their forests, but as latest Forest Survey of India's report indicates, these community managed forests are in rather more degraded conditions. Similarly, in the hills of U.P. the "Civil Soyam Forests" supposed to be managed by the community are more degraded compared to near by

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reserved or protected forests. In fact these "Civil Soyam" forests are being treated as nobody's child. Other similar instances can be cited that community managed forests are in no better conditions than Govt. owned forests. If we see the condition of Revenue Deptt. owned forests, it is worst. In fact most of the trees first disappeared from these Revenue Deptt. managed forests and later on all such land devoid of any vegetation has been settled. The reasons for the same need not be discussed. Then, why the foresters alone are being blamed for shrinking forests, when neither "community" nor "all powerful district administration" has been able to save the forests entrusted to them.

No, this is not the time for the foresters to console themselves that they have done excellent jobs in last more than hundred years. The fundamentals of scientific forestry have helped them so far to conserve the forests to great extent. But one basic element, which was missing in traditional forestry is human element. The foresters failed to take cognizance of the fact that the population is rising by leaps and bounds. All the concepts of "sustained yield" are irrelevant due to ever increasing demands of exploding population. Moreover, with growing awareness of "rights", "empowerment", "equity" - the "forests" cannot be managed in isolation. JFM is one of the ways, developed after lot of experimentation, to involve the people in the management of forests.

In this paper, it is my request to those "sceptic" foresters and "overenthusiastic" foresters both, to objectively weigh both advantages and disadvantages of JFM before jumping to any conclusion. The philosophy is not bad but if we implement it half heartedly, without giving due time,

opportunity and appreciation to the people involved in JFM, it may fail. Also it cannot be said JFM is panacea for all the ills from which modern forestry is suffering. It is like "fire" which is a very important tool for forest managers. The same "fire" when used in controlled manner, is very beneficial to forest but when uncontrolled can cause huge damage to the forests.

Management and Protection

The author has been involved in management of forests in Garhwa District of Bihar for the last four years. His conversion from the rank of "sceptics" to the "believers" has been gradual through lots of experience of JFM in different villages.

One positive aspect of JFM which I would like to share with readers is perhaps unique. Through the Village Forest Management and Protection Committee (VFMP), the foresters have got an interface to interact with the villagers - talk to them, exchange the views, act according to the genuine demands of the people. Otherwise previously, it was "ordering" attitude of the foresters, particularly true to the senior level foresters as far as villagers were concerned. This was one of the important causes of alienation of people to the degradation of forests. With increasing interaction with villagers by all level of foresters, it is being felt that vast majority of villagers are aware of degradation of "their" forests and some of them are very keen to stop this degradation. But such keen villagers were finding themselves helpless in absence of any official support. The resolution of Bihar Govt. 54/90 - 5244 dt. 8.1.90. and consequent forming of VFMPs have given the villagers the confidence and resolve to protect their forests. The work in some of the villages has

been exceptionally good. Besides the general protection of forests, villagers have been persuading the encroachers of forest land to vacate it or helping Forest Deptt. to get it vacated from the encroachers. Details of encroachment removed in Garhwa South Forest Division are given in Table 1.

Encroachment

Encroachment of forest land is perennial problem and every forest of India is suffering from this problem. If we take the all India figure of encroached forest land, we can imagine the gravity of the situation. This forest land is lost for ever, for all practical forestry purposes. All the statistics of forest cover are deceptive if we deduct the area of forest "encroached". The removal of "encroachment" from forest land is extremely difficult task if not impossible, if we take into consideration the present day law and order situation, political climate and ill-equipped Forest Deptt. JFM as a tool has come very handy. It has been

instrumental in removing the encroachments from forest land to this extent, only because of active involvement and co-operation of villagers who by persuasion and sometimes even coercing the "encroachers" (fellow villagers) helped in getting forest land vacated. To make fool-proof, after the vacation of encroached forest land, the encroachers have been made to file affidavit, which says that they have no claim in "such encroached" forest land.

Conclusion

554.66 acres is not a small area. If given due protection, in a few years it will bloom into natural forests. To plant such area, at present rate, it will cost around Rs. 22 lakh to the state exchequer.

Hence, it is felt that JFM is a very important strategy for the modern forest management. It can help immensely if practiced in an appropriate and judicious manner.

Table 1

Encroachments removed in Garhwa South Forest Division

Name of the Forest Range	Total forest area under encroachment (in acres)	Total forest area freed from encroachment (in acres)	Percentage achievement (%)
Ranka East	1032.56	373.70	36.19
Bhandaria	355.88	26.83	7.54
Kutku	175.91	68.70	39.05
Chainpur	349.25	49.45	14.56
Ranka West	46.18	35.98	77.90
Total	1959.78	554.66	28.30

SUMMARY

The management of forests in appropriate and judicious manner through Joint Forest Management, has been discussed in this paper.

संयुक्त वन प्रबन्ध के विधि प्रावधान

एच०एस० गुप्त

सारांश

व्याहसित वन भूमियों का पुनर्संस्कार करने में ग्राम समुदायों और स्वैच्छिक अभिकरणों की भागीदारी के लिए बनाई निर्देशावली के कानूनी प्रावधानों का विवेचन प्रस्तुत अभिपत्र में किया गया है।