

JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT IN INDIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

Joint Forest Management in India is considered as one of the famous model of decentralization in natural resource management. Joint Forest Management is a set of policy innovations that were designed to give power to the people who live in and around forests through the organisation, management and utilization of forest products, on the other hand improving their livelihood conditions. Over the past three decades, Joint Forest Management has undergone a remarkable shift from state-centric and top-down to community-based participatory approach to forest governance by streamlining plans and policies related to Forestry sector in India. Despite the successive modification of policies, Joint Forest Management in India continues to face challenges during its implementation phase. The Programs and policies are inconsistent and do not favorably support the poverty alleviation of tribal's who are dependent on forests, which is one of the major objective of India's community forestry program. Unbalanced benefit sharing mechanism, exclusion of local population in decision making system, are the major challenges that are to be resolved in coming years.

Keyword: *Joint Forest Management, Livelihood, Sustainable Development.*

1. INTRODUCTION

India is known for its wealthy natural resources and large rural population who are basically close to traditional values. It has rich biodiversity, diverse climate and varied land use pattern. India, the 7th largest country in area with 2.4% (328.72 million hectare) of the geographic area of the world, accounts for 1.8% of world forests, but contributes 17.5% (1,210 million) to the world population. The population density of India is 382 persons per sq. km, and exceeds 1,000 persons per sq.km in some states of the Gangetic plains (Census of India, 2011). There is huge pressure on land and forest resources. The strength of the diversified forest resources of India can be attributed to constructive, varied climatic and geological conditions as evident from 35 agro-meteorological regions, 15 agro-climatic zones, 20 agro-ecological regions and 10 bio-geographical zones. The increasing rate of deforestation has not only become a concern for developing and underdeveloped countries but developing countries are also concerned about it. It is well known that due to increase in population land use patterns have changed because of which the balance between man and environment has been disturbed. In Addition, the dependency on firewood for energy has become a major factor for

deforestation and forest degradation. In order to correct the existing problem of deforestation and forest degradation, there has been a great concern among researchers and policy makers in making the alternative methods of forest management. Participatory arrangements have existed in Indian forestry for several years in some form or the other. However, it got official with the issuance of a circular from the Ministry of Environment and Forests in June 1990, which provided to the state governments a structure for participation of village communities in protection, regeneration and organisation of degraded forests situated in the surrounding area of the villages. Joint Forest Management (JFM) has been in action for about 30 years and has been adopted by all States. The total number of JFM Committees in the country now are 189, 996 and the forest area brought under their ambit is 36.6 Mha, till March 2018. (FSR- India, 2018) The main objective of this paper was to review the current status of Joint Forest Management in India contributing to sustainable livelihoods, and the monitoring and evaluation system of the community forests. The institutions and policies related to community forestry have been highlighted. Furthermore, opportunities and challenges in making the decentralized forest governance more successful in achieving the dual

goals of environmental conservation and poverty alleviation as envisaged by India's sustainable development framework have been discussed.

2.HISTORY OF JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT (JFM) IN INDIA

The national forest policy of 1988 was a landmark policy for local people's rights over forest resources. The policy recognized people's participation in managing and protecting forests and suggested the forest communities should organize and conserve forests together with the state forest departments. This transformation in forest policy has begun to renovate how forests are protected and used in India. Local people who are living in and around forests were in the past alleged to be encroachers were invited to be a stakeholder in the protection of forests. Thus the main aim was to change the mindset of the people from forest users to forest conservators. This began after the implementation of guidelines in 1990; various state governments implemented their own Joint Forest Management strategies. The National Joint Forest Management Policy came out after the successful experience of Arbari hills in Midnapore district of West Bengal during the early 1970s where local communities formed forest protection committees to conserve their forest resources. The concept of joint forest management was discovered accidentally by then Divisional Forest Officer of Midnapore District, West Bengal, A.K. Banerjee, in 1972. In response to the continued grazing of cattle by local villagers in an area of new plantation, Banerjee asked the locals to refrain grazing in the plot, in return for a share of the final timber harvest. The strategy proved to be a good innovation, and proved to be beneficial for both forest department and the local community. The success of JFM spread quickly throughout the state, and by July 1990, 1611 Forest Protection Committees had been formed, protecting 195,000 ha of forest lands in the three southwest districts of West Bengal; Bankura, Midnapore and Purulia - 47% of the total forest land (Malhotra and Deb).

3.ACHIEVEMENTS OF JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

Joint Forest Management is a program of developing partnerships between people who live in and around forests and Forest department on the basis of mutual trust and mutually defined roles and responsibilities with view to forest

protection and organisation and management. Under the JFM programme, the local communities and the government manage the resource and share the cost equally. The valuable participation of local communities in developing sustainable forest management systems is now being looked upon as a important approach to address the venerable problems of land degradation in India. The successful participation in various forest developmental programs has made hopeful impacts on the ecological and socio-economic environment of the JFM areas. The idea is to bring 33% of the forest cover in India within this joint forest programme by the year 2020. By the end of 2006, close to 100,000 communities were adopting one or the other form of JFM covering an area of about 22 million hectares in 28 states, (Saxena, 2012). Another significant activity where participation of local people who live in and around forests is important is fire management in forests. In Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, VFCs are involved in creating and maintaining fire lines by cleaning them regularly and in putting out forest fires, which has resulted in good regeneration in vulnerable areas. The Forest department has structured training programmes in different states to impart advanced fire-fighting skills to field staff and village forest committee members. Forest protection has been provided by communities through patrolling on a rotational basis against grazing, fires, illicit felling, etc. The effect of innovative planning for protection is reflected in encouraging trend with respect to various forest and ecological parameters such as grass productivity, tree count, and regeneration of trees and shrubs. There has been a great decline in timber smuggling as village forest committees are keeping eye on timber smugglers at great risk in many states including Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and West Bengal. However, system of reward to VFCs from such efforts are yet to be worked out and implemented in many states.

4.ECONOMIC ASPECT OF FORESTS IN INDIA

Protection and conservation of forests is a major objective of the financial resources allocation by the government. Social forestry program was initiated during the late 1970's with the aim to increase forest cover in the country and improve its quality. These programmes were implemented with aid from different funding agencies like the World Bank, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States

Agency for International Development (US AID) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The funds from all the funding agencies amounting to US\$ 309.10 million over the years was used to for raising nurseries for distributing seedlings to people, to raise forest plantations of 2.572 Mha mostly in non-forest lands along roads, rail and canal sides, on barren common lands (MoEF, 2004). In this project extensive issues of the forest sector, like livelihood promotion, afforestation, forest management, institutional strengthening, protection and conservation of biodiversity of forests, were mainly kept in focus. Traditionally, timber has been the most important and valuable product of the forests. Many State Governments have established their own Forest Development Corporations to carry out commercial operations related to forestry sector. In Arunachal Pradesh and Andaman & Nicobar Island, the FDC was established to supplement forest departments in harvesting and marketing of timber. In Haryana and Punjab, FDCs were created to support farmers growing trees by providing reasonable price for their trees, besides supporting forest department in harvesting and marketing of timber. In Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, the FDCs are harvesting and marketing timber only in the limited forest area leased to them where they raise commercially valuable tree species. Thus, timber production from government forests has gradually declined with increasing restriction imposed by Central Government on felling of trees during 1980s for biodiversity conservation and bringing more areas under Protected Area network.

5.CONCLUSION

Forest is an essential natural resource blessed by God to man. Forest is not only important from the ecological point of view but has economic importance as well. The imbalance between man and environment is due to increase in population which resulted change in the land use patterns. As we are aware that forest provide many things to man including food, shelter, clothing, rubber, timer, gum, oil, and the most important oxygen which we breath, and absorb carbon dioxide. Thus we know that its protection and management is very important. Joint Forest Management program was initiated to for these concerns. Joint Forest Management has been introduced to change the mind set of the people from forest users to forest

conservators. The formulation of norms regulating resource use based on equity between all members. So for Joint Forest management has been a great success but there are certain things which should be pursued most intensively in areas with high tribal and forest concentrations. In such regions, already many communities are interested in acquiring formal authority as forest managers. In targeting specific areas for information campaigns by the Forest Department or NGOs, outside facilitators should seek communities with heavy forest dependencies, interest in acquiring forest management responsibilities, and the presence of motivated forestry field staff, NGOs, and local colleges or universities that could assist the expansion of JFM programs. It is important that main attention should also be given to forest areas with good ecological potential for rapid regeneration, this will help in achieving speedy recovery and will prove motivating factor. Thus it is becoming understandable that sustainability is undoubtedly linked to the participation of the local users living in and around forests. Joint Forest Management has acquired more achievement in protecting forest. The role of NGO's is significant in encouraging forest management and by conducting programs and seminars on the conservation, protection and management of essential natural resource. It is important to highlight that the JFM is potentially providing income-generating opportunities, which is highly appreciated as we are aware of the fact the forests are being exposed to rampant illicit felling and there are many other factors which determined by its survival. Poverty of the local people is the reason for illicit felling because they are being exploited by timber smugglers and are asked to cut down trees for money. So income increasing initiatives by JFM has changed the mind of local population from forest users to forest conservators.

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