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THOUGHTS ON A PROPOSAL ON PEOPLE CENTRED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN HIMALAYAN REGION

New Trends:

Management of natural resources through people's participation is gradually accepted by governments and donor agencies as the most effective way to arrest and reverse the alarming rate of resource degradation and its economic and environment consequence. The important factors contributing to this awareness include: the increasing realisation of limits to state interventions despite their legal, fiscal and administrative support structure, in managing local resources without involving local communities; rediscovery of rationale and mechanisms of traditional systems of common property resource management; pressures degenerated by grass root level NGOs for local resource management by local communities who compared to the outsiders understand more about diversities as well as potentialities and deficiencies of local resources; and successful experiences of some recent initiatives involving participatory approaches to development and harnessing natural resources through community forestry programmes, community irrigation systems, and user groups managed pasture development, joint management of forest etc. in Asia.

Support without "Lead":

The above awareness has already led to several grass root level initiatives with varying degree of people's participation and local control of local resources. Several donor agencies in various ways help such activities. Some of these experiments have evolved very innovative approaches to ensure both equity in obligations and awards to the participants, and protection and upgrading of the resource while using it. Diversity is their another strength. However, despite all this their key feature is the **ad hoc and sporadic nature of the whole movement**. There is no mechanism to collect, synthesise and exchange the varied experiences. Being strongly action oriented initiatives they hardly give any priority to introspection, exchange, and forward thinking. Due to their understandable problems, the donors too encourage and support these new initiatives but rarely lead them. Most of them operated in project mode, do not have the perspective of a movement that could systematically identify constraints as well technological and institutional means to handle them. These problem are often realised but participatory natural resource management activities still continue in ad hoc manner, without effectively managing above dimensions.

THE FORD FOUNDATION'S AND PARTICIPATORY RESOURCE INITIATIVES

There would be very few agencies which would realise these problems more than the Ford Foundation, as the latter has pioneered work in several areas of natural resource management with people's participation. To count a few one may refer to support for social forestry in India in early 1970s, common property (land and water) resources in India since early 1980s, joint forest management in India since mid 1980s, community irrigation systems (through support to IMMI ever since its inception), integrated watershed management in India and other countries (including through support to ICIMOD). The Foundation has been a big supporter of innovative work in the above fields. The results have had impacts at both policy level and operational level. But this should be admitted that despite flexibility and innovativeness, the Foundation also shares the problem of other donors supporting participatory natural resource management. It can encourage, support and even help disseminate the experience, but cannot lead the participatory initiatives in terms of new ideas and future directions. Nor it can act as a networking agency to induce new thinking through regular and focussed exchange between different initiatives. Nature of its mandate and pressure of work on (already overburdened) programme officers are obvious limitation.

ICIMOD'S CONCERNS:

The concerns and mandates of the Ford Foundation and ICIMOD coverage to a great extent. For that reason the Foundation has been supporting ICIMOD programmes, especially the Farming Systems Programme (covering all landbased activities and their natural resource base) since several years. In its present stage of work, ICIMOD has reached the level where most of work is acquiring operational focus. The emphasis is on replicating successful experiences from one part of the mountain areas to the others. This involves greater emphasis on action research, interaction and training, exchange and dissemination, demonstration and application, and finally policy/programme advocacy and facilitation of their application.

Unlike short term surveys, case studies etc. the above type of activities (directed to field action and impact making) can not be conceived and implemented in a time frame of one to two years. They need 3-5 year long commitment of resources.

The above problem is acute in the work of The Farming Systems Division, where approaches to sustainable mountain agriculture involve increasingly more work on management, and upgrading resources in the context farming forestry linkages, agroforestry, community forestry, support land development etc. Any successful demonstration on innovative approaches to the above are not short term activities.

Given the resource support, ICIMOD has comparative advantages to conduct the above work, synthesise the inter-country experiences for identifying new directions and combine action research, field demonstration-policy-programme advocacy and replication. The basis of the above comparative advantage consists of: the inter country comparative perspectives and facility to study and observe and work in any country of HK-H; (the regional countries have varied experiences); operational flexibility and autonomy that allows innovative, unconventional approaches to work; decentralised mode of operation, involving working with national agencies. Finally, the past work of ICIMOD has equipped it in terms of local understanding, contacts and credibility with the regional governments and international agencies.

ICIMOD - FORD FOUNDATION COMPLEMENTARITIES

The above briefs on strengths and limitation of the two organisation give enough idea of complementary role of the two organisation in addressing the issue of participatory natural resource managements, with primary focus on forestry. As mentioned earlier, the Foundation has been supporting various programmes involving forestry (trees) in India and Nepal and elsewhere. In June 1992, ICIMOD, through support from the Ford Foundation organised a informal (idea centered rather than paper oriented seminar in Hatti Ban near Kathmandu. Around 25 functionaries, (foresters, NGO workers, researchers, administrators donors) dealing with Community Forester/User groups in Nepal and Joint Forest Management in India, participated in the meeting and exchanged their experiences. The meeting proved so productive and effective that several participants wanted it to be a frequent phenomenon and at different levels. In fact this seminar, induced ICIMOD to think in terms of a long term programme covered by this proposal.

This programme, hopefully may help in identifying innovative approaches and method for successful spread of participatory natural resource management supported by the Ford Foundation. On the other hand, it may prove a useful facility for action oriented, impact making work of ICIMOD. The concrete details of the programme in term of thrust areas, focal activities are presented below.

**THE PARTICIPATORY NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROJECT WILL HAVE
FOLLOWING KEY THRUST AREAS.**

**1. RECENT INITIATIVES INVOLVING PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION/JOINT
MANAGEMENT ETC.**

The recent initiatives involving people's participation in forest resource management - such as community forestry and user groups in Nepal, joint forest management in India, women user-group managed CPR development in India etc. They have to be the focal area of proposed ICIMOD programme.

Focal Activities:

The key activities under this component will be interaction and exchange of experience between such groups through structured/unstructured meetings cross visits etc. to facilitate learning from each other and synthesis of experiences for evolving long term strategies and future direction of work, and also to replicate successful experiences elsewhere.

Rationale:

This activity will fill in a major gap in synthesising the experiences as a source of new direction to lead community efforts currently conducted in relative isolation, except common funding and periodic meetings of programme executives.

ICIMOD's Comparative Advantage:

Due to inter country perspective, already established focal point nodal agencies and international linkages; accumulation of past experience and operation autonomy and flexibility, ICIMOD has some comparative advantage in undertaking the above tasks.

2. COMMON PROPERTY REGIMES: AN OPERATIONAL FRAME WORK

For reasons of ecological consideration (i.e. putting sub-marginal lands under natural vegetation), collective sharing systems and complementarity of production systems based on domesticated crops and natural vegetation, provision of common property resources in the past had been an important method of natural resource management at community level.

The deliberate state policies, pressure of demographic and commercial forces have accentuated the process of CPR depletion in terms of their extent, productivity management, and sustainable usage.

The studies of CPRs all over the developing countries including through Ford Foundation support have questioned the conventional intellectual bias against CPRs manifested and debated in terms of the tragedy of commons. An understanding the rationale and operating mechanisms of CPR regimes can help in evolving a framework for grassroot level participatory/joint management approaches to natural resource management.

Focal Activities:

Key activities to be emphasised will include selective case studies of still surviving and effectively operating traditional management system with focus on identification of elements for incorporation into modern initiatives. Dissemination of the understanding through various media directed to new initiatives for joint resource management etc.

Rationale:

Identification and harnessing location and natural resource specific experiences of CPR management, that will otherwise disappear in due course. Work could be primarily focussed of forest based (and grazing land based) CPRs in mountains. Options directed to blending traditional approaches and formal institutional arrangements for CPR management can be identified to ensure participatory management of natural resources. ICIMOD's comparative advantages mentioned earlier also equip it well for this talk.

3. SUPPORT LAND DEVELOPMENT

Past work has shown that in mountains the farming systems based on private resources/crop lands cannot be sustained without the support from neighbouring uncultivated lands - often called waste lands which fall under CPRs. Hence, development and harnessing of support lands is not a matter of who owns/manages but how they are managed in terms of keeping up the bio-diversity and upgrading their physical productivity. This is one of the neglected aspects of mountain agricultural development strategies where role of nature's regenerative processes and energy and material flows are completely ignored or taken for granted. A conscious effort towards support lands is a key element of efforts for sustainable mountain agriculture. Applied research with focus on bio-physical aspects, technological dimensions of natural resource management will be main spring of this work. This will ultimately link sustainability of agricultural resource base with "People's Science and Technology".

Focal Activities

Key focal activities under this component will be on understanding of the current status of support lands including their bio-degradation and approaches to upgrade them and explicitly bring out their role in sustainable use of natural resources. It will also involve focus on prospective technologies for upgrading support land. Forest, trees, shrubs and grasses will be vegetative components. Some focus on physical dimensions (e.g. soil, topography) will also be there. Whole range of issues can be examined in watershed frame work as well.

Rationale:

Key role of support lands in sustainable mountain agriculture is recognised. Efforts needs to be made more explicit to induce action to their development and management.

4. DATA BASE ON FOREST MANAGEMENT

This is a component of an international effort led by Indiana University to use a computer based system for information of community management systems of CPRs including forest, irrigation etc. For Himalayan region this will be linked to ICIMOD. To effectively reciprocate to international demands and make use of the data base for practical programmes (e.g. for joint forest management) ICIMOD would like to cover this as component of the overall programme on natural resource management.

Note: Details on time frame, budgetary implications can be worked out after discussions on worth whileness of the above ideas. Once agreed as a concept other methodological and operation details in the form of or formal proposed may be prepared.

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*Processing / value
additions
- Secondary level
(sustainability)
- output / projected
- operational
logistics*