

1 Background

Pakistan suffers from far more severe forest product scarcity than most other countries. Its natural forest assets are very small, covering less than five per cent of the total land area. The forest and woodland area per person is one of the world's lowest, at one thirtieth of a hectare, and most forests are slow growing. Yet Pakistan's demands on its forests are high and getting higher. The population is growing at three per cent per year, and industrial growth is about six per cent, thus the demands for wood for construction, fuelwood, and water from watershed areas are increasing.

Despite this very disturbing situation with regard to forest resources, the forestry sector in Pakistan has not been able to adjust to cope with the challenges. It remains one of the most distinctive remnants of the colonial era. The forestry departments that were created in the nineteenth century in the provinces (there is no federal department) continue to be centralized in their management operations, insular in outlook, and bureaucratic in nature.

The administrative machinery is geared towards revenue generation for the state, with a strong focus on timber harvesting from the natural forests, and placing government control above local needs. Service to the people is not a concern; rather people are treated as a threat to the resource and have been alienated through

persistent policing efforts. The forest departments continue to be top-down, authoritative, and hierarchical 'line' organizations. In such a system, orders come from the top and everyone below runs to implement them.

These attributes may have been appropriate for the objectives of imperial Britain, but they are not necessarily helpful to democratic Pakistan. Not a single management review of the forest departments has been undertaken since the 1850s. With slight modifications, the pattern of line and staff functions still persists as it was then.

Most forest policies, until recently, have viewed people as the prime threat to forests. The forest departments maintain an outmoded forestry legislation and administration and present many loopholes that can be exploited by influential individuals - like members of the 'Timber Mafia' - who are stripping the remaining forests. The immediate losers are the rural people whose livelihoods suffer. The longer term loser is the nation as a whole as the natural forest asset is not used to its optimal renewable capacity; critical watersheds are degraded, leading to soil erosion, flooding and drought; biodiversity is lost, diminishing cultural and tourism value; and - critically - conflicts between local groups grow, leading to all types of social and economic problems.