

PLANNING FOR DISTRICT AND PANCHAYAT LEVEL DEVELOPMENT

The recently promulgated Decentralization Act (1984) empowers the District Panchayat Assembly to carry out all district level planning. This means that forestry development activities carried out under the supervision of the District Forest Controller require the approval of the District Assembly. Consequently, attention to planning activities is an important district function.

During the past decade considerable effort has been expended in developing systems which will enable forestry development work to proceed with active cooperation between government and villagers. By and large, plantations have been (and are being) established wherever land is available on the implicit assumption that more forests are required. The stage has now been reached where thought needs to be given to major planning issues so that future actions are appropriate to the needs of the people. These planning issues can be considered on two levels: strategic and tactical.

Strategic Planning Issues

Strategic planning deals with the long-term goals for a large area and ideally, serious thought and effort should go into strategic planning prior to the initiation of any major forestry development programme. Strategic issues that need to be raised include:

- o Why are forests required ?
(fuelwood, fodder, animal bedding, construction timber, local use, industrial use)
- o What is the demand for the various forest components ?
- o How much forest is required ?
- o What are the ownership categories of the forests ?
- o What is the productivity of the various forest types?
- o What land is available ?
(past history, area, tenure, abiotic and biotic factors)
- o What are the characteristics and attitudes of the local people?

- o How is forest management to be carried out?

Ideally, planners need to answer all these questions, and possibly many more, before decisions are taken and plans made to implement forest development activities.

Unfortunately, in many instances answers are not available and frequently decisions need to be made on limited and inadequate information (Thompson and Warburton 1985a, b). However, it is often preferable to initiate development and proceed at a relatively slow pace while improving the information base, rather than wait until adequate information is available. In this way, experience can be gained and the opportunity becomes available to feed new information into the decision-making process so that attitudes and practices can respond to the new information. However, this requires a flexible management system. For example, at the time the Nepal-Australia Forestry Project commenced in 1978, official concern was expressed at the progressive deforestation of the Middle Hills area and at its impact on the lifestyle of the rural dwellers. Almost no data was available and the project went ahead on the premise that people needed fuelwood and fodder.

The primary objective of the project was "to assist with the implementation of the National Forestry Plan in the Chautara Forest Division," a purposefully broad aim which reflected the lack of information and the inability to make sound strategic plans. Any attempt to make detailed strategic plans at that stage would probably have arrived at inadequate solutions. Few of the questions posed above could be answered. It soon became evident that there was a need to know more about the following:

- o Productivity of existing natural forest and proposed plantations;
- o Consumption rates of various forest components;
- o The role of forests in the subsistence farming system;
- o The amount and category of land available; there was virtually a complete lack of maps and aerial photos;

no cadastral survey had been carried out;

- o Precise location of boundaries between various categories of land (particularly farming, grazing, and forest land);
- o Attitudes of local villagers towards forestry activities;
- o Appropriate techniques for raising seedlings and establishing plantations;
- o Performance of various tree species on the land available.

A good deal of information has been derived since the project commenced, gradually giving the project a more defined focus and direction. Surveys have been carried out in Sindhupalchok to determine attitudes towards forestry development (New Era 1980). Studies have been commissioned to report on land use in the area (NAFP 1982). Post-graduate students have been encouraged to work in the project area on a range of issues of concern, including historical aspects (Mahat 1985) and the interaction of the forest and farming systems (Shrestha 1982 and Byrne 1985). Biomass and productivity studies have been carried out by both project staff and post-graduate students. Information is now being collated to assist with more meaningful application of strategic planning in the future.

Tactical Planning Issues

Tactical planning refers to the "here and now" of actually getting things done. Once the major strategic decisions have been made, district staff have the task of implementing those decisions. Soundly based tactical plans will ensure that implementation is carried out smoothly and efficiently. While strategic planning has many common elements which are independent of location and forest type,

tactical planning issues will be more location-specific. Consequently, it is difficult to make many generalizations.

It is extremely important that staff at all levels clearly understand what is expected of them. The best way for this to occur is to have some sort of local tactical planning document. This should be flexible enough to allow for change if the situation requires it, yet rigid enough so that everyone knows what is expected. Such plans should include specific action statements and also reminders to encourage forward planning for future action. One such plan developed by Applegate, Joshi, and Tripathi (1985) has been successfully used in the NAFP districts.

The progress made by the project in plantation establishment is shown in Table 4. This indicates slow growth during the early years; experience was gained with new techniques and systems as people were trained, and tactical planning was refined to the stage where it could be clearly understood and applied at the appropriate levels. The current annual plantation establishment rate is about 2000 ha and in both districts many of the 114 nurseries are three to five days walking distance from the district headquarters. Only with a considerable degree of administrative skill can a task of this magnitude and complexity be co-ordinated.

Panchayat Involvement

Many strategic and tactical decisions are made by forest officers and rangers at the district level. However, these decisions often affect the local villagers who frequently depend on surrounding open land and forest land for part of their subsistence farming needs (such as fodder and fuelwood). Consequently, decisions affecting local people should not be taken in isolation. Both strategic and tactical planning need to consider the viewpoints of local people.