

## EXTERNAL INTERVENTIONS: APPROACHES AND CONSTRAINTS

In the previous chapter a picture of the range of indigenous forest management systems which exists in Sindhu Palchok and Kabhre Palanchok has emerged and some factors which contribute to their success have been identified. The aim of this chapter is to examine some cases of external interventions in forestry development in order to consider why things have worked in some places and not in others. The chapter begins with an examination of two areas where forestry development has been very successful in establishing new forest resources (through plantation), but where limited progress has been made towards full hand-over of authority for management and utilisation of the forests. It then moves to a brief examination of reasons why success has been very limited in some areas.

### Case Studies

So far in this report, the word management has been used primarily to refer to the **management of forests** themselves, rather than the **management of forest development**. It is appropriate, at this point, to shift emphasis to a discussion of the ways in which rural people have, and have not, been involved in planning forest development and forest management.

#### *Chaubas*

Although older informants in Chaubas remember extensive forests in their childhood, the area was almost totally deforested in the three decades prior to the commencement of forest development in 1978. In that year, local residents approached the DFO and a Government nursery was established. Since the first trees from this nursery were planted (in 1979) an estimated 200 ha (Carter 1987a) has been planted in Chaubas panchayat, mostly on ridge tops which were grazing land before plantation commenced. By 1987 the older plantation sites were well established. In fact, some pruning was authorised as early as 1984.

At the earliest stages of plantation in Chaubas the stimulation seems to have come from one or two residents and the DFO. Nevertheless, the remarkable success of the plantation program which has transformed the entire Chaubas landscape, is evidence that local people supported the program, since protection requires people to actively refrain from cutting green products and from allowing animals to graze in the forest. Further, the labour for plantation at Chaubas was, until a change in policy in 1980, provided voluntarily by villagers. (After 1980, NAFFP, reluctantly following the precedent set by other projects, also began to pay for planting.) Thus, participation by villagers was a feature of plantation establishment. There is little evidence, however, that many villagers had a major role in decision-making.

In 1984 a Panchayat level forest committee was established. The members were appointed by the Panchayat and confirmed by the DFO. This committee now<sup>1</sup> as a major input into management of the forest resources. The main features of the management system are:

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1. This account of Chaubas refers to the situation at the end of 1987.

- o People are not allowed to graze any animals in the forest or to collect any forest products themselves.
- o Breaches of these rules are punished by compulsory labour in the nursery or during planting. However this remains largely theoretical since there are, reportedly, very few breaches.
- o Forest products are collected by the forest watchers and sold. A system of annual cutting of lower branches (under 2 metres or one third of total height) has commenced and the resulting firewood is sold for 50 *paisa* per *bhari* (head-load).
- o The forest watchers who do the cutting receive one *bhari* for each day's work (amounting to six *bharis* each during the cutting period prior to the field visit).
- o The remaining *bharis* are sold on a first come first served basis until the supply runs out. (This, of course, favours households with a lot of available labour).
- o People from ward numbers 1,2,3,5,6,7,8, (but not 4 and 9) use the products. They would be available to others, but no one uses them, probably because of distance.

This system appears, at first sight, to involve a high degree of local participation. However, this is, to some extent, illusory. Firstly, the committee does not have authority to initiate pruning. This can only be done at the discretion of the DFO. Secondly, while the forest committee is fairly active in forest development work, it is effectively dominated by nursery staff. The nursery staff, including nursery workers and plantation watchers, are all employed either by the Department of Forest, or by the project. The number of forest watchers or nursery staff who are elected members of the panchayat is quite noticeable and, at the time of the first OMRD field visit, included the *Pradhan Pancha* and several ward chairmen. The *Pradhan Pancha* was a Senior *Naika* responsible for several nurseries including Chaubas. He resigned from the Project late in 1987.

Whether being on the forest staff is a result of good Panchayat connections, or whether forest staff are elected because of the influence working in forest development gives them, is a moot point. However, a connection between control of the forest resource and local political power, is evident. An important implication of the relationship between forest committee membership and employment by external forest development agencies, is that control of forest resources is concentrated in a few hands.

There are strong indications that the products of the forest are not being widely distributed. In the third pruning period (1986), 520 *bharis* of firewood were collected. This included 120 given to forest watchers as payment for cutting and 400 distributed to members of the seven wards of users. This means that the 400 *bharis* had to be shared between perhaps 250 households. It is known that the nursery employees and forest watchers obtained some of these 400 head-loads as well. Whether they obtained a large proportion or just a few is not known. Even if it is assumed that all of the 400 head loads were divided equally amongst the user households, the average amount of firewood per household would be less than two head loads per year, which is rather a small proportion of the total household requirement of between 35 and 50 head loads per year.

There is no suggestion of dishonesty or corruption within the forest committee. However association with the nursery or the committee may lead to increased access to resources by individuals.

It is significant that the forest committee was not set up until 1984. Prior to that, protection was carried out by local employees of outside agencies with the apparent consent of the villagers. (The fact that effective protection occurred is clear evidence that people voluntarily refrained from using forests, since externally imposed protection seems never to be an effective deterrent in itself). It was only when utilisation of forest products came under consideration that a committee was formed.

Organisationally, there are interesting contrasts between the heavily externally-supported (if not initially externally-sponsored) development of forest resources in Chaubas and the successful indigenous systems examined earlier. Firstly, the forest resource at Chaubas is a large new resource, a planted forest not a natural one. Most of the indigenous systems discussed refer to natural forests, however degraded. Secondly, as it is a Panchayat level resource, the user group is much larger than usual.

There are also some interesting parallels with indigenous systems. The underlying common perception of the need to do something and the underlying local agreement about the solution is consistent with what we saw in indigenous systems. It is also apparent that the capacity of the nursery-centred organisation for handling utilisation and distribution is much less than its capacity for encouraging protection. There are serious doubts as to whether equitable distribution has occurred previously or will occur in the future under the current method of organisation.

Interestingly, following the first three pruning- distribution exercises there was a long gap before the DFO approved the fourth. During this time illegal pruning of trees emerged as a problem perhaps for the first time in the Chaubas plantation. This was attributed by some as being a result of concern about the delay in providing products. It may, just as easily, be a reaction against the non-equitable distribution of products by the Committee.<sup>2</sup>

At a late stage in the preparation of this report a further pruning exercise was being arranged, using a revised distribution system. The details are not available.

#### *Thulo-Siru-Bari*

Thulo-Siru-Bari is another case of a Panchayat in which a previously deforested area is now relatively well forested. As with Chaubas the major resource at present is new plantation forest, mostly of pines, although the Panchayat also has some large patches of natural forest. It has been estimated that there are now at least 200 ha of plantation forest in Thulo-Siru-Bari (Carter 1987b).

The early stages of externally-sponsored forest development clearly worked well. The minimum conditions of perception of need and consent were present. However, attempts to set up an externally-sponsored forest committee to manage utilisation of forest products struck major difficulties.

The first attempts to set up a mechanism for utilising the plantation resources of Thulo-Siru-Bari occurred in 1986 and were initiated by the project and the DFO. Meetings between staff from the Department of Forest and the Panchayat took place and a Forest Committee was set up. This lapsed in early 1987. Late in 1987, a new committee was set up with a newly elected Pradhan Pancha as Chairman. The election took place at a meeting between the Ranger and the "community".

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2. At a late stage in the preparation of this report a further pruning exercise was being arranged, using a revised distribution system. The details are not available.

In fact attendance at the meeting was limited to people who happened to be around at the time as the meeting was not announced in advance. Further, among the people elected to the committee several were absent. A decision was made to prune a section of forest. Each household was to be allowed to cut 90 kg, for which there would be a fee of 5 *paise* per kg. It was intended that access would be allowed on a rotating basis, with people from various wards collecting firewood by turn.

A field visit by the researchers for this case study occurred, by coincidence, only a few days after the meeting. Interviews with people in Thulo-Siru-Bari panchayat showed that the nature of the arrangement was poorly understood, even by those who had attended the meeting. One *Sarki* who had been elected to the committee knew no more than the price of firewood and the distribution date. Generally the *Sarkis*, even if they knew about the arrangement, had little confidence that they would benefit. The arrangement also created concern about possible future charges for collection of products from natural forests.

The pruning arrangement and the committee set up to control it were a case of a heavily top-down decision making-process. There was little local understanding, and great concern about equitable distribution. Probably as a result of the non-participatory nature of the exercise extensive illegal cutting took place before the authorised pruning exercise began.

### *Discussion*

The problems in Chaubas and Thulo-Siru-Bari are of a somewhat different order. In Chaubas the forest committee is something of a benign local oligarchy. In Thulo-Siru-Bari major factionalism and extreme lack of confidence in the imposed management system go hand in hand. There are some important parallels and contrasts in the two situations. Features in common are:

- o In both cases there is a large newly created resource of plantation forest for which use rights are not clearly established.
- o In Thulo-Siru-Bari use-rights have been decided administratively, not by negotiation. In Chaubas there appears to have been some negotiation about use-rights within the Panchayat.
- o Decision-making in Thulo-Siru-Bari took place at a meeting of the community, which, in fact, was little more than an accidental gathering. The decisions were made abruptly, with no attempt to seek the views of users, or even to make sure that the issues were properly discussed. At Chaubas the whole process was much more cautious and people had a much clearer idea about what was going on. The relatively greater level of local participation in forest management oriented decision-making in Chaubas is evidence that local initiatives can, to some extent, function within externally-sponsored structures, providing time is given for negotiation and internal adjustment.
- o The size of the user groups is very large in each case. This may not present a crucial problem for protection, but seems to be a serious problem in utilisation and distribution. (For a similar reason the change of the large indigenous system at Nala-ko-Thulo-Ban from a protection-orientation to a utilisation-orientation may be very difficult.)

The two cases outlined above are cases where the process of plantation and protection involved a substantial degree of local consensus. The fact that difficulties are being experienced in transferring effective control and in developing systems for utilisation and distribution should not be allowed to obscure this important point.

The rather far-sighted philosophy which underlay the early activities of the Department of Forest and the project in Sindhu Palchok and Kabhre Palanchok was developed initially by I B.S Mahat (Campbell and Mahat 1977). It was based on a strategy which assumed that activities should occur only where people were "*already strongly motivated toward community forestry*" (Campbell and Mahat 1977, 4).

This strategy was very successful in a number of areas. There is a close correlation between areas where plantation was successful and where strong local motivation exists. The existence of areas where plantation and protection have been less successful is related to the absence of the "motivation" regarded as essential by Campbell and Mahat. It may be that the underlying philosophy has been somewhat lost as the planting program has become very big. It is likely that the expressed interest of a few (particularly political leaders) has sometimes been confused with broad-based "motivation".

### **Unsuccessful Interventions**

Evidence from this case study suggests that project interventions at the level of plantation establishment, tend to be unsuccessful when support and motivation are lacking. Motivation, however, should not be seen as an independent variable. It is a response to other circumstances. People tend to be unmotivated or negatively motivated either because (1) forest products are relatively accessible and there is no particular reason to become involved, or (2) because of disputes over tenure of plantation land.

### *Alternative Accessible Resources*

In Chapter 2 there was a discussion of the resource availability model proposed by Gilmour (1987). Evidence from this case study supports the finding that indigenous forest management systems are more likely to be present when resources are insufficient than when they are readily available. Similarly, as Gilmour's model suggests, support for outside interventions is most likely when resources are not readily accessible.

Among the settlements selected for examination in this case study were the adjoining settlements of Phusre and Sano Okhraneni in Syaule Panchayat and the settlement of Chillaune in Thangpalkot Panchayat. All of these settlements are situated on the fringes of Chyo Chyo Lekh in Sindhu Palchok District. In each of these areas, a relative lack of success in plantation establishment is at least partly a result of the existence of relatively accessible high altitude forests only a few hours return trip away.

### *Tenure Problems*

In the cases of Chillaune and Syaule a second factor was at work which substantially limited motivation. In each case nurseries now exist with little local support. The major constraint to successful plantation in each case is that some of the land used for plantation is locally claimed as common or private grazing land.

Tenure disputes occur in a number of places in the project area, besides the two mentioned. In Majhi-Pheda planting has taken place on undisputed land, but there has been great resistance to planting on some plots of land where villagers strongly assert that their rights and needs are ignored. In Chaubas there are also disputes over tenure or use-rights in regard to some patches of plantation forest.

However, the effects of such disputes vary. In Syaule there has been a lack of interest in plantation activities, and a tendency to ignore restrictions against grazing. In Chillaune the result has been outright antagonism against the nursery, blatant flouting of grazing restrictions in planting areas, deliberate destruction of seedlings and several violent incidents.

A clear finding of this case study has been that planting on land used for other purposes or land with disputed tenure has been a major reason for failure of reforestation.

### *Discussion*

To look for evidence of local motivation before initiating forest plantation activities is, as Campbell and Mahat (1977) suggest, a useful strategy. The success of forest plantation and protection at Chaubas and Thulo-Siru-Bari suggests that the people were "motivated toward community forestry" at the beginning.

However, it also appears that something more is needed for utilisation and distribution of forest resources. The missing factor is the need for functioning local institutions which operate with the full consent and understanding of the users. It would seem, from the cases of Chaubas and Thulo-Siru-Bari, that a role in actual decision making is necessary. In Thulo-Siru-Bari this was totally lacking and the outside intervention was heavily top-down. In Chaubas the process, although hardly "indigenous", at least involved an active local committee.

It seems that the participatory process must be much more active for management systems involving utilisation to operate because something more than passive cooperation (i.e. not cutting down trees) is needed when forest products begin to be distributed.