

six what lies ahead

The Present Scenario

The situation at present can be summed up simply. While the government technically assumes the KFCS to be in a state of suspended animation, at ground level the organisations themselves (at least some of them) are alive and active. The people are annoyed and angry at being sidelined from managing and using 'their' forests, and at the way in which the state has sought to unilaterally appropriate the basis of their rights and their existence. The issue of reviving these KFCS is important in itself, as well as being one aspect of the overall fight to ensure an appropriate and enabling environment for participatory and sustainable forest management in HP.

The KFCS represent one of the oldest state-led attempts at PFM in HP, but overall the activities of the state seem more to have been designed to alienate local communities from the forests than to integrate them. Since the 1980s, the FD in Himachal Pradesh has continued to try out different forms of PFM, mostly to similar effect. The recent history of these attempts may help to forecast what could lie ahead, and to suggest a better path forward.



Report of the inspector of the Cooperatives Department for Arla Saloh KFCS 1999–2000.

Recent History of Participatory Forest Management in Himachal Pradesh

Indo German Dhauladhar Project (IGDP)

The IGDP was conceptualised around the assertion that problems in the Himalayas have an interdependent environmental and socioeconomic character. This multi-sectoral integrated project covered about 100 villages in the upper catchment of the Binwa River in Kangra, at the base of the Dhauladhar mountain range, from 1980 to 1989. The project initiated a strategy for securing people's participation called TRUCO (Trust and Confidence). A separate social development section played the main role in reaching out to village communities. The IGDP accepted village level institutions (VLIs) as the best agents for change in mountain systems and helped form and strengthen approximately 53 VDCs and 73 youth clubs and mahila mandals (MMs).

At the beginning, a series of meetings was held in each 'key village'. Thereafter, the local community had to request the project that it be taken as a partner. With the help of IGDP staff, each selected village formed a VDC. Gaining trust in itself and confidence in its abilities, the VDC gradually took up planning and implementing IGDP programmes. The notable achievements were:

- plantation of broad-leaved trees to serve as future fodder banks, and establishment of village nurseries to provide saplings continuously to communities;
- plantation of community orchards and fodder crops;
- popularising stall feeding and developing an equitable system for the distribution of grass from strips within closed and planted belts;
- upgrading breeds and reducing non-productive livestock, thus increasing farmers' returns;
- promoting smokeless 'dhauladhar chulhas' for better kitchen hygiene and women's health; and
- increasing agricultural production due to better agricultural awareness and extension.

Building the trust and confidence of local VLIs in their ability to undertake community-based management of local resources was a remarkable and significant step for PFM in Himachal Pradesh. However, no government department (including the FD, IGDP's major partner) recognised these IGDP-created institutions as focal points for mobilising village communities, so they were neglected and eventually became defunct after the project ended. The FD, again the main force behind the experiment, apparently failed to internalise any lessons from the success of this community-managed forestry.

Social Forestry Project

The National Social Forestry (umbrella) project was implemented in HP between 1985 and 1993 with a total budget of Rs 570 million. Its main aims were to raise income and employment amongst the rural poor by increasing the production of fuelwood, fodder, and timber, and to arrest the erosion of the natural environment caused by deforestation. The scheme included tree tenures for the poor and landless, community woodlots (self-help and rainfed), regeneration of degraded forests, farmers' nurseries and distribution of seedlings, as well as the planting of a variety of trees on private non-arable lands. The 'Van Lagao, Rozi Kamao' scheme, announced later, was one of its components.

This project covered all of HP's 12 districts and attempted to implement its activities through villagers or in consultation with villagers. The FD started the dialogue with the villagers through

'gram panchayats' (GP) or other existing VLIs such as MMs. Village forest development committees (VFDCs) were set up in many villages for the first time to implement the scheme. However, attempts to seek the active participation of an entire village community by including one woman (from the MM), one representative from the scheduled castes, and one from the GP, were not very successful (Sood 1994). The VDCs evolved neither participatory mechanisms nor bottom-up systems for planning and management. The lack of representation of local forest users and domination by the elite reduced the experiment to pro forma 'involvement' of the people. As ex-officio member secretary of the VDC, the FD forest beat guard formulated the integrated resource management plan (IRMP) for the village, leading to FD rather than community ownership. While on paper the social forestry programme succeeded in planting over 100,000 ha of plantations, community participation was limited and the FD continued choosing the species to be planted (like eucalyptus), without reference to the needs of the community – leading many communities to call it 'un-social' forestry.

Joint Forest Management – a national strategy

By the early 1970s, many foresters throughout India were having serious doubts about the effectiveness of the forest conservancy systems they had inherited and were practising. Instead of continuing to limit people's rights and drive them out of forests, they began involving people in managing and protecting forest land from illicit felling, grazing, fires and encroachment. In return, the users were granted access to intermediate products and a share of the final harvest. These approaches were initiated in West Bengal and then spread to Orissa, Gujrat, Haryana, and later UP and Bihar.

The success of these experiments and movements influenced national policy makers and led to a new forest policy in 1988. Reversing the previous focus on commercial timber production, it emphasised the importance of ensuring environmental stability and ecological balance, and accepted that the 'first charge' on forest produce was that of tribal communities and other poor people living within or near the forests. In 1990, the Ministry of Environment and Forests GOI complemented the 1988 policy with a government order (GO) to all states that participatory forest management of degraded forest land be adopted with communities, through NGOs wherever possible. The GO provided guidelines for developing mutually binding working arrangements between the various partners. Called 'Joint Forest Management' (JFM), this represented a major policy shift from the authoritarian forest management previously practised by the FD. In 1993, HP passed its government order notifying guidelines for JFM in the state.

The notifications and government orders for the Kangra Forest Cooperatives and for JFM were separated by almost five decades. On paper the two have somewhat different social, political, and forest management objectives, but actually when one examines the relevant issues in the context of the current situation the differences seem less impressive than the similarities. The comparison between the approaches of the FD and other stakeholder institutions provides useful insights and lessons related to the PFM approaches that could help future implementation of PFM in HP to be more successful. The comparison indicates that that the 1993 government order for JFM was more or less 'old wine in a new bottle', the positive aspects being the better provision for ensuring equity in participation and benefit distribution.

In practice, the guidelines for JFM were not passed on in any meaningful way to the territorial forest divisions of the state. By 2001 less than 1,000 village (or tika) forest development committees (VFDCs) had reportedly been formed from some 20,000 villages comprising maybe as many as 120,000 hamlets (tika). The extent to which these institutions are genuinely

participatory is also questionable, since no in-depth training was imparted to FD staff before they were asked to initiate JFM. Their approach, as in the social forestry programme, continues to be authoritarian and non-participatory.

The Indo-German Changer Project and the Himachal Pradesh Forestry Project

A more extended 'joint participatory forest management' (JPFM) approach is being tried out in two bilateral projects. Although both projects have been running since the early nineties, this experiment is still confined to the pilot areas. The approach emphasises both developing genuine 'bottom-up' and participatory planning with the emphasis on user communities rather than on individuals, and large-scale capacity building within the FD itself to reorient staff and train them in communications and facilitation skills.

The Indo-German Changer Project (IGCP) started in 1993 with a planned implementation period of 15 years supported by German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). It covers an area in Kangra district of a little more than 400 sq.km with 570 villages. It is an integrated development project that includes forestry as one component. The emphasis has been on strengthening village self-help organizations followed by participatory integrated land use planning.

The Himachal Pradesh Forestry Project (HPFP) is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID – formerly ODA). It was launched in 1994 in the Kullu and Mandi districts and is ongoing in 2002. The project focuses on process learning and monitoring; the aim was to build people's participation into the normal functioning of the FD and the project emphasised changing the attitudes of FD staff at all levels. Compared to the methodology used for KFCS formation 50 years earlier, the approach is very slow and cautious. An impact assessment study indicated significant concern about the achievements of the project's first phase. The process of working with communities proved lengthy and costly; the groups formed tended to be too large and unrepresentative so that the needs and priorities of the poorest were not reflected in micro-plan activities; and the micro-plans themselves were too oriented towards forest enclosure and replanting. Micro-plan funds were effectively providing wage labour opportunities as temporary compensation for lost grazing, fuelwood, and fodder benefits from the forest. Despite considerable training in sensitisation and methodology with territorial FD staff, the perception of DFOs and conservators did not appear to have changed much in favour of PFM, although ground level staff have found JFM to be very useful and are now committed to it in principal. Emphasis in the second phase shifted towards sustainable livelihoods as this is the strongest reason for any community to engage with the FD and undertake any meaningful and long-term participatory forest management

Overall the FD's emphasis in these two projects was to accumulate examples and gain experience. Nearly ten years later it seems, in the opinion of the author, that JPFM is becoming yet another of the FD's 'oasis experiments,' new initiatives being tried out in small spaces while the mainstream territorial policies and attitudes remain unchanged.

Sanjhi Van Yojna

The Sanjhi Van Yojna scheme is a new effort in PFM somewhat similar to JFM but financed from the state budget. It was launched between 1998 and 1999 with an initial outlay of 100 million rupees (approximately 1.3 million US dollars). This scheme adds the gram panchayat (the elected village level body for local self-governance) to the list of social institutions that can be involved. It aims both to regenerate degraded forest areas and to increase social, non-forest related, infrastructural assets (up to 25% of the total budget), although these two would seem to

be mutually exclusive. The scheme also promises that the village forest development committees (VFDCs) to be formed will be registered by the DFO as welfare societies (VFDS)(non-government organisations) under the Societies Act of 1860. One step forward has been made in the provision to send the grant money for the approved micro-plan by cheque to the official joint account of the VFDC. Also new is the ‘usufruct-sharing’ model at the time of final harvest. The sale proceeds from plantations on government lands will be distributed as follows.

- 25% to the VFDS executive committee – to be distributed amongst members
- 25% to be deposited in the joint account of the VFDS and village development fund
- 10% to the gram panchayat within which the VFDS falls
- 40% to the government treasury

In practice, however, the Sanjhi Van Yojna scheme suffers from the same shortcomings as the JFM in the Himachal Pradesh Forestry Project, including imposing the forest guard on the Village Forest Development Society as ex-officio secretary. It seems likely that this scheme will also be unsustainable beyond the first five-year micro-planning cycle. Having started PFM in some 400 villages throughout the state, the programme is already bogged down by a shortage of funds in the third year of implementation.

Ongoing Plans and Activities

Draft PFM rules

The draft of a new GO to replace the 1993 government order and detailed PFM rules are both awaiting government approval. The drafts provide for increasing the institutional autonomy of village forest development committees by registering them and vesting their presidents with the power of a forest officer for compounding offences. There still seem to be considerable shortcomings, however. The village forest development societies are expected to play a primarily policing function on behalf of the FD. The rules propose continuation of contemporary micro-planning with all its shortcomings. Annual implementation plan formats attached to the rules imply that the micro-plans will take the form of even more tree plantation and closures than under HPFP, with little space for integrating the diversity of existing livelihood dependencies on forest land into the micro-planning process. Grassland and pasture development are not even mentioned in the micro-plan format. Some of the main features of the draft rules are summarised in comparison with the characteristics of the KFCS in Annex 3.

A more problematic provision, carried over from the 1993 order, is for sharing 50% of the net income with the VFDS “at the time of final harvest of the crop (of at least 20 years rotation).” This is clearly an inappropriate incentive for livelihood focused PFM, particularly in Himachal Pradesh where most VFDS members already have legal timber distribution rights and are unlikely to be willing to share the timber harvest either with the government or with non-right holding residents. A shift in focus to participatory resource management would seem to be a more appropriate incentive for making PFM sustainable in HP. This would improve livelihoods by providing real choices for increasing the continuing flow of multiple benefits to the most resource poor women and men, irrespective of their legal rights, and devolving management (and not just protection) authority to the VFDSs.

The draft rules increase inclusivity by opening membership to all adults not just households, thereby entitling all women and other adults within larger households to independent membership. Ironically, whereas the current 1993 PFM order provides for 50% of the VFDCs’ executive committee members to be women, the new draft rules reduce this to 33%.

At present, even rightholders are not entitled to sell surplus produce such as grass and firewood from their JFM areas; the rights are for bona fide domestic use only. This has become a major obstacle for older VFDCs in generating a common fund. Participatory forest management rules need to clearly empower them to raise income through such means. A more equitable, longer term goal of PFM should be to create consensus in favour of replacing individual rights with community rights, thus facilitating genuine needs-based community resource management and undoing the distortions created by settlements made a century ago. It would be desirable to explore the idea of declaring village common lands, traditionally used for grazing livestock (and now legally notified as 'forests') as 'village forests' under Section 28 of the Indian Forest Act along the lines of the van panchayats in the UP hills. This would provide a statutory mechanism for devolving control over their management back to the resource users in line with the move towards devolution in other fields.

A major shortcoming in the draft rules is that they do not grant the VFDS any security of tenure over the PFM forest land area in cases of dispute with the Forest Department. Disputes are to be resolved within the FD structure, making one party to the agreement the ultimate arbiter of any dispute. In the context of Himachal Pradesh, tenurial security for the VFDS may remain a problem as the FD itself has no clear jurisdiction over Class III 'undemarcated protected forest' categories of 'forest' lands as these are still the subject of dispute between the FD and the revenue department. The draft rules assume, however, that the FD has the authority to enter into PFM agreements related to UPF lands as well as for other government lands over which it has no jurisdiction. This anomaly may prove problematic.

The envisaged process for constituting VFDS is too rapid and lacks mechanisms to ensure informed participation of poor forest-dependent women and men. It is prone to capture by village elites, as has happened with most of the VFDCs formed so far.

Forest sector review

The Himachal Pradesh Forest Department carried out a comprehensive review of the forest sector (FSR) in 1999/2000. The review aimed to provide basic information and a consensus on which to build the future policies and strategies of the department and other key institutions so that they would meet the needs of key forest stakeholders and ensure sustainable management of forest resources, integrating forest sector planning with socioeconomic development.

The FSR analysis and discussion raise three groups of related issues:

- participation in forest management for livelihood needs,
- increasing the goods and services available through improving forest management, and
- coherence in governance, law and policy to achieve the above.

The FSR has identified four key principles that need to be adopted in HP as a basis for defining policies and programmes towards sustainable forest management.

Multiple forest values – The many forest values that sustain local livelihoods and economic growth – from energy, food, and fibre production to cultural values and environmental services – should be recognised in order to allow a continuous flow of benefits for different stakeholders.

Multiple forest stakeholders – The many stakeholders involved in the forest sector must be recognised – from those dependent on forests for subsistence needs, through state-level institutions charged with looking after HP forests, to national and international stakeholders. Good policies and programmes should be implemented to give them access to information and

decision-making processes, and to emphasise participation in sharing the costs and benefits of forest use.

Changing conditions – Since economic, environmental, social, and institutional circumstances and needs are changing rapidly, both within HP and outside, policies and programmes need to be capable of regular review and adaptation, and should include a precautionary approach to protect important forest assets.

The need for a lead agency to coordinate the transition to SFM – This is necessary because all stakeholders expect the FD, as the recognised authority, to coordinate the transition to sustainable forest management: therefore the department must be given considerable support. Also necessary is a regular, equitable, participatory system through which stakeholders themselves can meet, debate strategic issues, consider optional solutions, and form partnerships – facilitated by the FD itself.

Ultimately, these principles imply a significant re-negotiation of forest stakeholder roles that are both realistic and acceptable to all. Already a recognised need, this cannot occur without a shared vision of SFM, based on a participatory policy process.

This re-negotiation is likely to herald the beginning of significant institutional change over the coming years, and will possibly be the main outcome of the forest sector review. A process of decentralisation of forestry is needed to handle local complexities, but there must be enough centralisation to ensure greater policy coherence both within and outside the state.

The FSR has recognised most of the factors that can help PFM and forest management in general to become a sustainable and profitable option for the state and the communities involved. It identifies the fact that this can only happen through policy and institutional change within the FD, but fails to adequately define what factors would lead to such a change occurring.

The future of the Kangra Forest Cooperative Societies

On 20 March 2000, the HP State Cooperatives Development Union organised a one-day seminar called “The Problems and Challenges Before the Forest Cooperative Societies” in Dharamsala. Chaired by Sh. Rikhi Ram Kaundal, Honourable Minister for Cooperatives, the seminar brought together the FD, represented by the conservator (Kangra), and the CD, represented by the assistant registrar (Kangra). Many representatives of KFCS from throughout the district also attended. By the end of the seminar, clear consensus had been reached that the KFCS had been badly treated. The CD accepted its inability to fight for the societies and a committee was formed under the chairmanship of the additional registrar of the CD to discuss how to revive them.



Mr. Vasudev, guard to the three KFCS around Maniara.

The FD accepted that the KFCS are PFM institutions capable in their present extent of managing up to 9% of the district's forest land and that, with minor changes in the existing PFM schemes, they could continue this role.

The KFCS accepted that their by-laws harked from an earlier era and must include equity and gender concerns as well as a broader membership base, and they agreed to undertake these changes at once. Some of the changes needed are as follows.

Rationalisation of the forest areas – The growth and movement in populations over the last fifty years has put pressure on the forest area under the KFCS. Those that started with one or two hamlets today have 10 to 15 villages and are large and unwieldy.

Open membership – Membership must be opened to all forest users, not just rightholders. Special provisions for involving women must be included in the by-laws.

Transparency – Lack of ordinary members' participation and centralised management committees have made the societies non-transparent, and requires adjustment.

Legal control over forests – If the societies are to effectively manage their forests, long-term and legally clear tenurial systems ensuring their stake are required.

Role vis à vis panchayats – It is necessary to consider how these cooperatives would coordinate and benefit from the decentralised governance system of the panchayat. While the autonomy of forest-based user group forestry has its own strengths, the coordination and support of the panchayats can strengthen these institutions.

The PFM approach will be vindicated in HP if the cooperative societies are revived. Real PFM, however, with all its benefits, can only come about when the basic tenets outlined below have been achieved.

Lessons from the History of Participatory Forestry Management in Himachal Pradesh

Common themes

Technically, the task of managing HP's official 37,600 sq.km of forest land (67% of the total geographical area, but only about one third actually forested, see below) falls upon approximately 4,400 FD field foresters. In reality, the direct day-to-day work of the village communities – 91% of the total state population of 550,000 – has the most impact on forest use in the state. Forests are an integral part of farming systems, including horticultural development and livestock management, and they provide fuelwood, wood for agricultural implements, fodder, compost, timber, staking and fencing material, and food for these communities. Studies have shown that in terms of value forests contribute 19%, 20%, and 26% respectively of the total production of food grains, fruit, and vegetables in the hills (Gulati 1996). Further, they contribute 49% of requirements for animal husbandry, and 90% of the domestic energy requirement of the rural population. According to FD estimates, the direct tangible removals from HP's forests exceed a value of Rs 10 billion every year.

There are central themes common to all previous attempts at PFM in HP, from the very first KFCS in the 1940s to more recent schemes. These shared features are as follow.

- The attempt at PFM takes the form of a temporary scheme or a time-bound project.
- The FD allows the village community to form new, transient village organisations to protect and manage usually degraded (open access) forest land, with closure and plantation as a uniform prescription.

- The main benefit is disguised wage-work for non-forest based asset creation (footpaths, spring wells) or plantation work for an initial period of only 2 to 3 years. During this time the closed-off areas show considerable improvement and benefits in terms of grass production, but the planted trees need at least 8 to 10 years to grow. Pressure on the demarcated protected forest nearby is lifted temporarily as a result of the wage-labour and the creation of non-forest assets.
- The 'jointness' has a very clear definition: the village committees (VDCs, VFDCs, Village Eco-development Committees) take over the most important (protection) roles from the FD: the removal of encroachments, ensuring the closure of disputed open access grazing lands, distribution of grass and loppings, conflict resolution, and other vital work. However, legal recognition of these institutions, their control over the land they manage, their power to fine offenders, and their right to manage forests as well as enjoy major long-term benefits such as timber, and high value NTFPs (resin, khair, and so on) are left undefined and very much in the control of the FD.

To date, mainstream forest management systems attempt to define forest lands as a property only of the state, the FD is landlord of 66% of HP's geographical area.

On the other hand, the village communities define the forests not merely as 'resources' to be exploited, but as the very essence of their existence and livelihood. This is asserted through centuries-old customary systems of community forest management and use that are based on mutually recognised rights of access and extraction that members of the forest user groups in each community accept and respect.

These systems, the only systems on which true forest management can really be based, are not mentioned in the WP documents or other planning and implementation mechanisms of the FD. Most forest guards admit that when transferred to a new beat, the village community provides the exact location of the boundary pillars defining forest land under their control. In fact, given the large size of their forest beats, most learn about illegal felling and timber smuggling only from the forest users themselves.

The idea behind experimenting with PFM is to develop a new path on which forestry can develop, but tragically it has become a footpath into the wilderness. The HP Forest Department currently uses the idea of PFM as a means to attract substantial foreign donor contributions and also to relieve some of the communities' pent-up anger over their alienation from their forest wealth and their lack of access and control. Unfortunately, the department seems not to have found it expedient to integrate the lessons learned from the PFM experiment into its forestry management systems.

The questions the FD should be asking, and which all those concerned with the future of HP's forests and the well-being of the people of HP should ask are:

- What lessons and experiences do these initiatives hold for the future of sustainable forest management in HP?
- What should be the future of the KFCS themselves?

Emerging lessons for the future of sustainable forest management in Himachal Pradesh

For sustainable forest management to succeed, existing PFM attempts must be transcended. Fundamental changes are required.

Mainstreaming PFM

Failure to re-notify the KFCS scheme, and experiences from JFM and Sanjhi Van Yojna, suggest that the FD considers these simply to be trials and experiments to show that PFM is possible. All these initiatives, however, seem both peripheral to mainstream forest management, and also to lack any inbuilt sustainability. PFM should now become **the** forest management system rather than a single, isolated experiment. Participatory forest management must be how the FD manages **all** forest land with a high population-forest interface. The FD should see the community as forest managers, with the necessary powers deriving from the Forest Act and PFM rules. PFM must be a system of forest management with clear milestones written into the working plans and designated forest areas handed over to communities on a long-term lease arrangement.



Maniara has fertile agricultural land irrigated by this 'kuhl'. Maniara KFCS contributes a share for the annual maintenance of the kuhl.

traditional village common lands acquired by the state in the mid-70s. Even today, most of these are heavy-dependence open grazing lands or pastures with bush regimes, many of which the FD attempts each year to close and plant, with poor survival rates for obvious reasons.

The FD must realise and accept that different areas in the hills have different land uses supporting local livelihoods. These are being destroyed and resource-dependent groups alienated from the forests due to bad prescriptions and monoculture plantations. Thus pastures, rangelands, and others should be considered a correct use of a proportion of the land in the hills – and different management systems should be reflected in the silvicultural prescriptions and norms in the WPs.

Changing forest land use

In theory, the FD considers trees to be the optimum land use for HP's forest lands. However it must be remembered that the most recent legal definition of 'forest land' uses the idea of an 'ecosystem' as the basis, forest land is by no means necessarily forested. According to FD statistics (and although not reflected in the revenue department's land records) of the 37,600 sq.km land legally classified as 'forest' (67% of the state's geographic area), of which 37,000 sq.km is under FD jurisdiction, only 12,500 sq.km is actually forested (crown density of more than 10%) and only 9,600 sq.km of this has dense forest (Bhatia 2000). As much as 11,300 sq.km is actually incapable of supporting tree cover as it lies above the tree line at altitudes above 3,000 to 4,000m and is covered by alpine pasture or permanent snow. This means that some 24,500 sq.km of forest land is capable of supporting forest cover and about half of this is actually forested. Much of the 'forest land' consists of 'undemarcated protected forest' and

Reclassifying forest lands

It may be both useful and necessary to reclassify forest land on the basis of who has primary responsibility for its management and the use to which it is put. One suggested classification is as follows.

- **Community forest:** forests managed exclusively by communities along PFM principles for local use (with technical expertise and support from the FD). There could be two designated types.
 - a) **Supply forest:** managed to supply fuelwood, fodder, timber, and NTFPs. Livelihood development for local communities through technical, financial and marketing support should be provided. Extraction, processing, and export rules will have to be changed to achieve this.
 - b) **Conservation forest:** areas around villages where the primary objectives are land stabilisation of severely eroded areas, watershed management, and biodiversity conservation. These areas would become forest resources under long-term rotation.
- **State forest:** managed primarily by the FD, these areas would provide for the nation's ecological, timber and industrial needs. There could be two designated types as follows.
 - a) **Supply forest:** forest areas with a minimum of community extraction, devoted to supplying national needs for timber and NTFPs (including cultivation)
 - b) **Conservation forest:** alpine areas and protected areas along peripheries where community dependence is low and participatory conservation management could ensure the continuance of biodiversity elements. The preservation of Himalayan habitats and the benefits thereof to the nation – such as water and carbon fixation – could be ensured.

Converting individual rights to community rights

Individual rights are clearly difficult to regulate, especially with a regulatory mechanism that is external to the community of forest users. One important lesson that emerges from the KFCS experience is that if the forest resource is community property and extraction a community right; and if the community institutions are equity-based and supportive to forest dependent groups; internal regulation leading to sustainable extraction is possible. The FD's role then shifts to one of external monitoring and conflict resolution.

Strengthening sustainable forest-based livelihoods

Unless forests generate and support short-term benefits and thus strengthen sustainable livelihoods, communities will have little interest in PFM. Involving people in activities that rehabilitate and rejuvenate the natural resources that their communities depend on is the most difficult task that conservation-oriented attempts face. Over the years, community dependence on, and hence interest in, most common property resources (CPRs) has decreased. To promote involvement in and eventual community control of CPRs, each individual user group concerned with a specific natural resource use should be mobilised. Real mobilisation generally has an economic dimension, it is triggered by a perceived increase in benefits from the resource/asset in question, thus these benefits must be secured in both the short and the long term. In general, there needs to be a tangible short-term benefit to push otherwise reluctant vested interest groups to renegotiate resource use practices and to resolve existing conflicts for long-term investments in resource conservation and utilisation.

The forest-based livelihoods approach can focus all initial efforts at demonstrating increased short-term benefits and clear cash incomes to identified stakeholders through production-based initiatives. This creates interest in each stakeholder to work for that activity, and to settle

differences and organise themselves together into a collective. Once the collective starts earning sustainable income from a certain resource use, interest in resource conservation and resource enhancement and management is also created. Thus forest-based livelihoods could bring people together to take up ecological restoration and management of natural resources.

Rationalising the role of people's institutions

The present scenario presents a bewildering variety of people's institutions created or recognised for PFM by the FD and the government. The state has created village forest development societies (VFDS), village eco-development societies (VEDS), village development committees (VDCs) and, significantly, has placed forests among 14 line departments to be managed and supervised by the gram panchayat. These institutions are distinct from the popular traditional local institutions that previously played a significant role in forest management, the 'devta' committees, 'sudhar sabhas', mahila mandals and others.

JFM and PFM have thus far allocated only superficial and inconsequential legal roles and powers to the institutions created to implement them. But these institutions have demonstrated an ability to garner people's involvement at a time when communities are distancing themselves from line departments. As demonstrated in the KFCS case, local institutions can play a much greater role in sustainable forest management, but must be given a clear and central role. Given the present social and political scenario regarding forests, the FD itself has to initiate such changes, providing clear-cut milestones and indicators for restructuring and handing over the agreed functions to village communities.

Conclusion

The history of forest management in HP shows that neither the FD nor any other government institution changes on its own. Himachal has seen no significant people's resistance or revolts against the alienation of the forests for the last 150 years. Modern development agendas, large-scale government employment between 1970 and 1990, and the opening up of trade and market opportunities post-1990 have absorbed such pressures. Large-scale investment by the central government has fuelled a shift from forest-based livelihoods to tertiary options.

As India's economic scenario is now undergoing a dramatic change, with a shortfall in available subsidies, economics will force the state to look again at forests and their economic value and to plan larger community involvement in the co-management of forest wealth for economic and ecological gain. The HP Government should play the role of change manager, considering these realities and setting in motion changed policies, institutions, and implementation in order to achieve these gains.

Many states have taken the other path, bringing in private industry as the facilitator, using private benefit as the precursor to improved economic management of the state forests. This has created two problems – bringing larger incomes for a few individuals at the cost of entire communities, especially forest users; and leading to economically productive but ecologically destructive forest use practices, thus destroying the foundation of a long-term asset base. While this approach can be followed in state supply forests, in most forests the livelihood options available to local communities must be developed as the main precursor to creating and increasing their stake in sustainable management. This will create local incomes as well as self-perpetuating and self-regulating forest management practices.

Himachal Pradesh must now choose between the two paths. This decision will determine what will happen to the future of the forests and the people whose lives depend on them.