

2 Participatory Forest Management

Throughout India, as a matter of policy, the government is emphasising involving local people in the management of forest resources through the Joint Forest Management (JFM) programme. The Himalayan forests are no exception to this.

The extent to which JFM is being implemented varies from state to state and even within states. Success appears to have been somewhat sporadic. There has been no comprehensive evaluation of the JFM programme, and much of the information describing success is based on reports prepared by the implementing bodies themselves or their network organisations. It is clear that JFM has not been implemented in many of the areas where it could (or should) have been, notwithstanding nation-wide publicity that sometimes indicates the opposite. Some of the issues requiring attention are summarised below.

- **Lack of legal support** – The concept of JFM has not been incorporated into any Forest Act. This hinders the adoption, formalisation, and integration of JFM into the normal operations and working procedures of Forest Departments.
- **Adoption of JFM Rules** – So far, 17 States have adopted the JFM Policy following the 1st June, 1990, circular by the Government of India. However, to give practical shape to this, a set of rules needs to be prepared and approved specifying such things as exact rights and concessions and benefit-sharing arrangements.
- **Inconsistent commitment**–In many areas, the move towards JFM has not been consistent over time. Establishing a new institutional system, such as that required for JFM, calls for patient and dedicated persuasion over a long period. For various reasons, efforts have slowed down in the formative stages greatly retarding the process.
- **Frequent transfers**–JFM is a partnership between the communities and the state, and transfer of forest officers, particularly those who have a day-to-day link with the forest communities, results in a sudden breakdown of this relationship. The new incumbent needs time to rebuild the relationship, and this results in a crucial loss of time.
- **Location-specific constraints**–There are various location specific constraints that need to be analysed and addressed at the local level.
- **Concept of resource management**–It is most important that the JFM programme is perceived and understood properly by different groups at the grass roots' level, but the concept of resource management for sustainability is not fully appreciated by the different participating agencies.
- **JFM cell**–No 'JFM cell' has been set up to support and monitor the developments in India as a whole, and there is no overall information available that could be used when developing future strategies and programmes.
- **Commitment**–Both political will, and commitment and motivation by forest officers at all levels, are essential for the success of JFM activities. Appropriate human resource development is needed.

- **Gender issues**—Especially in hill areas, gender issues must be addressed to ensure the success of the programme.
- **Forest working plan**—The forest working plans must have an overlapping JFM working circle to incorporate the micro-plans prepared by the JFM committees.

The stability and livelihood of forest dwelling and forest dependent communities is of considerable concern for the stability of the Himalayan ecosystem. All developmental and other interested agencies should cooperate to ensure this stability. The relationship between the forest management and the stability of forest dependent communities is complex. Provision of employment is not enough, communities need assured tenure and a vested interest in sustainable production. It is in this context that changes in the way JFM is being implemented need to be considered.

2.1 The Role of Forests in Livelihood, and JFM, in Jammu and Kashmir

Forests play an important role in increasing the productivity of agricultural land by creating humus. The forest soils are very rich and fertile. Village communities apply top soil and leaf litter to their fields. These natural fertilisers are rich in all nutrients and improve the texture of soil, thereby improving the water holding capacity, and their use increases agricultural yield.

Forests increase the rate of infiltration of precipitation and lower runoff, thereby protecting agricultural fields from increased erosion. They serve as shelterbelts and wind-breaks and also protect agricultural crops from extremes of temperature. Forests serve as water banks and regulate the water in springs and streams. In one sense, Himalayan people sacrifice much to keep the catchments of major rivers intact for the benefit of people in the plains.

In earlier times, the Shivalik belt from Ravi to Rajouri was covered with deciduous forest, there was a perennial flow of water in the *nallahs*, and there were a large number of springs scattered all over the Shivalik forests. The forests

were full of wildlife. The forest communities, nomadic grazers, and wildlife lived in harmony.

With the increase in population of both humans and livestock, encroachment increased, the forests were degraded, and the perennial streams became dry and seasonal. About 30 years ago, tubewells were dug to supply drinking water to people in these areas. Now the water table has dropped and the department concerned is facing difficulty in supplying drinking water. Shortage of fodder for the local community and nomadic grazers has also caused serious problems.

2.1.1 Status of Community Institutions

There are two types of community institution: formal institutions, including *Village Panchayats* and *Village Committees*, and informal institutions like the '*Bradari*', '*Bradari-Bhi-Charra*', and '*Panch*'.

Formal Institutions

The Jammu and Kashmir Government Order on Joint Forest Management came into force on 19 March 1992. This order defines two types of forest committee: the *Village (Rehabilitation of Degraded Forests) Committee*; and the *Village Plantation (Protection and Management) Committee*.

- The *Village (Rehabilitation of Degraded Forests) Committee* has the following functions:
 - to assist the Social Forestry Department/Forest Department in protecting the Social Forestry/Forest Department plantations through the members of the committee;
 - to inform forest personnel of any person or persons attempting to trespass or causing wilful damage to the Social Forestry/Forest Department plantations or committing theft therein;
 - to assist the Social Forestry/Forest Department in preventing trespass, encroachment, grazing, theft, or damage;
 - to assist the Social Forestry/Forest Department in the smooth and timely execution of all plantation work in degraded forests;

- to assist the Social Forestry/Forest Department officials concerned in the selection and hire of labourers required for plantation work;
 - to assist in harvesting of the plantations by the Social Forestry/Forest Department;
 - to assist the Social Forestry/Forest Department officials concerned in the distribution of usufruct among the members of the committee as per the register of members;
 - to assist in preventing any activity at the plantation site in contravention of the provisions of the J&K Forest Act, Svt. (1930 Ad) 1987, and the rules made thereunder;
 - to report to the Range Officer concerned any activities by a member that are prejudicial and detrimental to the interests of the plantations and that may warrant cancellation of membership;
 - to help forest officials take action or proceed under the J&K Forest Act and the rules made thereunder, against the persons involved in forest offences in degraded forests; and
 - in consultation with Social Forestry/Forest Department officials, to evolve procedures to be adopted by committee members for collecting produce such as fodder grass and dry and fallen wood from the plantation in a manner that ensures sustainable yields of such produce from the area.
- The Village Plantation (Protection and Management) Committee will:
 - enter into an agreement in terms of resolutions arrived at and sanctioned by the authority, that is, Divisional Forests' Officer, Social Forestry wing of the area
 - enforce the rules framed for the protection of the area and the regulation of concessions, benefits, and grazing rules as sanctioned in the file; and
 - in case of an act, concession, or benefits not specifically provided in the rules as sanctioned in the file, enforce rules formed under the J&K Forest Act, Samvat 1987 (1930 AD).

The Functioning of the Committees

There are now more than one thousand communities implementing JFM. Protection is largely effective in all the areas under community management even in those where there are disputes.

The Social Forestry Department appoints and pays for a forest guard to protect the closure. Being answerable to the Social Forestry Project official, the forest guard tends to function as an employee of the department, even though he is appointed on the recommendation of the Village Forest Committee.

The efforts of the Forest Guard are invariably supplemented by the village community protecting their closures from the village herd belonging to the *bakarwals* (the nomadic tribes practising transhumance). The presence of a uniformed guard acts as a strong deterrent to the nomadic herds.

2.2 JFM Guidelines in Uttar Pradesh

The new guidelines reiterate the resolution of the Indian Government to seek people's participation in the management of forests and in preparing micro-plans for afforestation of degraded areas and other development activities. The guidelines stipulate that forest produce resulting from lopping and other silvicultural operations, fodder, and minor forest produce will be made available to villagers residing near the forest in accordance with certain standards and rules.

2.2.1 New Guidelines for JFM

The new guidelines include the following.

- In the first phase only those forest areas should be selected where people live close by and are already collecting fuelwood, fodder, small timber, and minor forest products.
- Priority should be given to degraded forest lands adjoining villages, where encroachment and forest protection have become a serious problem.

- Selected areas should act as a buffer between Reserved/Protected Forests, National Parks, or Wildlife Sanctuaries and village common lands.
 - Vacant portions of village common lands (or community lands), which are suitable for plantation or which have already been planted, should be put under JFM.
 - Plantations along roads, railway lines, and canals should be included.
 - If villages are located close to large areas of forest (whether reserved or protected), only the peripheral forests are to be brought under JFM, with the explicit understanding that the villagers assume responsibility for protecting the core forest.
 - A three-tiered JFM committee should be constituted for the area: (a) the village-level forest committee (VFC), (b) division/district-level steering committee, and (c) state-level steering committee.
 - The new guidelines stipulate that the Forest Department (FD) officers should keep in touch with the villagers with frequent but informal consultations and discussions on JFM including such topics as its objectives, proposed benefit-sharing, planning for plantation, and choice of species. The village-level committee, comprising all beneficiary families, should only be formed after adequate publicity for JFM.
 - The president of the village-level executive committee will be allowed a two-year tenure and only two consecutive terms. The member of the *gram sabha* (village committee) who is dealing with community forests will be the secretary of the village-level executive committee.
 - The committee shall have a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 15 elected members, the number depending on the number of families in the village. To be elected to the VFC, members must secure two-thirds of the votes of the villagers present at the meeting.
 - Whenever village community lands are transferred to the FD for plantation, an agreement (formal document) to that effect must be signed between the Range Officer and the president of the committee.
 - Micro-planning, covering such items as forest production and protection, and benefit sharing are to be done under the technical guidance of the FD. Administrative and financial matters are to be decided in consultation with the state-level steering committee and the district/division-level committee.
 - The VFC shall be funded by various development schemes sponsored by the central or state government and aim to provide steady employment to at least two persons per family.
 - The VFC shall decide the norms of entitlements to benefit sharing. All those enlisting as members before the first meeting of the general body shall be entitled to receive benefits immediately; those becoming members afterwards shall receive benefits like forest produce, fodder, and fuelwood after two years, and of cut wood after five years. After meeting people's requirements, the balance of forest produce is to be sold. Twenty-five per cent of the proceeds go to VFC funds, 25 per cent is distributed among the members who contributed labour, and the remaining 50 per cent goes to revenue, the FD, or the *van panchayat* as appropriate, for use in forest development.
- The new guidelines make the following provisions for the participation of NGOs in JFM.
- NGOs may organise meetings, seminars, and training programmes to discuss forest production, management, and development.
 - NGOs may cooperate (with the FD) in organising villagers for JFM.
 - NGOs may be represented in the VFC or in the divisional or state-level steering committees.
 - NGOs may provide training and guidance on JFM, alternative energy sources, and development issues.
 - NGOs may act as links between the FD, universities, and other institutions.
- The new guidelines stipulate that NGOs participating in the JFM in cooperation with the

VFC and the FD shall not be entitled to any financial benefits or to any share of forest produce. Furthermore, NGOs are expected to make a full report on the activities or working of the VFC to the higher level committees.

In the hills of UP, forest degradation and deforestation is closely linked with the socioeconomic situation of the local population who have been co-existing with the forest from time immemorial. In the absence of any viable alternatives for grazing and fuelwood, the rural population will continue to depend upon forest resources for their living. The problem is acute in the Himalayan region where 67 per cent of the total area is administered by the FD. The FD must play a key role in involving the local population in protection, propagation, processing, marketing, establishment of cottage industries based on non-timber forest products, and growing of fodder grass on wastelands. A shrub stratum needs to be created before planting trees when degraded areas are rehabilitated.

One strategy to aid the conservation of threatened plant species could be to raise precious and medicinal shrubs and herbs in an ethnobotanical herbarium and to create a museum of plants. However, the most important method would be to preserve and multiply plants in botanical gardens, nurseries, and through large-scale cultivation of commercially important species. It is essential to establish research cum demonstration centres in different agroclimatic zones in order to involve the local population. The centres should make 'packages' available for commercially important species through expert guidance comprising cultivation techniques, processing methods, and marketing details. Each centre should have demonstration cultivation nurseries and processing units to provide demonstrations of the different technical aspects involved in the processing of medicinal plants. These activities should form a part of JFM in all hill areas.

2.3 JFM in Himachal Pradesh

The Himachal Pradesh externally aided forestry project that has been implemented since 1997

has a Joint Forest Planning and Management (JFPM) component in degraded forest areas. The village forest protection committees share responsibility for managing the forest lands. Greater attention is given to the non-forestry needs of people. The focus is on client-focused forestry management, integrated planning, and the development of strong self-sustaining local groups. The primary stakeholders are the local forest users.

The state is implementing an integrated watershed development project in the Kandi area whose aim is the holistic development of all the resources for the benefit of people whilst ensuring the sustainability of the resource base. This type of programme not only ensures conservation of flora and fauna in catchment areas, it also provides stability for agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, and local cottage industries, and thus helps in all-round economic development. Such an approach to mountain development can bring about a change in the life of people and ensure ecological stability.

2.4 JFM in Tripura

Tripura is the only state in the north-east where the JFM programme was taken up quite early, in 1992. More than 50 per cent of the area of the state is classed as reserved or protected forest. The State Resolution provides a maximum share of 50 per cent of the final harvest and all the intermediate yield for rehabilitating degraded forests. The programme was launched in a big way in North Tripura in 1993, about 38,000 ha of forest land was brought under JFM. The local people depend heavily on the forests and take bamboo and other minor forest products freely both for their own needs and for sale.

In other parts of the north-east, there are a large number of forests under the control of tribal bodies. These areas must be managed with the help of local people to increase productivity and socioeconomic benefits.

There is an urgent need to evolve an integrated mountain development strategy based on watershed development to ensure uniformity in

planning and execution of projects in the Himalayas. This should be done both at the national level and at the international level. The experience gained by the countries of the region in mountain development should be shared. The main bottleneck in development relates to inadequate funding. This problem should be dealt with immediately so that people do not exploit the forests in an unsustainable manner as a result

of poverty and unemployment, even when they are aware of environmental threats. There is precious biodiversity in the hills, and this should be conserved and developed through special programmes by involving local people and making them aware of the importance of different plants. The thrust of educational schemes should be on developing the vocational skills of local people to help them become self-employed.