

3 Joint Forest Management

From the beginning of forest management in J&K, certain provisions were made for rights and concessions of local people in demarcated forests, in lieu of which they were legally bound to cooperate with the Forest Department for forest protection. Although cooperation was made mandatory, in practice it has remained limited.

It was with the initiation of the World Bank-aided Social Forestry Project in the state in 1982 that implementation of the concept of people's participation took a new turn. This project included a provision for agreements with village *panchayats* for forest management. However, the concept was not immediately implemented, as procedures for involvement of *panchayats* and their roles were not clearly defined. The *panchayats* were dissolved in 1984, breaking the only direct link between people and the project. The project authorities then decided to organise people in such a way that they participated in the development of areas close to their villages. A few village forest committees (VFCs) were formed during 1987-88 in Tulibal in Kashmir and Chinota in Jammu. Encouraged by the favourable response, the Social Forestry Project made vigorous efforts and constituted many more such committees.

3.1 Management of Local Forest Areas

In J&K State, all demarcated forests are under the control of the Forest Department. Forests are protected and managed, and the yield is realised, by the Department. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests is the Head of the Department.

The State of J&K is divided into two regions, Jammu and Kashmir, each headed by a Chief Conservator of Forests. Each region is divided into circles headed by a Conservator of Forests. In general, three to five forest divisions constitute a circle. A Divisional Forest Officer heads the forest division. Each division is further divided into ranges, blocks, and beats, under the control of a Range Officer, Block Forester, or Beat Guard, respectively.

The Social Forestry Project is engaged in plantation works in the state mainly outside demarcated forests. The Project Director, an officer of the rank of Chief Conservator of Forests, heads the Project. The project has administrative units similar to those in the regions, with divisions, ranges, blocks, and beats.

In 1990, following the National Forest Policy of 1988, the Ministry of Environment and Forests directed state governments to involve village communities in the protection and development of degraded forest areas. By then, many VFCs had been established in J&K State. The SRO 61 issued by the State Government in 1992 gave legal status to the local committees, and since then committees have been constituted according to the provisions of these rules. So far more than 1,000 VFCs have been formed in the state. Two categories of area are distinguished under this order.

- Category A: Certain identified degraded forest areas in demarcated forests under the control of the Forest Department.

- Category B: Wastelands, community lands, and undemarcated forests (not under the control of the Forest Department).

Rehabilitation of degraded forests is undertaken by both the Forest Department and the Social Forestry Project, whereas plantations on community lands (like *khalsa*, *sarkar*, *kahcharai*, and *shamlat* lands) and government land outside demarcated forests are only done by the Social Forestry Project. Thus under SRO 61 Category A areas are being rehabilitated both by the Forest Department and the Social Forestry Project, and Category B areas only by the Project.

The objective is to raise village woodlots on Category B land to meet the fuelwood, fodder, and small timber requirements of local people, with their active participation in the regeneration, maintenance, and protection of plantations.

There is a great grazing pressure on land both from migratory grazers and from local livestock. The livestock owners are not in favour of closing areas for plantation; particularly migratory grazers, because it creates a hurdle to the movement of their cattle. Both the Department and the Project are facing great difficulties as a result of the non-availability of land to establish plantations.

There are standing instructions for Foresters and Forest Guards to find areas under their jurisdiction for plantation while performing their normal duties. Normally Foresters and Forest Guards seek the most influential people in their area and enlist their help in finding suitable areas for plantation. This starts an interaction between the staff and people residing near the selected areas. Sometimes people themselves approach field staff for such programmes. After regular interactions, a formal meeting is organised which is attended by a senior officer such as a Range Officer or a Divisional Forest Officer.

The senior officer addresses this group on the need to protect the forest and issues relating to the environment. The contents of SRO 61 are explained and the benefits to local people

discussed in detail. The Department performs this kind of activity throughout the year. If a consensus is reached, the area is taken up for afforestation. The village elects an executive committee consisting of representatives of different groups in the village. Up to now, nomination by consensus has been the norm.

Six months before the close of the financial year, the government indicates the next year's plan. An annual plan is prepared, and agreements with village committees are signed. Fieldwork starts in consultation with the local committee after approval of the annual plan.

Village (Rehabilitation of Degraded Forests) Committees are constituted for protection and management of plantations in Category A areas, and Village Plantation (Protection and Management) Committees for those in category B areas.

3.1.1 Village (Rehabilitation of Degraded Forests) Committees

These committees are intended to assist the Social Forestry Project or the Forest Department in the selection of sites and of species to be planted. The committee members assist the department in the execution, protection, and management of plantations on forest land and prepare operational plans.

Members of the committee are entitled to collect products such as grass, fodder, and dry and fallen wood, free of royalty, with the permission of the Block Forester.

After consultation with all its members, the committee will share a minimum of 25 per cent of the proceeds from the sale of the produce from the first major harvest of the plantation in cash or kind among the members after deducting the costs incurred by the Forest Department. The Forest Department or the Social Forestry Project raises, protects, and maintains the plantations. Members are entitled to share the produce on the condition that they assist the Department in the protection of the plantations.

3.1.2 Village Plantation (Protection and Management) Committees

The functions of these committees are the same as those of the Village (Rehabilitation of Degraded Forests) Committees. The only difference is that the cost of planting, maintenance, and protection is borne by the Social Forestry Project for the first five years. Thereafter, management and protection of the plantation will be the responsibility of the Village Plantation (Protection and Management) Committee.

The Social Forestry Project will continue to monitor the management of plantations even after they have been taken over by the village committees. When the first major harvest is made, the Social Forestry Project will recover its costs (except the cost of seedlings) from the sale of fuelwood, timber, and/or poles, and the cash balance will be given to the committee. The committee will utilise the funds for replanting the area, for financing the establishment of additional woodlots, or in any other way for the benefit of the community.

3.2 Performance of Village Forest Committees

A study conducted on the village forest committees by the Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development has found the following.

- Protection of the areas has been excellent.
- Distribution of immediate needs from the closed areas has so far been effective in establishing the credibility of the Department. The distribution system shows that scarce resources have been distributed equitably, whereas the distribution of surplus has been based on consensus.
- The performance of the committees has been uneven in terms of the role played, and variability in performance is linked to the quality of interaction between the Department and the committees.
- Within the village community, the participation of different sections of the commu-

nity has been unequal. Participation of the weaker sections of the society has been poor, and landless people, who are dependent on these plantations for their livelihood, may not be getting full benefits.

The results show that community participation has remained limited largely to protection. There has been some improvement in knowledge about work undertaken and some information about the rights, responsibilities, and management functions in the closed areas.

The World Bank, which supported the Social Forestry Project in J&K, has also highlighted the following major problems.

- Lack of leadership and interest in the village community
- Lack of a role and responsibilities for the participating community and of a policy on benefit sharing

The issues that have emerged, and that have to be solved for the continued and effective protection and management of planted areas, are as follow.

- The legal position of the village committees has to be made clear by clarifying the rights and responsibilities of all the parties concerned.
- The village committees need to be strengthened and should be capable of working as multifunctional agencies. They will need to be involved in the effective execution of management plans. This will require an environment of openness and information sharing by all concerned. At present, there is a pressure to generate employment by employing guards to protect plantations. This also indicates that the dependence of the rural population on forest resources is high. As an alternative, the income-generating capacity of a village community has to be ensured.
- The question of rights of nomadic grazers and the village community has to be resolved.

Creation of strong extension and training networks, formation of village forest committees, and preparation of joint management plans will play an important role in creating mass awareness and ensuring the effective participation of people in afforestation programmes. There should also be an adequate representation of women in social forestry programmes. The Social Forestry Directorate of J&K has initiated the formation of village-level forest committees in the state, in order to involve people in afforestation programmes, with a positive response.

3.3 The Role of NGOs in Joint Forest Management

Although there are many voluntary organisations working in the field of rural development in Jammu and Kashmir, there are few in the field of forestry. The following seven organisations are working for wasteland development and afforestation programmes in Jammu and Kashmir.

- The Himalayan Tree Society, Jammu
- The Tree Growers Society, Kathua
- The J&K Paryavaran Sanstha, Jammu
- Indian Council for Environment Legal Action, J&K Chapter
- The Himalayan Tree Farming Research and Demonstration Centre, Jammu
- The Common Cause Club, Poonch
- AWARE, Jammu

The extent of involvement of NGOs in the affairs of the state is insufficient compared to that of the Forest Department. Participation of NGOs in social forestry promotion in J&K needs to be enhanced.

3.4 The Potential for Joint Forest Management in Jammu and Kashmir

J&K faces great problems of poverty and unemployment of the people living around forest areas. People have many grievances against the Forest Department and the government as a result of earlier policies. There may be many other reasons for the ongoing militancy in the state, but one of the important causes is unemployment.

The last fifty years' experience shows that development with external financial assistance is not sustainable, and that development of local capabilities to improve financial resources is the best approach. Foreign financial assistance should only be used for technical know-how, education, training, and creation of infrastructure.

The state has a number of favourable factors for the promotion of JFM and community development. These include the availability of vast forest areas, experience of social forestry promotion over the last 15 years, a large pool of unemployed people living around the forests, and streams flowing through the forests.

If the government frames its policy for joint ventures with local people for planning, protecting, managing, and harvesting forest resources, there is great potential for raising medicinal plants, herbs, grasses, and shrubs of indigenous flora. This will not only create employment, it will also be a big source of income generation. To start with, a small pilot project can be initiated first, and the entire state then covered in a phased manner.