

Technical Management or Post-formation Support

The challenge currently faced by foresters, villagers, and project staff alike is to ensure that appropriate silvicultural regimes are put in place and to ensure the achievement of the objectives of management. During the initial stages of user-group formation in Nepal, there is limited scope for technical input, since the formation process focuses on building users' confidence and involving them in decision-making, rather than focussing on technical innovations. To date, the operational plans produced by user groups have concentrated on the constitutional or indeed the institutional aspects of the user group itself, with much attention placed on rules of cooperation, punitive measures, and so on.

Management prescriptions frequently consist of a statement of the total quantity of a certain type of material which can be collected per household during a specified collecting season. The specified quantities do not necessarily bear any relationship to

the actual amounts of these products available or the rate at which they can be produced on a sustainable basis (Branney and Deo 1993:2).

As more forest areas come under user group management, there is a reduction in the alternative open-access resources available. This has increased the pressure on user-managed forests as well as the need for enhanced production from these forests. It is necessary, therefore, to move away from the 'conservative and protectionist approach to forest management'. Increased demands for improved forest management are now necessitating more direct forest management as well as collection of basic information about the potential of the growing stock to meet the management objectives of each user group. Once an operational plan has been agreed upon and the forest formally handed over to the user group by the DFO, the user group is legally in control of the forest. Most of the attention up to now has been focussed on the formation of strong and representative user groups, with little attention paid to the resources to be managed by the user group. Several projects and, in particular, the Koshi Hills Community Forestry Project (KHCFP), are now helping both user group members and the forest department field staff to acquire the necessary technical skills for managing the forest resource.

As a precursor to training in appropriate management techniques, demonstration plots with different management systems have been established by several projects. However, the KHCFP has departed from a mechanical use of the demonstration plot and taken it one step further. The users themselves are now designing and managing demonstration plots in their forests and using these plots to decide how best their management objectives can be met. Since the format of the operational plan was not an adequate framework for allowing a full description of the management practices to be implemented, user groups now draw up simple working plans for each forest in addition to the formal operational plan.

Short-term training courses are held with rangers to develop management skills for the diverse user group forests. The main areas covered in these courses, held by the KHCFP, include:

- improved assessment and description of the forest, i.e., condition and productive potential based on visual observations rather than an inventory;
- appropriate forest management options for diverse natural forests such as regeneration, use of office systems etc;
- incorporation of non-traditional forestry operations such as agroforestry, soil conservation, conservation of non-timber products and bamboo and grass cultivation; and
- simple assessment of quantities of forest products available on the basis of information collected from demonstration plots (Branney and Deo 1993:8).

Forest users will, with the help of the training, move beyond the purely protective management stage to the realisation of the full potential of their forests, for their own needs and, perhaps, to create a surplus for sale. The Forest Department staff will gain

the technical experience and confidence to help improve user group management. In order to ensure that users continue to be able to supply their forest product and tree needs, user group nurseries are also being established. Support and training are given to user groups interested in establishing their own nursery. Users can, thus, maintain control over the species and quality of trees or other seedlings raised in the nursery and can also respond to local demand as it is identified. The Forest Department staff provide advice and seeds if they are not locally available. In support of these user group nurseries, district forest staff are developing larger district and range-based nurseries where research and development of different nursery techniques and species will be carried out by forest staff.

In India, members of the JFM research network are assessing the ecological impacts of community of regenerating forests, in order to develop new silvicultural practices or amend old ones. Attempts are being made to examine how foresters and local community managers can effectively plan new silvicultural management systems together. Recent experiences with PRA methods show that these can be very useful in helping communities plan collectively. Some of these PRA methods evolved for assessing people's needs and economic benefits can be extended to explore different technical and silvicultural possibilities. A number of techniques developed to help people list, rank, and score the importance and usefulness of different tree species and forest products can be extended to help in the evolution, assessment, and monitoring of different silvicultural operations. Once the needs for forest products have been determined, the ways in which these needs can be met from the forest and from on farm or community property, by reducing needs through energy-saving devices and so on, have to be identified. It will be the management of the forest to meet these objectives first which will realise the objectives of JFM. However, few forests have taken up this challenge in the field.

The existence of old Working Plan prescriptions (usually based on timber production objectives and an area-control or landscape-level perspective) which are legally binding creates further complications. The mechanism for merging village-level micro-plans with Working Plans is still being worked out in a number of states. At present, the approach being followed is to temporarily suspend the Working Plan in those forests in which JFM is underway. New Working Plans will hopefully be formulated through a more consultative process, building on village or community-level, micro forest management plans which direct silvicultural prescriptions towards multiple use and the regeneration and harvesting of non-timber forest products along with timber. The Indian Council for Forestry Research and Education plans to undertake research on a variety of multiple-use silvicultural management strategies, in consultation with communities involved in JFM. This will lead to thumb rules for innovation in silvicultural practices - an exciting challenge for foresters all over the world.