

Training and Orientation for Participatory Forestry

Early experiences in establishing forest committees and identifying forest users in both the community forestry and joint forest management programmes made the Forest Department realise the need for attitudinal changes at all levels and for new skills to facilitate the widespread replication of community forestry. In order to institutionalise the changes necessary within villages and the Forest Department, a systematic programme of reorientation and training was essential. Different states in India approached this task differently, but most of them have adopted some sort of training programme. A lesson emerging from the work of the Institute of Bio-Social Research and development (IBRAD), which has worked extensively in the field of JFM training, is the importance of training the highest-level officers before the lower-level staff. Periodic follow-up sessions with trainees are also very important. IBRAD found field exercises, in which foresters try out participatory rural appraisal techniques and actually work with forest protection committee members on problem solving, to be of great value. In several other states, including Gujarat and Haryana, training programmes for community groups are part of the programme. These often focus on specific skills needed by local institutions, such as account keeping or on the concepts and practice of JFM. In Orissa, a group of 325 indigenous forest protection committees is organised into a loose federation by a coalition of 15 grass roots' NGOs. This coalition has a

continuous programme of village-level workshops and meetings for dealing with problems of forest protection and management.

In Nepal, the first stages of the training process for field staff involve a series of field-based participatory workshops. Workshops encourage a democratic, two-way learning process. Each person participating in the workshop is encouraged to share his/her experience and knowledge with others. These short-term training courses cannot provide all the skills and confidence necessary for the effective implementation of community forestry. Therefore, sustained follow-up support within the districts, until the methodologies for community forestry are fully understood and effectively implemented, is essential. Currently, such support is provided by project staff until the field staff are confident in both the requisite social and technical skills. This support system is further enhanced through regular range and district-level meetings where experiences and emerging problems are discussed.

Reorientation of staff and formation of user groups are only the preliminary stages of a long process of change, both at the local level and within the bureaucracy. To date attention has been focussed primarily on the institutional aspects of community forestry and, in particular, the training of field staff in user group formation and support techniques.