

Joint Forest Management and Community Participation: A Study in Indian Perspective

Dr. Sujit Kumar Biswas¹

Ms. Ashima Rai²

Abstract

The Joint Forest Management Programme (JFM) has been a major thrust area of forest management over the last two decades. The programme is operating with main objective of forest management and empowerment of local communities through sustainable resource utilisation. The effective and meaningful involvement of local communities has been attempted under the Joint forest Management system in India by linking socio-economic incentives and forest development. The present paper will provide a brief overview of the policy makers regarding the effectiveness of the programme operationalised in different parts of the country. It further tries to review the process of JFM and factors promoting community participation for forest management under the regime of JFM in India.

Key words: Sustainable, Joint Forest Management, Local Communities, Forest Policies, Rights, Community Participation.

I. Introduction

The focus on the role of rural communities in the management of forest resources and forest policy formulation has, in its background, the concerns for environment and sustainable development at the world as well as at national level. The United Nations Conference on Human Environment at Stockholm in the year 1972 drew the attention of the international community towards the protection and improvement of environment and related issues. This was reiterated by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987 through its report titled 'Our Common Future' which was followed by intensive discussion at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. As a result, a consensus seems to have emerged that global

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Law, University of North Bengal

² B.A.LL.B.(Hons), LL.M., (Gold Medal), Research Assistant, Department of Law, University of North Bengal

environment problems have solutions only in the combination of decentralisation of governance and participation of the community in the management of natural resources. In the case of forests, the United Nation Rio Conference marked a turning point when countries affirmed their commitment to sustainable forest management by adopting a statement of the principles for a global consensus on the management, conservation and sustainable development of forests popularly known as forest principles.³

In India the increasing depletion of forest resources has brought into sharp focus the inherent inadequacy of traditional state owned and run systems of forest management in sustaining the forest resource against the growing human and livestock population pressures, industrialisation, urbanisation and overall economic development. The crisis in Indian forestry relating to high rates of deforestation, unregulated and unsustainable use of forest produce in the past, can be attributed to the twin processes of erosion of customary resource management regimes and the acquisitive tendencies of the state in the period following independence. Forest conservation priorities cannot be determined in isolation from local people and broader patterns of natural resource use, and this must be complimented by policies promoting sustainable and equitable development of the natural resource base as a whole.⁴ However, forest management policies have been faulted on account of ignoring the livelihoods of people directly or indirectly. It is also believed that such policies have alienated a vast majority of rural communities in the forest management. In acknowledging this factor, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India issued a circular in June 1990 to various state Department of Forest encouraging for the involvement of village communities and voluntary agencies in the regeneration of degraded forest lands under the Joint Forest Management (JFM) programme.⁵

³Dinesh Pratap, Community participation and forest policies in India. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258185406_Community_Participation_and_Forest_Policies_in_India_An_Overview, p.236-237 (last visited March 22,2021)

⁴ Binodini Majhi, Joint Forest Management Programme in India and Community participation, p. 322, (2016) <http://euroasiapub.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/31ESSMarch-3213-1-3.pdf> (last visited March 22, 2021)

⁵ Sanjay Upadhyay & Videh Upadhyay, *Forest laws wildlife and the Environment*, p. 49, (2008)

II. Joint Forest Management and Community Involvement: A Conceptual Framework

Joint Forest Management (JFM) is a concept of developing partnerships between fringe forest user groups and the Forest Department (FD) on the basis of mutual trust and jointly defined roles and responsibilities with regard to forest protection and development.⁶ In JFM, the user (local communities) and the owner (Government) manage the resource and share the cost equally, however it is difficult to generalise the JFM concept and approach in the light of variations across the nation with respect to geography, resource base, socio-economic status, cultural diversity and pressures on forests.

While the primary objective of the JFM programme continues to be rehabilitation of degraded forestlands with people's organisations (Village Forest Committees - VFCs), in the course of evolution, approaches like village resource development, micro watershed development have got integrated into JFM as most State governments are attempting to improve the socio-economic status of forest dependent communities in order to reduce pressure on forests. Several approaches initiated to conserve forests without involving the local communities have not met with reasonable success. Thus, it is increasingly recognised that involvement of people in forest management, apart from contributing to regeneration of degraded forest, and helping in cost-effective conservation, also meets community's subsistence needs. To push such efforts, a decentralised and participatory forest management program called joint forest management (JFM) is being promoted in India since 1990. The JFM provisions, under the JFM guidelines of 1990, are expected to promote peoples' involvement, collective decision-making, social fencing, empowerment of the village community, sharing of authority, and focus on non-timber forest products (NTFP) and sustained harvest of usufructs.

The term 'community' has received recurrent and persistent attention in social science literature. Hence, a longer-term perspective is required to understand how community has acquired prominence or lost it at different points of time. In

⁶ S. Agarwal, Essay on Joint Forest Management (JFM) | Forestry, <https://www.environmentalpollution.in/essay/joint-forest-management/essay-on-joint-forest-management-jfm-forestry/4806> (last visited March 23, 2021)

the context of teleological theories of social change or theories of modernisation, community is seen to possess limited transformative capacities. On the other hand, when change is regarded ambivalently or negatively, community is perceived to have positive notions. The term 'community' depicts a small, locally situated, harmonious social formation in the contemporary writings. For instance, a study on community and forestry brings out that community exists among individuals who share common interests and common identification and grows out of shared characteristics.

The first meaning of community concerns with community as shared understandings where the community members are presumed to possess common interests and share beliefs about how to achieve their interests. The second meaning of community concerns with community as a social organisation, implying shared territory, regular and frequent interactions over a range of livelihood issues, local tenurial or institutional arrangements and stability in membership. The external agencies including the state, NGOs, aid agencies, and policy makers can do very little about the first aspect, but can influence the second aspect. Most recent programmes to involve communities in resource management included attempts to alter local institutional arrangements, establish new structures of decision-making or decentralise power, with a hope to encourage a greater feeling of community as shared understandings.

In the context of community-based conservation of forests, community involvement implies assigning specific roles and responsibilities to the community in conserving the allotted portion of forest by granting certain rights to it over the use of the resource along with a few other incentives like the provision of wage labour, building of locally useful infrastructure, etc., to take part in the process. In this sense, community involvement means the participation of the members of community in both protecting and managing the forest area allotted to them, enabling them to derive some benefits at present and in future. Thus, community involvement is synonymous with community or people's participation. If the objective of conservation is to achieve sustainable and effective management of the resource, then nothing less than functional participation will suffice. Thus, community involvement in conservation of

forests means functional participation of the people in protecting and managing the forest resources.⁷

Community participation is being increasingly viewed as the process of empowering the local people with the focus on transfer of power to communities by incorporating changes in the power structure. Interactive participation and participation through self-mobilisation are critical for participation to become a process of empowering the people so that they gain more control over their own resources and lives. In brief, the objectives of community involvement as an active process are empowerment, building beneficiary capacity and self-reliance, increasing project effectiveness, improving project efficiency and project cost sharing. In fact, the involvement in decision-making, implementation and monitoring helps in developing local human resources in the form of target group, and leads to sustainability. The community participation is intended to contribute towards both beneficiaries' empowerment and project efficiency.⁸

III. Evolution of Joint Forest Management in India

To understand the concept and process of Joint Forest Management (JFM) in India one needs to delve into the evolution of the forest policy and legislations in the country. Though the initial set of policies and laws on forestry dates back to the colonial period and the immediate post-independence period, one notices a paradigm shift in India's forest policy and legislations in the 1980s, with the passage of the Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980. The first forest policy of India was enacted during the British period in the year 1894 which emphasised upon the commercial use as well as ecological role of forests. It stressed on conserving forests for maintaining environmental stability and meeting basic needs of fringe forest user groups. However, the primary focus of the policy was commercial need of the furtherance of cultivation and revenue collection.⁹ The

⁷ Rani G Sudha, Community involvement in joint forest management: A study in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh, p.3-7 (2008), https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/85617/8/08_chapter%201.pdf, (last visited March 27,2021)

⁸ *See id*

⁹ Bishwa Bhaskar Choudhary et al., Evaluating the Joint Forest Management: A Review of Impact, Performance and Constraints, p.814-815,(2017), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317113214_Evaluating_the_Joint_Forest_

Forest Act was enacted in the year 1927, which gives the state jurisdiction over both public and private forests and facilitates the extraction of timber for profit. The Act of 1927, continues to be the governing legislation till date despite all its flaws.¹⁰ Immediately after gaining independence, India adopted the policy of industrialisation with special emphasis on establishment of heavy industries. This proved to come in conflict with the local communities and in turn adversely impact the lives of forest dwelling communities. Around the same time the Government of India enacted a new forest policy in the year 1952 that, while largely subscribing to the philosophy of the 1894 policy, nevertheless highlighted the functional classification of forests.¹¹ The most explicit emphasis in the post-independence declared 1952 policy statement was with respect to the claims of communities living near forests. Referring to the claims of such communities, it stated that ‘local use should at no event be permitted at the cost of national interest’ and that ‘national interests should not be sacrificed because they are not greatly discernible.’ Forests that had the potential for timber and related raw materials required for the industry were exploited on the basis of ‘scientific working plans’ to yield raw materials. With a number of decades of scientific forestry behind it, the government’s view of production was, fairly obviously, timber production.

The debate over how to balance the various demands of the nation on forests intensified in the 1970s. The Forty-second Amendment Act of 1976 transferred forests from State List to the Concurrent List of the Indian Constitution.¹² In the year 1976, the National Commission on Agriculture too, endorsed the same approach to the use of forest. The point was put in very categorical terms by the commission, which said that there should be a changeover from conservation-oriented forestry to more dynamic programme of production forestry. Production of industrial wood would have to be the *raison d’etre* for the existence of forests. The commission also identified providing small timber and

Management_A_Review_of_Impact_Performance_and_Constraints (last visited March 24, 2021)

¹⁰ Shyam Divan & Armin Rosencranz, *Environmental Law and Policy in India*, p.289-293, (2nd ed. 2003)

¹¹ Divya Tyagi, *Protection of rights of forest dwellers in India: An unfinished agenda*, in, *Environmental law and climate change*.p.321, Sanjay Kumar Singh (1st ed.,2010)

¹² Shyam Divan & Armin Rosencranz, *Environmental Law and Policy in India*, p.289-293, (2nd ed. 2003)

fuel wood requirement and grass grazing for livestock for rural population as important needs. However, this was subject to a qualification, which can be best put in the commission's word: "free supply of forest produce to rural population and their rights and privileges have brought about destruction to forests, so it is necessary to preserve the process."¹³ The increasing rates of deforestation, loss of bio-diversity, recurrent droughts and degradation of forests showed by several civil society and research organisations created a platform to reconsider the forest policies and forest management practices of our country during the year 1980. Further, the marginalisation of rights of the forest dependent communities and the large-scale deforestation, which further curtailed their share of forestland, had resulted in varying kinds of protests and struggles in many parts of the country. Particularly, the seminal Chipko Movement and other subsequent movements have played a major role in mobilising local people to challenge the commercial orientation of state forest management. Impacts have been felt both directly on the ground and also through the movements' wider effects on policy. The internationally famed Chipko Andolan movement was originated in Uttar Pradesh's Chamoli district (now Uttarakhand) in 1973 has led to a major victory and also inspired the villagers of the Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka Province in southern India to launch similar movement to save their forests, and in September 1983, the people of Salkani also 'hugged the trees' in Kalase Forest. The local term for 'hugging' in Kannada is *appiko*, and so the *Appiko Andolan* movement emerged. The *Andolan* mobilised local people across the Western Ghats to agitate against the state forest management systems that have excluded local people and their priorities from the forests, leading to clear felling and exotic monocultures. The agitation led to state recognition that local people should be involved in biodiversity protection and therefore forest management. The people's movement had a major effect in generating pressure for a natural resources policy more sensitive to people's needs and the natural environment. Accordingly, the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 was enacted by the Government of India to check diversion of forestlands for non-forestry purposes. Social Forestry Programme initiated in mid of 1970 had aimed to raise fuel wood and biomass generating plantations in non-forest lands. Further the programme suffered for want of the participatory element. These concerns

¹³ Sanjay Upadhyay & Videh Upadhyay, *Forest laws wildlife and the Environment*, p. 27-28, (2008)

caused the Government of India and the States to shift their policy towards a massive afforestation programme in the wastelands of the country. The National Wasteland Development Board (NWDB) was set up in the year 1985 to promote the afforestation process in community and private lands, with the involvement of stakeholders. Despite these initiatives, the trend of depletion of forest cover in India continued unabated.

The success of two community-driven “greening” movements in India opened the eyes of the policy makers to the immense potential afforded by people’s participation in the management of forests. The first one was a community-based forest conservation movement initiated in Araberi in Midnapur District of West Bengal State during 1971-72, while the second one was a grassroots movement in the Sukhomajri village in Haryana in the 1980, to rejuvenate forests and agricultural systems in the village. In Araberi, the movement was triggered by a Silvi-culturists of the State Forest Department, who by offering incentives to local communities induced them to protect and regenerate degraded Sal forests. The local communities, which were organised into ‘forest protection committees’ (FPCs), successfully protected the degraded forests from illegal felling, overgrazing, fire, and encroachment. In Sukhomajri, in Haryana State, the movement started from amongst the people. Forests in and around Sukhomajri village regenerated as a result. The regenerated forests in turn provided valuable biomass, including bhabar grass to local communities. These instances awakened the policy makers at the Central Government to the need to go beyond the legalistic “Forest Conservation Act 1980.”¹⁴

The National Forest Policy of 1988 was a total paradigm shift vis-à-vis the earlier two policies with a strong focus on conservation, environmental stability and ecological balance through association of tribals and local communities in protection, regeneration and development of forests.¹⁵ The 1988 policy gave new direction in important areas. In a sense, it constituted a small beginning in trying to create an enabling rather than a policing role for government. In

¹⁴ Appukuttannair Damodaran et al., Joint forest management in India: Assessment of performance and evaluation of impacts, p.5-7, (2003), https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/84708/1/zef_dp77.pdf (last visited March 24, 2021)

¹⁵ Sanjay Upadhyay &Videh Upadhyay, *Forest laws wildlife and the Environment*, p. 28, (2008)

pursuance of the National Forest Policy of 1988, the Government of India issued a 'circular' in June 1990 for involvement of village communities and village associations (VAs) in the regeneration of degraded forest lands. This marked the birth of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) movement in India. Events generated by the 1990 circular forced the pace for the formation of the National Afforestation and Eco-Development Board (NAEB) in the year 1993, which was given the mandate of focusing its activities on degraded forest lands. The NWDB focused on its original mandate i.e., afforestation of community and non-forest wastelands. Subsequently while the NAEB functioned under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the NWDB was shifted to the Ministry of Rural Areas and Employment.¹⁶

After almost ten years of experimenting with JFM in different states, the Government of India issued further guidelines to strengthen the programme through the Circular dated 21st February, 2000 which provided for the legal back up to the JFM committees, participation of women in JFM committees, extension of JFM to good forest areas, preparation of micro-plans in JFM areas, conflict resolution, recognition of self-initiated groups, contribution for regeneration of resources, monitoring and evaluation of JFM. To further strengthen the involvement of communities in forest management, the government of India issued the revised JFM guidelines in 2002. The key elements of these guidelines are memorandum of understanding, relationship with panchayats and capacity building for the management of NTFPs¹⁷

The number of Social Forestry programmes that were developed had helped the emphasis of the state policies shift from commercial forestry to that meeting the needs of the forest dependent communities on a priority basis. In that sense, JFM is a progression in the 'social' focus policy. On the other hand, the involvement of villagers on state-owned forest land is an important paradigmatic shift from any previous forest management model. Further, National

¹⁶ Appukuttannair Damodaran et al., Joint forest management in India: Assessment of performance and evaluation of impacts, p.5-7, (2003), https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/84708/1/zef_dp77.pdf (last visited March 24, 2021)

¹⁷Guidelines on Joint Forest Management (JFM) Programme <https://pbforests.gov.in/Pdfs/policies/JFM%20Guidelines.pdf> (last visited March 28, 2021)

Environment Policy of 2006 has also identified universalisation of JFM throughout the country as an innovative strategy to achieve the target of 33 per cent of area under forest and tree cover. The concept of Joint Forest Management originated in India and spread over all the developing countries as it is in favour of rural masses, poor tribal populations and environmental improvement.¹⁸

IV. Community Participation in Joint Forest Management in India

India's National Forest Policy of 1988 was a landmark policy for local people's rights over forest resources. The policy recognised people's participation in using and protecting forests and suggested the forest communities should develop and conserve forests together with the state forest departments. This reform in forest policy has begun to transform how forests are protected and used in India. Communities that were historically perceived to be encroachers and illegal users of forests by the state were invited to partner with the state in protecting forests. Following national implementation guidelines in 1990, various state governments began implementing their own Joint Forest Management strategies. By 2001, some twenty-two states had adopted JFM (Joint Forest Management). The area under forest cover has been fallen from the year 1987 to 1999 and also from sixth five-year plan to ninth five-year plan in most states. Madhya Pradesh is distinctively having the highest forest area cover and this is followed by Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Under the terms of JFM, Village Forest Institutions (VFI) is given conditional access to specified forest products in accordance with the guidelines laid by the forest department. The products usually include fuelwood, fodder, and non-timber forest products. Forest departments also provide VFI's with information, training, and wage employment related to forest management. In many states, JFM resolutions mandate that villagers be solicited to make micro-plans for forests. Organising into a VFI can result in access to wage employment and fuelwood through forest management activities such as lopping, clearing of debris, and cutting. In return, VFIs agree to certain conditions such as collective protection of the forest against encroachment, poaching or timber smuggling, and, monitoring of restrictions on some types of use. The organisation structure and membership rules of VFIs differ in each state. For example, in Andhra

¹⁸ *See Id*

Pradesh, all households living in a JFM village are eligible for JFM membership. While membership is optional for the general population of the village, it is automatic for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste households. In Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, two persons (one of which must be a woman) from each household living in the JFM village are automatically considered members. In Uttar Pradesh, membership to JFM is either automatic to the village residents who are registered in the electoral rolls of the village or those who are existing members of the forest panchayat system. In West Bengal, only “economically backward people living in the vicinity of forests” are considered to be members. However, every family living in the vicinity of the forests has the option of becoming a member. In general, VFIs have an executive committee that makes major decisions. VFIs have no independent legal existence as they are usually registered with the forest department alone.¹⁹

V. Joint Forest Management and the Other Government Schemes and Regulations

A. Forest Rights Act, 2006

Till 2006 it was found that no sufficient provisions are there to protect the rights of forest dwellers. That is why it was felt to make comprehensive legislation to protect the rights of forest dwellers. Responding to the ‘historical injustice’ to forest dwelling and forest fringe tribal communities, especially in central India, the Forest Rights Act, 2006 was passed by the Government of India. The Act provides for a variety of rights in state forests. It includes a provision for Community Forest Rights and Community Forest Resources.²⁰ From the perspective of JFM, the community Forest Rights (CFR) can be viewed to be a natural progression wherein Communities can take over management of their local forests that they have been protecting and the Forest Departments can move into an enabling, supporting and regulatory role. CFR effectively create

¹⁹ Pratap C. Mohanty, Role of Community Participation through JFM for Rural Development in India, p.326, <http://www.coford.ie/media/coford/content/publicatios/smallscaleforestryconference/ns/projectreportMohanty.pdf> (last visited March 26,2021)

²⁰ Dr. Arun Kumar Singh, *Restoration of forest dwellers rights vis-à-vis environment: an analysis in Indian context*, in, An introduction to environmental rights, p.138, (Dr. Ratin Bandopadhyay et al. eds.,1st ed.2010)

community tenure within the state forest lands, which cannot be alienated and where there is no provision for further privatisation or land use change, on the assumption that this is the area that communities themselves want to keep as a community forest resource. Moreover, major conflicts have arisen as no areas have been demarcated so far and thus people are claiming lands in different area. Alternative livelihood models could be developed by State and central institutions for FRA transferred areas.²¹

B. National Afforestation Programme (NAP)

The Revised Operational Guidelines (2009) of the National Afforestation Programme (NAP) are being issued to further decentralise the project cycle management of the Scheme with a view to expedite fund transfer to the village-level implementing organisation, that is the Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) and Eco-development Committees (EDCs), to embed the Scheme in the overall forestry development programme of the State and Union Territories, build capacity of the institutional actors a, and promote livelihoods of JFMC members by linking forest development to value addition and marketing of forest products.²² The NAP required formation of JFMCs at the field level to implement the programme. This has led to a rapid increase in the number of JFMCs. However, the functioning of these groups, to protect and manage forests after the funded plantation and maintenance cycle of about 3 odd years is complete, needs to be supported and their capacity enhanced. Few counter provisions emphasising on local decentralised management and the provision for a local village level secretary exist in the state JFM guidelines of some states.²³

C. Green India Mission

One of the eight missions in the Prime Minister's Action Plan on Climate Change, aims to promote adaptation and mitigation measures that increase

²¹ Joint Forest Management: A Hand book, p.48, <http://ifs.nic.in/Dynamic/pdf/JFM%20handbook.pdf>, (last visited March 28, 2021)

²²National Afforestation Programme Revised Operational Guidelines 2009, p.2 http://naeb.nic.in/NAP_revised%20Guidelines%20English.pdf (last visited March 27, 2021)

²³ Joint Forest Management: A Hand book, p. 48, <http://ifs.nic.in/Dynamic/pdf/JFM%20handbook.pdf>. (last visited March 26, 2021)

sequestration in sustainably managed forests and other eco-systems, adaptation of vulnerable species, ecosystems and of forest-dependent communities. Mission objectives are: Increase forest cover (afforestation), as well as improve quality of forest cover, improved ecosystem services including biodiversity, hydrological services and carbon sequestration, and increased forest-based livelihood income for forest dependent households. The Green India Mission has several innovative elements which, if implemented, would be a new inclusive approach of protecting and regenerating landscapes. Further, the Green India Mission document recognises the key role for local communities and decentralised governance for Mission implementation. Taking a pluralistic role, the GIM document states that, “The committees set up by the Gram Sabha, including revamped JFMCs, CFM groups, Van Panchayats, Committees set up under Forest Rights Act; Biodiversity Management Committees etc., will be strengthened as the primary institutions on the ground for nested decentralised forest governance in rural areas”. The Mission proposed revamping JFM on the following lines:

- i. Acknowledge JFMCs and other local institutions as technical bodies of the Gram Sabha, with the right to protect, regenerate and sustainably manage forests, under Indian Forest Act, including rights of a forest officer to the JFMC.
- ii. Add provisions to acknowledge JFMCs as bodies of the Gram Sabha.
- iii. Silvicultural management of JFM areas as per plan approved by Gram Sabha with technical approval of the Forest Department.
- iv. The Forest Department’s role is envisaged as, “to provide demand-based support to the Gram Sabha and its mandated committees to strengthen decentralized forest governance leading to sustainable management of the forests.”

It is thus clear that the role of the Forest Department is expected to transform into supporting communities to sustainably manage forests especially in forest-fringe areas, via a plurality of institutions including revamped JFMCs.

D. National Forestry Plan and Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, MNREGA

On 7 September 2005, the central government commenced the National Rural Employment Act and subsequently renamed Mahatma Gandhi National Rural

Employment Guarantee Act, or MNREGA. This Act has converted the previous labour based programmes into a Right's based programme. The government is now legally bound to give employment to all those households which demand employment in rural areas. In order to secure rural livelihood, the Act aims at providing a maximum of 100 days of annual employment to every rural household. The Act also aims at improving the condition of those natural resources which provide a means of livelihood, as well as build capacity for adapting to climate change. It is important in the situation where natural resources can be developed through MNREGA. A provision for collaborating with other schemes has also been made under MNREGA. The objective of this collaboration is to improve the economic condition of people residing in or near the forest and reduce their direct dependence on forest so that forest development can take place through the watershed approach. The central government has therefore given orders for uniting the Forestry plan and MNREGA for facilitating natural resource development. Now, the question that arises is that how will the National Afforestation Plan be implemented through MNREGA? The NAP activities to be undertaken through MNREGA will be decided on the basis of the following conditions:

Management

For this purpose, the District Collector will set up a District Resource Group. This group will share the information about MNREGA and other Departments. It will then identify activities that can be undertaken by combining the two schemes. Based on the guidelines for the selected activities, the group will make arrangements for planning, publicity, training as well as technical support and ensure the availability of resources.

Planning

At this level, an annual plan and Perspective plan will be developed for all the activities to be undertaken under the two schemes. The Perspective plan will be prepared according to the district level MNREGA guidelines. The objective of this plan is to highlight the requirements and shortcomings of all the sectors. The Annual Work Plan contains a list all activities approved by the Gram Sabha/Panchayat/Zila Parishad. By combining the two plans, a small plan is prepared related to the solution for soil and water conservation, construction of soil and water conservation structures multipurpose tree plantation, conservation

and plantation of medicinal herbs, plantation of bamboos and shelter belt, agricultural works, discover and promote alternative agricultural activities and publicising new technologies.

Activities

It is necessary to coordinate the activities to be conducted in the current year and those to be undertaken in the years to come.

E. Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, REDD Plus Benefits for the JFM

The Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change met (UNFCCC) and the decision was taken on reducing emission from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in the developing countries (REDD-plus). India's national strategy aims at enhancing and improving the forest and tree cover of the country and thereby enhancing the quantum of forest ecosystem services that flow to the local communities. These services include fuel wood, timber, fodder, and also carbon sequestration. It is important to note that in Indian context, carbon service from forest and plantations is one of the co-benefits and not the main or the sole benefit. Initiatives like Green India Mission (GIM) and National Afforestation Programme (NAP), together with programmes in sectors like agriculture and rural development would add or improve existing forest and tree cover in our country. However, the Joint Forest Management Programme, which is being implemented in India over the last two decades, has helped in increasing the forest cover in some rural parts of India. The local communities, through Joint Forest Management Programme, are involved in protection and management of forest and through this programme they are getting the livelihood benefits. In some parts of India this programme is going on very successfully, which is not only enhancing the forest carbon stock but also reducing considerable emission from deforestation and forest degradation through sustainable management of forests but there exist instances where considerable shortcomings have also been witnessed. Hence possibilities need to be explored for the JFM committees to be eligible for the REDD plus benefits.²⁴

²⁴ *See id*

F. Climate Change Adaptation

A study on “Climate Proofing of JFM” was undertaken by Inspire Network for Environment to find out whether the option of adaptation to the Climate Change was mentioned in the guidelines of the State Joint Forest Management Programme and how the communities have been adapting with the climate variation happening over the years in the rural areas of India. The guidelines of the JFM programme have been drafted in 1990-91, the discussion on issues of climate change and adaptation came much later part. Through the implementation of the JFM programme and the JFM associated activities the forest cover over time has been increased, the socio-economic condition of the local communities especially the vulnerable section of the people got enhanced which helped them to cope up with the changing climatic condition over time.²⁵

VI. Present Status of Joint Forest Management in India

The experience of implementation of JFM in different States reveals that the whole concept still remains to be institutionalised. The essence of the programme is the empowerment at the grass root level. However, necessary decentralisation has not been attempted in the Forest Department nor, any change has been noticed in the hierarchical structure. Further delegation of power and decentralisation of authority are yet to take place at various levels. Entry point activities have not been able to stimulate the local villagers to participate fully in the developmental activities. In many areas, people have been found to demonstrate withdrawal system once entry point activities have been completed and the periodic input intervention by the Department is either withdrawn or made irregular. Examples of Arabari in West Bengal, Harda in Madhya Pradesh and so many other places point out this fact that villagers are not prepared to participate voluntarily in the overall developmental activities without regular intervention from the different agencies. Absence of clear-cut relationship between JFM committee and the existing village Panchayat has made the smooth progress of entire JFM process quite difficult in many places. Because of absence of productive functional relationship between the JFM bodies and Panchayats in the wake of increased decentralisation of power to the Panchayat Raj institutions through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 lot of problems are coming to the fore. Poor marketing linkage of Forest

²⁵ See *Id*

Protection Committee (FPC) has adversely affected the sustainability of the entire programme. Concept of voluntary labour is found to be missing in many villages. Monitoring and evaluation mechanism has not been developed properly to get regular feedback so as to ensure remedial measures in between. The linkage of this programme to different departments and organisations has not institutionalised in the absence of clear-cut guidelines from respective State Government.²⁶

A. JFM and Income Generation Activities

In order to reduce pressure on forests, interventions for increasing the current income levels of forest user communities have been attempted through creating opportunities for wage employment, providing agricultural implements, developing irrigation infrastructure, undertaking dairy development, capacity-building, etc. Investments in providing different agricultural inputs and irrigation infrastructure have successfully increased agricultural productivity especially in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana. However, training programmes by themselves have failed to create any significant impact on the economic status of the people in Andhra Pradesh owing to the low skill levels, inadequate capital, etc. In West Bengal, while piggery is the most successful project, it is limited to the ST community owing to social taboos. The challenge for the JFM implementers lies in designing and introducing employment generation schemes in consonance with the socio-economic and other conditions of the area to elevate the status of the poor within a specified time frame.

B. Role of Rural Development in JFM

While the initial aim of JFM was the provision of forest usufructs, today the emphasis is shifting to a facilitation of overall village development. The emphasis on village development needs to become a common feature in all the states and should include programmes to increase agricultural productivity, soil and water conservation measures, introduction of school and community buildings, inputs of seeds, fertilizers, planting of trees on agricultural bunds and homesteads, establishment of fuelwood and fodder plantations, etc.

²⁶ Joint Forest Management: The need for the fresh approach <http://www.fao.org/3/XII/0196-C1.htm#:~:text=Present%20Status%20of%20JFM&text=Around%2010.25%20million%20ha.,different%20states%20as%20on%201.1.> (last visited March 23, 2021)

C. Norms for Participation and Equity in JFM Institutions

A lack of equity has been observed in JFM areas especially in multi-village and -hamlet protection committees. This can be avoided by bringing about changes in government resolutions that ensure representation of all hamlets of a village or all villages of the protection committee, castes, gender, etc. In multi-village and hamlet committees the sharing of responsibilities on a rotational basis would improve access to equal opportunities. Therefore, the resolutions specify that priority in all wage labour and employment activities be given to the landless, marginal farmers, those below the poverty line, SC (Scheduled Caste) and ST (Scheduled Tribe), etc. The executive committees and the general body must ensure that women, landless and those below the poverty line have a representation in the JFM institutions. Equity in benefit-sharing needs to shift from the current focus on forest usufructs to the other benefits derived from this programme -wage labour, development and income generating programmes, etc.²⁷

However, for Joint Forest Management to attain long-term sustainability and become a viable long-term option, it is important not to lose sight of the complexity and diversity of local people's dependency on forests. The challenge is to move beyond community forest protection to develop options for the sustainable satisfaction of essential needs for forest protected by local people.

VII. Conclusion

The experience of management of forests in India made one thing clear that neither people themselves nor the forest department alone could manage the forests but the combine efforts of these two are required to effectively manage forests in a mutually beneficial manner. The *de facto* forest control by a large number of organised local communities had a major influence on forest development policy, forcing the states and centre to recognise the validity of their involvement in forest management. The various events and policy measures having some significance to or impact on participatory forest

²⁷ Binodini Majhi, Joint Forest Management Programme in India and Community participation, p. 322, (2016) <http://euroasiapub.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/31ESSMarch-3213-1-3.pdf> (last visited March 23, 2021)

management in India mobilise the community to become important stakeholders and active partners in the affairs of forestry through JFM programme. The JFM guidelines have been revised from time to time to devolve more powers to the community so as to facilitate the sustainability of the programme in the long run.

Further, it is important to have uniform guidelines across different states with regard to the legal status of Forest Protection Committees, tenurial rights to the FPCs, sharing of usufruct benefits and revenue by the protecting communities on the principle of equity and allocation of certain share of the revenue for the protection and sustainable management of JFM areas. Efforts need to be made to strengthen the involvement of local communities in the implementation of JFM programme, which alone would be useful in striking a balance between the self-consumption needs of the community and ecological and environmental sustainability of forests in the country.

From the above study, it could be recommended that proper implementation of the JFM could potentially increase the adaptive capacities of the JFM communities. The state guidelines still need to be field tested in light of the adaptation to the climate change in both the cases where JFM is successful and wherever, it is not successful. Location specific adaptation strategy needs to be included in the guidelines. Capacities of the local communities and the local level government officers needs to be built to undertake different adaptation strategies at the local level. Awareness generation activities on climate change and adaptation needs to be undertaken in all the states for the local communities as well as the local level government staff. JFM guidelines regarding the benefit sharing part can be modified depending upon the respond of the communities and depending upon their contribution towards forest protection. JFMCs should be registered as a legal entity to have more stakes and decision making capacity in the forest management. Local rule making, local enforcement and local monitoring are the key to the success of Joint Forest Management in the current time.