

Joint Forest Management A Critique Based on People's Perceptions



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Introduction:

Conflict over control, management and decision-making over resources is the primary consequence of the increasing changes in politico-economic trends and policies. These conflict situations, having led to an alarming degradation of natural resources has given rise to new thoughts on the need to take people into confidence and involve them in the process of development. One such effort made by the government is the Joint Forest Management programme (JFM) initiated by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department.

Introduced in the year 1993 as part of the Andhra Pradesh Forestry Project and aided by the World Bank, JFM is the first programme of its nature in the state, to attempt at a recreation of a balance in the grossly degraded forests in Andhra Pradesh and has brought in a new form of forestry wherein people play a major role in afforestation and forest protection. Such a catalytic program which has far reaching implications for development has to be understood in the changes it envisages to bring to people and the nature of changes that actually take place.

A Study on the Impact of Joint Forest Management Program in North Coastal Andhra Pradesh:

A study was undertaken to analyse the relationship between empowerment and control over resources vis-à-vis the JFM program in Andhra Pradesh. Besides, the study also looked at the underlying forms of development particularly in the context of forest dwellers in order to identify vulnerabilities, possible areas for strategic involvement and policy interventions within the framework of people's perceptions.

Samata, an NGO which has worked in north coastal Andhra Pradesh and has been addressing the problems of forest dwelling communities in the region for more than a decade, undertook this study along with a federation of nine community based groups called Coastal Rural Youth Network (CRYNET). The study traces the progress of the programme since its inception in the state in 1992 to 1998, over a period of six years.

The study covered the region of the four districts of north coastal Andhra Pradesh – Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and East Godavari. A sample of twenty-nine Vana Samrakshana Samithis (VSS) with an average of one VSS per Forest Range were selected for the study. The sample was proportionately spread over hill-top areas, the foothills and the plains and a few from the rural areas closer to the highways to ensure a fair representation of different geographical zones and communities.

The study methodology consisted of primary data collection from interviews and group discussions with VSS members, forest department staff at different levels and with NGO's. Secondary data was sourced from departmental reports, World Bank documents and reports, research documents on forestry and JFM and the various Acts and legal documents.

Report Findings:

Implementation of JFM: A Critique based on People's Perceptions:

a) Objectives of JFM in People's Perceptions:

The objectives of the people also seems to vary from the plains to the hills. People have expressed their objectives in taking up the JFM programme or in giving up podu as either

- (i) that neighbouring villages were getting the JFM scheme and other benefits attached to it by forming VSS, so they also followed suit,
- (ii) that podu was bad for them as explained by the officials and NGO's,
- (iii) they felt less threatened with eviction if they took up JFM,
- (iv) they felt this would help stop illegal felling and smuggling by outsiders

Most often it has been an NGO or a forester who motivated them to take up the programme. Tribals, whether men or women have stated that forest regeneration is the main objective with which they took up JFM. Podu cultivation was given up more because it was mandatory in order to get the JFM programme. Women in some VSS expressed that they thought the objective of JFM was to provide them wage labour.

There is a desire to occupy government/reserve forest lands for individual needs rather than community needs in the plains. Most people do not know the existence of VSS. The existing need for firewood and fodder are illegally met where by, both the consumers and those selling the firewood face problems. Both sections are again mainly the poor communities and their needs have to be recognised and planned.

Micro-Planning:

In some VSS people have clearly said that micro-planning does not meet their needs while in others, the people did not really mind whatever species the department gave them to plant. There was no baseline or bench-mark surveys done for any VSS which is creating problems for them at the time of harvesting and profit sharing.(eg: Vankachinta, Gonduru, 59 Kotturupadu, etc).

When people were asked to list the species they would like to grow in their forest for different purposes, each VSS came up with their own list of species most of which were not being planted at present under the micro plans.

There are conflicting objectives where people have asked for economically viable/quick yielding crops like cashew, banana, coffee, pepper and this has been rejected by the department. Where people do not perceive a need like eucalyptus, they were made to plant them. Where such interests are conflicting two things have happened-either people went ahead and planted cashew and their VSS was cancelled (eg. Dabbanda) or people are going ahead with a tacit/informal understanding among VSS members for growing species like bamboo, coffee, cashew (eg. Vankachinta). This lack of vision is perceived both in the

department and the people. Certainly, the nature of micro-planning will differ if people and the department were to prepare it in a scientific manner and mutual respect.

Micro-planning has been haphazard in the plains as well. Since in the plains, the pressure on a piece of forest is severe not only from the village communities but also from the surrounding populations and towns, these needs have to be estimated in micro-planning. Here the forest-people symbiosis is not as intimate as with the tribals in the forest.

Dependence on NTFP is also quite minimal and the basic means of survival other than agriculture are activities like sale of firewood, fodder, artisan activities, etc. The economic and political pressures are much more severe in the plains and social cohesion is weak. The department is facing political pressures in the plain areas to set up VSS's and use it as a tool for land grabbing.

People's philosophy over agriculture and forest in their tradition is based on the theory of gradient of land which differs from the state demarcation of forest-revenue boundaries. They expressed that any land, whether revenue or forest, which is accessible for ploughing should be used for agriculture. Lands on the hill-slopes are for podu cultivation and forest protection.

Meetings:

Meetings are regular in many VSS but participation is mostly restricted to a few in the committee. Where there is NGO involvement, they are more regular and there is better participation. It is most often the Management Committee, which meets, and the presence of women members is very poor. The main issues discussed are funds received, disbursement, wages, forestry works for the month. Inter village disputes and utilisation of funds are two conflict related issues that are frequently discussed in most of the VSS.

Where NGO's are involved, the FD is eliciting their support in organising monthly meetings, reviewing the activities of the VSS's and in ensuring that the works allotted to the people are implemented with the motivation of the NGO. The meetings are a platform to chide people when certain works allocated to them are not fulfilled and to dissuade them from continuing with podu cultivation.

b) Problems and conflicts in VSS in the study area: people's perceptions and responses:

i) Boundary Disputes:

1. Disputes over forest boundaries are seen in almost all VSS because the traditional village boundaries were not respected by the department while demarcating VSS areas. So plantations raised were cut down by neighbouring villages, NTFP and other forest produce is collected without VSS permission and podu cultivation by neighbouring villagers, smuggling of wood, etc are some of the serious problems. Political and extremist groups have taken advantage of such situations and the forest department could not handle the situation (eg. R.K. Nagar). Funds were stopped and department withdrew its active participation which upset the program when actually there was good response from the people. People felt that department should not create such inter-village conflicts with its short sightedness and withdraw when problem gets aggravated.

2. Department has not thought of maintaining proportion between population and extent of forest area or in its enthusiasm, has made clinical boundaries trespassing into other villages. Artificial boundaries have taken over traditional village 'polimeru' causing most of these problems.
3. Immediately there is no relapse into podu cultivation but the period is too short to assess whether this is a long term impact. A lot depends on consistent wages available, increase in forest produce and sustained income from the forest.

ii) Problems from Funds:

4. The nature of funding and financial support to VSS is creating conflicts. Lower level staff of the department have formed/created new strategies for extorting money which they earlier got through bribes in kind. For eg. Extra wages are counted or double wages are claimed by a few to pass on to the forest department staff. Allocation of funds is done at a price, etc. Only the chairpersons or a few committee members of the VSS are aware of the amount of funds given to them by the foresters or guards. The rest of the members are almost totally ignorant of the funds allocated or released. However, people have some knowledge of the extent and purpose of funds that were utilised by the VSS as these are discussed in the monthly meetings depending on the activity taken up that month. Transparency has become a much-debated issue in this program among people, NGO's and the forest department.

There is a lot of wasteful expenditure which could have been utilised for forestry activities or as wages to people. For example, setting up publicity material like huge sign boards at the entrance of the village specifying the name of the VSS is more of a political gimmick than of any benefit to the VSS. Atleast if there were details of the works taken up by the VSS, budget and expenditure, species planted, etc. displayed on these boards, it provides information to the people.

iii) Profit Sharing:

5. There has been no share in profits or compounding fees even in a single VSS. There is disagreement between VSS's and forest department on the quantity harvested in the study area (eg. bamboo). Department has not given any commitment on paper to any VSS so far and is still caught up in procedural aspects. Some in the department also feel that it would be difficult for the people to get their share of the profits from the department.
6. There are a number of problems arising out of bamboo harvesting. The problem goes back also to the lack of working plans in the state. Even the PCCF does not have the power to sanction 50% share in bamboo harvesting to any VSS inspite of repeated applications from people. The approval has to come from the MoEF, Government of India, as of the present, all applications for right to share in income are pending on this account. Although the department passed a G.O regarding this share, it has not been able to translate it into implementation anywhere. In the case of Vankachinta, after almost three years of dispute the department finally indicated that it cannot share the revenue from bamboo on the grounds that it was not planted by the people. Such action is a breach of faith from the department's side, which could lead to the failure

of JFM, if not addressed. At present, even the permission to grant leases for bamboo coupes is being obtained from the MoEF annually through renewing the applications.

Besides, the neighbouring VSS, on perceiving the dispute between Vankachinta and the department, have started cutting down bamboo in small amounts by individual members without the knowledge of the department. There is another danger which may arise from this. In Vankachinta people have prevented bamboo from being harvested this year because of which there is wastage of natural resources which could in turn lead to forest fires if not removed on time.

7. When the issue of share in compound fees to the VSS was raised with the department officials, they have either said that cases were not reported to them or that there was no written complaint from the people. In many VSS the members have mentioned that they didn't know what happened to the cases which they handed over to the department. Where people are not yet used to the written code, especially the tribals, the excuse that there was no written complaint does not look justifiable.
8. People expressed that forest should not be totally left untouched but has to be worked for better regeneration of root stock and this would also help them in getting income from the forest.
9. Even where profits or share in revenue was declared by the department, people have not seen the money or given the right or choice of utilising it.
10. Where VSS have consciously chosen to build up their savings by taking less wages so as to use the balance amount for village development works, the VSS was later not paid the balance amount. This has created another cause for dispute between the people and the department.

iv) Disputes over Grazing and collection of Firewood:

11. In many cases, when disputes arose between villages and were brought to the notice of the department, especially on issues of grazing and collection of firewood and NTFP, there was no response or action from the department or they tried to patch up without addressing the real issues. This shows that the management practices of a VSS depends, to a large extent, on the traditional practices of law and order and social cohesiveness and not on the interventions of the department.
12. In many VSS grazing and firewood are collected from outside VSS area which is leading to conflicts with other villages. People have organised meetings with neighbouring villages when such disputes arose, without the involvement of the FD. In some VSS grazing is done within the forest village boundaries but outside the plantation area.
13. In some VSS the department staff is not allowing VSS to sell firewood where forest working like singling is done. People feel that there is no reason why this prohibition should exist.
14. Forest department is actively dissuading people from rearing goats as it is felt that they cause damage to the plantations and destroy the forests. The people do not seem

to think so as they have not reduced their goat-stock in their homesteads and find them a very useful asset in crisis situations.

v) Marketing of NTFP:

15. For marketing of NTFP, monopoly laws are a serious hindrance to the economic progress of VSS. VSS like Gonduru in Paderu mandal are facing this problem and, depending on the benevolent nature of the DFO some temporary methods are adopted to give VSS permission for transport and sale of NTFP outside their area. There has to be a serious effort to amend obsolete laws which are detrimental to local communities. People have expressed that bamboo should also be made as NTFP item.
16. Because of the target-oriented approach, the department is forming VSS on a large scale. It does not have the manpower or resources to concentrate on building up the institution. Some have even been formed without people's knowledge and they exist on paper only. In the plains and coastal villages the concept of JFM has really driven home. Older VSS are neglected in its haste to increase VSS area.

vi) Response from other Departments:

17. There is no coordination between ITDA and forest department and there is duplication of the same species, for eg: coffee. The people would have felt more comfortable with micro-planning for the whole village, whether forest or revenue or common lands so that people's needs for economic sustenance, domestic requirements, regeneration of forest cover and maintaining the bio-diversity can have a long term vision and balance.

vii) Control over resources and decision-making:

18. An important area of concern is power and control over resources. So far only responsibility has been shared with the people but no power or benefits. This is clearly evident in all the VSS. No profits were given even after repeatedly raising this question (Vankachinta). The case of Damara VSS is a serious issue as it reflects on the policy on forestry and industry working at cross-purposes. The VSS was not consulted for giving VSS area to private quarrying companies. Even when Damarahe VSS and those surrounding it protested and went up to the DFO and Conservator levels, they were not given any response. Infact, the VSS plantation was cut down for quarrying according to the people.

Similar may be the case coming up in Araku mandal, Anantagiri range where there are proposals for bauxite mining in VSS areas (Nandivalasa area) and people are being told that they have to part with their VSS forest for mining.

19. Within the VSS (mainly in plain areas) also, power and decision-making lies with the upper castes and landed families while the activities under JFM (wage labor) is done by the poor and the landless. Participation in wage labour cannot be considered as real participation in the program.

20. There were some problems voiced over power of decision-making on the participation of NGO's. In some places, the department decided the NGO which has to be involved in the program. A clear example is the conflict taking place in VSS's like Vankachinta, Kummarithomu, etc. Here a small NGO run by the local tribal youth which has been involved in the program from the beginning has been pushed aside and instead, a bigger NGO which has only set up its office recently has been asked to look into the VSS activities due to close relations between the NGO and the field staff.
21. Discussions with forest department officials gives one the feeling that by 'joint' management, the department believes in allowing people to decide on the micro issues like day to day management of VSS, members' dynamics, to some extent selection of species, distribution of wages, grazing of cattle, collection of firewood, etc, while larger decisions and legal controls are to be vested with the department.
22. In some VSS (Dabbanda) forest department cancelled a VSS as it went ahead planting cashew which is against the norms of the department. A clearer perspective needs to be developed on the rights of the people.

viii) Perceptions on Rights over Forest:

23. Discussions with people have led to the conclusion that people have not given much thought to the powers and decision-making of VSS, the 'joint' nature of management and the future course of their VSS. It is interesting to note the varied responses of people on the above aspects.
 - People should have rights on some aspects and on the larger issues the department should have control.
 - Since the forest is handed over to them, they should have all rights over it.
 - VSS should be given 'pattas' to have a legal ownership over their forest.
 - They do not believe that the forest department would ever share their power over the forest with the people and that it is only a temporary programme.
 - Closer to the plains, the people desire individual distribution of land where they can raise their own cash crops like cashew, etc.
 - They should have power to catch smugglers and the government (FD) has the right of punishment.
 - The responsibility of protecting the forest was with the department. Now with formation of VSS the work of the department has considerably reduced as VSS is doing all the protection and regeneration. So most of the decision making powers should be with the people.

ix) Traditional Management practices:

24. One instance where traditional forest management practices have been converted to VSS (Sovva) it has been reported that the VSS has serious conflicts and is no longer functioning. Clashes over leadership between two villages who are part of the same VSS led to a murder of a VSS leader and some of the VSS members are under trial in the central prison. It is interesting to compare this VSS with Malingivalasa which is a village adjacent to Sovva and managing its forest traditionally. In Sovva, clashes started erupting after flow of funds from JFM program and each village accused the other of taking more funds for development activities. In Malingivalasa the tribals are protecting and regenerating the forest in community lands outside the RF.
25. In Dommingivalasa, there are five villages participating in forest protection through traditional management practices. They follow a customary law and order for management of the forest and for conflict resolution. For them the department does not exist. However, right next to their village timber is smuggled in large quantities very openly. When the study team visited the villages, timber was being transported by cartloads at midday in the presence of the MRO and other revenue staff. This reflects on the integrity of the government, which further reflects on its ability to motivate people to take up JFM. Interference from outside without understanding the social and legal systems within tribal villages will also lead to a collapse, like in the case of Sovva. Where tribals have not got a formal system of management, many informal rules and conflict resolution mechanisms exist.
26. Some VSS have expressed that after giving up podu cultivation, they have stopped cultivating their traditional crops like sama, chodi, kandi, valusulu, chikkullu, etc and this in turn, is leading to changes in food patterns.

x) Legal Issues:

27. Regarding the issue of legal strength to JFM, people have expressed that they should have either total or partial (50%) power over the management of their forest. When asked what their reaction would be in the event of the department taking back total control over the forest, all VSS have said that they will not let this happen and will fight for their rights (although they are not clear as to how they would do this). Some have expressed that since there are so many VSS in the state, all will protest for their rights and the department cannot ignore such a large number.
28. Although the courage and determination of the people is to be appreciated, one has to see how strong would be their ability to protest. Like in the case of Damara, people have protested but were futile in their demands as the department has gone ahead with the quarrying lease.
29. Most of the VSS are heavily depending on the local NGO's which motivated them to help them in getting MoU documents, to bring a law on JFM and get them legal backup, to follow-up with the department on share of profits, etc. Some VSS have stated that they should be given the right to market their NTFP which they do not enjoy at present.

xi) Leases in VSS Areas:

30. On the question of leases in JFM areas like in mining, quarrying, gem stone prospecting, etc, people have expressed that if they discover any mineral wealth, they will discuss the issue in their VSS and take up the mining themselves rather than allow outsiders to enter their forest. The women in some VSS expressed that it is the men who succumb to monetary influences and might sign off their VSS area to some companies if they are not watchful.

xii) Participation:

31. Some VSS have problems of poor participation from the members. The reasons are many, like

- non-users of forest are members (eg: non-tribals, non forest dwellers),
- other economic activities are more viable than VSS works (eg: wage labour in the railways, agriculture labour, larger landholdings, etc),
- people dependent on forest are not members (eg: artisans, basket weavers, landless poor, etc),
- people were forced to give up their podu lands and have no alternate means of survival,
- religious and social differences (eg: christianity, discrimination of PTG's like Khonds),
- VSS is not a felt need of the people as there is good forest and good income from other sources (eg: Thummalavalasa),
- village does not have much agricultural land to part with for forest protection,
- disputes over boundaries arose with neighbouring village which dissuaded people from participating, etc.

32. On an average, it was observed that there is very good participation from the people in the study area. Particularly, VSS which are in interior hills with tribal and homogeneous populations, the response is much better, social cohesiveness and traditional management practices playing a vital role. Where there has been consistent NGO presence and concentration by the FD, the response has been more positive. The regeneration of forest cover is a good reflection of the participation of the people.

xiii) Eco- development committees:

33. In the case of EDC's and VSS in the coastal areas (Rajahmundry and Hyderabad, Wildlife Circle) people's participation and perceptions of JFM seem to be nebulous. Most of the JFM work is being done by the department itself with the help of hired migrant labor and temporary staff. There is very good motivation and involvement of forest department staff. They have been extremely good at explaining the importance

of mangrove forests and are actively ensuring that the mangroves are protected. However, the communities living in this area are fishing communities who are not dependent on the forest like the tribals and other forest-dwellers. The department is finding it difficult to elicit active participation from them as the people have a single-minded concentration on fishing alone. Their only dependence on the mangrove forest is for fuelwood and timber for housing. They have traditional systems of management and laws over the waterways and creeks but not on the forest. A different approach to community participation needs to be adopted in this area.

34. The main objective of the department is to protect the sanctuary by removing the people's dependence on fuelwood. The department supplies the wood to the villages from outside. Each village has been allotted a part of the sanctuary area for protection, by the department but it was not very evident that people are involved in the protection.
35. An interesting problem in this area is the VSS in Hopeisland. The maps show a discrepancy in the extent of reserve forest on the island and the actual geographical area of the island. This is due to the constant process of sedimentation and erosion wherein the land mass is increasing at one end and getting cut off at the tail end. A VSS was formed on this island when the people actually want to shift out of the island completely for fear of cyclones.
36. The EDC's in this area do not face the problems that EDC's in other regions of A.P are faced with, like, threats of eviction and prohibition from utilising the forest resources in the name of forest protection. During the settlement of the sanctuary, only a few rights over the waterways are mentioned in the G.O but there is no mention on people's rights on the forest.

Chapter VIII: Critical Issues in JFM:

a) Some Significant Achievements:

1. It is for the first time that involvement of communities in resource management programmes of the government has become a focal activity.
2. The most positive feature of the program is that in all the VSS areas, JFM appears to be the most actively implemented government program at the village level. No other government department has built up this kind of community institutional structure where there is a people's committee, a joint account of fund management and people's involvement in management of program funds, maintenance of people's own musters and records.
3. Despite poor management of funds and conflicts arising thereof, unlike in any other government schemes, people are handling funds released, are involved in the planning of works as per funds released, maintain musters and hold meetings to discuss the utilisation and disbursement of funds. This process has not happened in any other government program. The task remains to refine this process further to bring in greater participation from the people.

4. An important achievement of the program in this region is the settlement of a village like Vankachinata (a village in the reserve forest) by recognising it under JFM and solving the conflict between the department and the people. This is a good example of how most of the conflicts between people and government could be amicably solved and still manage to protect the forests. However, even with Vankachinta, there is no formal legal procedure yet to recognise this village as legal.
5. The development works like community halls, check dams, drinking water structures, roads, etc which were taken up under JFM are a good example of well built structures with optimal utilisation of time and resources. This system of people's involvement in construction could be good models to be emulated by other departments like the Engineering and ITDA. It also gives an encouragement to the future that where there is earnest participation from the people and the forest department it is possible to have fruitful results.
6. Wage rates have increased in the area after JFM has started in the region and daily wage earners have a better income now. There is a stable flow of income through wage labour which has helped the people in not only food security but also in purchase of assets like livestock, repairs to houses, agricultural implements, etc
7. Women's thrift societies have received encouragement to some extent through matching grants, loans, training in vocational/value-addition activities like making leaf plates, tamarind processing, tailoring, etc. Tribal women are successfully using the loans given to their societies by lending to their members. One village, Gonduru, in Paderu mandal, has been using the loan for value-addition and marketing of tamarind, hill-brooms, etc. Some of them have learnt to face the officials confidently and discuss their problems without inhibition. Gonduru village had the privilege of a visit from the chief minister himself where the women openly expressed the problems of marketing NTFP.
8. The enmity and animosity between the department and forest dwellers has considerably reduced as the department is now considered not just in its police role but as a welfare department
9. The most visible achievement is the physical growth of the forest where root-stock has regenerated remarkably and particular species like bamboo and grasses have already started coming up for harvest.
10. The department has the advantage of being a technical department and is best suited to train people in plantation and management. Hence, plantation works taken up with people by the department show better results than other departments which do not have the technical expertise.
11. There is a visible change not only in the physical regeneration of the forest in villages where JFM is implemented but also in the development of community needs in other aspects. The development activities have helped in bringing drinking water, irrigation facilities, roads, school and other community structures, housing, etc to these villages which were otherwise totally neglected.

b) JFM and State Policies And Politics:

i) Funds and Expenditure under JFM:

Under the Eighth Five Year Plan in A.P, the State Plan Outlay for Forest Sector was 68.42 crores which is 0.58% of the total State Outlay. There is a marked decrease in forest outlay from the preceding Plans whereas the expenditure has shot up tremendously (148.70 crores). The Forest Revenue and Expenditure reflect some very revealing facts on the state of forestry in A.P. The net revenue from forests in the year 1996-97 is 115.89 crores while the net expenditure under Plan was 67.75 crores and under Non Plan was 70.56 crores. This led to a deficit of 22.42 crores in this year. The preceding years to 1997 showed a good surplus of twenty to forty crores when suddenly the figures dipped to a deficit situation while the revenues have continued to be more or less consistent. (source: Budget Estimates and Accounts, FD)

In the Ninth Five Year Plan state plan budget provision for forestry is a mere Rs.15 crores while that from externally aided provision comes to Rs. 258.38 crores which reflects the heavy dependence on external aid for the administration of FD activities. It also reflects a depreciation of state plan provision for forestry increasingly and the FD is left to seek more external aid for the sustenance of its programmes. With the World Bank withdrawing its support after September 2000, the FD is faced with a serious problem of maintaining the needs of all the existing and proposed VSS all over the state. It is most unfortunate that for a department which deals with 23% of the total land mass in the state it is of least priority to the government and does not even enjoy one percent of the budget allocation.

The JFM programme was launched with much publicity, heavy funds and external aid and sought the active involvement of NGO's. What was intended to be restricted to a few areas and degraded forests, soon spread all over the state and was turned into a populist programme of the government. There are now 6,600 VSS over an area of 5.09 lakh hectares of which, as per the chief minister's statement over television on 14.08.2000 there are 2667 VSS under APFP (World Bank), 244 under EDC, 376 under CSS, 75 under CA, 20 under APHMS and 3193 under EAS and District funds. The whole programme is lacking in any regional, forestry or financial based planning. The FD has been finding it extremely difficult to handle this large set up of forestry institutions at the village level both in terms of monitoring and finances.

In the absence of working plans for the state or appropriate micro plans for the VSS, expenditure on JFM has been erratic, inconsistent and short term. Emphasis was laid more on allocating budgets for and implementing development activities and not so much on forestry works with a long term perspective. Even lesser has been the emphasis given to institution building, legally and socially.

However, as the state of A.P does not have working plans for its forests, there is neither a proper forest audit nor is it possible to draw up a long term forestry plan based on the regions, forest types and communities.

As under the agreement of the JFM programme with the World Bank it was originally agreed upon that the state plan budget would be maintained at the level of funding of the World Bank when it withdraws at the end of the project period. However, the budget allocated for JFM in the ninth plan is much below the allocation agreed upon and unless the FD seeks private or external investments, it cannot keep up the present level of activity as under the

APFP. This reflects the state's unwillingness to invest in forestry or increase its income and revenue from forest produce through sustained financial support. The government of A.P is far below in its plan allocation on forestry compared to other states like Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu or even Karnataka. Instead of pressing for an increase in the state plan budget, the FD is unfortunately, inviting other external sources of funding for its programmes.

The expenditure on JFM as of May 2000 as stated by the FD stands to the tune of Rs. 239.31 crores most of which came from the World Bank, and a small amount from Centrally Sponsored Schemes. In many VSS, 50% or even more has been spent on development works like building infrastructures for the villages. If the department were to concentrate mainly on forestry activities now that the programme has gained greater publicity, the expenditure would not necessarily have to be in large proportions for regeneration of forests.

The FD ploughs back revenue to the state from sale of forest produce like beedi leaf, bamboo, timber, fuelwood, small wood and grasses, royalty from GCC Ltd, and through other means like compounding fees. The FDC has around 70,000 hectares of plantations of coffee, eucalyptus, casurina, bamboo, cashew and others which generates income to the government. The annual revenue of FD was 115.89 crores in 1996-97. When this revenue is being generated from forests, it is pitiable that the policies of the government are not geared towards increasing internal investments to improve this revenue and thereby promote self sustainability instead of depending on external loans and aids.

ii) Regeneration and Empowerment:

Indices for measuring the success or progress of a programme like JFM has to be viewed from the angle of people's empowerment and also of the physical growth in the density and quality of the forest. As far as the latter is concerned, there is visible and tangible evidence of the results of people's participation in regenerating the forest. This has already been described earlier. However, the long-term growth of the forests depends on continued protection of the area by VSS.

Yet, empowerment of people on control and management of forest resources is not quite discernible in the region. People's requests for setting up VSS, the number of VSS existing in the state and the extent of funds spent on the programme cannot be indicators of people's empowerment. The choices available for decision-making on the resources protected and regenerated, planning and priorities for usage patterns, micro level gains physically, legally and emotionally, share and benefits as a result of real ownership, are some of the parameters based on which empowerment can be experienced. These parameters seem far from being real in the context of JFM in the study area.

In the present state of implementation of the JFM program, devolving true power to the people in the real 'joint' sense seems quite unconvincing and this apprehension is very much present among the people as well. Various G.O's were passed in the JFM programme but the FD has not honoured these G.O's in many circumstances, especially in the context of sharing of profits and benefits from forest produce or in the choice of species.

The motivation stage in the program has passed and the second stage and more testing one has come for the department where it has to fulfil the promises made during motivation. 'Joint sharing' and joint decision-making have yet to be made a reality. This stage is crucial

also in terms of defining the roles and preparing the communities to a long term vision of responsibility and powers in managing their forests. Would the state government have the political will to transfer its powers to people and have the maturity of promoting socially and economically decentralised systems, is of serious concern.

The freedom of the VSS is hamstrung by too many restrictions. The rates for work are fixed by Forest Schedule of rates which is often unremunerative. The choice of species is restricted by the Forest Conservative Act and GOI guidelines. The sharing of benefits is restricted by conflicting government orders and departmental reluctance. With such obstructions, the people feel that a lot was promised but little has actually passed on to them as power or benefits.

iii) Role of the Forest Department:

If JFM is taken up with the seriousness of political will as projected at present, it should be an important part of the state forestry plan. If the state recognises JFM as the basis to its forestry policy, JFM should be the foundation on which the whole forestry plan is based. Any program taken up in future should fall within the state JFM plan and be commensurate to the philosophy of JFM. When this becomes the primary focus, the department's activities and structure would be geared towards strengthening this as an institution and not merely as a program.

Once the people are involved in forest protection and regeneration, the duties of the forest staff get considerably reduced and have to be redirected towards assisting the VSS in scientific management of forests, preparing the micro-plans and directing the VSS in applying these micro plans in their forestry works. This extension work is the most crucial role for the forest department once JFM is implemented in its true spirit.

Working Plans reflect the long term vision and planning of the forest department. The absence of such a wing in A.P forest department is a glaring lacuna. It has been told that the department is involved in preparing the working plans for the whole state. If micro planning for VSS have to be effective there should be clear working plan for each region/circle which become the blue print for the micro plans of each VSS. The most important task for the department lies in its extension services and scientific inputs to the VSS's.

Micro planning has to first look into the present usage patterns and traditional forest management practices of the forest dwellers, especially in demarcation of boundaries, selection of species, rules of watch and ward, traditional laws of forest management, geographical and climatic conditions, social systems, etc.

At the micro level, the department should receive clear policy and legal instructions on the action to be taken in the context of mining, precious stones, etc. The past experiences in the region have been either of ignorance, non-interference or playing a pro-active role in dealing with such issues. In the study area, the people's concern was in their lack of powers to take decisions or take preventive measures when powerful trade and industrial lobbies for mining or precious stones are involved. The people, in the case of precious stones, have expressed that they need the assistance of the department in playing a police role to curb such activities.

Also, there have been instances where in the study areas, forest officials have visited the villages and held talks with the people in trying to convince them to give consent to leases in

JFM areas. Such a pro-active approach on behalf of the industry seems unnecessary. In the case of Damara, quarrying was allowed inspite of the VSS protesting against it. Fortunately, the quarrying was discontinued after some time. Here, if the department believes in the 'joint management' approach, VSS should be first consulted before allowing external stakeholders who enter the VSS area. Consultation should be preceded with correct and detailed information for the VSS to take a balanced decision whether in the case of bamboo leases, mining leases, quarrying or semi-precious stones.

Role clarity between the department and the people is the next important step now that VSS have been formed and institutionalised. This issue leads to the legalities involved in 'joint management'- the powers and controls of VSS and the role of the forest department. As mentioned earlier, since the people take the responsibility of forest protection, the department should steer more towards extension work and in providing scientific inputs to the VSS.

Like the state support price to tribals in marketing of NTFP, the state should perform the support policing role when it is beyond the capacity of the VSS to control smuggling, illegal trade by outsiders, etc. To what extent will the department manage to reduce its paternalistic approach to people vis-à-vis forest management is also an area where the department has to take a conscious decision.

Institution building, especially at the grass-root level is a gradual process which has to undergo the test of time. It has to be built into the mindset of the forest staff and the communities that this is not a short term program like the earlier plantation or social forestry programs but as a social way of life in forestry management.

The ultimate aim and logical process of JFM should be that:

- a) The VSS should be fully free to manage the forest under it with the micro plans as a guide and not as a Bible
- b) The foresters/forest guards should be paid
- b) The DFO and higher level forest staff shall be involved in advisory and extension Work
- d) The VSS shall be free to sell its forest produce according to its will and convenience.

iv) Podu Cultivation:

Podu is an inherent tribal culture all over the world. It is an adaptation to life in hilly regions. An area of land is cultivated along the slope after clearing the forest. After a few years the land is abandoned as the fertility is lost due to erosion and a new patch taken up. Podu done over a long rotation as in days of yore has never depleted the soil fertility. The advent of forest administration and setting apart large tracts of forest as R.F by British under the imperial regime held the principle that the conqueror has right over all conquered. Land and the right of conquest has resulted in serious and substantial loss of land for podu and this combined with increase in tribal population has led to unrest in tribal areas. Coupled with this, the innumerable restrictions of the Forest Act on tribal way of life in the forest led to over a 100 tribal rebellions in the last 100 years of forest administration in the country.

The principle of podu cultivation is in full consonance with the best forestry practices of clearfelling and planting over a long rotation. Podu no longer meant shifting cultivation to the tribals in this region and became economically unviable further making them increase the size of podu lands owned by each family. Unless a viable economic alternative is worked out for them, they will have no choice but to go in for more podu cultivation on forest lands.

Mr. R.K.Rao, who was DFO, coffee project from 1965 to 1972 has been an eye-witness to deforestation in the sixties and seventies and he says that “in 1965 the Chintapalli Plateau from Lambasingi to Vedurupalligedda (RVNagar) was under high forest. In 1967 the government took up survey and settlement of tribal areas and the word went around among tribal communities that settlement will be done in tribal lands without tree growth and under cultivation.

Felling of forest was taken up in a frenetic way by tribals and, forests within and outside the RF, were felled and timber burnt/smuggled by plains people with the connivance of F.D staff. Between 1965 and 1972 the Chintapalli forests disappeared into smoke except for the area under coffee. Ramagedda, a tribal village of Khonds had 100 acres opposite to RVNagar in 1965 and it expanded to over 500 acres by 1972. The destruction was further aggravated by displaced tribal victims of government projects from A.P and neighbouring Orissa.

Thus, in the context of podu cultivation or local usage patterns of the forest, there has to be a holistic understanding of the macro political and economic history of the region. The development-displacement paradigm plays a vital link to the questions related to present day podu or forest degradation. Especially in the present study area, JFM cannot be viewed in isolation without this larger understanding.

Reclamation of encroached forest lands is a clearly stated objective of the JFM program, and it is happening that people are having to give up the lands occupied for podu. It was found that in many of the monthly meetings of VSS the staff of FD rebuke them for doing podu cultivation and are persuading them to give it up. Whether this is out of social pressure or departmental pressure, the basic issue here is that families depending on podu cannot be viewed as criminals but shown economic alternatives and this should become an important component of the micro-plan in the JFM program. The FD's acclaim of having rejuvenated 23,513 hectares of forest-land under encroachment by bringing it under JFM is a reinstatement of the government's objective of displacing people from their present landholding through an apparently people-centred programme.

When there are vast areas of reserved forest above the podu lands of people, which could be regenerated, it is unfortunate that the department stresses on plantation in the people's lands. Conflicts between people and the department have come up in such situations where the latter was obstinate in taking up plantation on podu lands.

v) Earlier Development Projects and their Impact on the Region:

The four districts where the study was conducted, especially on the borders of Vizag district and southern Orissa largescale migration has taken place for many decades now. This cross border migration has its roots in the nature of development taken up in the region. Development related displacement as a result of several development and industrial projects both in Orissa and A.P has, over the years, led to

displacement of tribals from their lands and livelihoods. In the Eastern Ghats region, especially Orissa and A.P, the tribals displaced by development projects between 1951 and 1990 are around 85.39 lakhs, i.e., 72.67% of all displaced persons in the region. Of this large mass of the displaced tribals, only 21.16 were rehabilitated (however meagre the compensation may be). (Fernandes, Walter, 1997).

The majority of those displaced experienced multiple displacement and finally left to rebuild their destinies on their own. As no alternative systems of livelihood were created, tribals were forced to migrate from either side of the border. With pressure on lands increasing, the migrants were bereft of any valley lands or lowlands and were forced to occupy forest lands for agriculture. This brought them into direct conflict with the forest department making them illegal and criminal in the eyes of the law.

Over and above the already displaced populations of forest dwellers in the region are the potential people to be displaced/affected by state policies of industrial development. The region is rich in natural resources which are proposed to be exploited by private commercial interests like mining, tourism, film industry, etc. This has implications for not only people's displacement but also of parting with forest-lands to the industries. State forestry plan should be able to foresee these macro stakeholders apart from the local communities and should have a clear policy on such issues instead of waiting for simmering conflicts to explode into social and political crisis.

vi) JFM and Other Existing Laws – the Legal complexities:

There is a bewildering maze of Acts, Laws and rules governing forest lands and tribal areas so much so that tribals ask visiting government functionaries as to which government they represent – the forest government, revenue government, tribal welfare government, GCC government, and so on in this confused state of administration. Going beyond this confusion, the state government, in its eagerness to make its programmes representative and decentralised, has formed a number of user groups / committees like the VTDA's, the water users' associations, education committees, health committees, VSS, etc. Superseding all these committees is the 73rd Amendment Act (The Panchayat Raj (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act) which gives all powers to the gram sabhas.

The Panchayat Raj (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act states that the laws in the tribal areas should ensure due respect to traditional laws and customs of resource management and that the Gram Sabha is the supreme authority in decision-making on all matters concerning their resources. JFM should logically be incorporated into this Act as forest management is an important component of the activities of the Gram Sabha. However, the other laws being passed and the amendments being made prove entirely disrespectful of either the Panchayat Raj Act or the JFM programme.

Legally, the JFM programme has brought very few new rights to the people as against the responsibilities created. 100% share from collection of NTFP cannot be considered an achievement under JFM as right to collection of NTFP existed even prior to JFM and in the event that GCC Ltd continues to wield monopoly rights over NTFP, the freedom to market their produce is still denied to tribals. A government order was passed to share 50% of net income from beedi leaf (over and above the income of last five years) is hardly a comfort to people's efforts at forest protection.

Although 100% share of profits from timber and bamboo have been promised as per G.O.Ms.No.173, nowhere in the study areas has any VSS received its share from this sale. On the contrary, a new G.O was passed to state that this share will be utilised for development activities of the VSS in consultation with the members thereby withholding the right to decide on the utilisation of the benefits to the FD staff.

G.O.Ms.No.21 was passed to give 25% of compounding fees to the VSS as incentive if they apprehend smugglers with forest produce. Firstly, the fact that it is given as an incentive and not as a right speaks of the FD's choice of whether to give or withhold joint sharing of such income. Secondly, there were many VSS in the study which apprehended smugglers but have not received any share of the compounding fees.

All the benefits and incentives stated in the G.O's will be shared provided there is "satisfactory observance of the duties and functions by this committee and the individual beneficiaries" as per the Memorandum of Understanding.

The forest areas of A.P are rich in mineral and other natural resources which come under the purview of other non forestry Acts like the Mines and Minerals Regulation Act (MMRD Act), the Land Transfer Regulation Act (LTR Act), the Land Acquisition Act, etc. There have been situations where forest and tribal lands were leased out to industries like mining, paper mills, etc in contravention of the Forest Conservation Act, the LTR Act, the Environment Protection Act, and the Wildlife Protection Act. Such leases, if enforced in VSS areas would affect the JFM programme and there is no legal support to the programme apart from a mere government order to rescue it from being misutilised or nullified where state policies sacrifice forest issues to that of industry.

The fact that the state of A.P has a strong constitutional backbone of all the above Acts frustrates the present government's obsession for liberalisation and privatisation of forest and tribal lands. Unfortunately, privatisation is viewed as the panacea to social and economic upliftment and considering that the state is seriously inclined towards privatisation of the social sector services like health and education, forestry is not far behind. Yet, the 1988 Forest Policy emphasises on maintaining environmental stability, ecological balance, meeting the needs of local forest dwellers and involving them in afforestation.

Existing legal mechanisms, protests from people, opposition parties and NGO's have been preventing the government from making amendments to these Acts because of which other means of circumventing the Acts or finding dents to them are often being sought after.

In the foreseeable future the government would find JFM as a shortcut medium to legal 'bottlenecks' as it can be projected as a people's programme for upliftment of the poor. In the name of economic investments to VSS, private participation from industries and other sources would be negotiated for providing capital to forestry. Instead of leasing out these lands, commercial plantations may be raised through VSS. Thus one has to certainly be prepared for JFM being utilised as a tool in lieu of physical transfer of forest lands to corporates. FDC was created for the purpose of raising plantations for meeting the increasing demand for wood from industries. FD should be cautious in understanding the differences in the objectives of JFM and FDC and not sacrifice the interests of local communities or their control over resources or decision-making by taking up plantation programmes similar to FDC programmes.

In A.P there is no clear law spelt out for JFM so far whereas the Water Users' Associations have been covered by a stronger legal support in the plains. Moreover, the undemocratic approach of the A.P government in brushing aside all opposition in passing resolutions to the amendment of the Land Transfer Regulation Act of 1959 in order to lease out tribal and forest lands for private mining companies speaks loudly of the government's lack of concern for the forests or the tribal people.

The present mindset of the government is not to honour the principles of the Forest Policy of 1988 but to find loop-holes in it or to circumvent it for commercial purposes in the name of regenerating forests and economically uplifting the poor. Where there are minerals, JFM is being sacrificed for mining interests. Where there is no mining, negotiations are being struck with industries for raising private plantations against the Forest Conservation Act, through VSS on the grounds that investments are mobilised for the continuity of the JFM programme.

Even where the investments come from a supposedly development aid agency like the World Bank, the extent of control and decision-making that people have is extremely marginal. When private industries whose past record far from shows any integrity in terms of over utilisation of forest resources and dodging payments to the government, the people will have fewer monitoring or controlling powers over the forests they themselves are regenerating and protecting.

The state of A.P is coming out with a new Act called Water and Trees Act and the guidelines passed to this effect reveal that it is a combined Act of many of the existing Acts in the state. However, on the other hand, we do not find the government pushing emphatically for a legal shape to JFM on similar lines, inspite of almost eight years of its existence.

People have not really given much thought to the future of JFM and are watching the state government on its future response. It is still viewed more as a program than as a long term institution, and no doubt, with the history of relationship between the people and the department, there is a strong suspicion from the people on the future ownership rights over the forest.

vii) Information Sharing and Transparency:

Lack of sufficient information is a serious lacuna in all government programmes which does not exclude JFM. From the formulation level at the state down to the

VSS level there is visibly a lack of transparency in terms of funding, planning, species selection, accounting, training, income and revenues, etc. Especially, there is not much information available to the people on budget provisions, releases and expenditures at the VSS level which have not been displayed in any of the VSS studied. At the macro level, there is little information on the funding norms of each project, repayment procedures, interest rates, future plans and funding proposals, etc.

viii) Conflict Resolution:

Redressal of conflicts between people and FD, between VSS members and non-members, other stake-holders, etc is not clearly addressed. There are many issues and problems in VSS areas which do not go beyond the Ranger level or the DFO level and many are left unresolved. At the state level, there is no formal or regular mechanism of dealing with conflicts and the problems continue to exist. Inter-village disputes are normally settled by the

people themselves with or without the involvement of the field level FD staff. Where there are NGO's, they are individually pursuing the problems of the VSS they are associated with and depending on their equations with the FD staff, they manage to carry forward these problems to the division levels.

ix) NGO's in JFM:

Almost all the NGO's in the region are associated with JFM in their respective areas of work. The involvement of NGO's in the programme was stressed by the World Bank right from the inception stage but there has never been a clarity on their role or status in JFM. It has been given a consultative role in those areas where the World Bank and FD choose to consult and on the issues they prefer to consult at various forums organised by them. Information on the programme when sought by NGO's has not been forthcoming on all issues and problems taken up by them have sometimes been dealt with or the macro level issues have been studiously ignored.

FD has created problems (and vice versa too) at times by causing disputes between NGO's due to lack of proper understanding or communication or based on the relationship with the field level staff. Local NGO's, in some cases felt that the department was bringing in some other NGO's from the outside into their areas of work. Some NGO's depend on the department for funds which has made them subservient or lacking in long-term vision.

Issues relating to settlement of people's rights, micro-planning, sharing of profits, control over resources, gender sensitivity, conflict resolution over forest issues, institution building, etc have also not been addressed by many NGO's who were concentrating more on accounts and finances, allocation and release of budgets, development activities and training. However, it is in the areas where NGO's are involved that a consistent follow-up and motivation of the programme is happening. Where there are no NGO's to motivate the people, the FD has to resort purely to providing incentives for making people form VSS.

The active involvement of NGO's in JFM activities helped in bringing some amount of transparency to the programme as field level problems and conflicts have received focus in various forums. Their participation in JFM committees at local, district and regional levels have repeatedly brought out the lacunae in the programme and voiced the demands of the people.

The recent trend of the government is to invite NGO's for consultation on various policies and programmes including JFM. Neither the suggestions nor the criticisms of NGO's are taken into account while formulating or implementing the programmes. This kind of participation is dangerous for NGO's as it gives the government leverage to justify their actions on the pretext of having 'democratically' implemented its policies. In the JFM programme in A.P, although there have been periodical workshops, consultative meetings, etc. organised by the government and the World Bank, NGO's have had very little say in formulating, suggesting changes, redressal of conflicts or in asserting for legal mechanisms to it. Besides, in many aspects like monitoring, evaluations, technical expertise or training, assistance has been drawn mostly from external sources rather than from NGO's involved in the programme or technical experts from within.

x) Impact of Future political factors on JFM in the region:

Political trends of the state government are, extreme in its approach with regard to forestry, people's needs and economic development. A very aggressive pro-poor image is being built up to convey to the masses that government policies are bent towards economic progress for the greater common good through decentralisation and prompt delivery of justice and duties. JFM is a highly publicised programme in the state of A.P in conveying the message that people are partners and participants to their own progress. The program is receiving heavy state patronage under the banner of 'chief minister JFM'.

Targets are placed before the department for achieving 'universal JFM' in the state. This has given only an apparent focus to the forestry sector and management of forests.

On the other end of the continuum is an equally aggressive approach of the government in bringing economic changes through a rapid process of liberalisation where industry receives the foremost priority. In the areas where JFM is being taken up on a wide scale, particularly in the present study area of north coastal Andhra, there is a high concentration of state interest in promotion of industries. The Eastern Ghats range of north coastal Andhra Pradesh is rich in natural resources which have prospects of industrial expansion. While in Vizag district mining and semi precious stones are the most lucrative commodities, in East Godavari it is paper mills and plywood industries and trading in semi precious stones, in Srikakulam and Vizianagaram it is quarrying and semi precious stones.

xi) Gender Issues in JFM:

Gender is not an issue measurable in terms of the number of women who are members of JFM or the number of women participating in the JFM works as wage labourers. This concerns a conscious sensitivity on the part of the project staff and NGO's in the involvement of women in planning, decision-making, implementation and management of JFM as a community institution. It requires a particular effort and mindset in comprehending the issue of forestry vis-à-vis rural women's lives and livelihoods.

The study found that apart from emphasis on equal membership in JFM by men and women and on minor components of the programme on gender sensitivity training, there has been no particular focus on empowering women through JFM or seriously engaging them. If there has been a shift towards equal wages between men and women, it was the decision of VSS on their own. Participation among women in JFM meetings is quite poor although they are the first affected when forest is degraded. In places like RK Nagar, Gonduru, Vankachinta, Regalla, etc, women have gained experience in discussing their problems due to constant interaction with officials as a result of various appraisal and research teams visiting the villages. They are able to describe JFM activities, are actively participating in meetings and discussing their problems with officials because they are roadside villages.

Micro-planning in JFM with the community as a whole has been negligible and even more with regard to planning with the involvement of women. Some schemes like distribution of smokeless chulhas or LPG stoves or in some VSS training in occupational skills like tailoring, adda leaf stitching, etc are seen in the area. One or two VSS were given a matching grant to support their thrift activities.

What is glaringly absent is the means of control and benefit to VSS and to women in particular. For instance, women members of one VSS, Gonduru have been involved in processing of NTFP items like tamarind and hill-brooms on their own. In spite of protecting, regenerating and value addition to the forest produce, they do not have any rights to market their products and thereby, improve their economic condition.

A major responsibility for building up a perspective towards approaching gender as an issue of respecting the rights and opportunities of women and not as providing certain welfare measures and schemes to a particular sex, lies with the NGO's. These groups have taken up a few training programmes to develop skills in income generating activities based on NTFP. However, the basic issues related to forest dwelling women have not been seriously pursued by the NGO's too.

c) The World Bank and JFM:

The World Bank investments in the forest sector in many countries has led to a considerable influence on the forest policies of those countries and it is one of the primary institutions to fund forestry programmes. The Bank's mission has been defined as improving forest conservation and management through important partnerships, including public-private partnerships, to achieve its goals.

The World Bank in A.P Forestry Project:

It is clearly evident that the World Bank had a significant role in the JFM programme in A.P since almost its inception in 1992. The JFM programme itself is divided into APFP (ie, world bank funded) and non APFP (funded from the chief minister's grant and other sources). Even though the World Bank did not propose to expand its funding to all VSS in the state, it was a political decision to introduce the JFM programme all over the state. Whereas only 2667 VSS (after the extension) in the state are supported by the World Bank, there are a total of 6600 VSS in A.P. Due to constraints of funds, the non-APFP VSS receive limited funds. This imbalance has brought discontent among the people as there could be two VSS next to each other having vast differences in funding patterns. For the people there exists only one government and it cannot treat each village differently.

It also has to be admitted that though the concept of JFM may have emerged from the forest department and the Indian forest policy, the progress in the implementation took place mainly because of the World Bank intervention and funds. For one, this fund helped the department in approaching the people with a welfare package in order to mitigate its police face with the people. Secondly, the targets and time-frame set under the agreement with the bank had to be fulfilled which guided the department in keeping up its pace and pursuance of the programme. Thirdly, it helped the department in finding the resources in developing its capacities, technical skills, information processing and in reorganising its structures within the department.

The World Bank's approach to forestry and other non-forestry sectors in its country strategy for India stand to severe scrutiny in its bid to influence policy decisions. Although it claims that only 3% of the external aid to India comes from the World Bank, its involvement in all the projects it funds is quite intensive and influential. In A.P Forestry Project, although it was the FD which approached the World Bank, it has brought many changes in the structure and

implementation of the activities of the department. The minute detail with which the project was designed including its management models for implementation by the FD, the external consultants brought in to give technical recommendations, training to FD staff, etc speaks of the Bank's policy of dictating its strategies. This detailed scrutiny is glaringly absent in bringing out the critical aspects of implementation of the programme or in fulfilling the promised rights to the communities.

The reports of most of the World Bank appraisal documents contain superficial evaluations from hectic visits which have no depth in analysis. In most of the cases it has been reported that there is good community participation, forest regeneration and institution development. None of the serious issues of conflicts, disputes, rights of the communities, sharing of benefits, legal necessities, working plans, etc have ever been stressed upon or followed up by the Bank with the department. Emphasis has been more concentrated on restructuring of the department, management models, staff training, restructuring heads of expenditure, etc.

The World bank is one of the key actors in pushing for privatisation in India, whether of forests, power, industry, education or health, and it visibly supports the state of A.P in pursuing the goals of privatisation. Its commitment to calling for community participation, NGO involvement and decentralisation cannot be taken seriously, the way it has dealt with the AP forestry project. It has been very selective and frugal when inviting NGO's for discussions and very few of the recommendations or criticisms have been highlighted or pursued with the department.

As mentioned above, calling NGO's for consultations and ignoring their observations has been a trend initiated by the World Bank atleast as far as A.P is concerned. It is a development agency which is persuading governments to relinquish their constitutional roles and duties as welfare states by passing over some of the basic social responsibilities of health, education, forests, tribals, etc to the private sector.

Chapter IX: The future ahead:

The government and the forest department in particular, stand at a juncture where they face the scrutiny of the people in their conformity to the assurances given at the start of the programme. The department, in the immediate future has a tough test ahead as there are two important phases it is simultaneously confronted with. One is the withdrawal of the World Bank support as the project comes to a close. The second is the share in benefits with VSS as some of them have come to a maturity in terms of harvest of forest produce.

The actual test of its longevity lies ahead – can the department continue its programme sans World Bank assistance and does it have the conscious will to consider people as co-equal partners and share its ownership over the forest by passing on the benefits to people and allowing for democratic space in decision-making? The political policies and decisions regarding JFM and the wider definitions related to forests, industry and development reflected in the political decisions would have a major bearing on the nature of implementation followed up by the forest department.

The World Bank, at the moment, is nodding its head against a next phase of funding and is not very clear in committing itself to any decisions. The achievements of JFM, to a large extent, were dependent on the flow of funds for development and forestry activities in order to gain the participation and cooperation of the people. When the World Bank withdraws its

funds, there would be a steep fall in this participation of which the department is well aware. The department, however, is reassuring that it is looking for alternate sources of funds to support the present level of activity atleast. The authorities also believe that the earlier VSS have come to a stage where they do not need to be funded but should look for self sustenance.

The FD has not yet fulfilled its commitments of sharing the benefits and income but there are assurances on this area as well – that the department is focussing its attention on re-organising its Working Plans after which clear processes for benefit sharing, leasing forest lands, etc can be possible without having to approach the MoEF.

It is very distressing to note that MoEF, GoAP and FD have all jumped into the JFM bandwagon with great alacrity and roped in the forest dwelling people with MoU's and a cartload of promises. When it comes to paying the people- the poorest of the poor- their share of the income, they have come out with excuses that the bamboo, etc cannot be worked till the working plans are approved by MoEF. Such lack of integrity from the government is unbecoming. On the other hand, the total responsibility of protecting the forests has been passed over to the people and foresters have started rebuking or questioning them on improper conduct of their duties on forest management.

Institution Building:

It has to be consciously perceived that VSS is not a totally new institution in rural India, particularly, in tribal India. One has to understand it in its broader framework of village as an institution in which forest management is a crucial aspect. The government has to be very cautious not to pit one village against the other through artificial institutionalisation and power-building systems in course of setting up Vana Samrakshana Samithis without understanding the inter-village traditional practices of law, resource sharing and cooperation.

A clear definition of VSS should be drawn to distinguish VSS from the forest department. The VSS has to be an independent institution and not a village extension of the forest department. On the other hand, the department's role after JFM, shifts to one of providing extension services to VSS. As the primary tasks of forest protection, management and regeneration are being taken up by the VSS, the department's work at the field on these aspects is greatly reduced.

It has a wider and enriching task of concentrating on forestry planning, preparing the larger micro-plans for each region within which each VSS prepares its own micro-plans, giving technical guidance to VSS in planning and implementing their micro-plans, in forestry and conservation, in developing nurseries and plantations to meet the needs of VSS in each region, in undertaking research and tests to study the various aspects of forest in each region, providing information and training to VSS on scientific methods of protecting forests, optimally tapping forest resources, value-addition and building market linkages on forest species, etc. Work in these areas has been far from focussed in the past and the department has the opportunity to devote its energies now that VSS have taken over their primary responsibilities.

Need to Improve Foresters' Knowledge of Natural Forest Management:

Today there is an urgent need to improve foresters' knowledge of natural forest management from the foresters in the pre-independence era when most forest management was based on systems of natural regeneration of forests. Post-Independent forestry has been mostly

plantation forestry of cutting down natural forests and planting mono-cultures. This is reflected in the micro-plans which divide the VSS area into five coupes and each to be worked in one year and if possible plant eucalyptus or some such trees. Even in NTFP programmes the ubiquitous eucalyptus has found a place!

Foresters have largely forgotten or have not adequate knowledge of NTFP, medicinal plants, their occurrences, harvesting, etc. The success of the JFM programme depends on evolving sustainable ways of harvesting and finding value addition to NTFP and medicinal plants which could give Rs.1,000 to Rs.3,000 per hectare, i.e., atleast one to two lakhs to each VSS of 100 hectares and employment, especially to women, all round the year. An indepth programme of training of foresters in NTFP and MP is the need of the hour.

Conclusions:

- The JFM programme has to be adapted in lines with the forest policy of India and not as a short term programme dependent on external aid or loans from either development agencies or private industries-some think of this in the air-but there cannot be a smoke without a fire.
- The emphasis should shift from incentive-based programme approach to community institution building for forest management.
- State plan outlay has to increase from its present humiliating contribution of 0.58% of its budget to forestry. Even a mere one or two percent increase will make the forest department self reliant in managing to protect and regenerate the forests without being burdened by huge loans and more importantly the funds should be assured and not depend on erratic health of state finances.
- Forestry should become a priority sector for the government and its policies should be geared towards internal mobilisation of funds, priority to meeting rural and local needs and natural regeneration of forests and forest policy of 1988 should be honoured.
- Forests and forest communities should not be sacrificed for industrial or commercial interests. VSS should not become a tool for making people regenerate and protect the forests so that benefits of their labour accrue to the industrial sector. Forest needs of industries should be met through using private lands and wastelands with commercial negotiations or tie-up with FDC which was set up for that purpose in accordance with 1988 Forest Policy.
- People should be given the rights of control and decision-making in respect of the 'joint' nature of management agreed upon under the program, and back-seat driving by Forest Department/Government should be replaced by genuine empowerment of VSS.
- Sharing of benefits and profits from NTFP, Bamboo, Beedileaf, etc. share from compounding fees should be given to VSS immediately where ever harvesting is being done and only then the FD should talk about second phase of the programme or of its principle of 'joint' management.

- What is given generously by the right hand should not be taken away by the right hand. Monopoly of GCC Ltd. over NTFP should be removed and the government should provide a support to the people for sale of NTFP. The people should have the right of marketing their forest produce where they can get a better price.
- The forest department has its own hidden agenda in the VSS program, which is reclamation of podu lands through JFM; it should never be the objective of the department. There are vast areas of reserved forest above people's settlements and priority should be given to regenerating the forest beyond the village settlements rather than taking over of people's lands.
- Micro plan should be area specific and clear at the start of the VSS with proper baseline surveys so that disputes do not arise at the time of harvesting. They should fit into the overall forest working plans. Target oriented approach should not be followed and concentration should be on hill areas than the plains or town areas.
- A different method to forest management should be adopted for plain areas where focus should be on user groups like those dependent on sale of firewood or grasses so that protection is ensured and the actual players in forest dependency get better benefits and income.
- In the case of bamboo, it would be good to introduce the concept of household management of bamboo in forest areas as was done in China although the forest department would argue that the Forest Conservation Act or the JFM guidelines do not permit individual ownership of forest land. There will be no violation of the Act or guidelines if the VSS as a society is given the ownership of the forest allotted to it and the VSS in turn assigns specific areas to its members for management. This can revolutionize bamboo yields and also several other NTFP species found in household plots as was the experience in Peoples Republic of China.
- In forest areas where coffee grows well like in Vizag agency areas, it should be allowed to be grown under JFM. There is good evidence that where-ever there is coffee there is very good tree cover and forest regeneration, soil and moisture conservation.
- Where there are strong traditional systems of forest management in the tribal areas, there the government should refrain from implementing JFM unless the people themselves request for it.
- In sanctuary areas, the objective of JFM should not be to evict people or prevent them from utilising the forest resources but should involve them in better management and usage of the same.
- Leasing of VSS areas by the government to industries should be stopped and if industries require raw material they should either raise their own plantations or purchase the same from the VSS. The right to sell or withhold and the nature of utilisation of the forest resources should lie with the VSS members. This should apply either to bamboo, minerals, quarrying, semi precious stones, etc.
- The government should come out with a clear legal framework for JFM on forest management and people's rights before it takes up its second phase of funding.

- Large amounts of funds through external aid and loans are unviable and wasteful to the state. The FD should prove its integrity to the people through devolving powers to them and sharing the benefits promised in its G.O's rather than through development incentives like community-halls, roads, check-dams, under the World Bank projects, etc which are the prerogative of rural/tribal developments departments.
- JFM could be a good tool for resolution/settlement of conflicts between people and the forest department where villages are situated in reserve forest enclosures. Such villages have to be recognised as eviction will not solve the problem and they can be involved in protection of the forest around them through formation of VSS. Vankachinta village in Paderu mandal of Vizag district is an excellent example of how this conflict was resolved successfully.
- The region of north coastal Andhra Pradesh or for that matter, the whole tribal belt has thick forests. This region also has mineral wealth but mining and forestry do not go together. Forests have to be destroyed for mining. Therefore, government policy has to have a clear perspective on forestry when taking up programmes like JFM. Protection of forests in these regions should be the first priority of the state and digging up forest lands for mining may be examined only if the mineral is for national defense. Once JFM is successfully implemented, the revenue to people and the government from forest produce, both timber and NTFP, would yield far higher returns than ecologically destructive projects like mining. Increase in forest cover will also have secondary sources of revenue like tourism which can flourish only when there are good forests.
- Government should encourage and initiate public debate on important policy matters like forestry, share information and follow transparency right from the top levels rather than be patronising and undemocratic in its attitude. One single government does not have the right to determine the fate of national properties like forests without constant public consultation (in its true essence).

Joint Forest Management in Andhra Pradesh in spite of all the fanfare and publicity has a long way to go to become just (and fair) forest management with real and genuine empowerment of local communities in managing their forests.

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