

Evaluation of Joint Forest Management Programme in India

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Article History

Manuscript No. IJEP27

Received in 01st February, 2015

Received in revised form 11th February, 2015

Accepted in final form 18th February, 2015

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Keywords

JFMCs, Forest management, Sustainable management

Abstract

The Joint Forest Management (JFM) program is a co-management system for protection, regeneration and development of degraded forests which acted as a bridge between the State and the people dependent on forests. Majority of India's rural population living in the forest rich regions is poor and their poverty issue can be solved by sustainable management and proper utilization of forest resources. Forest management in India evolved with a stress on commercial plantation after independence, thus relegating the development and conservation needs of forest communities. The JFM in West Bengal was the first plan which was successful in rejuvenating degraded forests during 1972 near Arabari in Midnapore district. JFM involves sharing of responsibilities and rights of local communities and forest department as primary stakeholders in forest management system. There were more than 1,18,213 JFMCs by 2011, covering 22.94 million ha forests of the country. About 14.5 million families including 4.6 million scheduled tribe families and scheduled caste families are involved in JFM (ICFRE, 2011). Although an overall increase is recorded in the number of JFMCs but the area covered under forests has decreased. There has been downward correction in number of JFMCs and forest area covered in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Punjab because many registered JFMCs were found non-functional. JFM flourished and reached its peak in the first half of the past decade leading up to 2006-2007 in terms of imitation and impact, after which it got stagnated. Still it is functioning in several areas and has potential to be improved.

1. Introduction

During the British period, the purpose of forest management was the re-distribution of economic gains to the Empire (Kant and Cooke, 1999). This purpose was achieved by commercialization of timber and restriction of the rights of local people which in turn led to large-scale deforestation (Gadgil and Guha, 1993). The British government allowed forest-based community forest management for some forest areas in the Himalayas, which took the form of van panchayats (forest villages) in Uttar Pradesh and Forest Cooperatives in Himachal Pradesh (Guha, 1983). After independence, the central government aimed at redefining social-utility and social-welfare functions, but the emphasis of forest management regimes still continued to be on commercial timber exploitation and the exclusion of local people (Kant and Cooke, 1999). In 1988, state ownership of forests rose by 50% covering an area of 67 million hectares through blanket notifications of forests by the government. The expansion of forest ownership by state sidelined the customary rights of forest dwellers, who were mostly tribal. Gadgil and

Guha (1983) urged that there have been a number of notable similarities between colonial and post-colonial forest policy. This demonstrates that the national forest policy of 1952 upholds the fundamental concepts of previous forest policy of 1894, and it reinforces the right of the state for exclusive control over forest protection, production, and management (Hannam, 1999).

An adverse relationship between the forest department and the people reflected the historical realities of past centuries. This led to reorientation and attitudinal changes not only in the forest departments but also in the communities. The Chipko protest movement during 1973 in the state of Uttar Pradesh now Uttaranchal was evidence to the people's movement to re-establish a relationship between man and nature over the state's management perspectives. Few other individual successful efforts were also made in the states of West Bengal (Arabari Village, 1972), Haryana (Sukhomajri Village, 1976), and Rajasthan (Gopalpura Village, 1986) to develop rural livelihoods and regenerate forests through co-management.



These movements caught the attention of foresters, politicians, as well as, international environmental activists.

2. The Joint Forest Management Program

The JFM program is a co-management system for protection, regeneration and development of degraded forests where NGOs acted as a bridge between the State and the people dependent on forests. The protection and management of forest areas under concern would be done jointly by the local community and Forest department, but ownership of the forests would lie with the government. International organizations also preferred people's participation in natural resource management as requirement for extending financial support (Saxena and Farrington, 2003). For the protection of forests, Forest department has evolved as the nodal agency. The basic organizational structure of the Forest department involves a hierarchical multi-tier organization which comprise of the Indian Forest Service at the Central level and Provincial Forest Service at the state level. The present allowance has changed little and is the continuum of colonial management.

3. Evolution and Status of JFM

The JFM in West Bengal was the first JFM which had its origin in the success achieved in rejuvenating a patch of 17 hectares of degraded forests under a pilot project implemented during 1972 near Arabari in Midnapore district. Further the JFM was implemented nationwide on large scale since 1990, covering more than 17.33 million ha of forest area managed through more than 84,000 village forest protection and management committees (VFPMCs). India was the pioneer in developing policy for involving people's participation in forest management; Forest Policy of 1988. MoEF, Govt. of India issued guidelines for the involvement of village communities under participatory forest management called Joint Forest Management. 'The holders of customary rights and concessions in forest areas should be motivated to identify themselves with the protection and development of forests from which they derive benefit' (National Forest Policy, 1988). During 1990 to 2000, the imitation was reticent because initially only degraded forests were allowed to be managed under JFM and in several areas where the local people were willing to form JFMCs they did not qualify for the programme. There were more than 1,18,213 JFMCs by 2011, covering 22.94 million ha forests of the country (Figure 1). About 14.5 million families including 4.6 million scheduled tribe families and scheduled caste families are involved in JFM (ICFRE, 2011). Although an overall increase in the number of JFMCs is recorded but the area covered under forests has decreased (Figure 2). There has been downward correction in number of JFMCs and forest area covered in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Punjab because many registered JFMCs were

found non-functional (Figure 3).

The primary objectives of JFM are to provide a visible role to the local communities in planning, management and protection of forests and to give them a share in the benefits from these forests. It aims to empower local people for their active participation as partner in the management of forest resources. This is linking the forestry development works with over all development of the land based resources, optimizing the returns and minimizing conflicts. It is helpful in acquiring technical and managerial capability available at the grass-root level.

4. Impact of JFM

JFM led to process change in the forest department, which was continuing from the British legacy. Training programs and meetings between foresters and villagers resulted to a decrease in negative attitudes along with effective conflict resolution. Changes in the forest management regime also attracted additional funds for forestry and environmental activities from international organizations. JFM also helped in the decentralization of decision making by empowering the Village Forest Committees politically and socio-economically. JFM has not only contributed to the better status of degraded forests, but has also contributed to sustainable human resource development. One of the most positive outcomes of policy

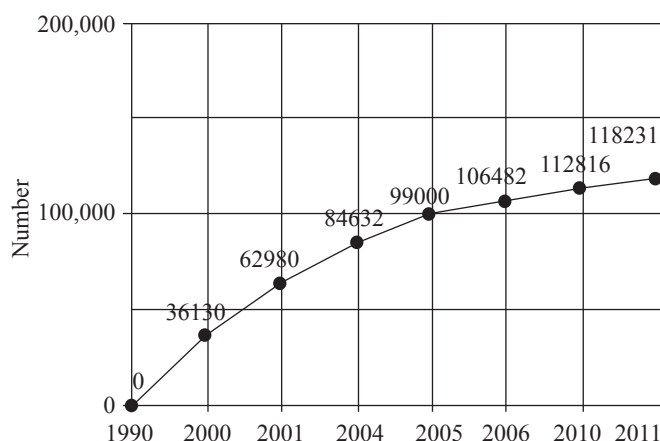


Figure 1: Growth of JFM Committees in India

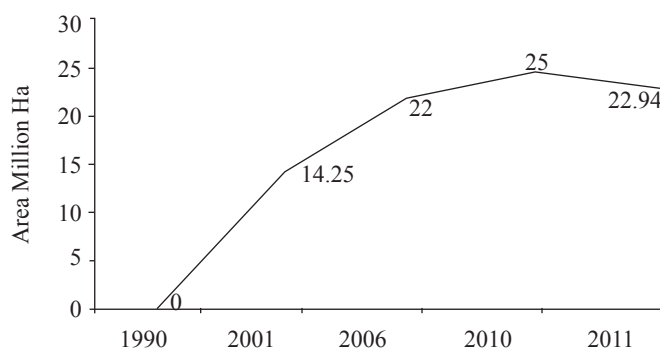


Figure 2: Forest Area Under JFM during the Last Decade

change is the increased participation of NGOs in protecting and raising plantation even in government forests.

In terms of environmental performance JFM had a huge impact in restoring the vegetation in degraded forests. Improvement was also noted in human resource development (HRD) within the forest administration through participatory workshops and study tours at all levels of the hierarchy. Training of village women, skill development training for value addition to forest produce, knowledge in medicinal plants management and marketing are a result of human resource development impact of JFM. It also brought into effect, several organizational developments in the form of forest management information system in the forest department together with capacity building of NGO's and village level institutions. The creation of employment in several areas led to enhanced communication, transportation and health, and the paper by Bhattacharya et al. (2010) claimed that JFM decreased urban migration by 60%. JFM also had a positive impact on livelihoods indirectly through agriculture (benefits from the rehabilitation technologies implemented).

5. Issues with JFM

JFM did not have a significant impact on poverty and livelihoods, because the local people did not get majority of the revenues from the forest produce. A common complaint was that the JFM program was not always voluntary and in many cases lacked people participation (IBRAD, 2006). JFM has also been generalized as a fund driven project activity that failed to bring about self reliance for forest dwellers. In some cases the people responsible for afforestation were not the ones who had a role in deforestation within the area. This led to a conflict of

interests but the pressure to fulfill these basic needs often meant that alternate, often productive forests were instead exploited. There is disjunction between the responsibilities of the JFM committees and the scientific needs of forest management. In most cases, villagers were mobilized for afforestation of degraded land (Buffum et al., 2010) but it lacked institution building (Milne, 2005). Even though the Government of India passed a resolution to involve local communities in managing and protecting dense and good forests in 2000, only three states adopted this policy so far (Bhattacharya et al., 2010). Hayes and Persha (2010) discussed how corruption undermined co-management activities and consequently why villagers felt no accountability or ownership towards their forests.

6. Strengthening of JFM

The JFM programme in the country was reviewed by Government of India from time to time in consultation with State Governments, NGO's and other stakeholders in view of several emerging issues. In order to further strengthen the programme, the State Governments may take action on the suggested lines of MoEF. Memorandum of understanding (MoU) should be signed between the forest department and the JFM committees outlining the short term roles and responsibilities, implementation of work programme, pattern of sharing of usufructs and conflict resolution. JFM committees should take the advantage of the panchayats for the management of forest resources while maintaining the non political identity. The success of JFM in good forest areas would depend upon the sustainable development and harvesting of non-timber forests products. Fundamental recommendations to move the program forward, derived from the study are:

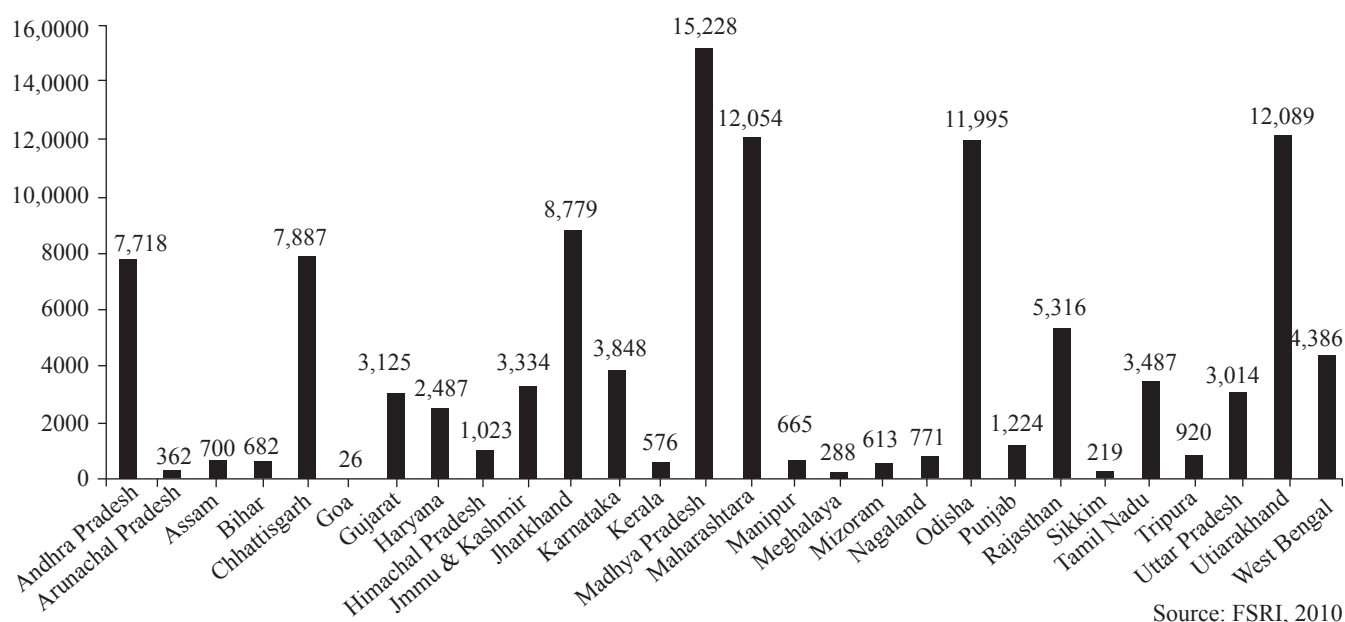


Figure 3: Statewise number of JFMCs in India (FSRI, 2010)

Source: FSRI, 2010



- The JFM policy needs to be made more flexible and adaptive.
- Sort out compatibility issues with the Forest rights act of 2007.
- JFMCs or any resource management committees should be setup voluntarily.
- Link the various parallel institutions or programs that have similar goals or activities with JFM.
- Improve market access of NTFPs and support value addition activities carried out on NTFPs.
- Continue to support and empower women and minorities. The ecosystem services provided the forests should be enhanced.

7. Conclusion

Over the last decade, the performance of JFM has varied temporally and spatially. JFM flourished and reached its peak in the first half of the past decade leading up to 2006-2007 in terms of replication and impact, after which it got stagnated. There has been downward correction in number of JFMCs and forest area covered in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Punjab because many registered JFMCs were found non-functional. Still it is functioning in several areas and has potential to be improved.

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