

# ROLE OF JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES IN THE CONSERVATION OF FOREST AND ENVIRONMENT

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**Abstract:** The Joint Forest Management (JFM) is a system to plan that a willing and active partnership between the state and local communities to promote conservation through managing forest resources sustainably. It is a concept of developing partnerships between extreme forest user groups and the Forest Department. Many countries have now adopted forest tenure reforms to secure rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities over forests and natural resources. Forest tenure reforms are happening against the background of growing evidence of the importance of rights-based approaches to conservation, particularly in contrast to the conventional conservation approach that is exclusive of rights and community participation. In the year 1990 Indian National JFM guidelines were issued. 22 States are now implementing the programme. JFM system which had its roots in participatory forestry JFM is the way for rural development and strategy for sustainable forest management because the communities are involved in protecting and managing the forest. Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMC) covers more than 22 million hectares of forests spread across 28 States of India and union territories. JFM cover more than 18% of the total forest. Forests are very important for social, economic, ecological and environmental reasons. They play an important role in ecosystem processes. Therefore, a serious attention to the factors that lead to effective forest governance is essential to deal with forest re-establishment and management challenges in India.

**Keyword:** Forest-deforestation-resources-conservation-management-community involvement.

## INTRODUCTION:

The history of the tribal indicates that the tribal economy was essentially dependent on forest lands and other such common resources. In Central province of India, tribal families belonging to korku, Bhil, Bhilala, and other communities have been the inhabitants of the Satpura Mountain region since generations. Such as in other part of the country various indigenous people were inhabitants of that region. Their livelihood, cultural beliefs and practices are all rooted in the forest and the natural resources. The tribal since many generations have been collecting a variety of forest produce which were used at home or sold in the market. A variety of medicinal herbs and materials for making and repairing houses were also collected. On this background Joint Forest Management (JFM) is a concept of developing partnerships between extreme forest user groups and the Forest Department (FD) on the basis of mutual trust and jointly defined roles and responsibilities with regard to forest protection and development. The Joint Forest Management (JFM) approach stems from the assumption that a willing and active partnership between the state and local communities can promote conservation through managing forest resources sustainably. In JFM, the user (local communities) and the owner (Government) manage the resource and share the cost equally, however it is difficult to generalize the JFM concept and approach in the light of variations across the nation with respect to geography, resource base, socio-economic status, cultural diversity and pressures on forests.

The last some decades have been eventful for conservation policy, with rights over resources and community conservation initiatives gaining more focus in academic debate, policy, and practice around the world.

Many countries have now adopted forest tenure reforms to secure rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities over forests and natural resources. Forest tenure reforms are happening against the backdrop of growing evidence of the importance of rights-based approaches to conservation, particularly in contrast to the conventional conservation approach that is exclusive of rights and community participation. These reforms are also occurring within the context of conflicts around the impacts of globalization and a new-liberal model of development based on resource extraction, both of which have threatened and continue to threaten the lands, forests, and livelihoods of Indigenous peoples and local communities around the world.

International and national policies to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD) have serious implications for the rights of Indigenous Peoples enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the rights of women enshrined in, amongst others, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the human rights of local communities, including land rights and substantive rights like the right to life, personal security, health, and an adequate standard of living. An important right enshrined in UNDRIP is the right of Indigenous Peoples to free, prior and informed consent, which has already been violated by international and by most national REDD initiatives; Indigenous Peoples have not given their prior consent to any of the major REDD-related initiatives to date. REDD also has many potential impacts on biodiversity and related rights. As a top-down forest governance model that is driven by powerful economic actors, REDD clashes with rights-based approaches to conservation. Continued support must

be ensured for successful, rights-based, and community-driven forest conservation and restoration initiatives, which are a more locally appropriate and just alternative to REDD. Since 2007, international negotiations towards a programme on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD) have been taking place under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC). Not only is it still uncertain what kind of compromises and outcomes might result, but it is also increasingly unlikely there will be a comprehensive agreement on climate change and REDD established in the near future, as the current negotiations are completely stalled. Despite this lack of an agreed international legal and policy framework, a few dozen countries have already started to elaborate national REDD policies, triggered by multilateral donors like the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, the UN-REDD programme, and bilateral initiatives (Third World Network, 2010. Analisis de los textos de negociacion revisados en Bonn, Third world Network briefing papers, pune, 2010.)

**STRUCTURE AND ROLE OF JFM IN INDIA:**

In the year 1990 National JFM guidelines were issued, 22 States are now implementing the programme. The JFM programme has evolved to different levels across these States. While West Bengal, Haryana and Orissa have completed two decades of JFM initiation, others like Assam, Sikkim and Mizoram have issued enabling orders in 1998 and accordingly the issues for which they are seeking solutions are different. As part of the study, the Government of India guidelines of 1990 was reviewed to assess the necessity for revising them. The major findings of the study made by various agencies are, the emergent issues and strategies for future JFM implementation have been presented briefly in the order of institutional, benefit sharing, marketing, productivity, followed by comments on the National Guidelines for JFM. The Government of India circular of 1st June 1990 formalized and endorsed the Joint Forest Management (JFM) system which had its roots in participatory forestry at Arabari in Midnapore district in West Bengal began in 1972. It laid out the broad guidelines for an institutional arrangement, involving the local people, to jointly protect and manage forest resources in return for the benefits from it (Ravindranath and Sudha 2000). The government resolutions on JFM in India emphasized active participation by women in the decision-making process and determining forest management priorities. In addition, a set of national guidelines on forest fires, which was issued to all states in 2000, stressed the importance of community involvement in forest fire prevention and control through the existing joint forest management program (Hiremath & Schmerbeck, 2007). JFM is the avenue for rural development and strategy for sustainable forest management because the communities are involved in protecting and managing the forest.

There are three kinds of committee like committees for protection of well-stocked forests, committees for rehabilitating degraded forests, and committees for participatory biodiversity. The main role of the JFM committee (JFMCs) involves protecting the regenerating

forests from being further degraded by activities such as grazing and encroachment. Incidence of illicit felling of trees has declined in many places. A study carried out by the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department has indicated that between 1996 and 1999, dense and open forest covers have increased by 18 percent and 22 percent respectively. One of the more immediately visible ecological effects of JFM has been the recovery of fodder resources in JFM areas. In the study by Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) of village forest committees

in the Jhabua Division of Madhya Pradesh, it has been found that the average saving of a household by augmentation of fodder from the area has been Rs. 3000 per annum (Bahuguna 1993).

**National resolution on JFM, 1990**

The 1990 guidelines have cemented the way for JFM across the country and states have issued enabling orders. The major provisions of the National Resolution are:

- i. Providing an enabling mechanism for participation of local communities and a platform for NGO participation. Facilitating institution building and allowed flexibility in their formation,
- ii. Eliminating the involvement of commercial interests and the middlemen in the benefit sharing mechanism,
- iii. Providing forest usufruct benefits to participating communities,
- iv. Providing for wage employment to local communities for some forest related work,
- v. Allowing for plantation of indigenous, multi-purpose species of trees and even grasses, shrubs and medicinal herbs,
- vi. Ensuring that the FD only harvests in accordance with a working scheme prepared in consultation with local communities.

Some aspects that have not been provided for by the National guidelines but have been incorporated by various State Governments in their order and/or working rules are:

- i. Criteria of success, monitoring procedures and baseline surveys,
- ii. Defining the working scheme to be a working plan or a microplan or both depending upon the scale of planning,
- iii. On the creation, management and use of village funds,
- iv. Grazing control mechanism,
- v. Membership norms to encourage involvement of representatives of different hamlets, villages, landless labourers, village artisans, members of forest-based craft making communities, scheduled castes and tribes, etc. in the General body and Management Committee of the VFCs,
- vi. The need for expanding the scope of JFM to include aspects of watershed development and holistic development that are now almost integral to JFM,
- vii. Forum for conflict resolution/dispute arbitration,
- viii. Financial provisions/arrangements for JFM programme,
- ix. Registration of committees in some States providing them with several benefits in terms of legal sanctity and empowerment.

Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMC)

covers 22 million hectares of forests spread across 28 States of India and union territories. JFM cover more than 18% of the total forest. This value indicates that a little over 18% of the forest cover has been brought under JFM, and about 45.6% open forest is brought under JFM. The extent of support offered to JFM is quite substantial in India. JFM on a large scale were supported by multilateral agencies. The World Bank has supported JFM in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra while the UK Department for International Development funded JFM in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka. Rajasthan and Karnataka have received support from the Japanese Agency for International Cooperation. The European Union has supported the Haryana initiative. Forests are very important for social, economic, ecological and environmental reasons. They play an important role in ecosystem processes (such as the biogeochemical and hydrological cycles), they provide habitat for wildlife and serve as sources of biodiversity, and they offer protection against soil erosion. Forests are also among the most effective systems for air pollution abatement and ground water recharge. In this era of global warming, forests help mitigate the effects of climate change, and maintain biodiversity and ecosystem functioning. However, in spite of their obvious value, human activity is causing unprecedented threats to forest ecosystems. Therefore, a serious attention to the factors that lead to effective forest governance is essential to deal with forest re-establishment and management challenges in India.

Vijai Shanker Singh Principal Secretary, Environment and Forests, Government of Rajasthan, and Chairperson, Rajasthan State Pollution Control Board, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India explained his thought in the article entitled 'What Makes Joint Forest Management Successful? Science-Based Policy Lessons on Sustainable Governance of Forests in India'. That, higher levels of local monitoring and enforcement of locally-made rules can result in improved forest restoration and lower the possibility of forest degradation across a variety of ecological, economic and social contexts. It is essential to emphasize here that strong autonomy of rule-making at the local level (and not the government-imposed rules) is a key predictor of both better forests as well as better availability of goods and services to support livelihoods of local people. These science-based policy lessons have immediate practical utility for evidence-based forest management and restoration in India. There is a need to activate local monitoring, local rule-making and local enforcement systems in every village-level organization to facilitate local learning and adaptation. In the context of joint forest management, it is expected that village forest management and protection committees that have local rule-making, local monitoring and local enforcement are more likely to succeed in their efforts directed towards better forests and improved livelihoods.

A Case study in West Bengal, India of Joint Forest Management, Deforestation and local people participation by Dr. Jyotish Prakash Basu, (Associate Professor of Economics, West Bengal State University, Barasa) explained some facts are

1) British forest policy for commercial interest and excessive land revenue, the human activities like forest fire, over

exploitation of fuel wood and fodder, population growth, poverty, 'Grow More Food' program, expansion of agriculture and infrastructure development are identified as the causes for deforestation and degradation of forest in India.

2) Joint forest management (JFM) helped to reduce illicit felling of trees, reduce area under illegal encroachments, forest fire prevention and control by community involvement and to enhance the forest cover through a forestation program.

3) All marginalized or under-privileged sections of the society like landless labour force, marginal and small farmers, scheduled castes, tribal groups, and women are involved in plantation and protection activities in JFM. In addition, Under Joint Forest management (JFM), about 85,000 Forest protection communities are entrusted with the protection and management of nearby forests and their effective involvement in evolving sustainable forest management systems has been looked upon as an important approach to address the long-standing problems of deforestation and land degradation in India. More than 17 million hectares of degraded land are managed under JFM.

4) Forest protection committee restricted the collection of NTFPs in excess of own requirement in JFM areas. The over extraction of fuel wood is completely prohibited in the JFM areas. This restriction on the use of forest products helps to reduce the degradation of forests.

5) The non-timber forest products (NTFPs) like fuel wood, food, medicinal herbs, mushroom, honey, mahua etc. are important contributors to the welfare of the households in the JFM areas. Evaluation studies of Joint Forest Management in India: a review of analytical processes by K.S. Murali, R. Jagannatha Rao and N.H. Ravindranath explained

1) Forests of India were largely managed until recently, by the state, with a prime objective to produce timber. In the process, the forest dependent communities' rights were marginalized and, moreover, large degraded forest areas were converted for plantation purposes. Several attempts to conserve forests through state controlled programs failed as they did not recognize the community's role in forest management. Thus, it is being recognized that the involvement of people in forest management not only contributes to the regeneration of degraded forest, but also helps in the effective conservation of the forest, apart from meeting the community's subsistence needs. Efforts at involving local people in the management of forest resources has produced encouraging results especially in respect of forest conservation and regeneration in 'Arabari' experiments in West Bengal, Western Ghats and 'Sukhomajri' in Haryana. The forest policy, formulated in 1988 based on these experiences, gave priority to the needs of the forest dependent communities. In 1990, the Government of India issued an order facilitating participatory approaches involving the Forest Department and the local community to manage forests. Subsequent to this order, 27 states have issued orders on JFM and over 62,800 Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) have been initiated to protect and regenerate of forest. The JFM provisions are expected to promote people's involvement in

collective decision making, social fencing, empowerment of the village community, and sustained harvest of usufructs.

Tushar Das explained in the article *The Forest Rights Act: Redefining Biodiversity Conservation in India* (Exploring the Right to Diversity in Conservation Law, Policy, and Practice Policy Matters 17, 2010) In India, the federal government has enacted the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 to recognize and vest rights of forest communities. The enactment of the law is the culmination of a protracted struggle by communities for forest rights and conservation<sup>4</sup> that spanned the greater part of the 19th and 20th centuries and continued into the 21st. This struggle emerged from issues like insecurity of land tenure and access rights, lack of recognition of community conservation initiatives in forest management, lack of recognition of traditional governance and resource ownership in tribal areas, and threats to community lands and forests from development projects. The Planning Commission of India has also highlighted the importance of resolving these issues through protective legislation such as the Forest Rights Act and the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act to deal with the growing discontent, unrest, and extremism in tribal and forest areas<sup>5</sup>. Since the beginning of implementation in January, 2008, the Forest Rights Act, in particular, has enlivened the conservation debate around two contesting arguments: one is represented by the conservation orthodoxy that holds forth that rights cannot co-exist with conservation; the other echoes the otherwise marginalized voice of the forest communities, as well as the current international discourse that recognition of forest rights and forest tenure reform are an essential part of a just and effective conservation process.

The Gram Sabhas, which have the authority under the Act to determine rights, arguably lack the information and capacity in the form of documents, maps, evidence, and technical support necessary for the determination and verification of claims. Ensuring that the Act is effectively utilized by forest communities will require a massive and concerted effort to raise awareness about the Act and its procedures and to develop the capacity of the implementing agencies.

Another issue is that forest communities who are not scheduled tribes remain excluded from the implementation process, due to the restrictive criteria of three generations (or 75 years) of habitation and the insistence of the authorities on documented evidence. Even though the list of evidence accepted under the Rules of the Forest Rights Act includes oral and physical evidence, authorities insist on documented evidence when considering claims, which is often not available, particularly for customary rights. In this case, the government authorities should be proactive in adhering to the existing provisions of the Act that allow for the processing of unrecorded rights with the help of oral and physical evidence.

The Forest Rights Act vests authority in the Gram Sabha (village assembly) to initiate the process of determination of rights, which includes receiving, consolidating, and verifying the claims. The Gram Sabha carries out these activities through Forest Rights

Committees. Rules under the Forest Rights Act provide for representation and adequate participation of forest-dependent communities such as scheduled tribes, other forest-dwelling communities, and women in the Gram Sabha and Forest Rights Committee. Determination and claim of rights is a collective exercise that requires the concerned villages and communities to decide collectively on the nature and extent of the rights.

#### CONCLUSION:

Forests are very important for social, economic, ecological and environmental reasons. They play an important role in ecosystem processes (such as the biogeochemical and hydrological cycles), they provide habitat for wildlife and serve as sources of biodiversity, and they offer protection against soil erosion. Forests are also among the most effective systems for air pollution abatement and ground water recharge. In this era of global warming, forests help mitigate the effects of climate change, and maintain biodiversity and ecosystem functioning. However, in spite of their obvious value, human activity is causing unprecedented threats to forest ecosystems. Therefore, a serious attention to the factors that lead to effective forest governance is essential to deal with forest re-establishment and management challenges in India. Joint forest management (JFM) helped to reduce illegal cutting of trees, reduce area under illegal encroachments, forest fire prevention and control by community involvement and to enhance the forest cover through a forestation program.

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