

## JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT IN INDIA

Joint Forest Management (JFM) is one of the most significant efforts in India to involve local communities in managing degraded forest lands under government control. The diversity of conditions and outcomes so far provide valuable insights into the challenges in developing participatory approaches to natural resource management, especially in densely populated countries like ours. Although forest area has remained relatively stable in India and there are some signs of increase in the forest cover. But still forest degradation remains a major problem. India has some 200,000 forest fringe villages having a population of over 275 million people. More than forty percent of the poor in India live in forest fringe villages. It supports some 270 million heads of cattle and grazing affects 78 percent of India's forests. Although most of the forests are under public ownership, the inability to effectively protect them have made them free access resources and given the enormous demand for products, over exploitation and degradation becomes inevitable. The pace of degradation continues unchecked and the area categorized as open forest continues to increase.

### History of local community involvement

India has a long history of local community involvement in managing forests. However the takeover of forests under colonial rule undermined the traditional system of resource management. In early days, people were involved in forest and tree management. Local initiatives for community involvement (Van Panchayats). Success of farm forestry (Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat, etc.) and the Arabari and Sukhomajri experiences in the 1980s are the best examples.

Through an agreement the local communities assume the responsibility to protect and manage the forests and in return to this they are given access to the products and share of the income from the area. To better understand JFM we need to look at the development of Forest policies, Rules and regulations and Institutional arrangements.

### Policy Development. National Forest Policy 1988

- Emphasized the critical importance of meeting the needs of forest dwellers and other rural communities.
- Stressed the need to involve local communities in the conservation of forests, in particular afforestation of degraded lands.

### Rules and regulations.

Government of India issued detailed guidelines on JFM in 1990. Many states developed their own guidelines on the model of the national guideline. Revised set of guidelines issued in February 2000. Guidelines for conflict resolution with Panchayati Raj institutions also been developed. Revised guideline in 2009, especially to facilitate involvement of local communities in National Afforestation Programme.

### Institutions.

JFM Committees (or Eco Development Committees - EDCs) for local community involvement at the forest/ village level and JFM Cell in Ministry of Environment and Forests established in August 1998. Establishment of Forest Development Agencies (FDAs) at the district level as an autonomous federation of JFM Committees and establishment of State FDAs as an umbrella organization of all FDAs in a state based on the guidelines issued by Government of India. Initially the progress has been very slow and up to 1998 the area under JFM was only 4 million ha. Since the establishment of the JFM Cell in the Ministry of Environment and Forests, there has been a significant increase in the area covered by JFM. By 2010 the extent of area covered by JFM increased to 24.6 million ha (about 30% of the forest area in the country). In some states almost three-fourth of the forests are under JFM and the total number of JFM Committees in 2010: 112,896 nos. Number of families involved in the JFM program 14.5 million.

### FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR JFM

In the early years there was significant financial support from several agencies including international organizations. Resources from central and state governments (especially under integrated watershed development programmes, national rural employment guarantee programmes) increasingly substantial resources for forestry development are being channelized to the FDAs and JFMCs to implement programmes like:

- ❖ National Afforestation Programme
- ❖ Green India Mission & converging many programs, carried out at district level like MNREGA and other rural development schemes also supported the JFM.

### **JFM ACTIVITIES AND BENEFIT SHARING**

Afforestation and reforestation are the main essence of the activities along with the management of non-wood forest products. Assisting the department in forest protection – including fire protection and prevention of poaching, illegal logging, encroachment, etc, become mandatory of the committee. The contract between JFM Committee and the Forest Department stipulates how benefits from the JFM area is shared between the two entities. While local communities get 100 percent of the income from NWFPs, the share of income from sale of timber is much lower, sometimes as low as 25% of the net income. This has been a contentious issue and many states have already reviewed the profitsharing arrangement, significantly enhancing the share that goes to the local communities.

**The outcomes of JFM have been extremely varied considering the enormous diversity in the social, political, economic and institutional environment.**

There are several studies that suggest that JFM had a positive impact on the condition of forests. JFM has enhanced the income earning opportunities – especially from the collection of non-wood forest products, sale of timber and wages for various ongoing activities and witnessed an improvement in afforestation and reforestation. In many states JFM has broadened their intervention to improve the overall development of the villages, especially through investing in schools, healthcare centres, improving irrigation, agriculture development, etc.

### **MANY CHALLENGES**

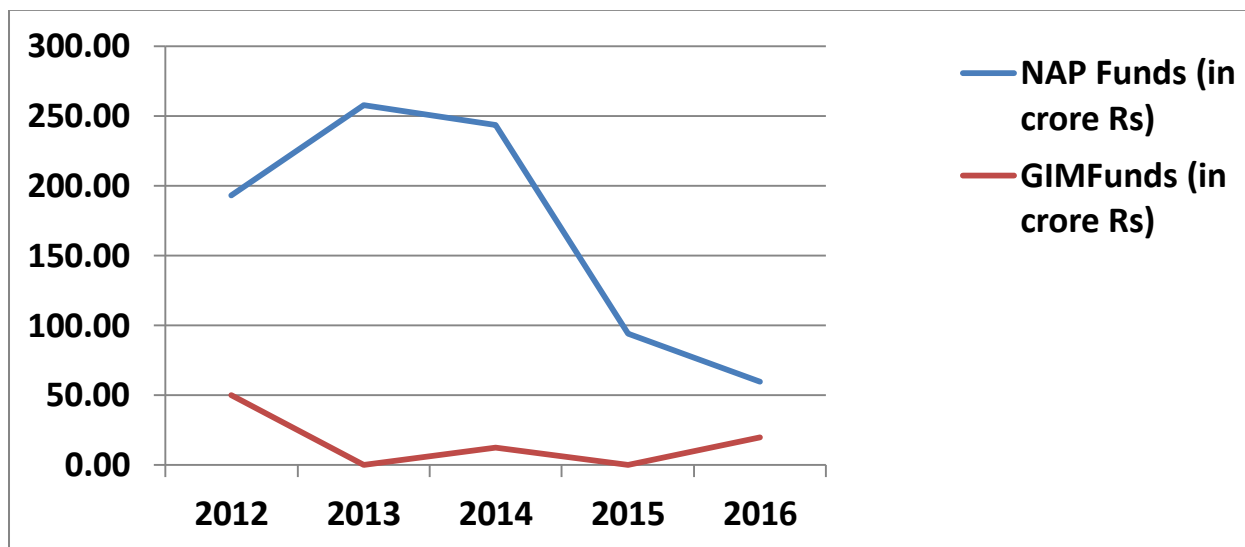
**However there are many challenges and more are expected as society-nature relationship evolves:**

- Governance facing many challenges, especially relating to the institutions involved.
- Relationship between the two key partners – local communities and forest departments – Unequal partnerships heavily loaded in favour of Forest Department.
- Internal issues relating to the management of joint forest management committees – In the case of more homogenous communities benefit sharing tends to be more equitable. But in others elite domination remains a concern.
- Internal issues relating to the Forest Department. There are those who see this as a genuine effort to involve local communities in forest management while there are others who use JFM as a means of mobilizing labour.
- Institutional rigidities – especially from the side of Forest Department.
- The performance of JFM differs considerably within and between the different states in India. It did have some positive impacts on poverty reduction.
- JFM has largely evolved as a top-down approach. Forest Department has a strong administrative, technical and financial control on JFM activities.
- Eventually JFM will have to evolve as a system where local communities take full responsibility for management of forests. In fact this is what the Forest Rights Act 2006 is aiming at.
- Many however are of the view that JFM is not encouraging true participatory efforts, preventing genuine devolution of forest management to local communities.

Issues of devolution of tenurial rights to Tribes and OTFDs through FRA 2006 is seen widely as a challenge to the functioning of Forest departments and also to the JFM movement. Individual title pertaining to 16,720 sq kms of forest area has been distributed to 18.87 lakh claims by Tribal and OTFDs till April 2019.

Community forest rights for management of forest land of another 35,632 sq kms of forest land has been devolved to communities where the role of forest department is minimal.

There has been a steep fall in the funding provided to JFM by NAEB of MOEFCC. The GIM which was proposed to subsume NAP has also not taken off properly.



Achieving INDC target of additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030 is impossible without people's co-operation.