

**ASSESSMENT OF A GOVT. PROGRAMME (JOINT FOREST
MANAGEMENT) & ITS RELATION TO THE LOCAL PEOPLE:
CASE STUDY IN CHOUPAHARI FOREST,
BIRBHUM, WEST BENGAL**

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Abstract:

Forest is very much significant for its feeding roll to the biosphere. There are also very close relation between forest and human beings. To a vast number of forest dwellers the forest is a home, a livelihood, the very existence. It gives them food-fruits, honey, nourishing roots etc. It provides them materials to build their houses and things for practicing their arts. By exploiting it produce they can supplement their meagre income.

In recent years, there has been much talk about the rapid denudation of green cover of the geographical area of our land. In this respect, Joint Forest Management play a significant role to preserve the forest cover and to enhance the forest economy.

Keywords: *Joint Forest Management (JFM), Forest Department (FD), forest protection and development, Forest Protection Committee (FPC) etc.*

Introduction:

Joint Forest Management (JFM) is the official and popular term in India for partnerships in 'Forest Management' involving both the Forest Departments (FD) and local communities. The policies and objectives of Joint Forest Management are detailed in the Indian comprehensive National Forest Policy of 1988 and the Joint Forest Management Guidelines of 1990 of the Government of India. Although schemes vary from state to state and are known by different names in different Indian languages, usually a village committee known as the Forest Protection Committee (FPC) and the Forest Department enter into a JFM agreement. Villagers agree to assist in the safeguarding of forest resources through protection from fire, grazing, and illegal harvesting in exchange for which they receive non-timber forest products and a share of the revenue from the sale of timber products.

JFM originated in West Bengal accidentally at the Arabari Forest Range in West Midnapore, near Midnapore town in 1971. The major hardwood of Arabari is sal, a commercially profitable forest crop. Ajit Kumar Banerjee, a silviculturalist, working for the Forest Department as the Divisional Forest Officer, was conducting trials which were constantly being disturbed by grazing and illegal harvesting by the local populace. At the time there were no initiatives for sharing of forest resources between the government and the locals, with the government considering many of the locals no more than "thieves". The forest official, against the suggestions of his co-workers, sought out representatives of eleven local villages and negotiated the terms of a contract with an *ad hoc* Forest Protection Committee. The initial program involved 612 families managing 12.7 square kilometres of forests classified as "degraded". 25% of profits from the forests were shared with the villagers.

Objectivs:

The present works endeavours to examine the ongoing situation of the forest and how the local people and forest department will conserve the forest, their mode of work and how these processes help to develop the rural economy of the area and to monitor the real scenrio of the study area.

Study Area:

Chupahari protect forest located in Birbhum Dist. ,under the Illambazer police station which is lie between 8736'47''-8733'00''E. long. And 2337'00''-2339'00''N. Lat. The study area Choupahari forest is within old alluvial soil and lateritic soil with moderate water retention capacity. The soil of the forest is grey and reddish in colour. The grey colour soil represents alluvial soil with course grain texture and sandy in nature. While, the reddish colour soil represents lateritic soil in patches mixed up with pebbles and gravels called as 'moram' in local Bengali term.

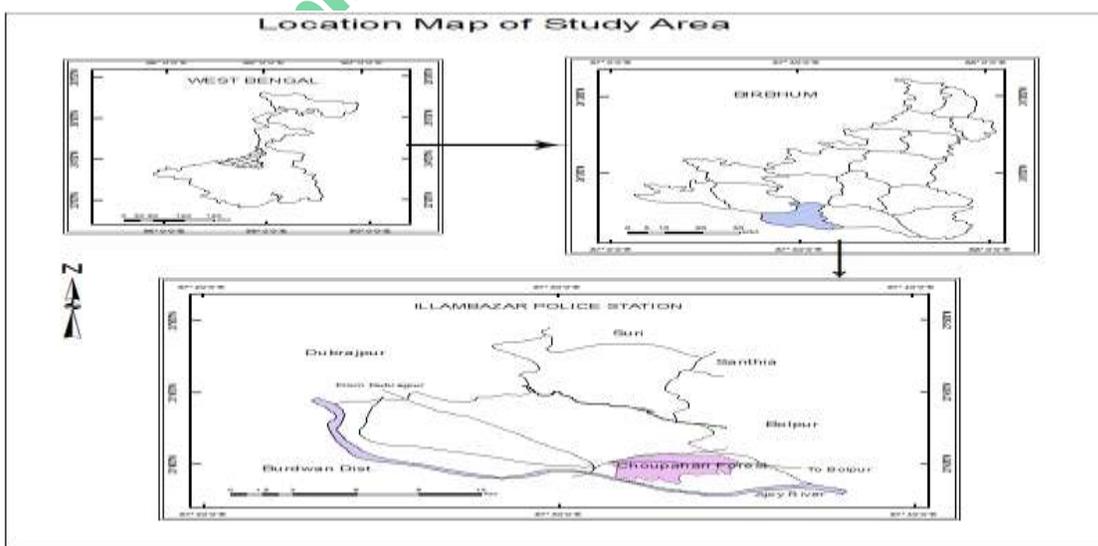


Fig: Location Map

Database & Methodology:

Primary data as well as secondary data are used. Primary data are collected mainly from door to door household survey and personal meetings. Secondary data collected from Illambazar Forest Office, Gram Panchayat Office, Official website of Birbhum, Central Library of Visva-Bharati, Meteorological Dept. of Sriniketan. After collecting the data, managed with the help of ArcGIS-10 & Exal softwre.

Forest Protection Committees(FPC) in Choupahari Forest :

In Choupahari Protected Forest Joint Forest Management in 5th November in 1990 with the initiatives of the then forest officials and the Panchayat. There are 10 FPC Choupahari. Generally FPC are formed from villagers living next to forest. Each FPC area is marked by stone pillar. A brief description of FPC of Choupahari forest are given in the following table (Table-1).

Table-1 : Forest Protection Committees in Illambazar Beat, Birbhum District.

FPC/Date of establishment	Villages under FPC	Member	Reg. No. and Date	Protected Area (ha.)	FPC Leader
Banovila 5.11.90	Ramnagar, Khayerdanga, Dharanda	51	4927/28-64 Dt-17.11.90	170	Ram Hembram
Lakshmipur 5.11.90	Srichandrapur, Lakshmipur, Ushar, Halsidanga, Puran vill.	72	4928/28-64, Dt-17.11.90	160	Laksman Muddi
Jambuni 5.11.90	Amkhai, Jambuni, Murgabuai, Nimbuni	47	4924/28-64, Dt-17.11.90	150	Bhim Muddi
Fulbagan 5.11.90	Fulbagan, Shayerpara, Kanupara, Dhalla	35	287/28-64, Dt- 15.01.92	100	Ramprasad Chatterjee
Beloyab 5.11.90	Beloya	239	2856/28-64, Dt-25.6.91	100	
Bansuli 5.11.90	Bansuli, Rangabandh, Usardihi, Panskura	60	2856/28-64, Dt-25.6.91	140	Susanto Roy
Khayerbuni 12.11.91	Khayerbuni	60	2856/28-44, Dt-15.01.92	160	Madhu Ghosh
Saldanga 20.8.91	Saldanga	220	4916/28-44 ,Dt-15.02.92	120	Abu Taleb

Nelegarh 10.9.91	Nelegarh	60	455/28-3060, Dt-30.11.95	100	Lakshmi- Narayan Pal
Sukhbazar 10.9.91	Sukhbazar	23	455/28-3062 ,Dt-30.09.92	200	Nisith Ghosh

1. The villagers have been involved in forest protection since the JFM programme start in the forest area, when they had faced an acute shortage fuel-wood and supply of poles. They have also maintained a harmonious relationship with the Forest Departments (see Figure 1).



Fig.1: FD-FPC Interaction Cone : Point of Contact (source : Manish Tiwari, Participatory Forest Policies and Politics in India)

Every FPC have a forest leader who are actively involved with the formal activities such as book-keeping and attending JFM related meetings. The nature of responsibilities put into three categories among the FPC members i.e. protection of forest, apprehension and reporting of offenders and forestry works.

2. Forest Patrols and Protection Mechanism:

The protection mechanism of the villagers was consolidated under the FPC and FD and even the Panchayat having the obligation to support them in the management of the local forest. The FPC guarded the forest with great zeal and enthusiasm. (See table2).

Table-2: Why FPC members chose JFM membership

Motivation	Person in percentage
Betterment of life	56
Conservation of forest	27
Aesthetic value	5
Other reasons	12

Source: Based on field survey.

The villagers reasoned that the slack in guarding mainly during the peak agricultural seasons. However on further inquiry, it was clear that there is no strict guarding system on any regular basis except during the timber harvest when the FD pays the villagers to keep vigilance. There is a rule of taking fine of Rs. 1000 excluding timber cost as an offence of illegal tree felling. Incidents of illegal cutting is very rare in this forest area. Recently, a tractor was arrested in Nachonsa region.

3. FPC Meeting:

The first meeting in Choupahari forest in 1990 recorded the name of villagers who were recommended for JFM. The meetings that followed were concerned with routine matters such as list of beneficiaries in each village who were to be registered and information about the committee who were not working well. In each FPC, a meeting is held in every month generally in playground or open ground of the villages. The invitation is made to each of the executive leaders. Minutes are kept during the meeting, depending on agenda, topics such harvest plan or rural development plans are discussed, noted, and passed on to relevant authorities for further consideration.

Impact of JFM on Society:

The JFM programme has led to several positive impacts on society like –

Improvement in the condition of forest:

According to the forest dwellers, the overall forest cover of the area has increased since from last 15 years and density of the forest is also increasing in a considerable manner. Incidence of illicit felling has declined.

Increase in income:

The committees have benefited from the employment generated under JFM projects through micro-planning, sale of non-timber forest products. Many FPC have sustained the level of community funds, which are used for local developmental activities and personal loans, thus lessening the bondage of money lenders.

Reduction in encroachment:

JFM has helped to reduce area under illegal encroachments.

Involvement of NGOs:

The JFM programme has led to a considerable involvement of NGOs and community based organisation though the degree of involvement vary one FPC to another. In Choupahari forest area three NGOs working successfully. They are – Lok Kalyan Samiti (at Rangab) and Nayantara (Khayerdanga) and Prag Mark – Wildlife Society.

Change in attitude and relationship:

One of the most significant impacts of JFM programme has been the change in the attitude of local communities and forest officials towards each other and towards forest.

Livelihood system:The 'livelihood system' means developing the forests in a manner that the outputs from the forest provide the community with sustainable economic benefit in

perpetuity to attain a satisfactory level of life. The schematic representation in table 4 explains the concept of Livelihood Initiatives through Forest Enrichment (LIFE).

Table-4: Livelihood Initiatives through Forest Enrichment (LIFE)

Criteria	Parameters for success	Performance indicators
Technical	Improved ecological condition	i. Better availability of fodder, fuel wood and other NTFPs etc. ii. Increased availability of fodder, fuel wood and timber from non-forest land.
Institutional	Effectiveness of training and operationalizing of principles of shared responsibility	i. Behavioural change in FD staff. ii. Relationship between FD and community.
Institutional	Performance of villages and district level initiatives	i. In terms of meeting, activities, participation and responsibilities.
Sustainability	Cost-effective eco-development activities	i. Employment generation and diversification. ii. Value addition of goods.
Equity	Empowerment of marginalised groups and women	i. Economic empowerment and social empowerment.
Participatory	Voluntary contribution	i. Increased development fund.
Participatory	Better forest management	i. Rotational grazing. ii. Rotational patrolling. iii. Decline in forest offences. iv. Control of forest fires. v. Removal encroachment from forest land.
Financial	Expected returns on investment	i. Intermediate returns. ii. Expected final return.

Source: Mudit Kumar Singh – JFM and Poverty Alleviation : an analysis.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN MAINTAINING THE FOREST:

To maintain the forest, the Govt. role is very important because they are the ultimate decision makers. To know the role of Govt. in maintaining the forest we should learn about different forest policies, acts and order. They are given as following.

Table 5: Summary of the Forest Acts, Policies and Orders:

Year	Forest acts, policies and orders
1947	Independence
1950s	Zamindari is abolished around the country. Adds large areas of forests to forest lands.
1952	National forest policy : Introduces concept of balanced land use, protection of environment, need for establishing plantations, to increase grazing and wood product availability, maintain sustainable timber flow and maximum forest revenues. Classifies forest into protection, national, village and tree lands.
1966	Indian forest service is reconstituted.
1973	Wild life protection act : provides for protection of certain species. Those without valid game licence are disallowed within forest areas, national parks and sanctuaries.
1973	Acquisition of private forest act provides for compensatory transfer of mismanaged private forests to government.
1974	Private contractors in forests are discouraged. Forest Development Corporation (FDC) established.
1975-77	State of emergency. The central govt. under 'Indira Gandhi suspends citizens' fundamental rights.
1976	Agriculture commission recommendations. Forest become a concurrent subject between the state and central government.
1980	Forest conservation act. Provides for protection of forest tracts, so that no forest area can be diverted for any purpose other than forestry without prior concurrence of the GOI.
1988	National forest policy is declared.
1990	Joint Forest Management order.

Table6: Forestry Issues in Five-year Plan:

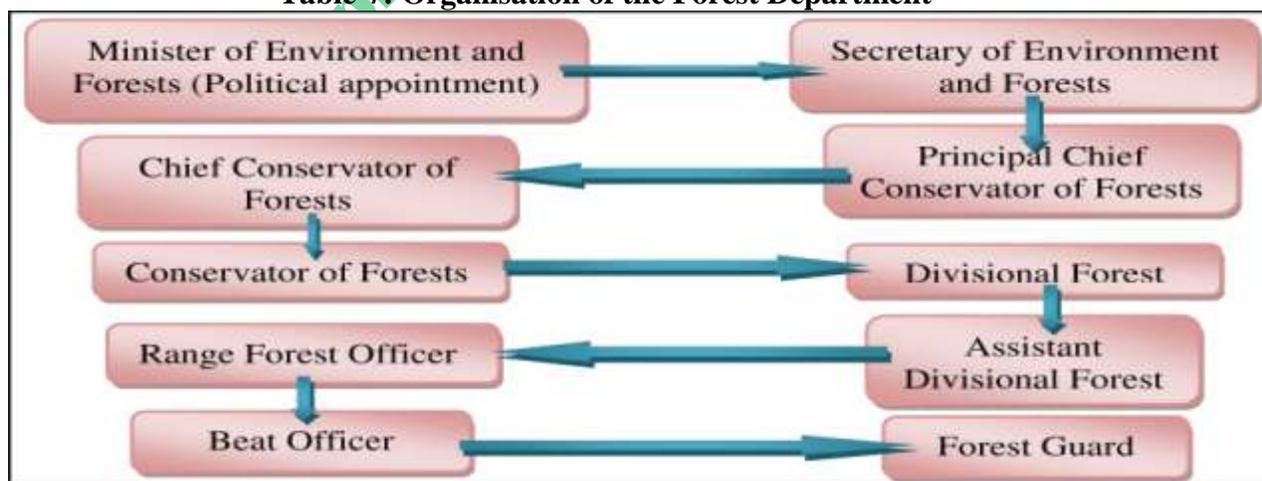
Five-year interval	Description
2 nd plan (1952-57)	One third of the country is to be put under forest cover (modelled on USSR and USA).
3 rd plan (1961-66)	Identifies role of community in enhancing forest cover, such as through sponsored tree-growing programmes.
4 th plan (1969-74)	Plantation of quick growing species (eucalyptus) and vigilance on illegal activities.
5 th plan (1974-79)	'Social Justice' call by Indira Gandhi Social Forestry is introduced.
6 th plan (1980-85)	Detailed plans about forestry. Support from people is sought, especially from the tribal community.

7 th plan (1985-90)	The emphasis shifts from commercial forestry to social forestry where subsistence needs are to be met on a priority basis.
8 th plan (1992-97)	Commends decentralization of control over natural resources, albeit announces a stricter implementation of the forest conservation act, 1980 and National Forest Polity 1988. Proposes an area specific approach to fuel wood and fodder. Grants to NGOs for afforestation projects.
9 th plan (1997-2002)	Joint Forest Management made integral to all 'plantation' projects; emphasis on micro planning and special focus on the tribals and other weaker sections, including women living in and around forests. Proposals for technology and database development and survey and demarcation of forest lands (to compare with land records of revenue department and determine cases of civil encroachments).
10 th plan (2002-07)	JFM becomes the mainstay of forest policies and projects. Formulation of National Afforestation Programme (NAP) at the centre and set up of Forest Development Agency (FDA) at the state level. Proposes to balance a number of 'forests and people' goals : give legal recognition to JFM Committees (JFMCs), involve JFM members in micro planning and 'Food for Work' schemes, ensure involvement to women and tribals, final better market value for forest products, better coordinate with NGOa and Panchayats and also bring 25% of the country's landmass. Under, forest cover, regenerate degraded forests and CPRs and promote agro-forestry.

Forest Department Structure and their Mode of Work:

The forest departments in all over the India are run by Indian Forest Service (IFS) officers selected on an all Indian level. A number of forest officers chosen at state level assist the IFS officers. The result is a strong hierarchy where lower FD official's only 'translate' orders that are issued from the top (see table 7).

Table-7: Organisation of the Forest Department



Forest Department has shown innovation, promptness and transparency in the implementation of JFM under after receiving the government of India's (GOI's) order on www.aarhat.com/vol II Issues I/July 18

JFM and JFM start in Illambazar beat in 1990. The major change was that the state Govt. agreed to provide ‘any family’ who would be interested in ‘work of protection’ of forests the option is to become a member of forest protection committee. The earlier provision allowed only economically backward people living in the vicinity of forests to become beneficiaries.

Rural Development Works of FD through JFM:

The benefits from JFM provide a share (25%) in timber harvest. Apart from providing benefits to villagers through forestry works such as plantation, thinning and harvest. The forest department has regularly taken up construction of roads (usually in forest land), earthen dams, ponds, culverts, tube well and monetary sharing in education.

Micro plans are prepared for a five year period for each FPC using participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) on the basis population number, cattle population, condition of roads and water facility etc. Different developmental works which are taken in Choupahari forests are given in following table.

Table-8: Plantation programme in Choupahari forest, Illambazar beat, Bolpur Range, Birbhum

Type of plantation	Year	Land (in ha.)	Location	Schemes
Sonajhuri	2010	10	Thayerbuni	NREG (National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme)
Sal	2010	15	Bansuli	FDA
Mixed	2010	5	Beloya	State Planning
Mixed	2010	20	Lakshmipur	State Planning
Mixed	2011 (Proposed)	15	Bansuli	State Planning
Mixed	2011 (Proposed)	15	Sukhbazar	FDA

Table-9: Rural developmental programme in Choupahari forest

Micro plan	No.	Location and Year	Micro plan	No.	Location and Year
Tube well	1	Panskura (2010)	Construction of earthen road	2 km	Panskura (2010)
Tube well	1	Amkhai (2010) near ICDS school	Digging of pond	1	Murgabuni (2010)
Earthen dam	1	Bansuli (2010)	Distribution of rice	2	Saldanga 1999,

			threshing machine		2006
Construction of earthen road and repairing	2 km	Sukhbazar (2010)	Distribution of rice threshing machine	2	Fulbagan (2006) and Dhalla (1999)

Apart from these, distribution of chicken and fruit plant among the villagers. In practice the micro plan process is a new concept for beat officers and without sustained and sufficient funding little has come out of the demands that were made by villagers. Some of the initial funding to support the project recommended in JFM micro plans came from West Bengal Forestry Projects (funded by the World Bank).

JFM PROBLEMS AND PROPOSALS:

1. Problems of JFM:

Several planning programme and development schemes have been chalked out for proper management of forests in Choupahari area. But there are certain problems which hinder the progress of JFM. They are –

- i. **Low productivity:** The main problem is sow productivity. The average production is about 17 m³/ha. But it is seen that the out-turn from good coppice coupe areas are almost 3 times than the average i.e. 66 m³/ha. The density of stem/ha is also very low. Due to the dearth of research work, the potentiality of minor forest products is not fully utilised.
- ii. **Lack of investment:** In earlier days, it was believed that coppice forest does not require any nourishment. But systematic coppicing helps in maintaining a good forest land. It has been found that such forest need care, fertilizer, dressing etc. After certain period these forest require re-plantation.

Sal forests are occasionally infected with fungus in the core-wood after 15 years or so. Such trees should be removed to maintain the quality of other sal trees. Termite attack is a common problem in this forest area.

- iii. **Defective management:** Proper management should give emphasis on research and techniques in adaptation of better scientific techniques to foster plan growth, nutrients requirements of the plants and associated factors.
- iv. **Financial Problems:** This forest area is facing financial crisis, thereby hindering development programmes. An analysis of the total forestry development expenditure during the plan period indicates that only 1% of the total plan expenditure of the state is devoted to the development forests (see table 6.1).

Table-10: Five year plan outlays in forestry in West Bengal

Plan period	Total for state under dev. plan	Forestry sector	% of forestry sector (W.B.)
First plan (1951-52–	67.71	0.53	0.78%

1955-56)			
Second plan (1956-57-1960-61)	148.57	1.49	1.00%
Third plan (1961-66)	304.75	2.59	0.85%
Annual plan (1966-67-1968-69)	161.46	2.49	1.54%
Fourth plan (1969-74)	363.46	1.96	0.54%
Fifth plan (1974-79)	1248.93	5.72	0.46%
Annual plan (1979-80)	383.21	3.60	0.94%
Sixth plan (1980-85)	2433.27	30.18	1.24%
Seventh plan (1985-90)	4125.00	60.00	1.45%

Source: Forest statistics of West Bengal, 1987

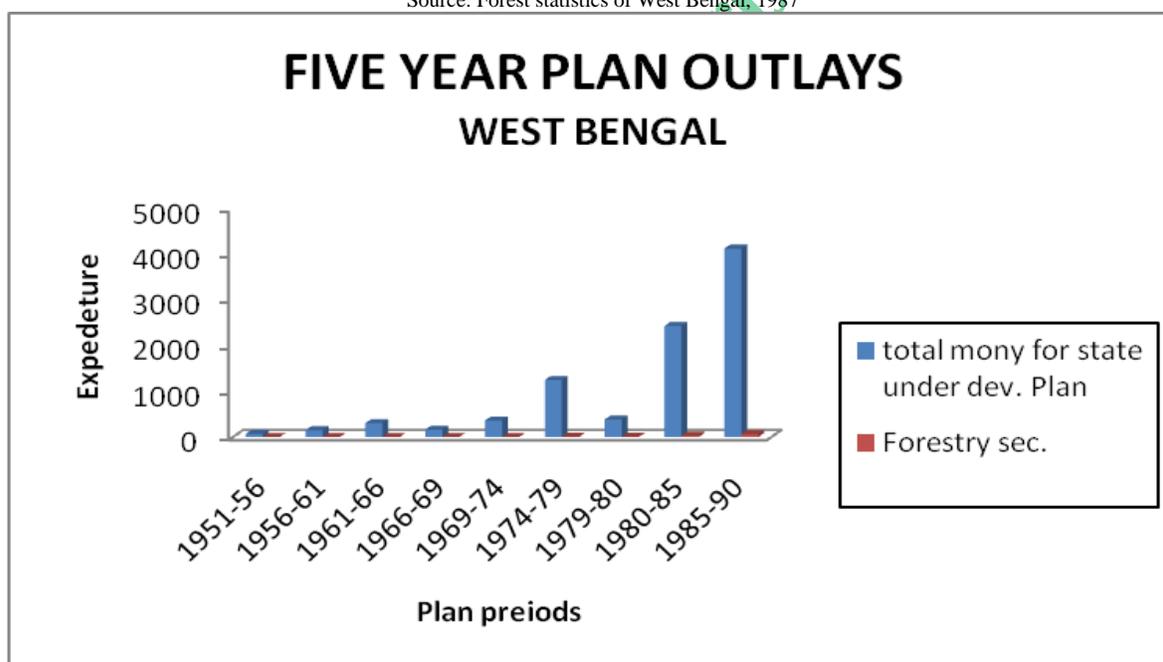


Fig:6.1

2. Proposals / Suggestions:

The JFM programme in Choupahari forest has to be managed in future with the following objectives –

- Quick growing species to be developed.
- Suitable model of multi-tier plantation to be involved and demonstrated.
- The high yielding varieties of NTFPs to be propagated and demonstrated.

- Multiple uses, high yielding varieties of fuel wood, fodder and fruit bearing species are to be planned for improving the economic condition of the people.

Some suggestions, which, when incorporated in the formation of forest policy will help to achieve the above mention objectives are –

1. The beat level office need to be strengthened in numbers, have better trained and oriented officers and often an attractive remuneration package and fair promotions to staff at this level. There needs to be provision of autonomy where lower level officials can respond more independently to the field situations.
2. The main incentives for villagers to interact with the forest department may not be in cash share from the harvest but rather the incentive to be able to secure forest usufruct on a regular basis and have the option to invite the FD into larger projects of rural development. The forest bureaucracy in India will need to take cognizance of these realities if it is to engage more effectively and equitably in participatory forest management.
3. It is suggested that participation from forest citizens cannot be limited to soliciting their involvement and initiatives. Rather it must provide a conducive atmosphere where these village based forum can form linkages with other institutions and actors and bargain on a variety of issues pertaining to rural development forestry in symmetrically located fashion.
4. More autonomy is recommended for village based forest committees. So that they able to determine working methods (while keeping the goals mutually agreed with the FD) that suit their interests and management method and best uses opportunities available in exchange for the labour expended in forest management and building institutional relations.
5. **Self-employment opportunities:** While developing community forestry it should be seen that self-employment opportunities are also generated and made available through proper organisation. In this regard the traditional handicrafts of the tribal people such as wood-curving, basket weaving, rope making etc. may be encouraged and supported by remunerative prices.
6. **Supply of forest produce:** The required among the forest produce such as timber for construction of huts, fodder for cattle, fuel wood for cooking etc. should be supplied through the forest depots to be set up in the nearby areas. These can be arranged by the village Panchayats, the produce may be given at concessional rates fixed by the Panchayats themselves.
7. **Alternatives of fuel wood:** There is a tremendous scope for reducing fuel wood requirements by propagation of more efficient chullas (stoves), solar and alternative fuel such as biogas, this can be encouraged with the help of various government agencies working in the forest areas.

6.3 Future Prospects and Conclusions: Several questions arise concerning implementation of JFM on a sustained basis. Studies have to be undertaken to find out whether the

impoverished women and men, who are compelled to resort to unsustainable forest use for survival are able to switch to sustainable resource use through JFM programme.

There is a growing trend to increase the number of JFM committees. The increase would need to be guided by the capacity of the field level forest staff and their ability to effectively coordinate and monitor the progress. Otherwise these committees remain only on paper with not much of attitudinal change. The other issues which need attention are resolving intra-committee and boundary conflicts. The entire JFM mechanism has to be process-based rather than individual based.

To achieve higher progress, land has to be made productive and cattle have to be healthy. A combination of short and medium rotations and coppice system needs to be evolved for a variety of tree species being planted under JFM for faster economic gains. How productivity in the forest can be increased to meet the challenge of growing fuel wood, fodder and timber demand is the biggest challenge. The second challenge is to provide gainful employment and generate produce which can be harvested sustainably the right approach is to manage JFM programme by setting national objectives which should include multi-tier plantation, NTFP propagation and technological inputs which are low cost and locally adaptive. The emphasis has to be on participatory process through community based economic development, sustainable management of local resources and policy feedback. Agriculture, water harvesting and land conservation practices have to be meticulously adapted to local conditions.

Every technology should have an ideology behind it to give it direction and meaning and every technology to be socially relevant should have a strategy to give it realism and experience. For achieving this in renewed perspective, the theme of any technology package under JFM programme should be to give maximum production in the shortest period; conserve forests and utilization of all that grows in the forests to meet people's needs.

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