

5

Introduction of Joint Forest Management of India

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1. Introduction

Joint Forest Management (JFM) of India and Community Forestry Program (CFP) of Nepal are successfully implemented examples of participatory approaches on natural resources management in the South Asian region. These approaches are not only succeed to make root level institution in order to organize the rural poor and tribal people who are depriving to and access the public resources, but also popular for local resources mobilization for the benefits of them and improvement of the resources condition as well in the recent years. The South Asian region is holding around 6% of forest of the world, whereas nearly 20% of the world's population resides in the area (FAO, 2003). Unlike illegal logging in the East Asian countries, population pressure on forest resources is a biggest challenge to the region. Moreover, the dependency of the people on forest resources is comparatively intensive and interactive. So, the participatory approaches applied in the forestry sector in the region are gaining popularity in terms of local resources mobilization and its equitable distribution to the local communities. To focus the community needs than commercial and industrial supply is the key features of participatory approaches of the region. This paper argues that how the participatory forest management history is developing in South Asia especially focusing on JFM of India and people are getting benefits from the forests within existing participatory forest management regime.

2. Methods and Materials

The study focuses on JFM of India and a small part of CFP of Nepal. Both the authors were visited Kerala State of India including other many states to observe the JFM activities in the field. The direct field observation, formal and informal discussions with both government and non-government individuals including executive members of local level institution have been carried out for primary information and available references were reviewed for secondary information throughout the study. The historical analysis of forest policy development in India and the reasons behind the introduction of participatory approach are taken into account during the study.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Historical Background of Indian Forest Management

The Forest Act 1878 revealed that India has more than 127 years old legitimized history of forest management. The forest policy 1894 and Indian Forests Act 1927 which is still in enforced, were the major forest policy measures under taken by the British India government. In spite of better intention, British policy had destabilized, and slowly destroyed the most indigenous forest management systems (Sarin, 1996).

After the independence, the forest policy 1894 was replaced in 1952 and targeted 1/3rd country area for forest lands. But, the government become failed to reach the set objectives because the forest policies were guided by the principle of revenue collection and supply of industrial raw materials instead of community needs. Moreover, excluding of local community in forest management regime, use of forest lands for non-forest purposes without ensuring compensatory afforestation and minimum environmental safeguards were the major reasons behind the failure of past management practices (MoEF, 1988; Sarin, 1996). Before 1976, each state had made independent for making the policy considering to the suitability of particular state, but it is slightly revised after the 42nd amendment in Indian constitution in 1976 and made forest is an issue of concurrent matter of both central and state governments (Nagamine, 2002). With the aims of massive people's mobilization in forest management process, the new forest policy and JFM guideline as a resolution have approved in 1988 and 1990 respectively.

3.2. JFM of India

The JFM is a participatory approach under which the government officials and local community reach into an agreement to share the management responsibilities and forests benefits. The experiences gained from the West Bengal and Hariyana play the key roles to introduce the JFM in India. The concept found very popular where people's dependency on forest resources is higher, although the dependencies vary by socio-economic status, castes: tribal and non-tribal within and between the committees (Sarin, 1996). Since the JFM has started from degraded forests in the beginning, it is highly criticized by the private sectors taking the limitation of degraded forests, and integration of women and minority groups in the forest management activities. With preciously, the government took the comments as an option to improve the guideline in the line of decentralization approach.

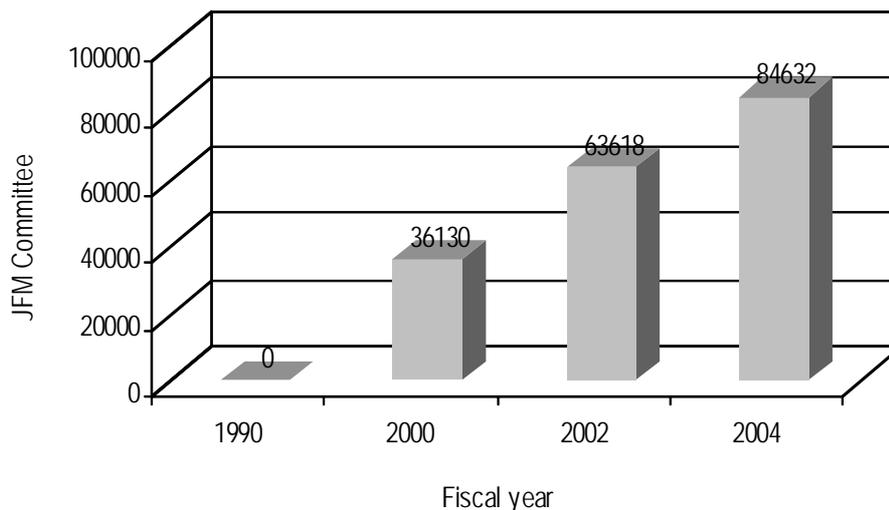


Figure 5.1. Progress of JFM in India

Source: MoEF (2004) and Damodaran (2003)

As a result, JFM guideline 2000 is approved with greater extent of good condition forests and mandatory involvement of women from the gender integration point of view in forest management regime. Moreover, focusing to the effective relationship with the government, better coordination to the Panchayats and capacity building of the local communities, the government had issued another JFM guideline in 2002. In the latest years, the program is getting rapid progress gradually as shown in the figure 5.1.

3.3. Participatory Process and Local Institutional Mechanism

Although India has a common forest policy at central level, each state has separate and independent forest policy for implementing participatory approach of JFM taking the local suitability into account. Normally, central government approves the common policy which is acceptable to all states, but it does not mean that all state governments are obligatory to implement the policy immediately as approved. The states can implement it according to the local situation gradually. But each state forest policy has to be compatible with central one. But highly bureaucratized forest management system acts as a limiting factor of effective forest management in India (Kumar and et al, 2004).

Although JFM is started in India in 1990, Kerala state took initiation for JFM after 8 years later in 1998. Considering the local situation, there are three participatory models namely, Fringe model, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) model, and a separate model for the Cardamom Hills Reserve, have been applied. The local level institution of JFM called Vana Samrakshana Samithi (VSS); implement the all forestry activities in the field. The participation mechanism between government and local communities consists of five steps. The Planning cycle starts from initial stage, and passes through preparation, planning and implementation phases, and ends monitoring stage. The whole cycle takes five years period. The VSS general body selects executive committee members, which consists of a president, a treasure, and other members; and a secretary from government side either forester or forest guard of the concern section (Damodaran, 2003).

3.4. Impact of JFM

The JFM is experimented in two states: West Bangle and Hariyana; before to legitimize the concept in 1990 under the frame of new forest policy 1988. Although no precise information is available, there are social and other indicators for example area under JFM and number of JFM committees show the positive impacts (Sarin, 1996; Kumar et al, 2004). Now, the concept is extended to all states except Meghalaya, although the number of JFM committees, and coverage area and households vary from state to state. There are 84,632 JFM committees are organized in the country and these committees have successfully been managed 17.33 million ha of forests area (22.5% of the reserved forests) with the coverage of nearly 6.3% of the country population. Based on the policy of 'a woman from a house,' there are 8.38 million of women are organized in the JFM committees at various posts and responsibilities (MoEF, 2004). The inclusion of women in the forest management activities is not only making the strong institution at local level, but also it providing the adequate opportunities for capacity building and decision making options to them.

3.5. Community Forestry Program of Nepal

The forests role in local livelihoods of Nepalese people is significant. Annually the fuel wood from forests shares 79.8% of total energy consumed by the Nepalese people (Department of Information, 1999). In addition, the dependency of rural people who do not have access or affording capacity to other alternative resources is comparatively higher in the daily livelihood. But, the history of Nepalese forestry also reveals that very little progress has been made in integrating people's needs with forest management objectives in the government policies in the past (Bhattarai, et al, 2002). Most of the forest policies had prepared under the principle of direct control of government and it was focused to increase revenue in order to keep the rulers in power. But later realizing the fact, the government of Nepal had been introduced the participatory approach in forests management regime in 1978, and it has gradually evolved to the present situation (Kanel, 2004).

By now, more than 13,047 community forest users groups have been formed and implementing the forest management activities regularly. It is enriched and consolidated in each year by its own field experiences based on the principle of learning by doing. Despite continuous progress, in many cases, Nepal has an experience that the transaction cost is higher to a people compare to the benefit from the community forests (Adhikari, 2002). The outputs of community forests in terms of improved forest condition and establishment of strong local level institution reveals that participatory approaches and decentralization principles are indispensable where the dependency of people on forest resources is higher.

4. Conclusions

The participatory approach on natural resources management was not suddenly came out in South Asian region. Actually, it was gradually developed in the region, when state controlled forest management system become failed to address the demands of country people in 1970s. Even after its introduction, it is extended gradually in side the country based on the learning by doing process before to legitimize in the form of government policy. Frequent pros and cons discussions on the role of forests department staffs and concerning local communities made possible to change the policy in the region. Learning from practices, refining them over time, and legitimizing these practices under the principle of decentralization and devolution of power have been the hallmarks of JFM in India and CFP of Nepal under participatory approach in South Asia.

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