

1. Introduction

Joint Forest Management and Community-Based Forestry Models

Forestry represents the second-largest land use in India after agriculture, covering about 641,130 square kilometers, or 22 percent of the total land base (FAO 2005). The sector contributes a little more than one percent to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Forests also provide a wide range of environmental and ecological benefits. About 275 million poor rural people in India depend on forests for at least part of their subsistence and cash livelihoods, which they earn from fuelwood, fodder, poles, and a range of nontimber forest products, such as fruits, flowers, and medicinal plants. Seventy percent of India's rural population depends on fuelwood to meet domestic energy needs. Half of India's 89 million tribal people, the most disadvantaged section of society, live in forest fringe areas, and a significant percentage of India's 471 million livestock are sustained by forest grazing or fodder collected from forests.

Joint Forest Management (JFM) is now a principal forest management strategy in India. In June 1990 the government issued a resolution that made it possible for state forest departments to formally involve people in forest management through JFM¹. In return for providing improved forest protection, communities receive better access to nontimber subsistence forest products and a share of net commercial timber revenues. The state retains most of the control and decision making over forest management, regulation, monitoring, timber harvesting, and forest product marketing. The government views JFM as a pivotal strategy for addressing the national policy goal of achieving 33 percent forest cover by 2012. The main focus of JFM in India is forest protection and conservation.

Some states initiated the JFM approach in 1990; others took much longer. JFM programs currently span 27 states, represent 85,000 village committees, and cover more than 17.3 million hectares of forest land. The program encompasses an estimated 8.3 million families, half of which are scheduled castes and tribes (Bahuguna 2004). Most JFM communities use the surrounding forests mainly as a safety net or for regular or seasonal subsistence production of fuelwood, fodder, and minor nontimber forest products, such as fruits and medicinal plants. Commercial sales of forest products by the communities are very limited and not well integrated into larger urban and national markets.

JFM represents one model of community-based forestry in which the state engages with communities in forestry. A variety of community-based forestry models exist. At one end of the spectrum, governments own the land and forests, and implement most forest management and marketing functions. At the other end, communities own the land and forests and are responsible for most forest management and marketing functions. The current JFM model in India falls between these two positions and is continuing to evolve. Opinions in India differ regarding how far this evolution should go, the pace at which it should occur, and what the immediate and longer term enabling policy and program priorities should be. The issues are complex, emotionally charged, and highly political; some have resulted in legal challenges brought before the Supreme Court

¹ Following the National Forest Policy of 1988, the Government of India issued a resolution in June 1990, making it possible for state forest departments to formally involve people in forest management through Joint Forest Management (JFM).

International experience suggests that when communities are empowered with greater rights and responsibilities, forest conservation and rural livelihoods tend to improve. Durst and others (2005) provide numerous examples from Australia, Cambodia, China, Nepal, New Zealand Vietnam, Thailand, and Vanuatu in which communities have successfully managed forest resources to achieve a range of ecological and economic goals. White and Xu (2004) identify a global shift toward community-based forestry models. Many of these models recognize ownership rights of indigenous peoples and traditional communities and are devolving management responsibilities as part of a broader decentralization process.

Latin America is emerging as a leader in implementing innovative community-based forestry models (Molnar 2004). In Brazil the government has recognized traditional rights to 80 million hectares of forest in the Amazon frontier. Management and forest conservation are proving as effective as under the old government command and control system—and in many sites much more effective. In Guatemala about 450,000 hectares of forest in the Mayan biosphere area are now under management by communities; remote sensing clearly shows an improvement in forest cover and forest density. In Mexico many communities have been allocated land ownership and most forest management rights. With government and external support to build required capacities, many community forest enterprises have developed technical expertise in forest management, production, and marketing. In the state of Peten, for example, community forest enterprises contribute almost \$400,000 to the state treasury; they also invested \$140,000 in fire control and management and \$136,000 in forest monitoring and protection. Given time, financial and technical support, and the right incentives, many communities can effectively develop and manage forests, reducing government management costs and generating incremental financial gains to the state.

International experience suggests that further evolution of the JFM community-based forestry model in India may improve livelihood opportunities and conservation. But four critical enabling conditions must be met in order for it to do so. First, communities must be provided with more secure forest resource tenure and management rights. Second, more effective and flexible institutional models must be applied with communities. Third, better systems for forest regulation, monitoring, and control must be developed. Fourth, communities must be provided with greater access to efficient markets for goods and services from the forest (Molnar, Scherr, and Khare 2004). Addressing these four factors must occur through integrated reforms and programs. The challenge facing Indian policymakers is to create an enabling environment that will improve opportunities for communities to use forests as a means of moving out of poverty while not compromising national forest conservation goals. Although international experience must be viewed with caution, there is growing evidence that movement toward a model with greater community rights and responsibilities over the forest can bring substantial economic and forest conservation benefits. In India a deliberate and well-intentioned process for continuous improvement is needed to support positive and progressive change.

Study Objectives and Structure of the Report

This study aims to stimulate debate on the continued evolution of JFM in India by presenting research conducted within India and providing relevant examples from other regions. The report identifies key questions and constraints surrounding the continued evolution of community forestry in India. It suggests new models for community-based forest management based on realistic solutions to increase forest-based livelihoods and reduce poverty in forest communities while also strengthening forest conservation. The report outlines options for enabling policy reforms at the state and national levels. The work builds on seminal national studies of community-based forestry completed in the past few years, including Khare and others (2000) on forest policy related to JFM;

Khan and Pillai (2001) on national legal and policy frameworks; Saigal, Arora, and Rizvi (2002) on issues and opportunities for private forestry, especially farm forests; and Bahuguna and others (2004), which provides a comprehensive update on JFM at the state level.

The report identifies options for improving local livelihoods in a community-based forestry model through an integrated approach that includes the legal and policy framework, institutions, resource assessment and planning systems, and marketing systems. The study is based largely on background papers developed from detailed analyses of JFM in Assam, Jharkhand, and Madhya Pradesh. All three states are important, because they have high poverty levels and large numbers of rural people who use forests for livelihoods. The three states differ in terms of the scale of the resource base, forest cover types, forest utilization, history and scope of JFM, forestry institutional capacities, and legal, policy and regulatory frameworks to support community-based forestry.² In addition, extensive literature from other states, national studies, national statistics, and research on community forestry in other countries was used to complement the state reviews and develop a broad, national report.

The research focuses mainly on community-based forestry outside protected areas. Although many states have instituted a parallel system of community-based natural resource management for villages inside and adjacent to protected areas (based on ecotourism and limited removals of subsistence products), the differences in approach, legal framework, and benefit-sharing warrant a separate study. The current study focuses on issues and opportunities for community-based forestry rather than farm forestry, which is covered in detail by Saigal, Arora, and Rizvi in their 2002 study.

The report is organized as follows. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the Indian forest resource and forest economy. Chapter 3 reviews the legal and policy framework and identifies key issues. Chapter 4 provides insight into the livelihood patterns of forest fringe communities and offers an evaluation of JFM from the perspective of villagers. Chapter 5 considers the main issues surrounding forest resource assessment and planning systems. Chapter 6 evaluates critical issues in forest product marketing systems and the forest fiscal system. Chapter 7 presents options for policy and program reform. Chapter 8 summarizes the report's conclusions.

² See appendix 1 for a brief overview of the forest conditions in each state and the study methods.