
NEWS AND VIEWS

JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT RESEARCH NETWORK

Jeffrey Y. Campbell, Ford Foundation, New Dehli. ISTF NEWS, Vol.15 No.2 June 1994.

As foresters and concerned resource managers search for viable options to regenerate, protect and sustainably manage tropical forest resources, the involvement of local communities is now understood to be a pre-requisite for success. India's emerging joint forest management program (JFM), represents an exciting model for going beyond mere involvement. In JFM local communities become partners in protecting and managing state owned forest resources, leading to a legitimized role in the control of resources which they have used for generations. JFM programs hold great promise for regenerating India's degraded forests and for empowering local communities in the management of the largest remaining land-based common property resource. Government policies and facilitating resolutions for JFM are in place in 11 states. To a great extent these are states with the best potential for natural regeneration. Around 1.5 million ha. of degraded lands are currently being regenerated through JFM.

In order to develop a better understanding of potential management pre-scriptions to favour natural regeneration and maximize benefits to local communities, a research network to examine the ecological and economic impacts of joint forest management has been established. The network, coordinated by the National Support

Group for Joint Forest Management in the Society for the Promotion of Wastelands Development, is attempting to develop rapid methodologies for assessing vegetation dynamics in different forest types and ecosystems following community protection, and for assessing forest use and management patterns and economic options including the value, collection practices, processing, and marketing of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). It is also focusing on institutional issues including training and re-orientation of forest department staff, NGOs and community organizations.

Already results are clarifying forest use and degradation patterns, regeneration processes and management strategies. Information regarding the productivity and use of non-timber forest products, including grasses, is being gathered. The network is an expanding group of researchers which includes Forest Departments in Haryana, West Bengal, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan. The Ford Foundation provides partial funding to IIFM, IIMA, Development (IBRAD), Ramakrishna Mission (RKM), TERI, VIKSAT, AKRSP, Center for Ecological Sciences IIS, Center for Minor Forest Products, ICFRE, IRMA, Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC) to participate in the network.

TFAP FORESTRY ADVISORS GROUP REPORTS

Reports by Ralph W. Roberts, until recently Chairperson of the TEAP Forestry Advisors Group on the recommendations of its Study Group for revision of TFAP. Excerpts follow:

Developing countries are over-stretched by the various interrelated, often overlapping and uncoordinated, international initiatives concerned with natural resources planning and management. As a consequence, the effectiveness of all these

initiatives is diminished. Contrary to intention, national capacity is weakened by the creation of institutional overlap and heavy burdens on limited human resources. Too often, these initiatives reflect more strongly the concerns of international agencies than national needs and priorities. This stands in stark contrast with UNCED principles and with the basic tenet of foreign aid in the forestry sector, that development must build local capacity, be country driven and be based on national plans and programmes.

The post-UNCED negotiations to define formal structures for more efficient and effective coordination of the international community are likely to be prolonged and formidable. Thus, efforts to establish clear mandates, lines of responsibility, and procedures to streamline existing coordination mechanisms, are hindered among the major international agencies. Informal arrangements that foster direct collaboration between partners are a promising way to sustain forestry development activities.

Subregional mechanisms, built upon well defined issues of common interest and joint action, are emerging as promising fora to forage practical partnerships. In addition, thematic groupings amongst those sharing similar ecological or sociopolitical conditions provide useful opportunities for partners to agree upon approaches, and to mobilise resources for action.

The study team therefore recommends that the Forestry Adviser's Group:

1. Strengthen and help consolidate existing and emerging subregional and thematic groups so that they may identify and agree on common approaches to critical issues of sustainable forestry development;
2. Make use of these fora as a vehicle to form operational parties to address sustainable forestry issues in specific countries;
3. Support subregional and thematic meetings and seminars of policy makers and influential representatives from the private sector and NGOs to develop, disseminate and promote the application of analytical approaches and policy recommendations;
4. Make the results of these efforts available to all interested parties, including any entity emerging from the UNCED process and charged with leadership for international forestry development and coordination;
5. Solicit feedback on this study from developing country representatives before embarking on this process.

In the IUCN Forest Conservation Programme Newsletter No.16 for September 1993 (IUCN, Rue Mauveme 28, 1196 Gland, Switzerland).

THEOLOGIAN LOOKS AT ENVIRONMENTALISM

In an article, "Forest management and the theology of nature" (American Forests 99(11)/12):13-16 (November/December 1993), a Methodist minister, Don Ian Smith, comments on

the current development of environmentalism, in part, as follows:

I have become interested in a recent

cultural trend that, in the name of environmentalism, seems to be a serious impediment to improved forest management. This rapidly growing world view has all the characteristics of religion-it might, in fact, be called a theology of nature. Through political influence, it is creating a situation in which good management is being held hostage, and causing some of our best managers to give up in frustration.

Management involves intervention by humans into the processes of nature. Some bad management practices in the past have contributed to the ill health of today's forests. My observation is that we have enough expertise and concern among forest managers to make real progress towards healthy forests if managers are free to use the experience and technical knowledge they have, or are rapidly gaining.

Solutions require the use of our best technology to make improvements in management-rather than viewing the efforts of managers as an intrusion into the "wisdom" of nature and then, by legislative action, placing large areas outside the scope of management or placing unrealistic restrictions on management. Management can help our forests provide the greatest amount of these values, for the largest number of people-something nature, without man's help, cannot or does not do.

As the debate about our relationship to our natural resources and other life forms continues, a great deal of emotion and subjective feeling is taking the place of informed scientific thinking. The term "environmentalist" now is being applied to a member of a certain group, one who can be recognized for adherence to a set of esoteric concepts that have the trappings of religious dogma, rather than one who is seriously working to make the environment of earth a better place to live.

The danger in the "nature theology" is its antipathy to progress, its rejection of science, and its view of four management of nature as a desecration of the sacred. Followed logically, it has to accept human kind's place in the "balance of nature", and can make no moral judgement on our right to prey upon each other, which is proper behaviour for other living creatures.

Mistakes in past management practices, many far in the past, have become evidence of the evil of past traditions. Modern Americans with an unrealistic longing to return to Eden have found the inspiration of a cause, a crusade to save the earth. But because they have never worked with nature in the production of food or fiber or metal, or in caring for the grassland or forest, they fail to understand that the real saving is being done by those who daily work to improve resource management practices while creating the abundance and beauty that we need.

But making the natural world a sacred object, and basing political decisions on a theology of nature, pose a real danger to our society and seriously limit the care we can give the natural world that is, and must be, our home. I have ample reason to believe a Christian concept of man as manager and caretaker of the earth, a concept that worships the Creator, not the creation.