

PARTICIPATORY FOREST CREATION APPROACH : A NEW CONCEPT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Forest, wild life and people are accepted as integral part of the ecosystem and their mutual interest co-exists, simultaneously. The significance of forest ecosystem in maintaining biological diversity and their role in the carbon cycle and global climate change are now better recognized than ever before (Varalaxmi & Kaul, 1999). As per the National Forest policy, ideally the geographical area under tree cover should be 33 per cent, but in India it covers 19.27 per cent (Anonymous, 1997). India supports the world largest population of cattle. Joint Forest Management (JFM) is now a well accepted and tested system of managing forest resources with the help of local people residing in and around forest. The study of Tejwani and Lai (1992) suggested that the three major requirements to ensure sound development and growth of forest resources are appropriate policies, strong institutions and sustainable operations.

The newly established state Chhattisgarh is enriched with 45.06 per cent forest area of total geographical area. Out of total forest area, 39.89, 48.14 and 11.97 per cent covered under reserve, protected and unclassified forests respectively. Large chunk of land outside forest, located around almost all villages are lying as village common land, panchayat land, revenue wasteland, degraded revenue forest land which remain as uncultivated, uncultivable wasteland, grazing grounds, etc. They can be potential area for creation of forest collectivity for the benefits of rural people. Such degraded and under utilized areas can be restored and rehabilitated by "Participatory Forest Creation Approach" (PFCA) a tool of management of degraded land/ common property resources.

The term PFCA was coined by the author for eco-restoration of village common land and development of wasteland through agro-forestry activities. During the last two decades agro forestry has come to be recognised as a distinct discipline and they play an important role in socio-economic upliftment of marginal and small farmers. Agro forestry may be defined as a collective term for multiple land use, (forestry, horticulture, agriculture, animal husbandry) of a unit area simultaneously and sequentially and the aim is to meet diverse need of farmers by getting multiple outputs from the unit in sustainable manner. The PFCA means raising of forest trees, agricultural crops, fodder through a democratic, collective approach towards a common goal on land located near or surrounding the village as common property resources. In PFCA each family of the village participate in agro forestry activities with the help of related government departments.

The experience at two villages namely Khuteri and Murra in District Raipur (CG) showed that this approach can be successfully utilized for bringing neglected village common land, utilized under agro forestry activities.

Objectives

There are manifold objectives of PFCA, which can be listed as under :

- * To increase the forest and cropped area by bringing unutilised land under agro forestry practices.

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- * To protect such common land of village from encroachment.
- * To check environmental degradation.
- * To prevent soil erosion by conservation of soil and moisture
- * To meet the fuel wood, fodder, and small timber demand of rural people to improve socio-economic status.
- * To develop fraternity and sense of belongingness among people.
- * To utilise human resources by providing gainful employment.

METHODOLOGY

With the help of forest Department his programme was laid down in the year 1998. The selected villages consisting homogenous population of schedule caste, poor people were identified as a participants farmers. The village economy was agriculture based with characteristics low land holding and low productivity. After a number of meeting and brainstorming sessions with people and officers of forest Department, the development activities was planned matching with the life style and cultural habits of local people, land use, economic status, human resource, natural resources, etc. A combination of agriculture and forestry was arrived for holistic eco-development through participatory Forest Creation on unutilised common land of village. A Village Forest Development Committee (VFDC) was constituted for executing the developed plan. The Forest Department agreed to do afforestation on these lands and to consider the expenditure as one time grant to VFDC. Expenditure involved in raising crops was contributed by ASORD as one time grant. The villagers decided to utilise the first time grant for plantation and crops by rotating it judiciously for coming year to make it a sustainable system. The participants were agreed upon that whole produce from agricultural crops, fodder, afforestation would go to the kitty committee. After keeping reserves of 25 per cent to be invested in the following area, the remaining 75 per cent should be deposited in the VFDC account. For afforestation *Eucalyptus* spp., *Gmelina arborea*, *Tectona grandis*, *Embolia officinalis* trees were selected. For intercropping purpose Til, Urd, Moong and Arhar crops were selected.

ASORD arranged the best quality seeds for agriculture crops and provided timely and regular technical support. A total of 10 hectares and 50 hectares area was put under this programme in village Khuteri and Murra respectively. Protection and cultural operation practices were equally distributed among the VFDC committee members in consultation with ASORD executives and Forest Department officers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In both villages, the plantation was done in July 1998. All the selected species were planted in selected specified areas with follow up of recommended techniques. By October 1998, the *Eucalyptus* plants attained an average height of 2.3 m and 9 cm girth at collar zone with survival of 98 per cent. The crops Til, Urd, Moong and Arhar were intercropped in between the plant rows. The yield of these crops in first year achieved up to 60-75 per cent as compared to average yield of crops. In the becoming year (1999 and 2000) the same crops were introduced on the same lands with same specifications, the crops productivity increased gradually. The each year soil testing reports shows that the fertility and organic qualities of land also gradually increased.

The effect of this programme motivated the participating farmers for increasing the land area with adjoining the previous afforested land. Some subsidiary and indirect benefits

to participating farmers and other villagers are listed below:

- a). **Reduce Encroachment Activities** — By putting village common land under PFCA, the encroachment problems on the common land of village was solved.
- b). **Impetus to Co-operative Movement**— Village level co-operative leadership may be developed as PFCA provide an opportunity to work collectively for creating and managing common property resources of the village.
- c). **Financial help to Community**— The 75 per cent income from the PFCA activities was deposited in VFDC account for community development. The committee also provide financial assistance to destitute villagers on low interest rates.
- d). **Creation of infrastructure**— A part of community development fund of PFCA used for the creation of infrastructure facilities at village level like roads, drainage channels, soak pits, maintenance of social buildings, etc, as per the requirement. This will become a fund generated by the people maintained by the people, and utilised by the people with the minimum interference with Government Agencies. It may prove a humble step toward Gram Swaraj.
- e). **Sustainability**— Most of the wasteland development programmes have failed due to lack of participation of locales. PFCA initially provides financial support for creation of village common funds and addition of income generated to this, every year. The results indicated that after withdrawal of project support, interest of people may maintain.

CONCLUSIONS

The Participatory Forestry Creation Approach maintains the ecological balance resulting in the eco-sustainability. This is the most appropriate approach for preservation of common assets of rural sectors. The PFCA approach will solve deforestation, degradation, poverty, and unemployment of youth in rural sectors. The programme clearly shows efficient utilization of unutilized land and increased the per capita income with very low investment in per unit area. The experience of PFCA indicates that this technique can be replicated and effectively used where homogenous group of villagers were living.

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