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Subject II

Forestry and Related Issues

Rapporteur: Vishwa Ballabh*

INTRODUCTION

The discussion started with a brief recapitulation of the key research issues raised in the keynote paper and the issues identified by the Rapporteur based on the contributed papers. The Group recognised the gaps and deficiencies of research in the forestry sector. A reflection on critical review of the different forestry studies indicated three serious shortcomings: (i) most studies were impressionistic; (ii) many of the studies seemed to assume that forest dwelling or tribal communities were homogeneous, and (iii) there was lack of systematic long-term studies encompassing physical, technological and institutional aspects. The Group also noted that the forestry programmes, in general, were not backed with sufficient systematic knowledge about how and why they affected environment or rural people. It was argued that often there was lack of identification of key variables that needed to be evaluated so that the outcome of various forestry programmes was better understood and the programmes could be further improved. The Group also noted the positive changes brought in 1988 in the National Forest Policy and recognised the influence of various interest groups and their competing claims that shaped these changes. However, it was felt that the changes in National Forest Policy would remain ineffective unless commensurate changes were also made in the State Forest Policies. Some participants felt that changes at the State level were rather slow. From these general discussions, the Group then moved to specific issues related to availability of data, valuation of forest resources and products, reasons for decline of forests, non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and their contribution to livelihood support system, bio-diversity conservation, development of people's institutions including those related with women's participation, conflict management and its resolution, and finally, issues related with agro- and farm-forestry and their decline.

DATA

Many participants mentioned that the data from various sources on forestry related matters were not consistent with each other. The area, productivity, and rate of deforestation varied widely depending upon the source of data. The Group discussed

* Professor, Institute of Rural Management, Anand-388 001 (Gujarat).

three important sources of these data: (i) Forest Survey of India, (ii) Land Use Statistics, and (iii) the data available from National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA). Apparently, researchers often used these data without fully understanding how these data were collected and what definitions and parameters were considered for collection of the data. It was also pointed out that in some states, the area under forest cover changed from one year to another because definition of 'forest' was changed and these states included social forestry plantations in the category of natural forests, thus ending to over-estimation of the area of natural forests. It was argued that the NRSA data were more reliable but often these data were not available in disaggregate form particularly for micro level analysis. It was recommended that researchers should use Geographical Information System (GIS) data for area and quality of forest cover. The data related to other aspects of forestry such as number of species available, the type and nature of NTFPs, method of collection and distribution, etc., were generally not available. It was pointed out that some states have created a special cell within the Forest Department to collect information related to NTFPs and bio-diversity. However, these data were not made available to the public for research or other purposes. Some efforts were also being made by the NGOs and individuals but these were not sufficient. The Group felt that the Forest Department should make concerted efforts to generate a data bank on NTFPs and plant species in different forest ecology.

Valuation of Forest Resources and Products

The Group also debated the valuation of forest resources and products. It was pointed out that market prices often did not reflect the true value of resource or product for two reasons: (i) most forest products often did not enter the market, and (ii) markets for forest produce were often distorted for a variety of reasons including restrictions on trading. It was argued that the value of forest could only be determined by considerations of both direct and indirect use values as well as non-use (existence) value of forest and their products. To determine the real value of forest, social-cost benefits and contingent evaluation methods were suggested. However, the Group noted the limitations of these methods and it was argued that these methods often gave only crude estimates. The Group recommended that there was need for detailed discussion on forest valuation. It was also suggested that the valuation of forests and their product should form essential part of Agricultural Economics curriculum.

Non-Timber Forest Products and Forest Management

The new paradigm shift in management of forest and emphasis on NTFPs was noticed as a positive change in the Indian forestry sector. Some participants argued that this shift would not only improve the condition of forest and strengthen people's livelihood support system but could also meet the state's objective of revenue maximisation. Others, however, argued that the primary objective of forest

management should be to strengthen the livelihood support system through skill upgradation and capacity building of forest-dependent communities. It was also argued that there was a need to develop an interface between traditional knowledge and modern concerns related with collection, processing and marketing of NTFPs.

The Group also felt that there was urgent need to critically examine the impact of commercialisation, Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) on NTFPs and bio-diversity. Some participants were of the opinion that the commercialisation of these products would lead to over-exploitation of these resources, and the depletion of forests. Others felt that it might also change the mode of production and might shift their production from natural forest areas to cultivated land, which in turn would affect the forest-dependent communities. Some participants argued that there was a need for documentation of traditional knowledge and cited examples of bio-diversity registers. The implications of expansion of patents and IPRs into the domain of bio-diversity through Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPRs) and WTO were also discussed. The Group considered it a threat to collective intellectual heritage of rural and tribal communities by appropriating and privatising their knowledge. It was felt that there was need to evolve pluralistic IPR regimes with the potential to respect indigenous knowledge. As regards usufructuary rights, the Group felt that the common property regime is ethically consistent for mutual interdependence of rural and tribal communities.

The Group spent considerable time on discussing processing and marketing of NTFPs. Several examples were cited which confirmed that NTFP markets were distorted and controlled by the vested interests. The private trade is generally exploitative, but nationalisation also did not help primary collectors of NTFPs. The primary collectors of NTFPs received an insignificant proportion of the final rupee of the consumer. It was pointed out that the State Governments fixed the price of nationalised NTFPs based on market price and prevailing daily wage rates. The primary collectors of NTFPs were also not considered as producers even if some processing was involved at the household level. The Group felt that a multi-pronged strategy is required for marketing of NTFPs; free market, price support and people's institutions for marketing and processing needed to be created. This approach would lead to healthy competition among various types of marketing and processing agencies and the primary collectors might get a better deal. The Group also felt there is need to examine the silvicultural practices and technology in the forestry sector in the context of changing priorities and emphasis on NTFPs.

People's Participation and Institutions

Different models of people's institutions were discussed by the Group. While there was general agreement that 'blue print' approach might not succeed and people's institutions should be developed considering local conditions, it was generally felt that there was a need to develop the principles of organising people for forest

management. It was pointed out that even in small area like village, people might not have single common interest for protection and management of forest and, therefore, organising people having diverse interests for collective action would be a daunting task. Some of the points that were highlighted in this context were the relationship between the members and their management committee on the one hand, and the management committee and operational rules and procedure of protection and management of the forest, on the other. The emerging conflicts within the people's institutions and between people's institutions and the Forest Department were also discussed at length. A few examples were cited wherein Village Panchayats helped resolve conflicts but examples were also cited where the conflict among different interest groups heightened due to Village Panchayats' involvement. The recent amendments to Panchayat Raj Institutions and their implementation created conflict between Forest Protection Committees and Village Panchayats. Since Village Panchayats are often spread over many villages and hamlets, there should be some institutional mechanism to avoid conflicts, both intra- and inter-villages. The Group felt that local resolution of conflict would be best and a forum needed to be created for negotiation. However, it was also argued that legal framework for resolution of conflicts should be developed since it was not always possible to resolve conflict through negotiation only.

The balance of power between Forest Department and communities and their institutions was also discussed at length. The Forest Departments in many states could cancel and dissolve the FPCs. The mechanism to dissolve FPCs often appeared to be arbitrary. It was argued that there was need for autonomy and enhancement of democratic process at the grass-root level. There is a strong need to empower people's institutions. The Group overwhelmingly recognised the role of women in forestry management, but it was felt that it was time to ask questions relating to the impact of the gender-sensitive forestry interventions particularly in JFM. It was pointed out that the positive role of women in raising nurseries and other related work of the forestry project should not be missed, and therefore, the Group emphasised function-specific role for women. Such interventions have potential to create space for women that would enable them to play a definite role in decision-making at the household and community levels. The various socio-cultural factors that prohibited women's participation in the forestry sector were also discussed.

Farm- and Agro-Forestry

The final session of discussion was devoted to the issues related with farm and agro-forestry. The Group noted with concern the decline of farm- and agro-forestry. It was also pointed out that the farmers suffered huge losses during the eighties and hence there was a decline in their interests. The Group felt the need to critically analyse returns from farm forestry taking into consideration long gestation periods and price risks. There is very little systematic knowledge regarding 'why do farmers

plant or protect trees' in different areas. There is also a need to identify indigenous useful tree species, which could be integrated into the farming systems of different agro-climatic zones.

Research Issues

Based on the discussion the Group identified the following issues for future research:

- * There is a strong need for critical review of data on forestry sector from various sources, their strength and limitations need to be identified. In view of non-availability of data on bio-diversity and NTFPs, there is a strong case for persuading the Forest Department to collect these data and make it available for research.
- * A more systematic study on the method of collection, use and marketing of NTFPs is needed. A study of processing, value addition and marketing of NTFPs may help in designing better intervention strategies and strengthening people's livelihood support system.
- * The relationship between peoples' institutions and the Forest Department in JFM need to be critically examined. An examination of working of the Forest Department is long overdue.
- * A comparative study of JFM in various states is needed to identify strengths and weaknesses of the programme. These studies would provide useful insights to policy makers and development workers about what works and what does not.
- * Another important area for research is documentation of traditional knowledge and plant species used for medicinal purposes in different forest ecology.
- * Research is also needed to document plant species which are integrated in the farming system in different agro-climatic zones. The farm-and agro-forestry programme should be designed on such knowledge base.
- * Institutional issue (policy, legal and administrative) and their impact need to be examined more critically. The synergy and contradictions need to be identified, it would help designing forest development programmes.