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SNIPPETS
FOR THE PAPER INDUSTRY

Vol.27 / Issue-12

DECEMBER-2023

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"SOCIAL FORESTRY IN INDIA – AN OVERVIEW"

Introduction:

The forests are a natural asset of great value, which, are renewable, can be productive and useful under proper management. Forests represent the largest, most complex and self-generating of all ecosystems. Forests have a direct and beneficial influence on various aspects like environment, flora, fauna and mankind. They act as buffer zones between natural and man-made ecosystems. Forests have provided considerable support to the mankind through ages. According to State of forest report (2017) the forest cover of our country is 21.54% of the total geographical area. The forests are the major supplier of employment to the people through collection of non-wood forest. For tribal communities in India forests formed a part of their ethos and a natural way of life. India is the world's largest consumer of fuel wood both in rural and urban areas. Forests are the foremost source of fodder, timber, fuel wood, gum, tannin, and a varied range of curative herbs. Till the mid of this century, all the demands were met from the forests. However, with the growing human and livestock population, supply of vital produces from forests were inadequate to meet the needs; this resulted in overexploitation and deforestation of the forests in India. The forests in India have depleted quickly over the past few decades as a consequence, ill-effects of the deforestation became prominent. These are soil erosion, flash floods, water, fodder and wood fuel scarcity, loss of precious flora and fauna and climate change. Deforestation has also turned most of the natural forests into wastelands reducing the area under tree cover. The community pastures are deteriorating due to over-grazing by cattles. Due to the non-accessibility of wood in village, rural women are constrained to devote 15-35 hours every week in covering long distances for gathering fuel wood from inland forests. As a result of deforestation, the destruction from floods affected million hectares of agricultural land and millions of people during the 1980s. The extent of damage had increased many folds during past few years.

Meaning of Social Forestry Programme

In accordance with the first objective of the study the meaning of social forestry and its socioeconomic dimensions were analyzed. The term 'Social Forestry, for the first time was used by the Forest Scientist Westoby, at the 9th Common Wealth Forestry congress held in 1968 in New Delhi. He defined that, "Social Forestry, is a forestry which aims at producing flow of protection and recreational benefits for the Community".

The term Social Forestry is made up of two words social and forestry. 'Social' means living together in communities, while the term 'Forestry' is related with the theory and practice of raising tree crops, their conservation, scientific management and the utilization of the resulting resources.

Major Objectives of social Forestry:

The main objectives of the social forestry programme as conceived by

the Indian government are:

- Ensuring availability of adequate timber wood, fire wood and fodder for domestic use.
- Encouraging farmers, panchayats and other organizations for using peripheral and degraded land.
- Planting tree crops for ecological and environmental balance and purity.
- Generation of productive employment and infrastructure.

Establishment of agro-based industries particularly for the benefit of rural areas. For comprehensive understanding of the above mentioned objectives, it is imperative to examine the socio-economic dimensions of Social forestry because this programme not only aims at forest and environmental regeneration, it also involves human intervention, participation and their welfare. Therefore, next section focuses on various dimensions of social forestry.

Dimensions of Social Forestry Programme

The chief dimensions of the Social Forestry can be classified into two aspects; environmental regeneration and human welfare. It aims at providing ecological, economic and social security to the people particularly to the rural masses.

A. Environmental Regeneration Aspects are:

1. Fortification and afforestation of degraded forests in the surrounding area of habitations
2. Formation of village woodlands on community lands and government wastelands.
3. Mass plantations in tank beds and foreshore lands.
4. Agro-forestry on peripheral and sub-marginal farm lands
5. Tree planting along field boundaries or dispersed planting within the fields particularly in arid and semi-arid zone.
6. Pasture and silvi-pasture development.
7. Encouraging tree plantation in urban and industrial areas for artistic purposes, purification of polluted air and for reducing noise pollution.
8. Control of water and wind erosion by tree and shrub-planting, planting of shelter belts, green belts etc.
9. Strip plantations along road sides' canal banks and rail lines.
10. Establishment of in built mechanism for recycling of organic matter and waste of the area.

B. Human Welfare Aspects are

1. To fulfill the basic requirements of the people such as fuel, fodder, timber, and supplementary food.
2. Collaboration by the government, panchayat and voluntary

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agencies in the supply of inputs (funds, seedlings, materials and labour)

3. To generate income from surplus forest products for poverty alleviation and to provide employment opportunities.
4. To identify the concealed energies and skills of the villagers for their own growth by enabling them to manage their own natural resources. It aims at participation of the beneficiary from the planning to ingesting stage
5. To popularize economic tree farming along with crop farming.
6. To develop integrated system for the distribution of economic gains and other benefits among socially and economically poor people.
7. To deliver amiable environment to the tribes and to assist them to preserve their cultural uniqueness, as their existence and culture is closely related to forest.
8. To inculcate the significance of village level self-reliance and self-management in the production as well as dissemination of forest products with social justice. It also aims at nurturing the spirit of co-operation and to encourage cooperative initiatives. In other words it focuses on minimal government control in production, management and distribution of forest benefits.

Thus, for the success of social forestry, it is essential to have a joint and collaborative effort of the Government and people. In the absence of assured support from the political, bureaucratic, panchayat and the local people social forestry cannot achieve its objective. However, direct economic benefit is the key to people's participation in social forestry programmes. There is no substitute for people's participation to make social forestry programme a success.



The following are the types of Social forestry which were made popular by the Government keeping in mind the geographical, ecological conditions and needs of the people. Here, it is imperative to mention that these types vary from one region to another due to huge geographical diversity our country is blessed with.

Farm forestry: Under farm forestry individual farmers are encouraged to plant trees on their own farmland to meet their needs. Farm forestry can be classified into commercial and non-commercial types. **Non-commercial farm forestry** involves growing of trees on the fields in place of agricultural crops. It involves tree planting by farmers on their own land for their own use and not for the land mainly used for this purpose includes boundaries of agricultural fields, wastelands and marginal lands which are not usually cultivated. **Commercial farm forestry** refers to the system under which farmers grow trees on commercial basis. This type of practice is usually taken up in areas where there is an established market for wood or other forest based products.

Community forestry: It is also called as Rural Forestry. Under this system, trees are planted on community land and not on individual land, as in the case of farm forestry.

Extension forestry: Planting of trees on the edges of roads, canals and railways, along with planting on wastelands is known as 'extension' forestry.

Agro- forestry: Agro-forestry, involves assimilating agriculture with forestry, like leguminous crop, orchard farming and livestock ranching are done on the same piece of land. In other words, agro-forestry means growing of trees along with farming crops on the same piece of land.

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Published by >>	Wires & Fabriks (S.A.) Ltd. JAIPUR-302012, India.	Phone: +91-141-2341722 Email: snippets@wirefabrik.com	Only For Private Circulation

Website: www.wirefabrik.com

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