SOCIAL FORESTRY NETWORK

WORKSHOP SYNTHESIS: DISCUSSION AND OUTCOME

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Introduction

In the workshop, not only the papers given but the subsequent sub-group discussions proved particularly useful for participants. For that reason an attempt to provide a sense of the direction discussions took is presented here.

Most people had come to the workshop with a set of issues of particular concern to them in their work, but with little certainty that others shared these. The workshop organisers did not plan topics for sub-group discussion in advance because they too wondered how widely shared their personal interests were. To allow the organisers to draw up a set of topics of wide relevance to the group, participants were asked to write down the topics about which they would most like discussion to take place, ranking them by distributing ten points between the topics they selected.

The exercise provided a long list of about twenty topics, of which the most popular were:

1. Successful strategies for common and wasteland afforestation
2. Village groups and intra-village equity problems
3. Legal obstacles to Social Forestry
4. NGOs and their relationship to others involved in forestry
5. Marketing
6. Who is gaining and who losing from Social Forestry?
7. Reaching the poor
8. Appropriate trees for the poor
9. Forester training
10. Tenure
11. Problems of short-term and long-term benefits in Social Forestry

We grouped these into five broader topics, which are those addressed in this network paper:

Better solutions for the poor (1,2,6,7,8,11)
Rights, rules and hassles (3,10)
NGOs and large-scale replicability (4)
Marketing (5)
Training and education for Forest Department staff (9)

The conclusions reached, and the suggestions for appropriate further action for those involved in Social Forestry in India, are contained within each section.

1.0 BETTER SOLUTIONS FOR THE POOR

1.1 Is wasteland afforestation appropriate for the poor?

There seem to be various problems intrinsically associated with trying to produce benefits from wastelands for the poor.

(i) Wasteland afforestation turns an individual activity into a communal one
If trees are grown on commons an individual activity - collection of fodder, grass and firewood - is replaced by a group activity in which the poor are weak partners. Planting on wastelands and commons is thus a high-risk activity for them because any revenue must be shared out in an unprecedented way.
Perhaps it would be better to try communal resource management only where use is indivisible, as in the case of a watershed or grazing area. Trees are a communal resource when they pre-exist in forest or bushland, but their ownership is quite different when labour and cash has been spent on planting them.

(ii) The function of the wasteland before tree-planting began
How were the commons being used before treeplanting was proposed? What existing resources such as grass for grazing, rope-making and so on would be lost and what was their value to those who gathered them? Can tree-growing compete in value for those wasteland users with what was there before?
Often middle and upper-income villagers were deriving no benefit from commons at the moment when tree-planting on them was proposed. For them, any prospect of economic return from the land is attractive: tree-planting is a low-risk, additional activity. But for the poor, a vital currently available resource may be being lost in return for an uncertain future share in a different, probably less valuable one.

(iii) Social inequality within the village
Just as the priorities of rich and poor in Indian villages vary, so the poor too have diverse needs.
They should be disaggregated as a category early in project planning in order to address precise and possibly conflicting needs. For instance, what proportion of the poor lack animals and have no need for fodder? Which categories use commons produce for income-generation rather than subsistence? We are still too much in the dark about how tree-planting schemes have actually been affecting the poor. All we know is that the poor have little to spare of anything;it is risky for them to give time or labour to uncertain benefits.

1.2 The short time horizons of the poor

Although trees represent tremendous opportunities for investment over time, their slow maturing rate is a particular problem for the poor. Solutions lie in devising low-risk tree-planting strategies.

i) Trees as additions to, not substitutes for, other activities
Tree-planting for the poor is most successful if treated as additional to other activities, rather than substituting, for them, as the example of Group Farm Forestry in West Bengal shows. A household free to treat trees as an investment must also have a source of daily income of course, either from agricultural production or from selling labour, and careful planning with farmers of the role they expect from trees is essential if the trees are to enhance, rather than endanger livelihoods.

ii) Getting the advantages of tree-planting up-front
Tree-growing has to be planned so that some of its benefits are brought forward in time. Possibilities include planting some quick-maturing trees like papaya among others; planting trees very close and obtaining thinnings for firewood and sale; and staggering planting. The addition of a water source to wasteland planting would speed up growth rates considerably. Foresters should be prepared to prioritize species and technologies for early returns.

iii) credit
If profits from tree-planting are to be realised by the poor, credit support is essential. Access to credit during the waiting period can be difficult, because ordinary banks are reluctant to accept a tree-crop as security. A special Forest Credit Fund for tree-growers might solve the problem. Cash subsidies for planting, however, must be offered with care, if people only plant because of a substantial subsidy, what they would otherwise have done is skewed, and the subsidies are very hard to phase out later.

1.3 Patta schemes

'Patta' schemes (land-leasing schemes) have the advantage over wasteland afforestation that beneficiaries for each piece of land in the scheme are clearly distinguished. The land for pattas should be underutilised revenue land or ceiling land, and such land should be released specifically to the poor, in preference to communal land. There is no shortage of such categories of land in many areas.

'Pattas' should be land pattas not tree pattas, to avoid confusion over rights and to avoid chaining people into too rigid and unattractive a system. It is better to give land on which agriculture may be practised along with tree-growing, and to give it for a generous leasehold period such as 30 or 90 years.

More recognition should also be given to the special relationship of communities living on the forest boundary to the forest itself. Encroached or degraded margins can be replanted and protected by those who live nearby, as has happened in South Gujarat, in return for harvesting rights within the forest.

If tree-planting and previous land-use are priorities, perhaps for different categories of villager, then, logically, village lands should be made more ample to accomodate both needs. Often ceiling land or revenue land could be made available.

1.4 The poor and risk-avoidance

(i) project planning with risk avoidance in mind
Since the poor are extremely risk-averse, more time is needed, in projects especially for them, for careful investigation in advance of implementation and more room for flexibility and change along the way. The poor need a good deal more help than the rich. Hurriedly

thought-through ideas should not be tried out on them, because they cannot afford to experiment with a risky innovation.
Participants stressed, too, the importance of spending enough time to discover the priorities of the poor, and regularly checking to make sure that these were being met. In some areas of India, for instance, it would seem that the poor are more enthusiastic about the wage employment aspects of Social Forestry than they are about tree-ownership. But the preference is simply a strategy for risk aversion: if low-risk ways of retaining the trees as assets were available, preferences would be likely to change.

(ii) extension and the poor
Good extension is vital for the poor. Firstly, they are often on the worst land. In dry areas in particular a great deal of technical innovation is often needed for which well-thought through extension and demonstration is vital. Secondly the poor are often poorly placed to hear of schemes intended for them because they are illiterate, busy and rarely in contact with influential people. They must be sought out by extension workers with a commitment to telling them of the options open to them. Thirdly, more value-adding through local processing of raw products - seed-crushing and fruit processing for instance - should be developed involving the poor.

(iii) moderating the play of market forces
Some participants felt strongly that the Indian Government should guard against a price-crash by leaving pole and pulpwood production to private farmers (rich and poor) and limiting its own implementation role to conservation and environmental protection.

(iv) diversification
Most households could become a little richer if they had a mixed selection of one or two dozen valuable trees (fruit and minor forest produce) planted by the house. The main obstacle is usually only the practical one of dissolving the horticulture/forestry boundary preventing some fruit trees being offered. The poor probably need species diversity more than the rich, because they experience deficits in both cash and subsistence requirements.

1.5 The poor and the State
Much Central Government commitment to the poor is dissipated at district-level. On the one hand there should be greater professional rewards for successfully getting government funds to the poor and successfully implementing schemes for them. On the other, the district-level funding situation needs stream-lining. Funds are available for tree-planting through the Forestry Department, Agriculture, Soil Conservation, Community Development, and through schemes for scheduled castes and tribes. Officials have to account to each body separately for funds spent. One participant argued strongly for the funnelling of all monies for the poor into a special pool to simplify accounting and speed the process of implementation of projects.

1.6 Research needs for the poor
We are still very poorly informed about the response of the poor to tree-planting schemes, and the extent to which they have benefitted from or been impoverished by them. There is much rhetoric on each side, but very little hard data of the kind being generated by Tushaar Shah in West Bengal.
More study of ongoing projects is needed before new ones are embarked upon. In particular research is needed on the land pattas distributed to individual households in contexts where that land was previously communally owned. Have the beneficiaries gained much? Have the dispossessed lost much? We need comparative analysis of such experience.

2.0 RIGHTS, RULES AND HASSLES

Several participants had come to the workshop with problems about legal and tenurial rights at the top of their own agenda. 'We don't even know what we don't know,' said one despairingly. This section list the problems as people saw them and some proposed solutions.

2.1 The confusion over the rights of participants in forestry projects

Social Forestry has come into existence in India in a legal milieu established to prevent the felling of India's natural forests for profit or in the course of agricultural clearance. Laws never intended to cover villager tree - planting nevertheless apply to it. The chief problems with this situation identified at the workshop were:

i) that there are inconsistencies between Central and State Government legislation, policy and practice with regard to territorial and Social Forestry.

ii) that laws,rights, and privileges vary from State to state and from area to area of States. For instance, the administration of revenue lands varies widely.

iii) that simplification is needed of the rules affecting private forestry so that the right exists to fell privately owned trees at will and take them to sell at the market of choice. Six permits are currently needed for this in Bihar, and all States have much inhibiting legislation.

iv) that the Forest Conservation Act 1980 has gone too far. It says that Forest Land cannot be alienated from the Forest Department, which rules out projects such as the otherwise highly desirable use of barren forest land for participatory people's forestry. In some States, such as Karnataka, low quality (C and D class) agricultural land was declared forest land before village afforestation was embarked upon.

v) that panchayats have a very unclear relationship to local panchayat lands and common lands, which can be effectively denied in direct negotiations between the Revenue Department and the Forestry Department.

2.2 Arriving at a clearcut situation

The first step needed is a clarification of what the relevant laws and statutes are in each State. Although Chhattrapati Singh at the Indian Law Institute has done some work on the problem, help will be required for what is an enormous task.

The need is for a complete set of state by state studies of current law, using State civil servants (many of whom spend their working lives interpreting Revenue department laws), administrators, land tenure and human rights lawyers and representatives of Voluntary Organisations.

When a codification of current law relevant to Forestry is complete, it must be agreed with government. It should then be publicised as widely as possible so that ordinary people know exactly what their rights and duties are in relation to the Forest Department, tree-planting on village land and tree-planting on their own land. The information should be included in project documents such as Karnataka's Project Implementation Manual, and in newspapers and magazines. Extension officers should also have the duty to publicize the information correctly.

2.3 The rights which need to be established

inevitably, as clarification of the current legal situation is completed,it will become clearer where change is imperative. Where legislation is confusing or contradictory, government orders can sometimes clarify or rationalize the situation, for instance. But the real advantage of conducting a big-scale investigation into Forest Law, is that explicit, implicit and subjective interpretations of the relevant laws can be disentangled, and the really important and intractable anomalies highlighted.

The aim of the exercise should be to give treeplanters better rights to their own product, primarily. This will certainly involve a simplification of the system of felling permits, transit permits,and royalty permits, and will open up tree-products markets and break the government's current monopoly in these.

A second aim should be clearer definition of rights of access to various categories of land. Rights on common land and the distinction if any in particular areas between revenue land near to a village, and village common land need clarification in most places.

The result should be the removal of many of the current disincentives to Social Forestry.

2.4 Effecting change

Change will come from various directions. The human rights and land-rights lawyers with whom Singh is working will propose solutions to some of the problems identified.

Campaigning bodies such as voluntary organisations and the media will work for change by highlighting problems which offend natural justice or on which legislative change is called for. They will make sure that villagers are aware of their rights and assert them, perhaps by collective action, focus on an issue, force liberalisation

Donors can contribute by cooperating together to press for any important changes in law or practice which are identified, and by making proposals for new action. The focus which non-formal bodies train on particular issues may encourage them to press for particular liberalisations of the law. They also have a duty to examine the Forest Act finalised this year, which will certainly be promulgated before the review of problems and anomalies suggested here can be undertaken.

3.0 NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS: WHAT IS THEIR CONTRIBUTION?

3.1 NGO strengths in the implementation of forestry projects

At their best, NGOs have the capacity to be experimental, practical, innovative and spontaneous. They may be able to pilot and initiate something which becomes part of normal practice in time. NGOs are also able to work on a mix of problems in a more integrated way than is possible for those funded sectorally.

It would be a strange NGO too, which did not pride itself on good relationships with project beneficiaries, and on its commitment to equity issues. Good NGOs can often be the conscience of more formal bodies and although they can be priggish in this role, they have in fact frequently instigated beneficial change in the way projects are conceived and good practice defined.

NGOs are important in areas where Government intervention is limited, or does not extend right down to village-level, though there may well be a conflict in the role which Government would like them to take in this circumstance, and the role which they envisage for themselves. Nevertheless, they may have the capacity to act as brokers between local people and government, putting the viewpoint of the poor to those who might not have heard it, acting as pressure groups, and helping locals to find out about grants and schemes for which they might be eligible.

Finally, NGOs are often able to obtain funding directly from Northern NGOs and other bodies, and can use it independently.

3.2 Constraints on NGOs

NGOs are faced with a sharp conflict of interest in India: one which is not always so acute elsewhere in the world. On one hand campaigns for the rights of the poor, tribals and others, demand confrontational political commitment. On the other, NGOs need government cooperation and inputs actually to work on rural development projects for the

poor.If the balance between confrontation and cooperation is got wrong, the poor may suffer. Individual NGOs probably need to consider these problems more carefully, to decide whether they are mainly campaigners or implementers, and to recognise that one activity places limits on the other. In the sphere of forestry, better NGO cooperation with the Forestry Service is usually needed though NGOs are often bad at such cooperation even with one another.

3.3 The potential for NGO / Forestry Service trade-offs

In principle, the complementary strengths of the voluntary sector and of government could enhance the work of both. NGOs have the freedom to try things out without commitment in a way difficult for government, and their good rural development projects are a potentially invaluable training ground for state foresters, where participatory extension methods may be experimented with.

NGOs in turn would usually benefit from training in the technical skills of government foresters. Special short courses for NGOs keen to have an involvement in forestry would help them and forge more friendly links between them and State Forestry Services. It would make a lot of sense for NGOs and government to evolve comparable standards of evaluation and monitoring of projects, and for NGOs to professionalise their inputs in coordination with government.

But none of these things can happen in an atmosphere of ill-will and suspicion. While National Government and donors may urge forest departments to cooperate more with NGOs, state forestry officials are likely to continue to be unenthusiastic if all they experience is ceaseless criticism from NGOs.

3.4 Effective NGOs

Effective NGOs will vary in size, though will be unlikely to be very tiny; they ought to have a good enough district and State-level relationship with government for mutual learning to be possible without loss of face; and they will treat good communication of their activities to government colleagues and to other NGOs as a duty. They must of course be well-trusted by the people they primarily work for. The advantage of managing the difficult balancing act which these prescriptions imply, is that the chief weakness of NGOs - inability to continue to fund a project after a short period - can be vitiated by the project's incorporation into the government programme.

3.5 Scaling Up

Finally the nature of the relationship between NGOs and government forestry is mainly of interest because the best NGOs have a good track record in participatory styles of rural development. Since the current working hypothesis is that a big-scale attack upon deforestation and soil erosion can only come through good villager-forester relationships, and a strong economic rationale for tree-planting from the farmer's point of view, NGO experience is potentially invaluable.

However, caution is needed. Some grassroots initiatives cannot be scaled up because they are too capital or labour-intensive for large-scale replication, or because they depend upon the kind of conscientisation which must by its very nature be extra-governmental. Better M. and E. would help both NGOs,and those who would emulate them,to see which these are.

Since many NGO projects are regarded as pilot projects by their implementers, replicability should be given more priority by them than is often the case. Even where a voluntary organisation has had a charismatic beginning, there is a stage where institutionalisation will occur - and where replicability should be taken seriously. In that way the best of the NGO's poverty-oriented and morally thoughtful approach stands a chance of being combined with government's broader and more durable impact.

4.0 MARKETING

4.1 Trees as cashcrops

In India it is now perfectly clear that people want marketable treecrops from forestry in addition to, and often in preference to trees for subsistence products.This fact puts an onus on foresters engaged in extension work with farmers and villagers to help them maximise returns on land and labour investments and to address the question of markets and marketing problems at the outset.

Which species have the best marketing potential? What are the most profitable end-uses for trees grown and what are the costs in attempting to supply these? What markets are available to farmers and how can sales of produce be effected? What local, state-level and national linkages have a bearing on the marketability of treecrops in particular situations?

4.2 The market information required

i) appropriate species and products
Products such as bamboo and other 'minor forest produce" have the potential for profitability, as well as traditional wood products, and ought to be given more consideration. Many have cash and subsistence uses but are rarely available to the smallholder as seedlings.

There should be more effort too to raise species which offer opportunities for processing on the spot, so adding value to the original product at source, along with extension help in processing. Examples mentioned included oil seed species including eucalyptus oil, fruits, species for charcoal production and species for dry fodder for fodder banks.

ii) help with marketing
Tree growers need good quality extension help with marketing from the Forestry Service to market trees successfully. In particular they need:
information on markets available
information about size and quality specifications
widely diffused price and marketing information
advice on different product and marketing options
Strategies may vary according to the client - individual or village group or coop.

The Forestry Department itself is currently unused to selling except by auction, and whole new marketing structures have probably got to be built up, starting with the setting-up of villagers' marketing groups.

iii) prices
- diffusing price information
The first step in creating a better market is in making details of demand, price and profitability far more readily available to treegrowers as a defence against middlemen with an incentive to skew such information.

- the threat of a price crash
The only way of avoiding a price-crash,important with a crop taking several years to mature, is for the government to be prepared to declare price support measures in advance.

- planning for tree-farmers
The Forestry Department should also undertake forward planning on behalf of farmers, monitoring trends in prices and seeking new outlets and end-uses for tree-products.
The most urgent potential problem in this area is the level of pulpwood importation into India. Unfortunately there is a world pulp surplus, imported pulp is far cheaper than its Indian counterpart, and at the moment, 50-70% of demand is met from imports. If current import restrictions were lifted, Farm Forestry in India would probably receive a death-blow. On the other hand, if a more extensive import ban were imposed, commercial tree-production would be even more profitable for Indian farmers, though prices would be higher for manufacturers.
Workshop participants felt strongly that as much as possible of the market should be earmarked for farmers, and that not only imports, but also the growing of pulpwood by government itself should be halted in favour of farmers.

- forest-based industries
Forest-based industries should no longer be subsidized: they offer unfair competiton both for resources and in the market, to the small producers the Forestry Department should be supporting. They currently obtain forest produce at 10 rupees a tonne, while individuals are paying 1000 rupees a tonne.

4.3 Selling

i) sellers'cooperatives
More information is need on the best formula for marketing trees grown by villagers. Should the coop be involved only in farm-gate sales, or also in transporting wood to market?
There a few models for investigation, including tenants' tree marketing coops in South Gujarat. Are local middlemen a necessity? Should they be encouraged or avoided?
How will marketing from wastelands rather than from farmers'own fields be managed locally?

ii) selling fuelwood to towns
Is there any way of setting up fuelwood marketing coops to towns which would make the production of fuelwood for this end more economically attractive, and would still be of value to poor townspeople?

4.4 Data needs

(i) Effective marketing of wood products by farmers is still in its infancy in most parts of India, though not universally. Urgent investigations of systems which already exist are required, which take note of distribution, analyse where the profits are, and indicate the services intermediaries provide.

(ii) What structures should be built up from village to wider sales networks?

(iii) Where should marketing support come from? Must the help inevitably come from the Forestry Department, or is there a case to be made for some other agency to step in? Who can best organise villagers to sell their trees in a less exploitable way?

(iv) How can the Forest department become more involved in marketing?

5.0 TRAINING AND EDUCATION FDR THE FOREST DEPARTMENT

5.1 The problem: new tasks for foresters
Training appropriate for Social Forestry is currently ad hoc, on-the-job and informal. The need now is for a variety of different things: broader training at Schools of Forestry as well as more varied field experience.

Course work for students should impart a better grasp of the work of others in rural development and agriculture; and a sense of the relationship between forestry and agriculture, water conservation and livestock-keeping. Much more training and experience in the monitoring and evaluation of Social Forestry projects is needed too.

Foresters need hands-on experience of village-level extension work, of helping villagers to market their trees, and of the identification of constraints from the farmers' point of view. Foresters must also - probably through the medium of in-service training - be taught how to generate publicity and education materials.

5.2 Training institutions

Who should the trainers be? The traditional forest training institutions are in flux and need the help of new courses; many forestry officials feel threatened by change and may be inclined to resist new ideas if they are not taught by those sympathetic to the previous role of foresters.

On the other hand, agricultural universities in India are now developing forestry courses - an aspect of the much broader range of bodies now involved in tree-planting - and centres such as the Indian Institutes of Management are also being drawn in. If foresters are not to be left behind, they and their training institutes must move fast to take on board the rural development approach.

Peer group training is especially important for mid-career foresters. This can take place by more exchanges between States and by visits to see the programmes of others. It was felt that secondment of younger foresters to good NGO forestry programmes, as already happens in one or two States and in Social Forestry elsewhere in the world, would be a good form of training.

5.3 Who should be trained?

Opinions varied on the priorities for training. While many people thought most training should be made available for the new younger generation of foresters, others felt that the priority was the reorientation of very senior people in the Forestry Service. Until their commitment was won, social Forestry would remain an unattractive option for junior foresters, who would see that prestigious careers were built through Territorial Forestry rather than Social Forestry. The point was also made that it was important to select only the people who had shown some interest in Social Forestry. Training for reluctant or unpromising individuals was a waste of time and money.

5.4 Training materials

There were many suggestions for the generation of training materials. Some found simulation games useful for practising the handling of village situations. It was suggested that there is probably quite a lot of good training material around already, being developed by others, both in other States and among NGOs (the Mahiti project was cited as one possibility). The main need is to find and draw these materials together. It was also suggested that Forestry might look

fruitfully for good training materials by going outside forestry itself and looking at the materials being developed by community Development projects.

Some people felt that case study materials on positive and negative interactions between the Forestry Department and rural people would be useful, with videos of case studies.

5.5 Training through field research

One workshop participant put the problem of forester reorientation and its solution very succinctly: make the patient the doctor. If a forester is asked to go and talk through a problem with villagers and report back with suggestions for solving it, he will have acquired a sympathy for those who suffer the problem in the process of reaching his conclusions.

Several people felt for this reason among others that appropriate pieces of field research, undertaken as a part of field training, would help foresters become acquainted with the needs of the poor, and give them practice in learning how to find out what to do about them.

5.6 The administrative burden of field staff

While all agreed that more training was very important it was also pointed out that field staff often spend little time, in the field, not because they dislike field activity, but because they have so much paperwork that extension actually forms a very small part of their week.

Those senior to field staff need to rethink this problem, and create the conditions under which field staff can spend more time with the people they serve, and less on form filling. Simplified forms, more delegation and more deputation would be very welcome and many staff would be happy to spend more time with villagers than they can currently manage.

Conclusion

The workshop participants were able to test their own opinions against one another in the sessions recorded in this paper. Each topic was first discussed in a rapid brain-storming way in small groups, and then the whole workshop met to hear group rapporteurs before splitting off to discuss the next agenda item. A great deal of work was done by everybody in the space of a single afternoon.

Since the group were almost all actively involved in research or implementation in India, there will certainly be practical outcomes from the workshop, including Social Forestry Network research, which will be reported in due course.

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