

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background and Study Objectives**

The Karnataka Evaluation Authority assigned the responsibility of carrying out an evaluation study entitled **Impact of the Joint Forest Planning and Management (JFPM) Programme in Karnataka** vide its proceeding no KEA 223 EVN 2015 dated 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016 to OUTREACH Association of Volunteers for Rural Development, Bangalore. The primary objectives of this assignment were to:

1. Assess the performance of Village Forest Committees, the institutional mechanism for operationalizing the JFPM programme in general and the state of plantations raised and managed by VFCs, in particular. In assessing the role of VFCs the two fundamental goals of JFPM, i.e. conservation of the forest and its regeneration and providing sustainable livelihood choices to forest dependent communities and enabling those to increase their assets by providing them income generation opportunities are taken into consideration.
2. Examine the activities of the VFCs for preventing encroachment, theft and fire in forest areas, and the livelihood opportunities created by VFCs to local communities.
3. Evaluate the efficacy of the benefits sharing mechanism between VFCs and the Karnataka Forest Department and also the nature of interface between VFCs and KFD.
4. Understand the type of linkages that exist between VFCs and other village level institutions, and profile the working of Tree Patta and other JFPM schemes.
5. Make an impact assessment study of the overall impact of JFPM by bringing out both the success stories and limitations, and in this background, examine the need and relevance of evolving alternate working models for making JFPM more effective

### **Policy Framework**

The National Forest Policy of 1988 which recognized people's participation in the development and protection of forests was the basis for the formulation of JFPM. The underlying tone of the 1988 Forest Policy was that forests are not to be commercially exploited for industrial development, but they are to be used for conserving the soil and environment, and meeting the subsistence requirements of local people. It was with the objective of translating this policy that JFPM came into being. As the name itself suggests the thrust was on participatory forest management with the Forest Department and local communities being treated as stakeholders. In Karnataka also the main objective of JFPM was to involve local communities in protection,

regeneration and development of degraded forest lands through the creation of Village Forest Committees for joint management of forest land and sharing of resources. The thrust in JFPM was on 'caring and sharing'.

The Village Forest Committee (VFC) was envisaged as the institution through which JFPM would be implemented. The composition of VFC, its Management Committee and its functions are governed by Government Orders issued from time to time. In all, 5006 VFCs have been formed in the state under four schemes namely Western Ghats Environmental Project (WGEP), centrally sponsored Schemes (CSS), Eastern Karnataka Afforestation Project (EKAP) and Karnataka Sustainable Forest Management & Bio- diversity Conservation (KSFMBC) Project. It was vide order no. FEE 50 FAP 2000 dated 19<sup>th</sup> June 2002 that VFCs were strengthened and given the powers to share the benefits not only from VFC plantations but also natural forest and plantations that existed prior to the formation of VFCs .

### **Methodology**

The present study has been carried out in the 40 forest divisions of Karnataka and the study universe is 5006 Village Forest Committees formed as per the Karnataka Forest Act 1963, with financial assistance from Western Ghats Forestry and Environmental Project, Eastern Karnataka Afforestation Project, Karnataka Sustainable Forest Management & Bio-diversity Conservation Project and Centrally Sponsored Schemes.

As per the Terms of Reference (TOR) a 10 per cent sample of the total number of VFCs spread over the 40 forest divisions in the state of Karnataka has been chosen for collecting the field data. The total number of VFCs to be selected as sample is around 501 (10 % of 5006 is 500.6). We have selected 504 VFCs as the study sample, and in each division 10 per cent of the VFCs have been chosen. Since the VFCs have been set up under four different schemes, and their number differs from one scheme to the other and also from one division to the other, proportionate representation has been given to each scheme as well as division. In the final round of selection, the distribution of the total sample is in tune with the number of VFCs in each division, scheme wise.

Of the 504 VFCs chosen as the study sample the majority (63.10%) were started under the EKAP scheme. The next larger number of VFCs were started under the KSFMBC (24.21%) followed by Western Ghats Forestry and Environmental Project (9.52%) and Centrally Sponsored Schemes (3.17%).

The primary data for the study have been generated with the help of an interview schedule which was constructed by keeping the evaluation questions in view. The interview schedule was divided into five sections and addressed the perspectives and concerns of five major stakeholders of JFPM, viz. members of VFCs, Member-Secretaries of VFCs, officers of the rank of ACF and above, members of Gram Panchayats and Self-Help Groups. After validating the interview schedule by pretesting it among select stakeholders it was finalized for collecting field data. A team of field investigators and the core research team visited different villages where the VFCs were located and collected data during the course of interviews and focus group discussions. The research team also met the DRFOs, who are member-secretaries of VFCs, officers of KFD above the rank of ACF and villagers for eliciting their views on the performance of VFCs and the factors responsible for their success or failure as the case may be. The data have been presented in the form of frequency tables and wherever appropriate the tables have been supplemented by diagrams. The data have been analysed and presented scheme wise. Where ever significant differences are found between one scheme and another they have been highlighted.

### **Major Findings of the Study**

1. Majority of the VFCs (281/504) have been formed in degraded forest lands where canopy cover is 0.25 and less. However, 81 VFCs have also been formed in Reserve Forest areas predominantly inhabited by tribal communities. During the past 18 years Karnataka Forest Department has constituted around 5200 VFCs/EDCs in the state bringing nearly 3, 40,000 hectares of degraded forests under JFPM and all the VFCs covered by the study have been formed as per stipulations of government orders existing at that point of time.
2. 96.43 per cent of the VFCs have only one village under their jurisdiction. It is seen that for the sample taken as a whole the maximum number of VFCs (14%) were formed during the year 2002-03 and the next higher number (13%) during 2000-2001. During the last one decade there has been gradual decline in the number of VFCs. This is primarily because of the discontinuance of funded projects.
3. The number of members has remained constant in about 83 per cent of the VFCs ever since their establishment. Though this can be seen as a positive trend, it is likely that the membership will decrease if VFCs become defunct due to non-availability of financial resources.

4. 38 per cent and about 34 per cent of the VFC plantations respectively were laid before and after the establishment of the VFCs. 28 per cent of the members were not aware of this fact at all. The two positive aspects of VFC plantations were that majority were laid as per the specifications outlined in the micro-plan/ integrated management plan and that plan revision had also taken place in most of the VFCs.
5. A comparison between the traditional and VFC plantations showed that in the matter of survival plantations managed by VFCs performed better. This is because members felt that the plantations belonged to them. Not all members however participate in protection and management activities of the forest. The nature and level of participation depends upon their role in the VFC, the distance between their place of residence and the plantation and the freedom that the VFC enjoys in management of the plantation. There is also a feeling in about 40 per cent of the VFCs that the Karnataka Forest Department representatives take all the decisions relating to the VFC plantations.
6. The three major activities in which VFC members have participated are planting of species, fire fighting and saving the plantation from encroachment by outsiders.
7. Since the VFC was visualized as an institution that imbibes the principle of democratic decentralization the JFPM policy laid down that elections to the Managing Committee must be held periodically and as per norms. In our field area it is seen that in about 50 per cent of the VFCs elections to the Managing Committee were unanimous where as in the other half the seats were filled through contest. In some VFCs the same Committee has continued while in others there have been changes. As for meetings in 34.92 per cent VFCs MC meetings are held once in three months. There are instances of non-functioning VFCs that have not met for several years (22.42%) and they have virtually become defunct. It must, however be realized that only when economic activities are being carried on regularly MC meetings can be held regularly. In most VFCs (61%) MC members are aware of their roles and responsibilities. This was especially true of VFCs where JFPM facilitators motivated VFC members by orienting them to appreciate the benefits of VFC membership.
8. It was observed that election records are not systematically maintained in many VFCs. In a few VFCs election proceedings are recorded in the minutes of the General Body meeting, where as in others there is only a casual reference to the election. This process needs to be streamlined. Most VFCs have only micro plan, MOU, bank pass books and audit reports.



9. In majority of the VFCs the DRFO who is the Member-Secretary performs routine duties such as maintenance of accounts and records. In VFCs which have a proactive President meetings are held very regularly and the President takes the initiative to convene meetings and also maintain the records.
10. Sharing of proceeds with KFD from the sale of the plantation yield has taken place only in about 40 per cent of the VFCs. Of these only 15.38 are VFC plantations and 24.21 per cent are traditional plantations. This shows that one of the main objectives with which the JFPM programme was initiated is yet to be achieved.
11. 55 per cent of the VFCs have bank accounts ranging between one and four lakh rupees. A scheme wise analysis shows that more VFCs in the WGEP and KSFMBBC groups had higher savings than their counterparts in EKAP and CSS categories.
12. All the VFCs in our sample, cutting across schemes have helped member families by supporting livelihood activities. It is also to be noted that members are engaging in multiple activities. The activities which have been taken up by the highest number of beneficiaries are (in that order) poultry farming, dairy, sheep rearing and farming and tailoring. In half o the VFCs, however no significant improvement is reported in the economic status of members by engaging in these activities.
13. It is seen that majority of VFC members have neither availed the Tree Patta nor the Farm Forestry schemes. There is need to review the functioning of these programmes and also their impact on the user groups.
14. It has emerged from the study that JFPM has created a positive impact in many areas, the most important ones being creation of a cordial relationship between KFD and the local communities; improvement in water tables; opening up more opportunities for enhancing livelihood bases through skill development and IGA; increase in peoples' awareness about the forest and the world in general.
15. VFC members were asked to give suggestions for making JFPM an effective programme. The most important suggestions that they gave for making JFPM more effective are creation of market linkages for VFC products; involving VFC members in Eco-tourism, continuing the services of facilitators, organising awareness building programmes and exposure visits to enhance the knowledge base of members and creating a system of continuous financial support by establishing a revolving fund for VFCs so that their activities could be continued even

without scheme grants. They also suggested that water conservation activities and steps to prevent crop damage and wild animal attacks must be increased.

16. When the KFD representatives were asked to give their perceptions of JFPM they said that JFPM has to be integrated with other village development initiatives. Their other suggestions include organizing more training programmes aimed at skill development; involvement of NGOs in VFC activities and provision of financial support for carrying on VFC activities in spite of the discontinuation of the scheme. While recognizing the fact that JFPM bridged the communication gap between local communities and KFD and created a space for working together in conservation and development activities, they observed that irregularity in meetings and infrequent visits by higher officials of KFD and non-monitoring of VFC activities were among the serious limitations of JFPM.
17. Since VFC-GP-SHG interface is an important aspect of forest conservation and management a study was made of the nature of convergence between these institutions. As for SHGs majority of the VFCs have not formed new groups but are supporting select SHGs that were already functioning in the village. Most VFCs are supporting SHGs by giving loans to engage in income generating activities. The relationship between VFC and the local GP also is found to be amicable in most cases, but given its multi-village jurisdiction and the pressures on GPs to handle several schemes, it is seen that the GP in most cases could not give any special attention to a single VFC. However, it is also the responsibility of the managing committees of VFCs to explore the possibilities of using schemes that are being handled by GPs for the benefit of their members.
18. The study data showed that in 41.57 per cent of the VFCs there is 'good' impact, in 18.59 per cent of VFCs the impact is 'moderate' and in the remaining 39.87 per cent the impact is 'minimal'.

### **Recommendations**

JFPM has succeeded in certain VFCs primarily because of two reasons. First, economic activities have been taking place in these VFCs and second, there has been a continuous flow of funds for providing those necessities that dissuade people from using the forest. Hence it is for the state agencies to ensure that financial support is provided to JFPM through different schemes sanctioned to the Gram Panchayat and other departments.

Officers of the rank of ACF and above must visit VFCs under their jurisdiction at least once in three months and show a sense of involvement in the VFC affairs.

VFCs must be constantly engaged in economic activities that lead to resource generation. Most of the VFCs are project dependent and once the project funds have stopped, VFCs have become defunct. To keep the VFC in an activity mode the Private-Public - Partnership model can be followed.

An institutional mechanism must be put in place within the KFD to handle different aspects of the JFPM Programme. A designated officer in the cadre of APCCF (JFPM) with a dedicated grant to monitor JFPM activities may be appointed.

A structured mechanism for monitoring the governance of VFCs by forming VFC Committees that would take the responsibility for ensuring better yield as well as safety of the plantations must be created.

Species displaying better yield, better chances of survival and also those that help local communities to sustain themselves by addressing their needs for food, fodder and fuel be encouraged. Special support must be given for increasing their yield and also for involvement of local communities in protection of such species.

Planting of species that facilitate collection of MFP may be encouraged because that serves as a motivating factor for greater involvement of people in conservation activities.

KFD must create a revolving fund for distribution of benefits such as gas cylinders, solar lamps and protection from wild animals. The Department must engage the VFCs in activities that bring economic returns to members so that they have enough resources to meet their biomass needs and in the process reduce their forest dependence. Management of eco tourism activities could be assigned to VFCs.

Services of facilitators must be continued because they are not only well informed about the JFPM programme and its implications for forest development, but also have the grass root connections and network that can take the programme forward. Facilitators can not only ensure a continuous flow of information but also motivate VFC members to convene meetings and discuss village development initiatives.

The entire election process for selection of MC members is to be monitored by an external agency, preferably a department level committee. The Committee can be entrusted with

the responsibility of ensuring that the rules laid down by the Act are followed in the conduct of elections.

One DRFO must be given charge of one VFC only or where there is a shortage of staff just one or two more. Since the Guard can officiate as Member-Secretary the special training required to handle this job may be given. One of the MC members, preferably the President or an active committed member could also be designated as Deputy-Member Secretary to manage the VFC affairs in times of need.

VFCs must be provided a designated office space and at least a cupboard with keys for safekeeping of documents.

Panchayat members and representatives of government departments must be invited to VFC meetings so that they can understand the real needs of VFCs and also identify the areas where they could help VFCs. This responsibility could be assigned to facilitators.

Close monitoring is required to ensure that all members and just a few take part in these activities.

JFPM can succeed only when there is a meaningful linkage between institutional arrangements and the policy goals. It is also very important to adopt the convergence model because no forestry development programme can function in isolation from other rural development initiatives.

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