

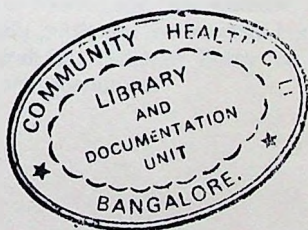
# JANAARANYA

PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE  
MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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# **JANAARANYA**

## **PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**



**Samaj Parivartana Samudaya  
Dharwad et al.**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publishers gratefully acknowledge the following sources from which different material in this document is reproduced :

### **Centre for Ecological Sciences**

Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore who originally brought out the write-up on "People's Participation in the Management of Natural Resources."

**Wasteland News** published by the Society for Promotion of Waste-Land Development, New Delhi who originally published the National Forest Policy and the draft on National Policy on Common Property Land Resources.





**JANAARANYA  
PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN THE MANAGEMENT OF  
NATURAL RESOURCES**

Jointly Published by :

**Samaj Parivartana Samudaya**

"Asha Deep" Jayanager Cross, Saptapur

Dharwad 580 001

**Federation of Voluntary Organisations**

**for Rural Development - Karnataka (FEVORD-K) B'lore**

**Action Committee for Protection of Common Lands**

(ACPCL), Dharwad

**Citizens for Democracy - Karnataka (CFD-K) B'lore**

and

**Jana Vikas Andolan - Karnataka (JVA - K) B'lore.**

**First Edition : 5000 copies**

**Aug. 1, 1991**

**Printed by**

**Omega Printers**

**316, SPM Road, Belgaum.**



## PREFACE

The common lands play an important role in the lives of rural people especially the poor. Basic needs of a vast majority of people such as fodder for sheep, goats and cattle, fuel for cooking, small timber for housing and agricultural implements, leaves for manure and raw material for rural artisans have been provided for by the common lands for centuries.

The right of people to use the common lands to meet their needs was not challenged until the British Rulers saw them as a means to generate revenues for the State. In the 1860s, they "reserved" majority of forests for the use of Government. The impact of this policy of the Colonial rulers was clearly seen by the social thinkers of the times e.g. Jyotiba Phule warned the people against H.M.'s Government's conspiratorial designs through the Forest Department in the following words as early as 1882 in his Marathi book "Shetkaryacha Aasud" (Cultivator's whip cord) :

"In the past the peasants who had small pieces of land who couldn't eke out enough from it for their survival used to eat fruits from the nearby forests and used to collect leaves, flowers and dried tree branches and by selling these to others supplemented their income. They also used to maintain a couple of cows or goats and were living happily in their villages depending on the village common grazing land. But H.M.'s Government's conspiratorial bureaucracy have used their foreign intelligence and have newly established the great forest department and have incorporated all mountains, hills, vallies alongwith barren lands, and village common grazing lands in this department thus making it impossible for the goats of the poor peasants to find even breathing space in the forests....".

After independence in 1947, our Indian Government has continued this process of governmentisation and privatization of common lands for their financial, commercial and political purposes. With increased adverse effects on the lives of the poor, these policies and practices are being increasingly questioned by people at all levels.

This booklet is being published on the occasion of the Common Lands Jatha - an expression of concern about the use of common lands and who should control them. The major

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demands of this Common Lands Jatha during August 1-10, 1991 from various villages in several districts in Karnataka to the Capital, Bangalore are : Keeping village Common Lands for villagers' needs, the establishment of village level People's committees for the management of all Common Property Resources (CPRs) like the common lands and tanks, the formulation of specific programmes with financial provision for protection and development of degraded land and formulating people - oriented policies and laws with the necessary amendments in the existing laws.

At the national level, efforts by policy makers, activists, bureaucrats and scientists have resulted in the realization that the Common Property Resources cannot be managed without the participation of the local people as decision makers. One example of this is the issuing of a comprehensive circular of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Government of India, entitled "Involvement of village communities and Voluntary agencies for regeneration of degraded forest lands" which is included in this booklet.

In Karnataka, the idea of meaningful participation of people in the management of natural resources grew out of the Save the Western Ghats March in 1987. This long March gave an excellent opportunity for the activists and other concerned people to meet the affected people and experience their problems first hand. Some examples include the plight of tribals in Mysore and Kodagu districts, whose traditional rights to use the forests for their basic needs have been seriously curtailed, the lakhs of rural poor in Shimoga, Chikmagalur, Dharwad and Belgaum districts whose common lands have been taken away for industrial raw material by the Mysore Paper Mills (MPM) and the Harihar Polyfibres through the Karnataka Pulpwood Ltd (KPL) and the gavlis in Belgaum, Dharwad and Uttarkannada districts who have been most adversely affected by the loss of water and fodder for their cattle due to the destruction of the forest and planting of commercial species.

As a result of this experience, the Federation of Voluntary Organizations for Rural Development in Karnataka (FEVORD-K), the Centre for Ecological Sciences (CES) of the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore and the Samaj Parivartana Samudaya (SPS), Dharwad began a dialogue on how the

affected people can be effectively involved in the Management of their own Common Property Resources. The series of activities including the National Seminar on Common Lands organized by the SPS in January '89 and the Workshop on Management of Natural Resources by the CSE in October '89 both in close cooperation with the FEVORD - K have resulted in the basic documents compiled in this booklet. Government officials from various departments, scientists, elected representatives and Voluntary Agency Representatives participated actively in these deliberations.

There is also a draft national policy on common Lands being circulated by the Society for Promotion of Wasteland Development (New Delhi) which is also included in this booklet.

The publishers request that these documents be utilized for debate on the State and Central policies and programmes on the use and management of the Common Property Resources.

President,  
Samaj Parivartana Samudaya, Dharwad.

President,  
Federation of Voluntary Organisations for Rural Development -  
Karnataka (FEVORD - K) Bangalore.

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President,  
Citizens for Democracy, (CFD - K) Bangalore

Convenor,  
Jana Vikas Andolan - (JVA - K) Bangalore

August 1, '91  
Dharwad



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**PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE MANAGEMENT  
OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

"It is necessary to empower the local community at the village level and ensure that each settlement will clearly have locally defined environment and natural resource base of its own to protect, care for, improve and use. If necessary, change can be brought out in laws. The entire process of political decentralisation and involvement of Panchayat Raj institutions must ultimately end up in solving the most vital problem facing India today, i.e., regeneration and restoration of the environment, specially the ecologically fragile regions. The only way to achieve this objective would be by deepening democracy and participation at the village level as much as possible. Every settlement in the country must have a clearly defined environment to protect, care for and use this as an open forum in which all can get together to discuss their problems and find common solutions."

— **Report of the Steering Group on Environment, Forests and Wastelands Development for the formulation of the Eighth Five Year Plan (1990-95). Planning Commission, Government of India. July 1989, pp. 134.**

1.1 There is obviously an increasing awareness in the country of the need to involve people actively in managing the soil, water and biomass resources of their locality. This has been mooted in a number of contexts including social forestry, watershed development and management of minor irrigation tanks. There has however been little progress in actually involving people; in part, because the nature of such involvement remains to be worked out explicitly. The voluntary sector and academic institutions can play a most useful role in defining the manifold ways in which such involvement could be fruitful.

1.2 The Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of

Science, Bangalore has been involved in such an attempt in active collaboration with Federation of Voluntary Organizations for Rural Development (Karnataka), the Save the Western Ghats Movement and an environmental voluntary agency, Sahyadri Parisara Vardhini. Working together this group of organizations conducted a series of village level meetings in Uttara Kannada district from January to April 1988. Based on the consensus arrived at in these meetings a concrete proposal to involve people in management of village forests was published on 5th June 1988 in English as well as Kannada newspapers from Bangalore. This has subsequently been widely debated in a number of forums including the Planning Commission Steering Group on Environment, Forests and Wastelands Development for the Eight Plan, and in a series of meetings involving Zilla Parishat members and office bearers, Government officials, workers of voluntary agencies and technical experts; as well as news media. This process culminated in a meeting on 22nd September 1989 at Bangalore. The present document reports the broad consensus arrived at during the last meeting on 22nd September 1989.

1.3 There are several reasons why the involvement of local people could contribute to better management of natural resources. These include :

(a) The quality of life of local people is intimately linked to the health of the resource base. Hence they are likely to be better motivated than any impersonal machinery operating from a distance to manage the resources well.

(b) The local people have considerable location specific knowledge of the resource base of value to its good management.

(c) The local people can continuously and closely monitor what is happening to the resource base, and how the various interventions are affecting the environment.

(d) Involving the people in a proper sharing of the benefits of good resource use is vital to alleviation of rural poverty, our most serious social problem.

(e) Involving local people actively in managing resources of their locality could help get them out of the syndrome of

dependency on Government handouts for everything and confer on them some community responsibility and personal dignity.

1.4 The possibilities of such involvement will have to be worked out in terms of the following six parameters :

(a) Nature of resource element : degraded hilly land, irrigated farm land, ground water trapped by bore well, small irrigation tank, bamboo, bhabbar grass, fish stocks, oyster beds etc.

(b) Form of control over access to resource : private farmland, state controlled reserve forest, roadsides controlled by PWD, temple land, tank controlled by minor irrigation department etc.

(c) Activity in which people could be involved : digging farm ponds on private land, planning of soil conservation works, deciding on the location of irrigation tanks, collection of forest produce like myrobalan, controlling fuelwood harvest from a forest area, processing of a minor forest produce such as pine resin, managing a community biogas plant, monitoring the performance of minor irrigation department in supplying irrigation water, marketing eucalyptus poles, etc.

(d) Kind of human social group involved : individual landless labourers, nomadic shepherds, basket weavers, village youth club, forest labourers' cooperative, farmers' co-operative sale-purchase society, countryboat fishermen's union, Mandal panchayats, Zilla Parishats etc.

(e) Mode of involvement : As daily wage labourers outside their own locality, daily wage labourers on their own land, joint managers of fuelwood plantations, watchdogs on execution of works such as nala bunds, planners of land use etc.

(f) Expected benefits of such involvement : Wage earnings, better management of fuelwood plantations, better availability of alternative cooking fuels such as biogas, reduction of grazing pressure, opportunity to put traditional indigenous knowledge to good use etc.

1.5 Evidently, there would be very many ways in which people could be actively involved in managing resources of land, water, vegetation and animal life. The most significant contexts in which this would be relevant would include :

- (a) Soil and water conservation
- (b) Irrigation
- (c) Common lands such as C and D class revenue lands, protected forests, Panchayat lands etc.
- (d) Reserve forest lands
- (e) Livestock and their fodder resources
- (f) Fish and shellfish stocks and
- (g) Biological diversity including crop genetic resources.

1.6 Given below is an illustrative list of possibilities of involvement restricted to productive use of plant biomass from common lands and reserve forest lands and conservation of biological diversity. This is an incomplete list which needs to be added to; it also requires to be fleshed out by providing the details along the six dimensions listed above.

- (a) Individual or collective tree pattas or sanads for use of wood or non-wood usufruct for roadside trees and for trees on various categories of Government lands including C and D class revenue lands, minor forest lands, reserve forest lands.
- (b) Community based management systems for various categories of public lands such as C and D class revenue lands, protected forest lands, minor forest lands etc.
- (c) Tree nurseries for planting on private, community or reserve forest lands through kisans, youth clubs, mahila mandals, schools etc.
- (d) Forest labourers co-operatives/tribal LAMP societies for plantation work, harvest, marketing and distribution of forest produce, production of forest lands etc. on wages or on contract as piece work.
- (e) Forest labourers' or artisans' co-operatives to process forest produce for making baskets, agricultural implements etc.
- (f) co-operative societies for sophisticated processing of forest produce such as preparation of strychnine from **Strychnos nuxvomica**.
- (g) Local forest protection forces for guarding reserve forests



against fire, smugglers etc.

(h) Continuation of traditional protection to sacred trees, sacred groves etc.

(i) Organizing protection of crops against damage by wild animals such as pigs and elephants.

(j) Educational institutions for developing data base on utilization and management of forest lands, traditional resource use practices etc.

## **2. VILLAGE FOREST, RESERVE FOREST AND GRAZING LANDS**

We explore below possibilities of involving people in managing forest and grazing lands in some detail, not because other issues such as management of irrigation tanks are not significant, but because the resource elements mentioned above have received considerable attention in the exercise on which this note is based.

### **2.1 Village forest and grazing land to meet the biomass needs of villagers**

Villagers depend on forests for their day-to-day needs like fuelwood, fodder, timber for house construction and agricultural implements. While farmers owning large tracts of land meet these demands through their agricultural by-products, small farmers and landless have to depend on Government owned land for these needs. The land designated to meet the needs of the people come under Revenue Department, Forest Department and Panchayat. Often the land controlled by the Forest Department is looked after fairly well; however the lands under Panchayat and Revenue Department tend to be neglected due to lack of funds and necessary facilities. There is nowhere any proper plan for growing fodder on Government land. Therefore landless people doing animal husbandry always suffer from scarcity of fodder. People below the poverty line are provided with cattle from various village development projects. But if fodder is not available, the purpose of removing poverty through these projects is defeated. Therefore it is necessary to reserve large area of land and develop them to meet the day-to-day needs of poor villagers. Such land may be called "village forest or grazing land".

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At present all villages do not have such lands. It is necessary to create such village forests and grazing lands in all places where there are Government lands.

The various needs of the local population should be kept in view while creating village forests or grazing lands. Depending on the population of the village, and number of cattle and other livestock, the requirement of fuelwood, fodder, manure etc should be decided. Village forest and grazing lands should be created after calculating how much of these should be drawn from agricultural lands and Government lands.

## **2.2 Village level committee for the development of village forests and grazing lands**

We believe that the cooperation of villagers is essential in the development of the village forests and grazing lands working side by side with the Government departments. The social unit appropriate for this purpose would be much smaller than the area under the jurisdiction of a Mandal Panchayat or a revenue village. These latter units are too large in extent of area and include too large and heterogeneous a population to be effective in the management of common lands and it would therefore be desirable if relatively small homogenous units of settlement such as a hamlet or a village are identified in which all the people are in regular face to face contact. Pieces of common lands close to such a unit settlement should then be identified to fulfill the biomass needs of the concerned population.

Committees working at such village levels should play an active role in the development and preservation of these lands as well as in taking decisions regarding the distribution of the produce. Committees should particularly involve landless agricultural labourers, and small and marginal farmers as members since they depend mainly on these lands. If the region includes tribal populations who are particularly dependent on forest lands then they should also be given a special role in these committees. It is also suggested that women who do lot of gathering should be given high level of representation.

### **2.2.1 Composition of the Committee**

Depending on the size of the families in the village, it is suggested that this committee should have 9 to 17 members in it.

Number of families	Number of members in the Committee
100 and below	9
101 to 300	11 to 13
301 to 600	13 to 15
601 to 1000	15 to 17

If there are more than 1000 families in a village, there should be more than one committee.

## **2.2.2 Election of members to the village committee**

1. There was some difference of opinion as to whether the members of such a committee should be elected or nominated in some fashion. Some believe that any election would introduce an element of politicization and should be avoided. They suggest that workers of local voluntary agencies should play an important role in these committees. Others believe that it would be better if the members are elected by the whole Grama Sabha, perhaps once every three years on the basis of a one person one vote system. However, it is felt that the membership should be reserved according to different categories with higher weightage for the people more intimately dependent on the common lands. The membership could include :

- (i) If there are tribal people in the area, several members including women from amongst them.
- (ii) One or more members from the landless agricultural labourer group and same number of women. Number of these members should be decided depending on the percentage of landless in a village population and number of members in the committee.
- (iii) One or more men from amongst small and marginal farmers and same number of women.
- (iv) One member from landowners.
- (v) One member from village artisan group.
- (vi) One member amongst the other citizens of the village like shopowners, workers etc.

- (vii) One member from Mandal Panchayat.
- (viii) One member from the association of milk producers if the village has such an association or union.

All these members should be residents of the village. In addition, following Government officials should be ex-officio members of the committee.

- (i) Forester. In his absence, forest guard can represent him.
- (ii) Village livestock inspector.

The president of the committee should be elected from the representatives of the village.

### **2.2.3 Staff of the Committee**

To implement the decisions taken by the committee a secretary and if needed a field assistant should be elected / nominated. The secretary should work on an honorary basis while the field assistants may be full-time employees who would serve for watch and ward and carry out any maintenance work required. The secretary should submit his report to the committee from time to time. The committee should pay the salaries/honoraria ultimately from the revenue derived by collecting fees for the fuelwood, fodder etc. supplied to the villagers from the common land. At the initial stage some Government inputs may be necessary towards remuneration.

### **2.2.4 Responsibility of the village level committee**

1. Development and protection of village forests and grazing lands, distribution of forest produce and planning suitable projects on Government's guidelines.
2. Growing fodder yielding plants and trees, arranging programmes with the help of range and division level committees to create awareness regarding wasteland development amongst people.
3. Training the local people about forest development and tree planting with the help of higher level committees.
4. Supervising the work done by the committee's staff.
5. Based on the report submitted by the committee's staff, reporting of people who have violated the rules to forest



officials for taking appropriate action.

6. Reporting any illegal activities in the village forest or grazing land to the forest officials and cooperating with them to prevent such activities.

### **2.2.5 Responsibilities of the staff of the committee**

#### **(a) Secretary**

1. Sending meeting notices as directed by the President.
2. Keeping records of the activities of the committee.
3. Executing the decisions taken in the meetings. Supervising the work of the field assistants.
4. Distribution of forest produce based on the committee's decisions and instruction.
5. Maintenance of accounts and reporting them in meetings.

#### **(b) Field Assistant**

Field assistants may be chosen on the recommendation of the secretary. Depending on the area of the village forest, the number of staff members should be decided.

Following are the responsibilities of the field assistants :

1. Implementation of forest development work based on committee's decisions.
2. Protecting the village forest from fire, animals and thieves.
3. Catching the thieves and handing them over to forest officials and reporting such matters to the secretary.
4. Reporting any illegal activities in the forest to the secretary.

### **2.2.6 Responsibility of the forester/field assistant**

The responsibilities of the local foresters/field assistants who are the ex-officio members of the committee are as follows

1. Taking appropriate action when there is theft or any activity that violates the rules.
2. Advising on technical matters and forest rules in the meetings.

3. Visiting the village forests now and then and giving guidance on technical matters to secretary and field assistants.
4. Reporting the events during the visit to the forest to the village committee.
5. Reporting the activities of the village committee to the higher level committee.

#### **2.2.7 Responsibilities of the village livestock inspector**

1. Giving suitable suggestions regarding animal husbandry, treatment for sterile cattle and sale of cattle in the meetings.
2. Giving technical advice on growing fodder plants in the village forests and helping in activities of the committee in creating awareness amongst people on such matters.

#### **2.2.8 Finances of the village committee**

Funds needed for protection and development of village forests during the first five years should come from the Government. There should be a gradual decline in the financial support from the Government in the next two years so that in seven years' time the committee would become self-supporting.

Based on the guidelines, prices for all the forest produce should be fixed. Rebate should be given to green card holding poor people. Whenever the rebate is given, the difference should be paid by the Government.

By seven years, enough money should be obtained by selling the produce of village forests to meet the expenses connected with staff salaries and forest development activities. Beyond this period, support from the Government should be taken only for educating and training programmes.

If there is surplus of the forest produce, it should be sent to depots of forest department for sale in other villages or to the urban poor. Money thus obtained should be utilized for the development work of the village forests and grazing lands. In case some funds remain after utilizing for development work, they should be used for village improvement programmes.

### **3. ROLE OF VILLAGERS IN WORKING AND DEVELOPMENT OF RESERVE FORESTS**

In addition to their cooperation and participation in taking care of the village forests, villagers' cooperation is needed in the development and protection of reserve forests as well.

It is important to involve people below the poverty line in the working, development and preservation of reserve forests by the Forest Department because,

1. Only these poor people will be willing to work as labourers in forest development activities. If they are convinced that they will be benefitted by working for the Forest Department, the expenses involved in their participation can be brought down.
2. Their dependence on the forests is more as they have little land of their own.
3. In view of social justice also, these people should get benefits of produce from the reserve forests.

#### **3.1 Aims of developing the reserve forests**

1. Conservation of water and soil nutrients of the forest land.
2. Preservation of diversity of plants.
3. Growing plants which yield the kind of fruits, flowers, leaves, seeds etc. that promote employment opportunities for the poor villagers. Villagers would be more enthusiastic in protecting such plants that continually yield usufructs without having to cut them periodically.
4. It is necessary to use some forest land to meet the fuelwood demands of the urban poor and for special occasions. It is also necessary to take steps to reduce the urban people's dependence on fuelwood. This could be achieved by providing stoves that consume less fuel and financial support for getting cooking gas. In addition encouragement could be given for growing timber and fuelwood yielding trees in urban Government lands. With proper planning pressure on reserve forests for supply of wood by felling trees should be reduced as much as possible.

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### 3.2 Involvement of villagers in the development, working and protection of reserve forest.

#### Suggestions

1. Ownership of reserve forests should continue to be with the Forest Department.
2. A society or association of poor people who are willing to work in cooperation with the Forest Department for the protection and development of reserve forests should be formed. Only landless agricultural labourers, small farmers and village artisans should be members of such societies.
3. At present, formation of such societies is possible only under the rules and regulations of Cooperative societies. Under these rules, it becomes difficult for the poor people to run such cooperative societies. Moreover, it is a difficult task to interact with different Government departments dealing with different kinds of matters. Therefore, simple guidelines should be formulated for the working of such people's societies. Forest development projects should have provisions for the formation of such societies.
4. Forest Department should give contracts to these societies instead of to individuals.
5. Contract for collection of minor forest produce should be given to such societies. The societies should be allowed to sell the minor forest produce only after paying the Forest Department the contract amount.
6. Processing of the minor forest produce should also be done in the villages as far as possible. Other Departments of the Government should help in this matter. The Government Departments, research institutions and voluntary agencies should play an important role in identifying minor forest products that help in creating employment to poor villagers.
7. The traditional occupation of the villagers should be taken into consideration while deciding about the types of plants to be grown in reserve forests. The plant species

that yield raw materials needed for them and those that might offer newer jobs should be planted. The poor villagers' societies should take active part in taking such decisions.

8. The chair-person of these societies should be from the respective villages. The ex-officio members should be the forest officials. An advisory committee should be constituted with heads of the Departments of Forests, Animal husbandry, Agriculture and Industry as its members. Representatives from Voluntary organizations should also be part of the committee.
9. It is estimated that about hundred lakh tonnes of fuelwood is being transported to cities as headloads at present. A union of people who sell headloads may be created and made to get involved in growing fuelwood yielding trees and plants. They should be trained to grow and scientifically cut plants. They may be permitted to transport fuelwood through vehicles and to sell fuelwood to poor people at fixed price. After first five years, these societies should be able to grow and sell fuelwood on their own. Lands will have to be specially earmarked for this purpose.
10. Forest dwelling tribals should also be brought together to make societies which could be involved in growing, gathering and processing and selling minor forest products.

#### **4. HIGHER LEVEL COMMITTEE/S**

There was considerable discussion about the constitution of higher level committees to oversee and help in the work of the village level committees / organizations such as forest labourers' societies. One view was that any structure thought of has to be compatible with the Mandal Panchayat and Zilla Parishat system. It was therefore suggested that special committees should be constituted at the Mandal and district level to discharge this function. There was also debate on whether this responsibility should be taken on by the appropriate standing committees of the Panchayat and Zilla Parishat or whether special committees need to be constituted. Experience with the village forest protection committees of Midnapore district

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of West Bengal, suggests that it might be useful to have a further hierarchy of committees between the Panchayat and Zilla level at the forest range and division level. If this is to be implemented the following structure is suggested :

#### **4.1 Range level committee**

The range level committee may have the following composition :

1. Five members from each Mandal. They should be representatives of the following groups : One from landless agricultural labourers group; one from amongst women; one from the artisans; one farmer and one of the members of Mandal panchayat.

These members should be elected by the representatives of the village level committees of each mandal. For example, if there are 10 village level committees, all landless agricultural labourers of these committees should elect one amongst them as a member to range level committee.

2. One of the members should be elected as the President.
3. The range forest officer should be the Secretary of the committee while other forest officials may be ex-officio members.
4. Heads of the Departments of Animal Husbandry, Horticulture, Agriculture and Development at taluk level should be ex-officio members.
5. Voluntary agencies, educational institutions and reserach organizations of a particular range should send representatives as ex-officio members of the committee.
6. Number of representatives from village level committees in range level committees should not be more than 30. In a committee of too many members, it becomes difficult for proper discussions to take place. Therefore it is suggested that if there are more than six Mandals in a range, there should be more than one committee.
7. Government officials of the range level committees are expected to pay frequent visits to the villages, supervise the functioning of the village level committees.



They should also visit the forests and submit reports on the status of the forests to range level committee.

#### **4.1.1. Responsibilities of range level committees**

1. Provide guidance and technical advice on rules and regulation to village level committees.
2. Arrange programmes to create awareness about forest development and growing fodder yielding plants and trees in private lands amongst people.
3. Train the staff of village committees and local people.
4. Review the complaints received from village committees and local forest officials and recommend suitable action.
5. If any village committee fails to function properly, report the matter to division level committee with a recommendation for proper course of action.
6. Supervise and direct the developmental activities of the village forests which are far from the concerned villages.
7. Take steps to increase the participation of poor villagers, societies in the development of reserve forests. Discuss with local poor about the types of plants to be planted.

#### **4.2 Division level committee**

A division level committee may be formed to guide and advise range level committees on technical matters. The composition of this committee may be as follows :

1. Five village level representatives from each range. They should be : One from landless agricultural labourer group; one amongst women; one village artisan, one member of the Mandal Panchayat and one from other categories. The range level members should elect them.
2. Range forest officers should be members.
3. Heads of the Departments of Animal Husbandry, Agriculture, Horticulture at district level should be members.
4. Two members from the Zilla Parishat of the division

elected by the Zilla parishat members.

5. Representatives from voluntary organizations, educational institutions and reserach organizations of the division.
6. From amongst the representatives from the village, one should be elected as president.
7. Deputy Conservator of the Division should act as the Secretary of the committee.
8. Three representatives from the poor villagers' societies.

#### **4.2.1 Responsibilities of the divisional level committee**

1. Provide guidance to range level committees.
2. Arrange to give technical advice to range level committees.
3. Review the recommendation and complaints received from range level committees regarding village level committees and take suitable actions.

#### **4.3 District level coordination committee**

Since the development, planning and administration would now focus on the district as a unit, it would be necessary to coordinate the activities of the lower level committees beginning with the village committees at the district level. This committee would work closely with the Zilla Parishat and the district level set-up of the Government development machinery.

##### **4.3.1 Composition of the Committee**

President of the Zilla Parishat should be the president of the committee and the Chief Secretary of the Zilla Parishat should function as the Secretary. In addition, the committee may be constituted with the following members :

1. Conservators of Forest of the district.
2. Deputy Conservators of Forest of the district
3. Ten members from division level committees from different groups of village societies with different occupations.

4. Heads of the departments of Animal Husbandry, Agriculture, and Horticulture at district level.
5. Representatives from voluntary organizations working in the district.
6. Representatives from educational institutions, research organizations working in the field of environment, agriculture and forestry. If such institutions are not found in the district, representatives may be invited from institutions outside the district.

#### **4.3.2 Responsibilities of the district level coordination committee**

The committee should meet at least once a year.

1. Form subcommittees to coordinate activities of different division level committees.
2. Look into the developmental activities of forest and wastelands of the district.
3. Guidance for future work.
4. Allocate funds earmarked for forest and wastelands and environment improvement projects to different divisional committees of the district.
5. Sanction funds for relevant research activities.
6. Arrange for periodic examination and review of the forests and wastelands of the district and evaluation of the developmental activities.

We believe that such formal local level management must be put into place to effectively involve the people and to ensure that the weaker segments of our population who are concentrated in the rural areas derive substantial benefits from the natural resource base. To quote once again, the Steering Group on Environment, Forests and Wastelands Development for the formulation of the Eight Five Year Plan (1990-95), strengthening community effort is perhaps the only hope for enriching rural resource base.

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## The National Forest Policy

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The Government of India presented in Parliament in December 1988 the National Forest Policy, 1988. We give below the Minister's speech in Parliament on this occasion, followed by the full text of the new policy.

"The issue of revision of the Forest Policy formulated in 1952 has been under the active consideration of the Government for some time. In view of the social, economic and ecological importance of forests, considerable thought has to be given to the multifarious implications of the Forest Policy. Although the 1952 Forest Policy aimed at Forest coverage of one-third of the total land area of the country, due to various constraints, this could not be attained. Rather, extensive diversion of forest land has taken place for non-forest use. The genetic diversity has also been considerably affected by the destruction of flora and fauna. The Government have increasingly realised the great importance of forests in contributing to the ecological stability of the country. This has necessitated a re-examination of the Forest Policy and giving emphasis to the conservation and ecological aspects.

The salient features of the new Forest Policy are :

1. Maintenance of environmental stability through preservation and restoration of ecological balance.
2. Conservation of the natural heritage of the country by preserving the remaining natural forests and protecting the vast genetic resources for the benefit of the posterity.
3. Meeting the basic needs of the people, especially fuelwood, fodder and small timber for the rural and the tribal people.
4. Maintaining the intrinsic relationship between forests and the tribal and other poor people living in and around forests by protecting their customary rights and concessions on the forests.

The main approach outlined is as follows :



1. Existing forest land and forests will be fully protected and their productivity will be improved. Emphasis will be given to enhance forest cover on hill slopes and catchment areas of rivers.
2. In order to conserve biological diversity, a network of sanctuaries, national parks, biosphere reserves and other protected areas will be extended and better managed.
3. The people will be actively involved in programmes of protection, conservation and management of the forests.

We believe that the new Forest Policy will be able to achieve nature conservation and ecological balance at the same time meeting the essential requirements of the people."

### **Text of the Resolution on National Forest Policy, 1988**

#### **1. PREAMBLE**

1.1 In Resolution No. 13/52-F, dated the 12th May 1952, the Government of India in the erstwhile Ministry of Food and Agriculture enunciated a Forest Policy to be followed in the management of State Forests in the country. However, over the years, forests in the country have suffered serious depletion. This is attributable to relentless pressures arising from ever-increasing demand for fuelwood, fodder and timber, inadequacy of protection measures; diversion of forest lands to non-forest uses without ensuring compensatory afforestation and essential environmental safeguards; and the tendency to look upon forests as revenue earning resource. The need to review the situation and to evolve, for the future, a new strategy of forest conservation has become imperative. Conservation includes preservation, maintenance, sustainable utilisation, restoration, and enhancement of the natural environment. It has thus become necessary to review and revise the National Forest Policy.

#### **2. BASIC OBJECTIVES**

2.1 The basic objectives that should govern the National Forest Policy are the following :-

- Maintenance of environmental stability through

preservation and, where necessary, restoration of the ecological balance that has been adversely disturbed by serious depletion of the forests of the country.

- Conserving the natural heritage of the country by preserving the remaining natural forests with the vast variety of flora and fauna, which represent the remarkable biological diversity and genetic resources of the country.
- Checking soil erosion and denudation in the catchment areas of rivers, lakes, reservoirs in the interest of soil and water conservation, for mitigating floods and droughts and for the retardation of siltation of reservoirs.
- Checking the extension of sand-dunes in the desert areas of Rajasthan and along the coastal tracts.
- Increasing substantially the forest/tree cover in the country through massive afforestation and social forestry programmes, especially on all denuded, degraded and unproductive lands.
- Meeting the requirements of fuelwood, fodder, minor forest produce and small timber of the rural and tribal populations.
- Increasing the productivity of forests to meet essential national needs.
- Encouraging efficient utilisation of forest produce and maximising substitution of wood.
- Creating a massive people's movement with the involvement of women, for achieving these objectives and to minimise pressure on existing forests.

2.2 The principal aim of Forest Policy must be to ensure environmental stability and maintenance of ecological balance including atmospheric equilibrium which are vital for sustenance of all lifeforms, human, animal and plant. The derivation of direct economic benefit must be subordinated to this principal aim.

### **3. ESSENTIALS OF FOREST MANAGEMENT**

3.1 Existing forests and forest lands should be fully protected and their productivity improved. Forest and vegetal cover should

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be increased rapidly on hill slopes, in catchment areas of rivers, lakes and reservoirs and ocean shores and on semi-arid, arid and desert tracts.

3.2 Diversion of good and productive agricultural lands to forestry should be discouraged in view of the need for increased food production.

3.3 For the conservation of total biological diversity, the network of national parks, sanctuaries, biosphere reserves and other protected areas should be strengthened and extended adequately.

3.4 Provision of sufficient fodder, fuel and pasture, specially in areas adjoining forest, is necessary in order to prevent depletion of forests beyond the sustainable limit. Since fuelwood continues to be the predominant source of energy in rural areas, the programme of afforestation should be intensified with special emphasis on augmenting fuelwood production to meet the requirement of the rural people.

3.5 Minor forest produce provides sustenance to tribal population and to other communities residing in and around the forests. Such produce should be protected, improved and their production enhanced with due regard to generation of employment and income.

#### **4. STRATEGY**

##### **4.1 Area Under Forest :**

The national goal should be to have a minimum of one-third of the total land area of the country under forest or tree cover. In the hills and in mountainous regions, the aim should be to maintain two-third of the area under such cover in order to prevent erosion and land degradation and to ensure the stability of the fragile eco-system.

##### **4.2 Afforestation, Social Forestry & Farm Forestry :**

4.2.1 A massive need-based and timebound programme of afforestation and tree planting, with particular emphasis on fuelwood and fodder development, on all degraded and denuded lands in the country, whether forest or non-forest land, is a national imperative.

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4.2.2 It is necessary to encourage the planting of tree alongside of roads, railway lines, rivers and streams and canals, and on other unutilised lands under State/corporate, institutional or private ownership. Green belts should be raised in urban/industrial areas as well as in arid tracts. Such a programme will help to check erosion and desertification as well as improve the micro-climate.

4.2.3 Village and community lands, including those on foreshores and environs of tanks, not required for other productive uses, should be taken up for the development of tree crops and fodder resources. Technical assistance and other inputs necessary for initiating such programmes should be provided by the Government. The revenues generated through such programmes should belong to the panchayats where the lands are vested in them; in all other cases, such revenues should be shared with the local communities in order to provide an incentive to them. The vesting, in individuals, particularly from the weaker sections (such as landless labour, small and marginal farmers, scheduled castes, tribals, women) of certain ownership rights over trees, could be considered, subject to appropriate regulations; beneficiaries would be entitled to usufruct and would in turn be responsible for their security and maintenance.

4.2.4 Land laws should be so modified wherever necessary so as to facilitate and motivate individuals and institutions to undertake tree-farming and grow fodder plants, grasses and legumes on their own land. Wherever possible, degraded lands should be made available for this purpose either on lease or on the basis of a tree-patta scheme. Such leasing of the land should be subject to the land grant rules and land ceiling laws. Steps necessary to encourage them to do so must be taken. Appropriate regulations should govern the felling of trees on private holding.

### **4.3 MANAGEMENT OF STATE FORESTS**

4.3.1. Schemes and projects which interfere with forests that clothe steep slopes, catchments of rivers, lakes, and reservoirs, geologically unstable terrain and such other ecologically sensitive areas should be severely restricted. Tropical rain/moist forests, particularly in areas like Arunachal Pradesh,



Kerala, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, should be totally safeguarded.

4.3.2 No forest should be permitted to be worked without the Government having approved the management plan, which should be in a prescribed format and in keeping with the National Forest Policy. the Central Government should issue necessary guidelines to the State Government in this regard and monitor compliance.

4.3.3 In order to meet the growing needs for essential goods and services which the forests provide, it is necessary to enhance forest cover and productivity of the forests through the application of scientific and technical inputs. Production forestry programmes, while aiming at enhancing the forest cover in the country, and meeting national needs, should also be oriented to narrowing by the turn of the century, the increasing gap between demand and supply of fuelwood. No such programme, however, should entail clear-felling of adequately stocked natural forests. Nor should exotic species be introduced, through public or private sources, unless long-term scientific trials undertaken by specialists in ecology, forestry and agriculture have established that they are suitable and have no adverse impact on native vegetation and environment.

#### **4.3.4 Rights and Concessions**

4.3.4.1 The rights and concessions, including grazing, should always remain related to the carrying capacity of forests. The capacity itself should be optimised by increased investment, silvicultural research and development of the area. Stall-feeding of cattle should be encouraged. The requirements of the community, which cannot be met by the rights and concessions so determined, should be met by development of social forestry outside the reserved forests.

4.3.4.2 The holders of customary rights and concessions in forest areas should be motivated to identify themselves with the protection and development of forests from which they derive benefits. The rights and concessions from forests should primarily be for the bonafide use of the communities living within and around forest areas, specially the tribals.

4.3.4.3 The life of tribals and other poor living within and near

forests revolves around forests. The rights and concessions enjoyed by them should be fully protected. Their domestic requirements of fuelwood, fodder, minor forest produce and construction timber should be the first charge on forest produce. These and substitute materials should be made available through conveniently located at depots at reasonable prices.

4.3.4.4 Similar consideration should be given to scheduled castes and other poor living near forests. However, the area, which such consideration should cover, would be determined by the carrying capacity of the forests.

4.3.5 Wood is in short supply. The long-term solution for meeting the existing gap lies in increasing the productivity of forests, but to relieve the existing pressure on forests for the demands of railway sleepers, construction industry (particularly in the public sector), furniture and panelling, mine-pit props, paper and paper board etc. substitution of wood needs to be taken recourse to. Similarly, on the front of domestic energy, fuelwood needs to be substituted as far as practicable with alternate sources like biogas, LPG and solar energy. Fuel-efficient "chulhas" as a measure of conservation of fuelwood need to be popularised in rural areas.

#### **4.4 Diversion of Forest Lands for Non-forest Purposes**

4.4.1 Forest land or land with tree cover should not be treated merely as a resource readily available to be utilised for various projects and programmes, but as a national asset which requires to be properly safeguarded for providing sustained benefits to the entire community. Diversion of forest land for any non-forest purpose should be subject to the most careful examinations by the specialists from the standpoint of social and environmental costs and benefits. Construction of dams and reservoirs, mining and industrial development and expansion of agriculture should be consistent with the needs for conservation of trees and forests. Projects which involve such diversion should at least provide in their investment budget, funds for regeneration/compensatory afforestation.

4.4.2 Beneficiaries who are allowed mining and quarrying in forest land and in land covered by trees should be required to repair and re-vegetate the area in accordance with established forestry practices. No mining lease should be

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granted to any party, private or public, without a proper mine management plan appraised from the environmental angle and enforced by adequate machinery.

#### **4.5 Wildlife Conservation**

Forest Management should take special care of the needs of wildlife conservation, and forest management plans should include prescriptions for this purpose. It is specially essential to provide for "corridors" linking the protected areas in order to maintain genetic continuity between artificially separated sub-sections of migrant wildlife.

#### **4.6 Tribal People and Forests**

Having regard to the symbiotic relationship between the tribal people and forests, a primary task of all agencies responsible for forest management, including the forest development corporations should be to associate the tribal people closely in the protection, regeneration and development of forests as well as to provide gainful employment to people living in and around the forest. While safeguarding the customary rights and interests of such people, forestry programmes should pay special attention to the following :-

- One of the major causes for degradation of forest is illegal cutting and removal by contractors and their labour. In order to put an end to this practice, contractors should be replaced by institutions such as tribal cooperatives, labour cooperatives, government corporations, etc. as early as possible.
- Protection, regeneration and optimum collection of minor forest produce along with institutional arrangements for the marketing of such produce;
- Development of forest villages on par with revenue villages;
- Family-oriented schemes for improving the status of the tribal beneficiaries; and
- Undertaking integrated area development programmes to meet the needs of the tribal economy in and around the forest areas, including the provision of alternative sources of domestic energy on a subsidised basis, to reduce



pressure on the existing forest areas.

#### **4.7 Shifting Cultivation**

Shifting cultivation is affecting the environment and productivity of land adversely. Alternative avenues of income, suitably harmonised with the right landuse practices, should be devised to discourage shifting cultivation. Efforts should be made to contain such cultivation within the area already affected, by propagating improved agricultural practices. Area already damaged by such cultivation should be rehabilitated through social forestry and energy plantations.

#### **4.8 Damage to Forests from Encroachments, Fires and Grazing**

4.8.1 Encroachment on forest lands has been on the increase. This trend has to be arrested and effective action taken to prevent its continuance. There should be no regularisation of existing encroachments.

4.8.2 The incidence of forest fires in the country is high. Standing trees and fodder are destroyed on a large scale and natural regeneration annihilated by such fires. Special precautions should be taken during the fire season. Improved and modern management practices should be adopted to deal with forest fires.

4.8.3 Grazing in forest areas should be regulated with the involvement of the community. Special conversation areas, young plantation and regeneration areas should be fully protected. Grazing and browsing in forest areas need to be controlled. Adequate grazing fees should be levied to discourage people in forest areas from maintaining large herds of non-essential livestock.

#### **4.9 Forest-based Industries**

The main considerations governing the establishment of forest-based industries and supply of raw material to them should be as follows :

- As far as possible, a forest-based industry should raise the raw material needed for meeting its own requirements, preferably by establishment of a direct relationship between the factory and the individuals who
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can grow the raw material by supporting the individuals with inputs including credit, constant technical advice and finally harvesting and transport services.

- No forest-based enterprise, except that at the village or cottage level, should be permitted in the future unless it has been first cleared after a careful scrutiny with regard to assured availability of raw material. In any case, the fuel, fodder and timber requirements of the local population should not be sacrificed for this purpose.
- Forest-based industries must not only provide employment to local people on priority but also involve them fully in raising trees and raw-material.
- Natural forests serve as a gene pool resource and help to maintain ecological balance. Such forests will not, therefore, be made available to industries for undertaking plantation and for any other activities.
- Farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers would be encouraged to grow, on marginal/degraded lands available with them, wood species required for industries. These may also be grown along with fuel and fodder species on community lands not required for pasture purposes, and by forest department/corporations on degraded forests, not earmarked for natural regeneration.
- The practice of supply of forest produce to industry at concessional prices should cease. Industry should be encouraged to use alternative raw materials import of wood and wood products should be liberalised.
- The above considerations will however, be subject to the current policy relating to land ceiling and land-laws.

#### **4.10 Forest Extension**

Forest conservation programme cannot succeed without the willing support and cooperation of the people. It is essential, therefore, to inculcate in the people, a direct interest in forests, their development and conservation, and to make them conscious of the value of trees, wildlife and nature in general. This can be achieved through the involvement of educational institutions, right from the primary stage. Farmers and

interested people should be provided opportunities through institutions like Krishi Vigyan Kendras, Trainers' Training Centres to learn agri-silvicultural and silvicultural techniques to ensure optimum use of their land and water resources. Short-term extension courses and lectures should be organised in order to educate farmers. For this purpose, it is essential that suitable programmes are propagated through mass media, audio-visual aids and the extension machinery.

#### **4.11 Forestry Education**

Forestry should be recognised both as a scientific discipline as well as a profession. Agriculture universities and institutions dedicated to the development of forestry education should formulate curricula and courses for imparting academic education and promoting post-graduate research and professional excellence, keeping in view the manpower needs of the country. Academic and professional qualifications in forestry should be kept in view for recruitment to the Indian Forest Service and the State Forest Service. Specialised and orientation courses for developing better management skills by inservice training need to be encouraged, taking into account the latest development in forestry and related disciplines.

#### **4.12 Forestry Research**

With the increasing recognition of the importance of forests for environmental health, energy and employment, emphasis must be laid on scientific forestry research, necessitating adequate strengthening of the research base as well as new priorities for action. Some broad priority areas of research and development needing special attention are :-

- i) Increasing the productivity of wood and other forest produce per unit of area per unit time by the application of modern scientific and technological methods.
- ii) Revegetation of barren/marginal/waste/mined lands and watershed areas.
- iii) Effective conservation and management of existing forest resources (mainly natural forest eco-systems).
- iv) Research related to social forestry for rural/tribal

development.

- v) Development of substitutes to replace wood and wood products.
- vi) Research related to wildlife and management of national parks and sanctuaries.

#### **4.13 Personnel Management**

Government policies in personnel management for professional foresters and forest scientists should aim at enhancing their professional competence and status and attracting and retaining qualified and motivated personnel, keeping in view particularly the arduous nature of duties they have to perform, often in remote and inhospitable places.

#### **4.14 Forest Survey and Data Base**

Inadequacy of data regarding forest resources is a matter of concern because this creates a false sense of complacency. Priority needs to be accorded to completing the survey of forest resources in the country on scientific lines and to updating information. For this purpose, periodical collection, collation and publication of reliable data on relevant aspects of forest management needs to be improved with recourse to modern technology and equipment.

#### **4.15 Legal Support and Infrastructure Development**

Appropriate legislation should be undertaken, supported by adequate infrastructure, at the Centre and State levels in order to implement the Policy effectively.

#### **4.16 Financial Support for Forestry**

The objectives of this revised Policy cannot be achieved without the investment of financial and other resources on a substantial scale. Such investment is indeed fully justified considering the contribution of forests in maintaining essential ecological processes and life-support systems and in preserving genetic diversity. Forests should not be looked upon as a source of revenue. Forests are a renewable natural resource. They are a national asset to be protected and enhanced for the well-being of the people and the Nation.



## National Policy on Common Property Land Resources

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The National Wastelands Development Board in the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, set up a Policy Advisory Group on Distribution of Benefits from Common Lands. Following the first meeting of the Group on 9th July 1990, the Ministry asked a sub-group under the chairmanship of Shri. V.B. Eswaran, Executive Director, SPWD, to draft a paper on the subject of common lands, their development and management including equitable distribution of the benefits of the development, bringing out the issues for policy and practice. Other members of the sub-group were Shri Anil C. Shah of the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, Ahmedabad, Shri K.B. Saxena, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development and Shri. J.C. Kala, Deputy Inspector-General of Forests, National Wastelands Development Board.

The draft paper was discussed at a meeting of the Policy Advisory Group in February 1991, when it was decided that it should be widely published, for inviting reactions and suggestions from non-government organisations all over the country. Taking these into account, as well as the views of State governments, it is expected that the whole subject would be placed before a national level conference for recommending a national policy.

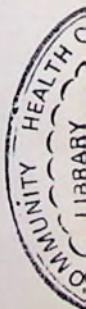
The following extract from the paper prepared by the sub-group contains its essentials. We have also reproduced certain comments by the NWDB on the draft paper, and the responses to them from the Chairman of the sub-group.

Readers would recall that a year ago, with our May-July 1990 issue, we brought the text of the S.P.W.D. Foundation Day Lecture 1990 by Dr. N.S. Jodha on Rural Common Property. That lecture provided the stimulus to many, including people in the government, to give serious thought to the subject.

Readers are requested to write to us, and/or to the Additional Secretary to the Government of India, National Wastelands Development Board, Paryavaran Bhawan, C.G.O. Complex, Lodi Road, New Delhi-110 003, to convey their reactions, comments and recommendations.

In the Indian village scene the common lands - in the

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form of grazing grounds, village wood-lands, dumping and threshing grounds, catchment areas, village ponds, rivers and streams, their banks and beds, other village wastelands, etc-provide an invisible source of employment, income generation and asset accumulation directly and by complementing the private resources.

2. In the country, Common Lands (CLs) broadly fall under the following categories, and are utilised for the purpose indicated against each :

Forest Lands : Environmental stability, preserving natural heritage, production of fuel, fodder, minor forest produce and small timber, for rural population, recreation, etc.

Other Government lands : Building, roads, parks, buffer lands for grazing, fuel gathering etc.

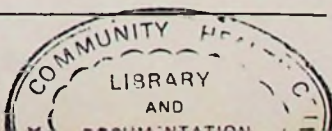
Community Lands : Pasture, grazing, collection of fuelwood, fodder, fruit, fibre, food, medicines, thatch material for artisans, green manure, silt, rearing of cattle, threshing, village ponds, etc.

In India generally all the common lands belong to the State governments, and even where lands for common use are vested in Panchayats, in many States the government has the right to resume such lands. Barring the lands which are under the control of the Forest Department, Irrigation Department or the Railways or some other government departments, all other lands are administered by the authorities of the Revenue Department, under land revenue laws, where provision exists for assignment for public purposes such as grazing, threshing floors, cremation grounds, etc. Government lands can also be assigned to private individuals or institutions by the same authority under land revenue laws and policy/executive instructions of State governments. Where assignments from common lands were made to individuals or for a public purpose (say, grazing), there was generally no follow-up of their management or development.

3. The National Forest Policy, 1988 provides the basic objectives and strategy for the management of the existing forests and the forest lands. Guidelines have also been issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in their letter dated

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June 1, 1990 to all State forest secretaries for the involvement of village communities and voluntary agencies for the regeneration of degraded forest lands. However, the problems concerning other Government and community lands, hereafter called as common property resource lands (CPRLs), have not been addressed so far, and there has been no national or State policy for common lands and their conservation, development and management. The heavy pressure and abuse to which these lands are subjected, coupled with the social structure prevailing in the village make these problems more complex.

4. Despite declining support available from common property resource lands (CPRLs), the rural poor continue to depend on them since the opportunity cost of their labour to harness these options is still lower and their access to these degraded lands is less hindered by others. With passage of time, more and more poor depend upon less and less productive common lands and in the process silently consume this permanent and valuable capital asset. Yet the common lands remain the inexpensive means to support the poor (84 to 100 per cent poor household depend on fuel, fodder and food items) with no burden on the public exchequer.

5. CPRLs contribute significantly, by way of inflows in cash or kind, to private farming. They also provide considerable support for sustenance of farm animals used as draught power as well as source of farmyard manure.

6. CPRLs also have the potential to contribute a minimum natural vegetation for ecological health.

7. Notwithstanding the above, CPRLs have been constantly declining both in extent and productivity. Reduction in areas of CPRLs varying from 30 to 50 percent have been noticed in different States since 1960. Half the resource is badly degraded.

8. The principal causes of degradation are :-

**(i) Population growth**

- both human and cattle, in a situation of absence of technological inputs into CPRLs to improve production of the biomass requirements.

## **(ii) Development forces**

- monetising of rural economy; neglect by those whose dependence on CPRLs was reduced as a result of changes in the rural economy,
- urban influences, diluting the sense of community obligation,
- breaking up of communities into families and families into individuals, resulting in gradual disappearance of values attached to common lands, and consequent collective indifference to CPRLs.

## **(iii) Public interventions**

- the grow more food campaign, the land reforms of the 1950's and the anti-poverty programmes launched from 1970 led to large-scale distribution of common lands to individuals for cultivation,
- indifference of public authorities to protecting the CPRLs encouraged encroachments on a large scale,
- vesting and assigning of common lands in panchayats and other bodies eroded the informal authority of village elders and of traditional institutions,
- more and more new needs started competing with the traditional ones, consequent to the implementation of development plans, (e.g. common lands diverted for kilns, public works, habitations, etc.)
- abolition of grazing tax, levies, compulsory labour for maintenance etc., induced overuse and poor upkeep of common lands. In many cases because of over exploitation, the lands lost their power of regeneration.

## **(iv) Technological changes**

- it encouraged changes in land use and in turn led to privatisation,
- prompted the State to grab most of the benefits, depriving the village community from having a fuller share.

## **(v) Environmental stress**



- drought and floods aggravated degradation of CPRLs.

**(vi) Others**

The right to utilise the produce of CPRL of a particular village, by neighboring villages, has resulted in indifference of the former to manage its CPRLs on a sustainable basis. Similarly, no restrictions are imposed on the shepherd communities who wander in several villages to utilise and consume products from the CPRLs.

**9. Public Interventions in Greening and Management of PLs-**

- A good deal of public intervention has gone into restoring the degraded common lands. But the policies and programmes lacked a CPR perspective, and rehabilitation efforts often remained a State-run project without people's participation.

- Since the mandate of such programmes was afforestation or tree-planting rather than the development of common property resources, the focus was laid on the production technology where recipes of species of trees, grasses, method of seeding the wastelands, thinning and other management techniques were made available, but nothing was done on sensitising the institutions to involve people.

- Experts comment that the "CPRs were virtually converted into commercial fields by Social Forestry Projects"

- The situation was further compounded as the State often appropriated the major portion of the resources without making available the fuller benefits to the village communities, specially the poor.

- On the assumption that the individuals are more interested and efficient in managing PLs/CPRLs as compared to collective efforts, a scheme of Tree Pattas' was evolved by the government. But owing to the refractory nature of degraded common lands, lack of input support, diversion of land by pattadars for crop cultivation and restriction of access to the ex-CPRLs to a very small number of animals and house-holds caused considerable resentment. The Tree Patta Scheme in effect was a privatisation process, for pattas of 15 or 20 years would operate in that manner. In many States these pattas



were not restricted to people of the village, and could be obtained by persons from other places too.

- Benefits sharing was identified as a keyword to involve the community in creation and management of assets on CPRLs. Models for sharing were developed in many States such as Haryana, West Bengal, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu etc. However, productivity will have to be increased in order to maintain the interest of the people in managing these resources.

Yet, justifications for maintaining the CPRLs in extent and productivity are overwhelming.

#### **10. National Policy for Common Property Resource Lands**

In view of the accelerated shrinkage and degradation of CPRLs, owing to a variety of forces as explained earlier, it is expedient and desirable to decide upon a National Policy, which, with the involvement of people in planning, implementation and management, and backed by public system support, viz., legal, administrative and financial, will lead to protection and development of CPRLs at the highest level of productivity on a sustained basis.

#### **11. Objective**

The basic objective of the National Policy is to provide support to the people and their production systems through restoration, protection and development of common property resources lands.

#### **12. Goals**

In order to achieve this objective the policy sets out the following goals :

- Meet all the biomass needs of the community, in terms of grazing, fuelwood, small timber, thatching material, medicinal plants, etc. and the public purposes like dumping and threshing, ponds, etc.
- Income and employment support to the poor at times of vulnerability.
- Support for sustenance of farm animals and thereby

complement the private resource for agriculture.

- Contribute the minimum natural vegetation for ecological health.
- Support to agencies and institutions responsible for management of CPRLs in the discharge of their responsibilities efficiently and equitably.

### **13. Requirements**

The existing common lands must be fully protected and their productivity enhanced to meet the rising demands of the community so that the interest of the people to manage them is sustained. It is also necessary that CPRLs are clearly demarcated and assigned and used by a particular village, that was traditionally depending on it.

### **14. Protection**

Privatisation of CPRLs should be stopped, and exceptions may be made only for very special considerations of policy. Government departmental and public sector requirements of land from CPRLs should be carefully vetted. The encroachments on the CPRLs should be demarcated on the ground and described in records. The State should have adequate legal authority to prevail upon the panchayats and other local bodies for the protection of CPRLs, even to the extent of disqualifying the office-holders of these bodies who themselves do or abet encroachments or are negligent otherwise in protecting common lands.

- Changes in the extent and use of CPRLs should be monitored by undertaking periodic ground surveys in order to ensure that the CPRLs do not decline any further. All tree pattas should be reviewed, and the land resumed if conditions of the patta have been infringed.
- Accountability should be enforced on all those who are expected to protect the CPRLs. Incentives/disincentives may be provided to this end.

### **15. Productivity**

- Inputs of science and technology (S & T) should be applied to enhance the productivity of CPRLs, in quantity and variety

consistent with the felt needs of the community.

- Appropriate scientific and technological options should be placed before the village community (gram saba and its committees) together with implementation packages and costs, for the village people to take a decision on the scope, scale and phasing of its programme and its management. Particularly in common lands in semi-arid and arid regions the technological inputs must be directed towards controlling erosion and conserving soil and water. An integrated micro-management plan could perhaps be prepared for CPRLs at village level on watershed basis. This micro-management plan should be put of the village community and its committees-broadly on the analogy of the village forest committees in joint forest management programmes or the village level committees envisaged in the 1st June 1990 policy letter of the Environment Ministry governing the use of degraded lands by village communities.

- This science and technology input function would need that research institutions and agricultural universities be given specific responsibility to take technological packages to the community at village level (more or less like the strategy of extension and provision of services and supplies for the green revolution from the 1960s).

- Any gaps in S & T should be identified, in order to sponsor R and D work to meet the same.

- Grazing in the CPRLs should be regulated by the community. This may include imposition of grazing fees and rotational grazing wherever feasible. Measures to encourage stall-feeding and upgradation of livestock may be promoted and adopted.

- A portion of the revenue generated from the CPRLs should be reinvested for their sustainable development and management.

## **16. Peoples participation**

- Formation of user groups may be promoted for the management of CPRLs.

- The village community/user group should be involved

in planning, regeneration and management of CPRLs, including distribution of benefits.

- The principle of equity in access and usage regulation must be enforced.

- Voluntary agencies and NGOs of established credibility and commitment may be involved as interface between Government and a local community for the management and development of common lands. They should, however, act as facilitators rather than implementers.

#### **17. Training and documentation**

Orientation programme for legislators, panchayat members as well as government implementers should be organised to emphasise the need, relevance and scope for protection and development of CPRLs.

Documentation of case studies and success stories of government officers, research organisations and VAs, as also critical analysis of failures, for drawing lessons, may be encouraged.

18. Technical problems and constraints surrounding community management may be studied through action-oriented research.

#### **19. Financial support**

The objective and goals of the National Policy on CPRLs cannot be achieved without making funds available on a substantial scale. The support to the people and their production systems, which the development and efficient management of CPRLs would provide, would fully justify the investment.

At the village level, however, many activities can be implemented without the full-time employees which a government department would need. Monitoring and execution by village communities (without the usual procedures of tenders or contracts even for small jobs), combined with social audit at the village level, would probably reduce costs considerably and also make for efficiency of execution.

The NWDB made the following points on the report (draft paper) of the Sub-Group



(i) The goal of the policy should be to meet the biomass needs of the community to the extent possible and not all biomass needs since a part of these needs is met from forest areas and private lands.

(ii) Creating of conditions to sustain the interest of people to manage common lands is as important as increasing the productivity of the common lands.

(iii) That, although protection is rightly emphasised in the report, there was need to give stress to a multi-disciplinary approach in managing the common lands.

(iv) Regulation of live-stock, in addition to regulation of grazing, needed to be mentioned in the report as contributing to enhancing the productivity of common lands.

(v) To ensure re-investment on the common lands, the first charge on the revenue generated from common lands could be that of ploughing it back on the common lands.

(vi) In regard to people's participation, cooperatives could also be mentioned as institutions for ensuring people's participation.

(vii) The report needed to specify a mechanism at the governmental level to maintain an inventory of common lands, their status, productivity, etc.

(viii) The report should bring out the need to support institutions and social and economic forces that would help ensure the collective management of the common lands.

(ix) The new stress on employment generation for building up and maintaining community assets could be stressed as a potential for developing and upgrading the common lands.

The following is the response by the Chairman of the Sub-Group, Shri V.B. Eswaran to these comments.

The goal of the policy has to be to meet all biomass needs of the community, meaning all kinds of biomass; and to the maximum extent where there is not enough common land. I do not wish to bring in the forests as a source of supply for these biomass needs, for the reason that the majority of villages in the country, I imagine, do not have forests next door.

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Where degraded forest lands are made available to village communities for growing their biomass needs, as envisaged in the Environment Ministry's policy letter of 1st June 1990, I would expect the village level organisation to take these into account while planning the development of common lands outside the forest.

May I also point out that different kinds of biomass are needed and used by different sections or strata of the village communities and unless each section or stratum clearly sees the benefits to be derived from the common lands, they are not going to be keen on protecting them; this is the prime condition to sustain the interest of every section/stratum of the local community, and cannot be substituted by any amount of support from the government to "institutions and social and economic forces". We did not stress or dwell upon a multi-disciplinary approach in the efforts at improving common lands' productivity, but we have talked about an integrated micro-management plan. The phrase 'multi-disciplinary approach' is officialese and no village level organisation should need such officialese to get on with its work.

Regulation of livestock should not be a prescription in the policy, but one would expect it to follow as a result of discussion and decisions in the local community organisation and by individual families in the village, as a consequence of assured availability of fodder. There is also a suggestion that reinvestment of revenues from common lands development should be compulsorily a first charge on the revenues. Our approach has been to leave all such matters to the good sense of the village level organisation and not to give top-down prescriptions.

If the village level organisation for the development of common lands is to be a co-operative society as the village community may decide, we should have no quarrel with it. We would not even insist that it should be a registered body of any kind, for that matter.

Whether the government maintains an inventory of common lands would not be, we think, a matter for a policy statement on common lands.

A point has been made that the new stress in the

government on employment generation could well be drawn upon for upgrading common land resources. No one can quarrel with this very useful suggestion. One may only note the caution that government programmes of this kind tend to shrink or expand in financial terms depending on the preferences and constraints upon the government from time to time, and are also quite often constrained by the procedural requirements built into such programmes.

As regards the distribution of the products of development of common lands, our approach has been that this should be left to the village level organisation, and they need not be given a set of prescriptions. Firstly, no prescriptions will apply equally in all villages in the light of their population make-up, livestock needs, the productive potential or the extent of common lands, etc. Secondly, we believe that these matters can best be dealt with at the village level, unfettered by top-down rules. However, we have made it clear in para 16 of the Draft Paper, for instance, that the principle of equity in access and usage regulations must be enforced. It should be read with para 13 of the Draft Paper, which refers to meeting the biomass needs of the community, income and employment support to the poor, and also sustenance of farm animals.

*"When any environmental issue is probed to its origins, it reveals an inescapable truth - that the root cause of the crisis is not to be found in how men interact with nature, but in how they interact with each other; that to solve the environmental crisis we must solve the problem of poverty, racial injustice and war; that the debt to nature which is the measure of the environmental crisis, cannot be paid, person by person, in recycled bottles or ecologically sound habits, but in the ancient coin of social justice."*

**Barry Commoner**  
**In Ecology & Social Action**

**No. 6-21/89-P.P.**  
**Government of India**  
**Ministry of Environment and Forests**  
**Department of Environment, Forests and Wildlife**  
**Paryavaran Bhavan, C.G.O. Complex, B-Block.**

Lodi Road, New Delhi.  
Dated : 1st June, 1990.

To,

The Forest Secretaries  
(All States/Uts)

**Subject:-**Involvement of village communities  
and voluntary agencies for regeneration  
of degraded forest lands.

Sir,

The National Forest Policy, 1988 envisages people's involvement in the development and protection of forests. The requirements of fuelwood, fodder and small timber such as house building material, of the tribals and other villagers living in and near the forests, are to be treated as first charge on forest produce. The policy document envisages it as one of the essentials of forest management that the forest communities should be motivated to identify themselves with the development and protection of forests from which they derive benefits.

2. In a D.O. letter No. 1/188-TMA dated 13th January, 1989 to the Chief Secretary of your State, the need for working out the modalities for giving to the village communities, living close to the forest land, usufructory benefits to ensure their participation in the afforestation programme, was emphasized by Shri. K.P. Geethakrishnan, the then Secretary (Environment and Forests).

3. Committed voluntary agencies /NGOs, with

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proven track record, may prove particularly well suited for motivating and organising village communities for protection, afforestation, and development of degraded forest land, especially in the vicinity of habitations. The State Forest Departments Social Forestry Organizations ought to take full advantage of their expertise and experience in this respect for building up meaningful people's participation in protection and development of degraded forest lands. The voluntary agencies/NGOs may be associated as interface between State Forest Departments and the local village communities for revival, restoration and development of degraded forests in the manner suggested below:-

- (i) The programme should be implemented under an arrangement between the Voluntary Agency/NGO, the village community (beneficiaries) and the State Forest Department.
- (ii) No ownership or lease rights over the forest land should be given to the beneficiaries or to the Voluntary Agency/NGO. Nor should the forest land be assigned in contravention of the provisions contained in the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.
- (iii) The beneficiaries should be entitled to a share in usufructs to the extent and subject to the conditions prescribed by the State Government in this behalf. The Voluntary Agency/NGO should not be entitled to usufructory benefits.
- (iv) Access to forest land and usufructory benefits should be only to the beneficiaries who get organized into a village institution, specifically for

forest regeneration and protection. This could be the Panchayat or the Co-operative of the village, with no restriction on membership. It could also be a village Forest Committee. In no case should any access or tree pattas be given to individuals.

- (v) The beneficiaries should be given usufructs like grasses, lops and tops of branches, and minor forest produce. If they successfully protect the forests, they may be given a portion of the proceeds from the sale of trees when they mature. (The Government of West Bengal has issued orders to give 25% of the sale proceeds to the Village Forest Protection Committees. Similar norms may be adopted by other States)
- (vi) Areas to be selected for the programme should be free from the claims (including existing rights, privileges, concessions) of any person who is not a beneficiary under the scheme. Alternatively, for a given site the selection of beneficiaries should be done in such a way that any one who has a claim to any forest produce from the selected site is not left out without being given full opportunity of joining.
- (vii) The selected site should be worked in accordance with a Working Scheme, duly approved by the State Government. Such scheme may remain in operation for a period of 10 years and revised/renewed after that. The working Scheme should be prepared in consultation with the beneficiaries. Apart from protection of the site, the said Scheme may prescribe

requisite operations, eg. Inducement to natural regeneration of existing root stock, seeding gap filling, and wherever necessary, intensive planting, soil-moisture conservation measures etc. The Working Scheme should also prescribe other operations eg. fire-protection, maintenance of boundaries, weeding, tending, cleaning, thinning etc.

- (viii) For raising nurseries, preparing land for planting and protecting the trees after planting, the beneficiaries should be paid by the Forest Department from the funds under the social forestry programme. However, the village community may obtain funds from other Government agencies and sources for undertaking these activities.
- (ix) It should be ensured that there is no grazing at all in the forest land protected by the village community. Permission to cut and carry grass free of cost should be given so that stall feeding is promoted.
- (x) No agriculture should be permitted on the forest land.
- (xi) Along with trees for fuel, fodder and timber, the village community may be permitted to plant such fruit trees as would fit in with the overall scheme of afforestation, such as aonla, Imli mango, mahua, etc. as well as shrubs, legumes and grasses which would meet local needs, help soil and water conservation, and enrich the degraded soils/land. Even indigenous medicinal plants may be grown according to the requirements and preferences of

beneficiaries.

- (xii) Cutting of trees should not be permitted before they are ripe for harvesting. The forest dept. also should not cut the trees on the forest land being protected by the village communities except in the manner prescribed in the Working Scheme. In case of emergency needs, the village communities should be taken into confidence.
- (xiii) The benefit of people's participation should go to the village communities and not to commercial or other interests which may try to derive benefit in their names. The selection of beneficiaries should therefore, be done from only those families which are willing to participate through their personal efforts.
- (xiv) The Forest Department should closely supervise the works. If the beneficiaries and/or the Voluntary Agency/NGO fail or neglect to protect the area from grazing, encroachment or do not perform the operations prescribed in the Working Scheme in a satisfactory manner, the usufructory benefits should be withdrawn without paying compensation to anyone for any work that might have been done prior to it. Suitable provisions in the Memorandum of understanding (MOU) for this purpose should be incorporated.

Yours faithfully,

Sd/-

(Mahesh Prasad)

Secretary to Government of India.

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Copy for information and necessary action to:-

1. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests/  
Chief Conservator of Forests (All States/  
UTs).
2. Additional Secretary, National Wasteland  
Development Board, Ministry of Environment  
and Forests, New Delhi.
3. Chief Conservator of Forests (Central) of  
all Regional Offices located at:  
Bhubaneswar, Bangalore, Bhopal, Shillong,  
Lucknow, Chandigarh.
4. All DIGFs including N.W.D.B., New Delhi.
5. All Officers of the Ministry of Environment  
and Forests.

Sd/-

(K.M. Chadha)

Joint Secretary to Govt. of India.

Copy for information to the:-

1. Secretary (Co-ordination), Cabinet  
Secretariat, Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi.
2. Secretary, Ministry of Welfare, New Delhi.
3. Secretary, Department of Rural Development,  
New Delhi.

sd/-

(K.M. Chadha)

Joint Secretary to Government of India.

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## REGENERATING THE COMMONS

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*A statement signed by over a hundred noted citizens of India including natural and social scientists, planners, thinkers, politicians activists, environmentalists, government officials, diplomats and others.*

*India is primarily a land of villages, a good proportion of whose inhabitants produce or earn barely enough to purchase the food they need. With access to food itself a serious problem, a majority of villagers cannot afford to pay for their other biomass needs. These needs are considerable quantities of fuel, fodder, small timber, thatch, and organic manure whose continued availability is absolutely critical to most rural households. These needs are met partly from agricultural wastes like cotton sticks and paddy straw, but more importantly from the produce of common lands. The dependence on common lands is even more acute among those sections of the rural population whose mode of livelihood does not depend on cultivated lands, yet whose dependence on biomass resources is total- e.g. shepherds and artisans.*

*The health of the plant-cover of these common lands is therefore critical to the quality of life of hundreds of millions of Indians. Unfortunately, this issue, has received little attention from planners and politicians - in fact, one could argue that government policy has itself been largely responsible for the continuing degradation of those lands. In the last century and a quarter, these lands, earlier under de facto control of village communities, have been progressively taken over by the state; prior to this takeover there did exist a widespread network of village forests, with well knit village communities guarding and managing these resources effectively. But at that time, these communities had the right to exclude outsiders from their community lands and to punish any of their own members who disobeyed the community regulations for the management of such lands. The British, by emphasizing state monopoly over forest protection and production, took away such authority. The divorce thus introduced between use and control of resources had disastrous consequences, with the new open access resources being subject to continued over*

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exploitation. Unfortunately, this trend has intensified after independence. While the government has favoured the option of taking more and more lands under its control, at the same time, it has greatly intensified commercial forest operations to meet the needs of an expanding forest industries sector. This entire process has been punctuated by bursts of widespread conflict between the state machinery and villagers who feel that their longstanding claims on forest produce has been neglected in favour of meeting urban and industrial demand for forest raw material. These conflicts, which are not likely to abate so long as the present system continues, have had an adverse impact on the natural environment.

While our common lands are getting progressively degraded, most rural households continue to be crucially dependent on biomass resources for their survival. Regenerating the commons is therefore one of the major development challenges of the day. Unfortunately, there are forces in motion for the privatization of these lands and their further alienation from those whose dependence on them is the most acute. Thus some state governments are handing over common lands to joint sector companies for the exclusive purpose of growing industrial raw material for the private sector. At the same time, the privatization of such lands within the village is also no solution, for experience has shown that such transfers ultimately end up benefiting a small class of richer landowners at the cost of the bulk of the villagers.

Neither increased state control nor privatization (under whatever guise) are therefore a solution to the biomass crisis of the majority of our rural population. We believe that the only ecologically sustainable and socially just option, especially in the long run, is to design an effective system of community management based on local control. Despite the increasing fragmentation within village society itself, the establishment of a decentralized, participatory system of forest management is the only way out. Research has shown that for both bureaucracy and industry, there are powerful disincentives under the present political-administrative system which inhibit the ecological sustainable management of common lands. In fact, the only people whose self interest is firmly linked to the good management of common lands are the local landless, the

small and marginal farmers, the pastoral nomads, and the basket weavers and other artisans and among all these social groups, it may be pointed out that it is the women folk who presently bear the brunt of the shortages, and are also most aware of the need to regenerate the commons. It is this self-interest that could ultimately save those lands and the people themselves, if it can be channelized properly. This is a difficult task, for these people are presently disorganized and with little political and economic clout. **But it must be done.** We, the undersigned, believe that the time has come for a major public debate which will come up with appropriate legal and institutional mechanisms, to ensure that our common lands are effectively integrated with the lives and livelihood of the poorer sections of the rural population. This debate as indeed the more serious job of regenerating the soils, the water cycle and the vegetation of the commons, will require the participation of all concerned sections of our society - apart from the concerned villagers themselves, natural scientists, social scientists, voluntary agencies, politicians and government officials.

**"Our mother Earth has enough to satisfy all our needs but not enough to satisfy our greed."**

**M.K. Gandhi**



*"Nature can never be managed well unless the people closest to it are involved in its management and healthy relationship is established between nature, society and culture. Common natural resources were earlier regulated through diverse, decentralised, Community Control systems. But the State's policy of converting common property resources into government property resources has put them under the control of centralised bureaucracies, who in turn have put them at the service of the more powerful. Today, with no participation of the common people in the management of local resources, even the poor have become so marginalised and alienated from their environment that they are ready to discount their future and sell away the remaining natural resources for a pittance."*

**- from the statement of "Shared Concern  
in the Second Citizens Report on  
India's Environment".**

**Samaj Parivartana Samudaya, Dharwad et al.**