

EVALUATION REPORT ON SOCIAL FORESTRY PROGRAMME, AUGUST 1987

1. The Study

Social Forestry Programme was conceived in the country as most effective means of raising plantations of quick growing species on all available private and community waste land outside the forest areas to ensure environmental protection by improving the life support systems of land, water and vegetations. The study was undertaken by the Programme Evaluation Organisation at the instance of the Advisory Board on Energy to assess overall impact of the programme on the local population, especially the rural poor in terms of employment generation through forestry programme on public and panchayat land.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the Evaluation study were as follows:

- i) to study the process of implementation of the programme including preparatory steps laid down and actually followed and the extension efforts to motivate the rural community to adopt the programme,
- ii) to assess the organisational and administrative infrastructure for programme implementation,
- iii) to study the area covered, species planted, system of distribution of produce, if any, to the rural poor, and
- iv) to study the economic and ecological impact on the local population, particularly the rural poor.

3. Sample Size/Criteria for Sample Selection

The study was conducted at five levels namely (a) Forest Division, (b) Range, (c) Village, (d) Beneficiaries and (e) Nursery

Sixteen states were selected for the purpose of study. The criterion for selection at all levels was the absolute number of seedlings distributed through all sources during 1981-82 or 1982-83 as the case may be. It was decided that 32 Forest Divisions would be selected in place of the Revenue Districts according to the size of the states and the number of PEO field

units in different States. The Divisions were selected on the basis of highest achievement in terms of seedlings distributed during the reference year.

Two ranges from each Division were selected representing the one range showing the best performance and the other having the performance nearest to the average. In each selected range four villages were selected which were stratified into three groups according to the number of beneficiaries viz. (i) five or more, (ii) three to four, and (iii) one or two.

The number of villages selected were 256. From each of the selected village, five beneficiaries under farm forestry and five landless labourers who had worked on block plantation, on panchayat and public land were selected at random. The actual number of the beneficiaries selected was 989 whereas the number of selected landless labour beneficiaries were 445. 63 Nurseries were selected for the study on the basis of maximum number of seedlings distributed by them during 1983-84 in the selected range.

4. Reference Period

The survey was conducted during 1984-85 and the secondary data/information were collected for the year 1981-82 and 1982-83.

5. Main Findings

1. In 16 selected divisions the social forestry programme was implemented by the regular officials of the Forest Department in addition to their normal workload without any extra staff support. However, in a few cases, extra staff were sanctioned for implementation of the specific schemes.
2. No extension and motivation staff at the gross-root level were appointed in six states, whereas in some states posts were filled up partially.
3. The officials at various levels involved in the programme were not trained in Social Forestry and there was no permanent arrangement for their training. It was also observed that the Forest Department officials did not prefer their posting in Social Forestry Organisation.
4. The implementation of the programme was affected in some of the States due to lack of coordination between the Forest Department and Block Agencies. No follow-up action was taken up by the implementing Agencies in almost all the States for getting feed back on implementation through regular field visits.

5. The size of some of the selected Nurseries was very small, whereas they were required to cover a very wide area in terms of number of villages. some of the selected Nurseries covering more than 100 villages each, had also worked much below capacity.
6. In some of the States, the beneficiaries under Farm Forestry were in fact, big farmers whereas the programme was meant for small marginal farmers.
7. In some States actual seedlings distributed was reported to be more than what was targeted for. The data base of the programme was not properly maintained in some of the States.
8. In five States funds were sanctioned in time whereas in a few States the programme suffered due to late release of funds by the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA) under Social Forestry Components of National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Drought Prone Areas Programme, etc. (DPAP).
9. Involvement of voluntary agencies in Social Forestry Programme appeared to be nominal. In as many as 20 out of 32 selected Divisions no involvement of voluntary agencies was reported. In other selected Divisions Voluntary Agencies helped either in motivation work or in distribution of seedlings.
10. Strip plantations on public land had not yet matured in most of the States. Some informal arrangements had, however, been made in a few states for sharing of the produce of public plantations as and when matured.
11. Of 256 selected villages block plantations on public and community land were raised in 23 villages. While in a few states the panchayats were either not inclined to hand over village grazing/community land for raising block plantations or they hardly owned any land.
12. Eucalyptus was most commonly grown by about two-thirds of the selected beneficiaries. In as many as ten states 70 to 100 per cent of the selected beneficiaries planted Eucalyptus. Next in order of preference were other local varieties grown by 43 per cent of the sample beneficiaries followed by fruit trees planted by 23 per cent of them.
13. More and more selected beneficiaries reported lower survival percentage of the seedlings due to scarcity of water, browsing of plants by animals and attack of pests and insects.

14. There was no remarkable achievement in the major sources of fuelwood, fodder and small timber for the beneficiaries as they had to foot the distance for collection of fuelwood and fodder.
15. Prospects of employment and steady wages at higher rates were reported to be the major benefits arising out of the wage employment on public plantation programme. However, in four states wages paid under the programme were less than the minimum wages fixed under the Act.

6. Major Suggestions

1. Extra monetary incentives may be considered for the officials for the proper motivations of staff posted in the Social Forestry Organisation. In order to give a thrust to Social Forestry separate trained staff should be provided at all levels including extension and motivation staff at the grass-root level.
2. The training in extension methodology and rural sociology should be considered essential as in some of the Divisions the programme suffered for want of training.
3. The supply of seedlings should be priced in order to prevent the wastage of the same. The seedlings to small marginal farmers may be supplied free upto a certain limit and beyond that limit supply should be priced.
4. There is need for setting up of more nurseries in rural areas for wider coverage. For quick and large scale multiplication of seedlings without any impairment in quality, technological innovations like tissue culture should be encouraged.
5. Funds for raising of seedlings in the nurseries should be made available well in time by December/January at the latest.
6. The voluntary organisations should be strongly associated with the implementation of the programme. However, the capabilities of dynamic voluntary organisations should be assessed in advance and they may be encouraged to adopt a group of villages for free plantation programme.
7. There should be an integrated approach involving all concerned Departments for coordinated action for successful implementation of Social Forestry. Target setting under various components of the Programme should be the responsibility of District Level Committee. The programme at the grass roots should be implemented through block and village level committees with people's participation at all levels.

8. Incentives in the form of fertilisers and insecticides should also be distributed free to small marginal farmers and weaker sections of the Society.
9. The system of maintenance of records especially distribution of register of seedlings, needed to be considerably improved in most of the States.
10. Seedlings should be made available at the plantation sites for which more nurseries should be set up.
11. It was suggested that chowkidar should be engaged for the proper maintenance of plants. There was also need for motivating the villagers through extension work about usefulness of plants and involving school children in the plantation programme.
12. To prevent the menace of stray cattle it was felt that unrestricted grazing of animals should be regulated in the village under the supervision of the local panchayat.