PARKS FOR PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

Biosphere reserves were developed in part to integrate conservation with regional development objectives and thereby to include protected areas (PAs) with in the resource management of inhabited areas. But almost all the PAs in the country face difficulties because of the existing and growing conflict between the protected area managers and the local people (user group) who depend on the forest and it's resources, in implementing the biosphere reserve concept. The crux of the problem lies in perceiving the environment and it's protection differently. To fill the gap, the Eco-development strategy was evolved, with an integrated approach to conservation and sustainable utilisation of biological diversity both for environmental protection and to support agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fisheries.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades two distinct but interactive macro processes have severely affected India's environment; the depletion of its natural resource base and the increasing appropriation of what is available for the benefit of a few. India is one of the 12 identified mega biodiversity centres of the world. It has also two of the 18 identified hot spots - the eastern Himalayas and the western ghats. The vast diversity represented in our alpine forests, rain forest, mangrooves in Sundarban, in our mountains, rivers, lakes and ponds, in hot deserts of Rajasthan and cold deserts of Ladakh. All this provide homes for a great variety of wildlife and plant species.

Since 1971 India's population has increased from 548 million to 844 million, a phenomenal 54 percent, in which much of the population is rural and directly dependent on natural resources for their immediate welfare. It has resulted in an increase in biotic pressures and consumerism which have taken a heavy toll on the shrinking forests and natural resources.

In India there are 75 declared National parks and 428 sanctuaries covering 1,42,924 sq. km. which is 4.2 percent of geographical area. And there are about 48 million forest dwellers living with in or in the vicinity of forests for whom forests represent the basis of their livelihood and means of survival. Fifty-six percent of the national parks and 725 of the sanctuaries in India have people living with in them. A major threat to PAs is in the form of biotic pressures by way of collection of fuelwood, fodder, grazing, collection of timber and minor forest produce, encroachment and poaching. In this scenario a lot of debate is going on, to evolve new strategies for the management of natural resources, especially forest resources in the country where these resources are controlled and managed by the respective State Governments. A consensus is emerging to blend social factors with the technical factors in order to effectively manage our parks and reserves with the help and involvement of local people.

ECODEVELOPMENT AS A STRATEGY

The term eco-development proposes an dynamic interaction between the existing systems operating in the government and the local people. It is a concept of utilising all the available physical and biological resources of an area in an integrated manner in order to ensure sustained supply of resources for the overall development, consistent and in conformity with ecological needs.

1. Ecodevelopment is basically a package of tools

2. A programme to reduce resource dependency on forests by the people living around them by suggesting viable alternatives. Introduction of improved methods in the agricultural practices, encouraging fuel wood and fodder plantations in the village common lands,

3. Means to increase agricultural productivity through water and soil conservation, irrigation, use of quality and disease resistant seeds so on and so forth.

Ecodevelopment is a comprehensive programme devised as a style of development which takes account of ecological and cultural contexts as well as present and longterm needs in attempting to reach both ecological and sociological sustainability. The important rationale of the Ecodevelopment plan is securing local peoples' participation in the conservation issues, planning and management.

HOW TO INVOLVE AND SUSTAIN PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION?

People's dependence on the forests has been for the fulfilment of what is termed as the "Five F's -- Fuel, Fodder, Food, Fibre and Fertiliser needs. Hardin (1968) believed that common property resources, if handed over to people would be destroyed by the 'free riders'. Olson (1965) argued that individuals would not go for collective action in the rational management unless they are forced to do so. There are optimistic thinkers like Kimber (1981), Runge (1984), and Wade (1987) who believe that collective action in the management of community property resources is possible under certain conditions.

Wade felt that people work collectively only if a strong felt need exists which can not be met individually.

The truth however is in between, and basically linked to Socio-economic and cultural life of the people. The philosophy of common property resource management has very few success to its credit in developing nations. This is probably on account of lack of proper people's institutions at the grassroots level and absence of understanding the practical aspects at the operational level (Bahuguna, Luthra & Rathore, 1993). Hence traditional socio-cultural institutions that enhance resource conservation should be safeguarded by winning the confidence and hence the participation of the people. Increased equity in distribution of resource benefits

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within the limits of social acceptability encourages greater participation by the people (user groups). The more resources the more likely the resource is to be managed for long term productivity.

PEOPLE KNOW MORE

There are many reasons why people inhabitating the countryside would be the stewards of the natural resource base. My belief is strengthened that if we wish to save and conserve our forests and our environment then we have to hand over the stick to the people, though a significant proportion of these people still depend on fuelwood, dung and timber for their own use and thatch gathered with their own labour to fulfil many of their basic needs. They graze their livestock and also depend on natural water sources to drink, bathe and wash. Hence, in many ways they are a part of the natural ecosystem. Any degradation of the environment hurts these people directly. A more important fact is that the rural villager and his livestock and the natural diversity can coexist and indeed may depend on each other. Since he has a direct and intimate relationship with the vegetative life around him, in the long run he has found ways and means to protect and preserve his own environment and these have been finely-kneaded in his behaviour, his culture and his traditions.

CONSERVATION MEASURES

In the last few decades international conservation programmes have sought environmental protection through integration of conservation goals with local inhabitant's needs and aspirations. Though the people's participation is a popular subject in academic discussions, little research / field work has been undertaken to document examples of cooperative or participatory social relations in Protected Areas. The National Wildlife Action Plan (1973) set out priorities for Wildlife conservation. But the Government has to take various steps to analyse the issues emerging out in managing the PAs at regional and national level.

LAST WORD

I don't have the doubt about the integrity of our policy makers and state machinery and their concern for the environment and forests is real and serious. But while worrying about the environment they are not concerned enough on the element of human being who is living in it's midst nor putting sufficient effort towards fulfilling his needs. Today the bureaucracy not only controls all natural resources but it also has a monopoly over all the information. The immense store of practical ecological knowledge of our ecosystem people is totally ignored. A reasonably knowledgeble villager or a tribe will roughly have information on about a hundred and more trees, herbs and their value which even our specialists do not have. I believe an effective system of management of the country's environment has to be grounded in the motivation and practical ecological knowledge of the people. Otherwise there won't be much people's involvement in our environmental activities and conservation programmes which then get relegated merely to figures on the paper.

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A BRIEF NOTE ON WILDLIFE DIVISION SHIMOGA

D.C.F., Shimoga

Shimoga Wildlife Division is working mainly on the improvement of habitats. This Division consists of the following sanctuaries.

1. SHETTIHALLI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY is located at a distance of 10 km. away from Shimoga city with an area of 395.60 sq.km. The sanctuary includes valuable forests and a variety of fauna. State and Central Government are providing funds for the developmental works.

2. MANDAGADDE BIRD SANCTUARY is part of the Shettihalli Wildlife Sanctuary. The area of the bird sanctuary is a natural island in Tunga river where varieties of birds come for nesting.

3. SHARAVATHY VALLEY WILDLIFE SANCTUARY is located at a distance of 30 km. from Sagar Taluk. The area of the sanctuary is 431.23 sq.km. The world famous Jog Falls is part of the sanctuary. The flora of the sanctuary consists of sholas, grassy banks and evergreen forest. It includes varities of fauna. State and Central Government provide the funds for its developmental works.

4. GUDAVI BIRD SANCTUARY is located about 15 kms away from Soraba town. The area of the sanctuary is 182 Acres. Many varities of birds are come for nesting to Gudavi.

5. THE LION AND TIGER SAFARI was established in 1988 at Thyavarekoppa, situated at a distance of 10 km. away from Shimoga city. The total extent of area is 230 acres, out of which 73 acres have been developed as a safari. Now there are 5 enclosures, viz. Tiger enclosure, Lion enclosure, Herbivores enclosure, Panther enclosure and Birds enclosure.

It is a place of education, entertainment and enlightenment for the visitors and also students of schools and colleges. Nature camp facilities have been Provided to students and public. Daily we receive 1000-1500 visitors.

6. MINI ZOO AT SHIMOGA is located adjacent to Gandhi Park It exhibits Bear, Hyena, Porcupine, Python, Crocodile, King Cobra, Birds, Tortoise, Jungle cat, Lion Tailed Macaque as well as a variety of herbivores.

7. ELEPHANT CAMP AT SACREBYLE is located 13 km. away from Shimoga city on the bank of Tunga River. It is accesible to visitors who find it very interesting.

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