

Options for Strengthening Forest Policy Implementation Strategies in Relation to Forest Resources and Biodiversity

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Abstract: *The 2018 draft National Forest Policy is people centric and the goal is "to safeguard the ecological and livelihood security of people of the present and future generations based on sustainable management of the forests for the flow of ecosystem services for eco-security." The present article proposes few options that can further strengthen the strategies already mentioned in the draft guidelines to achieve the sixteen point objectives envisaged in the said policy document. The concept proposed here may be used for undertaking national adaptation planning and in scientific projects and research design particularly for deciding on forest resources and biodiversity conservation with respect to climate change.*

Keywords: Forest policy, forest resources, forest biodiversity

1. Introduction

India's environment policy is anchored in the constitution of India. Article 48-A of the constitution says that "The state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country". The Indian development process is guided by the aspirations of making India prosperous and progress on the path of "Development without Destruction" (INDC document). The citizens of India have been incorporated as an integral part of saving the environment and mitigate climate change through the Constitution of India vide Article 51-A. "It is the fundamental duty of every citizen to protect and improve the natural environment including forest, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures".

The broad policy frame work on environment and climate change is laid down by the National Environment Policy (NEP) 2006. The National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) provides more inputs to the required interventions. The NAPCC is being implemented across the length and breadth of the country through the eight National Missions, namely, 1. National Solar Mission, National Mission on Enhanced Energy Efficiency, 3. National Mission on Sustainable Habitat, 4. National Water Mission, 5. National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Eco-system, 6. National Mission for a Green India, 7. National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture and 8. National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change. There are several strategies and policies that have been created to act as catalyst to the above mentioned national missions. The INDC document also mentions that India is committed to setting up on INR 3,500 million (USD 55.6 million) National Adaptation Fund. therefore it is imperative to have a very practical approach to develop strategies to implement the policy objectives.

The Ecosystem based Approach for strategizing policy implementation: The Ecosystem based approach promoted by the IUCN can be a strategic adaptation tool with reference to forest resources and biodiversity

conservation for climate change. This approach reduces social vulnerability and promotes resilience of ecosystem and society. It can be designed on best available science and local knowledge and also foster knowledge generation and diffusion.

To change things we need to change people. Build capacity for "Self help": Under the ecosystem based approach the local institutions both private and public, NGO's and civil societies become key actors in adaptation planning. They have maximum understanding of their environment and ability to detect changes in vulnerability. Most often the public sector management philosophy is centred around efficiency and cost recovery while the local governments fail to address environmental problems due to their limited resources. Therefore rural people need to become actively engaged in planning and management of their own resources.

Hence the need to device strategies to change the mindset and attitude of stakeholders and to enhance their capacity for "self - help" Lawrence et al. [2001]. Wise [1998] observed that subsidies prevent the farmers and local communities from becoming more competitive and tend to lock them in a "cycle of dependency". Too many years of government support leads to inability of people to embrace change and inculcates a "victim mentality" in the rural populace. This is often regarded as a major factor in the failure of acknowledging policy benefits and implementation (Ganon, 1998).

Adaptation strategies need to take into account social and human behavioural factors also: People use adaptation strategies on their own to achieve their individual goals, when faced with environmental constraints. The government policies aim to form rational mechanisms that optimise all values and uses of a natural resource both for present and future. But people's responses and adaptations to systems of government management are not based on complete rationality. For e.g. marginally poor people are less likely to take only their share of common property resources as the short term imperative to feed themselves out weights longer

resource condition considerations. It is human behaviour that people take more than their share if they perceive a resource will disappear quickly [Lawrence et al 2001].

Thus the adaptive behaviour which people undertake to achieve their needs and satisfy their beliefs and values make impossible to have complete control over large populations. Hence there is a need for strict enforcement of laws for limited access and other regulatory devices that would limit competition. But very often strict enforcement of law does not lead to effective results. Therefore the ecosystem based approach will help in unintended negative social and environmental impact. Because of this participatory planning, recognizing the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable is essential.

The ecosystem based approach recognizes the underlying causes of vulnerability such as power imbalances and entitlement of resources. Planning should focus on equality and the special needs of marginalized social groups and promote active, free meaningful and full participation of stakeholders. An ecosystem based approach that aim to empower people as rightful decision makers of their own future should be envisaged and local communities should be involved in monitoring to enhance efficiency and increase self help capacity building and learning.

2. Acknowledgements

The author thankful to the Director, GBPNIHESD, Almora for providing all the necessary facilities.

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