

UNIT 7

EXTENSION AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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7.0 INTRODUCTION

People's participation is the fundamental requirement for implementation of JFM. The government can only provide critical inputs like seedlings, money and technology but until people are made to realise the importance of protecting forests and raising trees in community lands which are not being used to their fullest capacity, they are bound to have indifferent attitude towards JFM. A major cause for the dismal performance of social forestry programme was lack of awareness among people about the benefits of the programme. It has been realised by the government that the past protective measures like posting forest officials in sensitive areas, intensive patrolling and other similar arrangements have not brought about any tangible results in terms of arresting deforestation. The government and other agencies involved in forest management have now come to the conclusion that until parallel efforts to educate and motivate the communities to co-operate with forest managers are made, it would be impossible to protect the forests. Likewise the JFM programme is also not likely to succeed unless community participation is ensured.

Participation through education is most reliable because education properly given, results in a sustainable and desirable change in the behaviour of the people. The need has now emerged for imparting training to all involved in implementation of JFM in extension and communication skills so as to enable them to effectively transfer the technologies, skills and experiences to the communities and other personnel involved in the programme. The idea is that the success cannot be achieved only by involving

knowledgeable and skilled personnel. Such persons ought to have skills in the areas of communication so that the doubts, apprehension, fixed notions about the government programmes prevailing among local communities could be effectively removed and favourable attitudinal change towards JFM can be created.

Extension can play a vital role in implementation of JFM by way of dissemination of appropriate innovations and information to the people concerned. The changing scenario offers a great scope for “Forestry Extension” to contribute by bringing the people to the nodal point in the linkage between different critical components of forest management. The extension agent helps the people to identify their needs which itself motivates them to the research and indigenous management. A personnel trained in extension and communication can also help a great deal in conflict management and developing harmonious relations between participating communities, government departments and NGOs. The job of extension worker is not only to help communities, which decision to take but he is also expected to train them how to take the decision.

Traditionally, the extension in forestry have been limited to publicity through posters, leaflets, newsletters, films, etc. But extension in JFM will involve helping people examine their own situation, problems and needs in relation to forests and to facilitate their voluntary action. The extension work also includes identifying different interest groups in the community. In the extension programme building process is to start from the community level with the felt need by working with the people rather than working for the people which is also the essence of JFM.

7.1 PARTICIPATORY EXTENSION EDUCATION

Extension education is non-formal, need-specific, problem oriented and flexible. The instructions need to be learner centered. The role of extension agent in a non-formal education situation is more of a facilitator rather than an instructor, thus making the extension education more participatory and two way process. The extension education process should start from the learner’s level, primarily by understanding their felt needs which act as the motivating force for their participation in the education process. Ironically, many a time unfelt needs are more important than felt needs and the real gap between what is and what ought to be is not known to the people. In such situations the extension process should start by converting the “unfelt needs” into “felt needs” and this is where the extension agent functions as a non-formal educator in the true sense.

Extension educator can build up “credibility” which is an important factor for good extension work if the client group is convinced that the extension agent is trying to serve their interest and real needs. One of the important functions of extension worker is to involve large number of persons in achieving desired common ends. For this local capacity is to be built up to choose the alternatives and to organise their self help efforts. Most members of local community will willingly co-operate in carrying out a project, which they conceived and decided to undertake. The experience shows that people become dynamic and develop a sense of ownership if they are permitted to take decisions concerning their own affairs, exercise responsibility in planning and implementation and carry out projects in their own localities or neighbourhoods.

7.2 PROBLEM SOLVING APPROACH

The approach of an extension worker should be "problem solving". A professional extension agent should address following pertinent questions before starting the extension mission.

- (i) **Should the extension agent aim at solving all the problems or selected ones ?**
It will depend upon the capability of the worker and resource availability. The thumb rule is that even if the extension worker aims at solving many problems of the communities, he should tackle only "one problem at a time". This implies that problems are to be prioritised. While prioritising the problems the focus should be on people's perception.
- (ii) **Should the extension agent offer the solutions for the problems or should he guide the people in solving the problems themselves ?**
The first approach would be more suitable for technical problems like choice between species for plantation, while the second is desirable in cases of value judgements like land use pattern where local knowledge and experience play vital role.
- (iii) **For developing solutions for local problems the extension workers are often in the dilemma whether to use research results or indigenous knowledge ?**
In such situations it is suggested that over emphasis on station-based research often results in disenchantment among the people, whereas the indigenous knowledge system alone may not be adequately strong to solve all types of problems. The extension worker should therefore, carefully integrate the research results and indigenous knowledge for effective problem solving.
- (iv) **To whom is extension advice directed ? Is it directed to every one living in a certain area, to specific groups or to those who are likely to make a decision ?**
Extension effort is in fact directed to every one who needs advice on a specific subject. It is called as target group. The above discussion may seem to imply that the initiative for giving extension advice lies with the extension agent. In fact, the initiative often comes from a villager or group of villagers who recognize(s) the need for expert information for solving problems/decision making. Good extension agents do little more than just to try to satisfy these demands, which has the advantage that their work then coincides with the problems that villagers consider to be important. They also help the villagers become aware of unfelt problems, thus avoiding the danger of helping to solve only yesterday's problem but not those of tomorrow.

7.3 FEED FORWARD EXTENSION APPROACH

The emerging feed forward approach in extension emphasises on circular pattern of flow of information. The local experts of indigenous knowledge occupy the centre space in this integration of indigenous knowledge with modern technologies and their transfer to the communities are the major functions of this model. For this to happen it is suggested that "power must shift" from professional outsiders to knowledgeable local people. Equal partnership between research, extension and local people, based on sound feed forward extension approach is best suited for JFM.

7.4 MOTIVATING PEOPLE FOR PROTECTING FORESTS

Until a few decades ago forests of north-east and its produce were abundantly available to local communities. Even today in most parts of the region, forest and 'unwanted vegetation' is almost synonymous. Thus convincing people to protect the forests in places where they have not been degraded below a critical level when they start feeling the scarcity of goods and services provided by the forests is the most difficult task an extension worker of north-east is likely to face.

Further, in most hill areas of north-east, shifting cultivation is practised by the local people and there is no boundary between agriculture and forest lands and therefore while motivating people to protect forest, the extension worker is to confront the problems of availability of land. Moreover, the communities are often not very sure of the return on their investment. Sometimes, state government provides some incentives for promoting JFM. These must be provided on the basis of logical considerations rather than blindly subsidising input components. In fact, incentives should be a tool to remove the constraints like lack of awareness/interest, infrastructural facility etc. and to compensate risk taking abilities of early adopters of innovations. Therefore, an extension worker has a very important role to play in motivating the people based on knowledge and attitudinal change (a bit slow but sustainable process) instead of making them merely dependent on subsidies which is a highly temporary phenomenon.

7.5 PROMOTING PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT IN FOREST MANAGEMENT

So far extension activities in forestry sector have been limited to publicity campaigns. But extension for participatory forest management involves helping people to examine their own situation, problems and needs in relation to forests and to facilitate their voluntary group action.

People's involvement in forest management includes four levels :

- participation in planning and decision making
- participation in implementation of projects
- participation in monitoring and evaluation
- participation in sharing benefits

A framework for promoting participation of rural poor in the development programme suggested by Yadav (1980) is of worth consideration.

7.5.1 Benefit-generating Activity

Mobilisation of people around economic and social activities so that they gain more material benefits. Working groups should be formed around productive activities. There can be many working groups engaged in a larger programme.

7.5.2 Promoting group Activity

The people themselves should decide the size of the working group and its composition. The extension workers only guide and help the local people to form working groups. Thus, only those who can work together well, will join together to form small groups. Cohesiveness and durability of groups are important to achieve larger objectives. Bigger working groups with more than 25 members should be discouraged. Group membership can range from 20–25.

7.5.3 Negotiation Process

Negotiation is regarded as a process by which the forest users – local people – discuss and debate issues with the intention of reaching agreement about the goals of forest management. At a negotiation meeting, it is necessary to concentrate on building consensus. However, it is not always true that once consensus is achieved, every one co-operate. Some rules and sanctions will also be needed to ensure collective action. The extension staff, as a facilitator of negotiation, should have competence to provide advice and technical information on forestry during the negotiation.

7.6 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOR JFM

The extension agents have been using a wide range of media for transfer of technologies including radio, television and print media like newspapers, posters, pamphlets, etc. Since no one medium is the best, extension agents are advised to go for a 'media mix' i.e. combination of selected media depending upon the nature of message, target audience and social environment. However, for JFM target groups interpersonal communication by way of personal rapport, group meetings and demonstrations are the best way to educate and develop credibility. Still, for creating general awareness on a wider scale like state, district and block levels radio and television can play an effective role. Print media can be used to elaborate and reinforce the messages delivered by other media. Video and films on the success stories can also be very effective in communicating with the masses. Because seeing is believing, visits to successful JFM sites have also been effectively used in motivating the officers, grassroots level workers and community opinion leaders.

NGOs play an important role in promoting the cause of JFM. In many places JFM programmes have been successfully implemented by NGOs because of their grassroots level contacts, intimate knowledge of local situations, credibility enjoyed among local people and their flexible functioning which are the essential qualities of good extension agency. Both NGOs and Government departments have strength and limitations. NGOs are better communicators and motivators among local communities, whereas Government departments are better trained in techniques of implementation. Healthy interface between both the development agencies and the NGOs will do immensely good to JFM movement.

All the participating individuals who come in contact with the local communities like foresters, rangers, divisional forest officers and NGO personnel need to be trained in extension and communication skills so that they become capable of effectively transferring the technologies and information in a manner that is simple and convincing. This is required for motivating people to undertake the works by involving themselves at all stages of the project life such as planning, execution, evaluation and monitoring.

7.7 COMMUNICATION MATRIX FOR JFM

In order to evolve a comprehensive and location specific communication strategy package for JFM, a 'communication matrix' can be used (Table 7.1).

After identifying 'issues of communication gap' in JFM implementation in a specific location, the extension agent should select a particular issue, fix it in the first column of the matrix, i.e. 'JFM issue' and later work out other columns as suggested in the matrix, resulting in a communication package for the selected issue. Likewise packages can be worked out for all identified JFM issues, leading to a comprehensive location specific communication strategy.

The format of 'communication matrix' for JFM contains 11 columns, worked out with a hypothetical communication issue 'Grazing', which is a common pressure felt on Indian forests. The example is restricted to two levels of source of information viz., Range Officer and Forest Guard who function as the Ex-officio Secretary of FPC. In reality, further levels of source of information have to be identified and correspondingly other columns of the matrix to be worked out to arrive at a complete communication package for the identified issue.

Table 7.1 : A proposed format of communication matrix for JFM

Communication Strategy for JFM		Name of the Village								
		Communication Process/Elements								
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
JFM Issue	source of Information	Target Issues	Message Information	Approach Audience	Channel	Effect	Feed back	Time Frame	Resource Access	
1. Grazing	Range Officer & Forest Guard	Executive member of FPC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ill effects of grazing - Rotational grazing - Stall feeding - Rearing productive animal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personal Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verbal discussion - Video - Visit to successful sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conviction on ill effects of grazing - advantage of rotational grazing and stall feeding 	Direct Feedback from Executive members	One month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expenses on field visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting place VCP at monitoring transport, boarding, lodging during field visit
	Secretary to the FPC & Executive Member	All villagers (Graziers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ill effects of uncontrolled grazing - Advantages of rotational grazing, stall feeding, - Economics of rearing productive animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group - Mass approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verbal discussion - Meetings - Video - Success stories - Posters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conviction on ill effects of grazing - Adopting rotational grazing and stall feeding of productive animals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring by Forest Guard - FPC meetings - Direct Feedback from Executive members, Grazier 	Three months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cost of poster printing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting place, VCPs monitoring

In addition while working on these columns, certain general factors like JFM resolution/policy, local conditions, particularly local forest status and socio-economic status etc. have to be considered. The matrix also emphasises the linkage between forest department, NGO and village institutions like FPC in JFM to make communication package more participatory. It is suggested that the fully worked out 'communication matrix' can be used as a part of the village microplan under a separate head named 'Communication Strategy for JFM'.

7.8 REFERENCES

Yadav, R. P. 1980. *People's Participation – focus on mobilization of rural poor in local level planning and rural development*. United Nations, Asian and Pacific Development Institute, Bangkok. Concept Publishing Co., New Delhi. ©