

UNIT 21

WORKING GROUPS

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21.0 INTRODUCTION

JFM implementation involves a number of participants. These participants may belong to a variety of organisations like government departments, non-governmental organisations, academic institutions and local bodies. The level of involvement may be deeper in case of some organisations while peripheral for others. But the success of JFM will depend on how best they are interlinked and also to what extent they work together towards achieving a shared common goal. All these agencies have been established for a definite objectives and have a work plan and therefore, in most cases JFM is not a core programme. In such situations, it is always likely that these organisations are not able to allocate desired level or resources and time towards JFM. In order to keep JFM constantly in focus, achieve and maintain high level of participation of all the agencies it is essential to set up a forum where all these agencies can meet and work together. This forum is generally called as Working Group.

21.1 COMPOSITION AND STRUCTURE

The working groups provide opportunities for discussing the problems and issues at a common platform. The working group composition may vary from state to state and within a state from place to place. However, the guiding principle for constitution of working groups is that it should have at least one member from each of the participating agencies.

Depending on the spread of JFM such working groups can be constituted at various levels such as at block or range level, district level or state level. The Range Officer, DFO and Conservator of Forests could act as a convenor of these groups in the range, district and state levels, respectively. The states of Nagaland and Gujarat have provided the constitution of Working Group in their Government Order on JFM. The excerpts of these GOs are given in box 21.1.

Box 21.1 Excerpts from government orders on JFM

Nagaland

A Working Group shall be constituted at the state level at Kohima under the Chairmanship of the Commissioner & Secretary, Forest for implementation of the Scheme as hereunder :

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|--|---|------------------|
| 1. Commissioner and Secretary Forest | – | Chairman |
| 2. Home Commissioner or his official representative | – | Member |
| 3. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests | – | Member Secretary |
| 4. Chief Conservator of Forests/Addl. Chief Conservator of Forests | – | Member |
| 5. Conservator of Forests (Southern and Northern circle) | – | Member |
| 6. 2 (two) Deputy Conservators of Forests | – | Member |

The working Group shall decide on the administrative and financial procedure for implementation of the scheme and from time to time review the activities of the Community Forest Committee (CFC) at the District level.

Gujarat

A Working Group shall be constituted at the state level at Vadodara under the Chairmanship of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests for implementation of the Scheme, as under :

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|--|---|----------|
| (i) Principal Chief Conservator of Forests | – | Chairman |
| (ii) Two Senior Chief Conservators of Forests | – | Members |
| (iii) One CCF will be the member Secretary | – | Members |
| (iv) to (vii) Four Deputy Conservators of Forests | – | Members |
| (viii) to (xi) Four voluntary agencies interested in afforestation | – | Members |

The Working Group shall decide on the administrative and financial procedure for implementation of the scheme and from time to time supervise the work of the district level working committees.

The composition of Working Group provided in the Government Orders of Nagaland and Gujarat is aimed at supervising and deciding on the administrative and financial proceeding of JFM by the state forest department. Only Officers of FD are the members of the Working Group in Nagaland while in Gujarat voluntary agencies are also represented. Ideally working group should provide membership to all the agencies, government departments and non-government organisations working for implementation of JFM. It is not necessary that a provision of the working group should be provided in the GO on JFM. The state and District and Range level forest officials implementing JFM can constitute working groups with, CF, DFO or RO as its convener.

The number of members in the working group should normally be between 6-10 which is considered to be large enough to accommodate all participating agencies but small enough to make it possible to meet frequently and work in the form of a cohesive group. Ideally, a working group should have members who are interested in promoting participatory approach to development and are willing to support the forest department in its intents to change its role for betterment.

21.2 WORKING AND FUNCTION

The working groups can meet as and when necessary. Many a times informal meetings and discussions are useful than a formal meeting with fixed agenda. The working group is a facilitating forum and helps removing difficulties at grassroots level. Such consultations and meetings also help in avoiding misunderstandings which at times crop up because the agencies tend to work in their own water tight compartments.

Sometimes projects of similar nature are implemented by a number of agencies viz., DRDA, Agriculture, Soil Conservation, Horticulture, Wastelands development department etc. and all these departments/agencies approach the village in their own way. The working group, where a representative of all relevant department/agency is represented, helps in pooling the resources and prioritization of project activities.

Another important function that the working group performs is in providing a link between the policy makers and implementors of the scheme/projects. The implementing agencies provide feedback about the bottlenecks and difficulties, which crop-up because of policies, and therefore need to be changed. Thus working group provides a linkage between the policy and implementation. The working group is composed of qualified and informed people. They play a role of moderators and over see that implementation of the project is as per the objectives and fulfills the requirements of the policies in vogue.

21.2.1 Microplanning

Members of working groups can oversee and provide guidance in microplanning process. Senior officers of different departments (forest, agriculture, soil conservation, rural development, livestock, health etc.) and NGOs with intimate understanding and knowledge of participatory process and technical background can contribute immensely towards preparation of a sound microplan.

21.2.2 Conflict Resolution

While the working groups are supposed to keep their eyes and ears open to see that a conflict situation does not develop and JFM is implemented smoothly with fullest co-operation of all the participating agencies, the occurrence of conflicts cannot be completely ruled out. In case such conflicts occur, the working group has a great role to play in the conflict management. The interests of parties in conflict can be discussed on this forum and sorted out in minimum time possible.

21.2.3 Monitoring and Evaluation

The working group is composed of persons drawn from a number of disciplines. The multidisciplinary character provides ample opportunity for sound analysis of the data and information which helps in reaching at unbiased inferences. This type of monitoring and evaluation can help in the mid-term correction of the scheme. The input from multidisciplinary team makes the JFM programme healthier and helps a great deal in achieving the objectives. The inclusion of technically trained people in the working group facilitates in undertaking technical works such as soil conservation, technical forestry, water management and harvesting.

21.2.4 Research

The working groups, particularly the ones at the state level may set up committees/ subgroups to study the important issues hampering the progress of JFM and suggest ways and means to overcome the same. Site specific research areas are identified and inputs are provided by the working group for strengthening the programme.

The member of the working group can support and facilitate the process of change and ensure that the change is gradual. The working group can also contribute in training and capacity building of the people implementing JFM.

The structure and function of the working group described here are just suggestive. In fact the actual membership as well as the role and responsibilities of the working group will depend on the local situation and should aim at providing solutions to local problems. ●