

XIII.A.2. Market-Oriented Approach to Forest Conservation: Re-devised for the Present Context

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The continued depletion of the forest resources, in the recent years, has brought into focus the inherent weaknesses of the conventional approach to forest conservation which viewed the forest dependants and their activities as 'threats' to forest ecosystem. Consequently, this approach began to be replaced by a new approach popularly known as Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDP). The latter differed from the former mainly it viewed the local people, at least in theory, as 'partners' in conservation attempts, and aims to link conservation with development. One of such models, known as the market-oriented conservation approach, intends to link conservation and development by extending the market services to the natural resource use in order to increase the economic value of the benefits to the users, and thereby increase their economic stake in conceiving the resource base. Notwithstanding the fact that this approach is associated with incentives to the resource users for conservation its success rates are not satisfactory.

The present paper analyses the market-oriented conservation projects (MOCP), and their relevance in the Indian scenario. It draws inputs from the existing literature as well as from the on going projects in India and elsewhere, and applies the inferences to the present context. As the present forest management strategies are laying emphasis on participatory approach through the initiation of participatory forest management (PFM)., insights gained by this analysis have greater implications for long term success of the people oriented forestry in the countries where they are under implementation.

The suggested institutional framework is to be made up of stakeholders with genuine interest in using and conserving the resources. There is evidence that projects that work with 'interest groups' succeed better than those work with loosely defined 'local communities'. Hence, an institutional structure that can 'build, own and operate' the project in the most appropriate form, and deliver the tangible benefits to the members in the most appropriate fashion is critical. It should ensure organised and scientific use and development of the products and integrate them with appropriate markets resulting in fair returns to the resource users. The structure should clearly mark the sustainability thresholds, and incorporate in it checks against unsustainable resource use, and thereby ensure the sustainable health of the ecosystem together with economic development. The products envisaged to be integrated with the markets should be collected from the ecosystem by the members, and are not substitutable by artificial products. The projects require a sound infrastructure set up for managing the operations, and should have access to markets and market information.