

REGENERATION OF DEGRADED FORESTS

Shri Mahesh Prasad, the then Secretary (Environment and Forests), Government of India, wrote on 1 June 1990 (No. 6.21/89-F.P.) to the Forest Secretaries of all States and Union Territories setting out the new policy on "Involvement of village communities and VAs in the regeneration of degraded forest lands". The text of this circular is reproduced below :

"The National Forest Policy, 1988 envisages people's involvement in the development and protection of forests. The requirements of fuelwood, fodder and small timber such as house-building material, of the tribals and other villagers living in and near the forests, are to be treated as first charge on forest produce. The policy document envisages it as one of the essentials of forest management that the forest communities should be motivated to identify themselves with the development and protection of forests from which they derive benefits.

2. In a D.O. Letter No. 1/1/88-TMA dated 13th January, 1989 to the Chief Secretary of your State, the need for working out the modalities for giving to the village communities, living close to the forest land, usufructory benefits to ensure their participation in the afforestation programme, was emphasized by Shri K. P. Geethakrishnan, the then Secretary (environment and Forests).

3. Committed voluntary agencies/NGOs, with proven track record, may prove particularly well suited for motivating and organising village communities for protection, afforestation and development of degraded forest land, especially in the vicinity of habitations. The State Forest Departments/Social Forestry Organisations ought to take full advantage of their expertise and experience in this respect for building up meaningful people's participation in protection and development of degraded forest lands. The voluntary agencies/NGOs may be associated as interface between State Forest Departments and the local village communities for revival, restoration and development of degraded forests in the manner suggested below :

- (i) The programme should be implemented under an arrangement between the voluntary agency/NGO, the village community (beneficiaries) and the State Forest Department.
- (ii) No ownership or lease rights over the forest land should be given to the beneficiaries or to the voluntary agency/NGO. Nor should the forest land be assigned in contravention of the provisions contained in the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.
- (iii) The beneficiaries should be entitled to a share in usufructs to the extent and subject to the conditions prescribed by the State Government in this behalf. The voluntary agency/NGO should not be entitled to usufructory benefits.

other interests which may try to derive benefit in their names. The selection of beneficiaries should, therefore, be done from only those families which are willing to participate through their personal efforts.

- (xiv) The Forest Department should closely supervise the works. If the beneficiaries and/ or the voluntary agency/NGO fail or neglect to protect the area from grazing, encroachment or do not perform the operations prescribed in the working scheme in a satisfactory manner, the usufructory benefits should be withdrawn without paying compensation to any one for any work that might have been done prior to it. Suitable provisions in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for this purpose should be incorporated."