



A long road to sustainable community forestry

The National Joint Forest Management Project, Haryana Province, India

The foothills of Himalaya in Haryana State are called Siwalik Hills and were once covered by forest. But uncontrolled logging, fires and overgrazing led to erosion and decreased forest productivity. Being an open access resource, inhabitants of the two adjacent villages brought their large cattle herds, goats and sheep to graze inside the forest and cut trees without restriction. The soil sediment eroded by the rain from the now unprotected forest ground built up in the crossing rivers and also settled on the agricultural land, leaving behind infertile land.

The state forestry officials determined that the local communities needed some incentives to protect the forest and take responsibility for its condition. So, they decided to increase water provision in order to enhance agricultural productivity and improve the household incomes of the villagers. This took the pressure from forest resources because the villagers became less dependent on the forest for their survival.

As a next step, they planned how to involve villagers in the forest's management. They set up Hill Resource Management Societies and opened it to all villagers for membership. The societies are responsible for the distribution of the water provided, the protection of the forest against overgrazing and illegal logging, as well as the maintenance of the dams and conveyance systems.

The locally-organized forest protection improved grass productivity, the number of trees per hectare and the regeneration of vegetation. Together, these measures eased the problem of flooding that occurred downstream and checked land degradation. Social improvements were also realized. The new forest protection system created employment opportunities which, along with better crop harvests, are the reasons behind the increased incomes at the household level.

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