

## **Third Party Evaluator's Opinion on Rajasthan Forestry Development Project**

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### **Relevance**

There are no two opinions on the appropriateness of the Rajasthan Forestry Development Project. All over India, particularly Rajasthan, trees have been cut indiscriminately. Hills, which once looked green, are now bare and their rocky part protruding and causing at times landslides. The effort to grow trees or grass, however limited, is praiseworthy because it will give new green cover to places which have been denuded by man.

Apart from trees, grass and fodder are the other two requirements of the area. They provide fodder to the cattle (livestock) which proliferate in Rajasthan. During dry seasons, farmers of Rajasthan have taken the cattle to far-off places, creating social problems. Trees cover not only the barrenness of hills and arid areas but also give people timber which is essential for household needs and funeral cremation. The Hindus, 85 per cent in Rajasthan, cremate their dead and they use wood for this purpose.

Afforestation was given high priority in the nine five-year-plans the country has completed. The current 10th Plan is no different. It has made special allocations to plant trees, grow grass and fodder and to dig up wells to augment water supply. There is also a substantial grant to stop the Thar desert creeping further. Any project which is devised and executed for this purpose is worth the cost and hard work. The development project, for which Japan has made allocations, is no different efficiency.

### **Efficiency**

In its report, the Forest Department has claimed 100 per cent success in afforestation. The achievement in development of water resources (small dams) is 11 per cent, participation of villages is 131 per cent. These are high figures to reach when the project was late to start. Completing it on time and achieving nearly impossible targets is, indeed, a miracle. It is a job which has been executed beyond human expectations. Particularly impressive is the participation of villages, as much as 139 per cent. It must have required a lot of persuasion because villagers do not come forth easily. However difficult the task, it has been achieved according to the report. Benefits will accrue in abundance. The most impressive part is that the survival rate of trees planted is 'high overall'.

### **Effectiveness**

The figures given in the report indicate that the project objectives have been achieved in relation to the output. Except a slight fall in 'bareland afforestation', the project has exceeded the target planned. Village Forest Protection and Management Committees(VFPMC) were

constituted in more villages than planned. To quote the report itself, “the preparation of these micro-plans appears to have contributed to the understanding of the villages’ social and economic conditions as well as smooth implementation of project activities.”

### **Impact**

Rajasthan has only five per cent of forest cover as against India’s average of 21 per cent. The State must be seeing the results of the project since it was completed in March,2002, more than three years ago.

Afforestation does not mean only planting trees. It means giving grass, fodder and fuel. It means the project has added the much needed water for drinking and irrigation. In real terms, it means improvement of the social and economic environment. By any standard, the results are positive. How far the project has spread on the ground can be a point of debate but there is no doubting about its benefit or effectiveness. In such projects there is no negative fallout.

Many villages may have been unhappy for having been left out. But these are not negative results. They indicate hunger for development. When the report itself says that there are no lessons to be learnt, it indicates everything has gone down well. In other words, the project has been a tremendous success.

Since the project is part of Joint Forest Management (JFM), announced and revised through the state government’s ordinance in 2000, the gains achieved may well have been deepened. The project’s sustainability is assured because the government will itself be interested to maintain what has been achieved on the ground. In any case, this is not one of those projects which are mixed with politics. It is purely economic and will stay so. In fact, the success of the project may spur the government to have similar projects for the betterment of its people. Whether Japan allocates additional money for more projects is another question.