

## **Third Part Evaluator's Opinion on Gujarat Afforestation and Development Project**

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### **Criteria-1 Effectiveness**

The effectiveness of the project seems to be good considering the harsh conditions under which the project was implemented. But some salient aspects should be further discussed. One is the stagnation and effective reduction of Dense forest coverage from 6,369 km<sup>2</sup> to 6,345 km<sup>2</sup> during 1992-2000, with an unusual variation in 1998. This particular aspect is worrying because the dense forests are instrumental in maintaining the ecological balance of the area than the open forests. So more focus should be given to this sector in future. Regarding the less than average survival rates, the tree species selected for pioneering the effort in degraded lands might have contributed. With a suitable set of pioneers it is possible to contribute substantially to the forest coverage within a span of 4-5 years. Another is the shortfall in the targeted production of wood for fuel by 735,000 tons (82%). This is a huge quantity and has got serious implications. It is not clear whether the community is going to fill this shortfall from the existing or newly planted forests or alternate fuels and fuel saving systems. Measures to address these aspects like high efficiency wood stoves, planting of fuel wood trees etc. are necessary in future. Regarding the trainings, the cross section of participants are important like farmers, tribal etc. and to what extent they are motivated to replicate the interventions. A comparison of the base line data about the forests, like bio diversity, fragmentation etc. before and after the project will be useful to assess the effectiveness further, since these factors will indicate the quality of the effort. Despite these limitations, the overall effectiveness of the intervention is remarkably good.

### **Criteria-2 Sustainability**

It is sure that the Gujarat Forest Department will carry on the initiative, and sustainability to that extent is achieved. The capacity of the department like infrastructure is also increased substantially to move forward. But the quality of personnel, a process to develop such persons and their continuity remains as a critical issue. A related issue is the knowledge management of the executing agency. In the absence of the above two, along with the lack of systematic internal monitoring and evaluation process, it will be difficult to ensure the sustainability. The experiences and quantitative data generated so far, should be processed in an adequate manner to cover this gap. The propagation of success stories and good practices through the local media and other mass communication methods are necessary to improve sustainability. It should be in a manner so as to improve people's emotional attachment to forests like traditional or folk songs and related art forms. This may produce a cascading effect. The State Government's contribution to conservation efforts remains the more or less same throughout the project period which is a cause of concern. To maintain the momentum generated by the project, there should be a provision to increase the Government's share after the project period. Another point is the institutional aspects. The percentage of successful Joint Forest Management (JFM) is lower than other states. The reasons for this shortcoming as explained at various levels; may be the lack of sufficient number of persons trained in social mobilization in the project, or the planning process without local participation, or lack of quality capacity building programmes. Creation of powerful People's bodies like JFM under the auspices of Local Self Governments like Gram Panchayths should have been one of the major objectives of the programme along with the strengthening of the Forest Department. Convergence of other departments and agencies working for water and soil conservation, renewable energy, livelihoods, tribal development etc. along with women Self Help Groups, Milk Co Operatives etc. is possible at the Local Self Government level since the enactment of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional amendment and the State Panchayath Raj Act. Motivated JFM can raise resources from different agencies after the project period ensuring continuity. Evolution of JFM in this context through an empowering process would have contributed more to the sustainability of the programme. But the vision of the executing agency regarding this is important. They have to treat JFM not as a tool but a sustainable People's institution capable of protecting the country's forests.