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PROPOSAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FORESTRY IN THE PUNJAB

By

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The Resource

Several climatic, edaphic and biotic factors have combined to make the Punjab a forest-poor province. Its location in arid and semi-arid areas; heavy pressure for fuel-wood, fodder and timber; excessive grazing; and cultivation on the steep slopes have brought us face to face with the present grim situation.

Out of the total land area of 20.63 million hectares of the Punjab province, various types of forests cover about 0.57 million hectares i.e. 2.8% of the total land mass of the province. The productive forest area is, however, less than even 1% of the land area. The average annual recorded production of timber and fuel-wood from state forests is reported to be 0.0055 million and 0.2 million cubic meter respectively. Whereas the total annual requirement of these products works out to be 1.4 million cubic meter and 12 million cubic meter respectively. The vast gap between the production from state forests and the annual consumption is quite obvious. This gap will widen further by the turn of the century and it is a serious challenge to the country-men and particularly to the foresters.

Note:- Production and consumption figures are subject to minor variations.

Scope of development

The production per unit area of our existing forests is not even half of their actual potential. This is because adequate funds have never been made available for their maintenance and improvement. Given required financial input, there is much scope of improvement of existing forests, afforestation of blank areas and planting on farmlands.

The high hill forests yield valuable coniferous timber of chir and kail and also serve as protectors of our highly valued watersheds. Special attention is, therefore, needed for rehabilitation and intensive management of these forests. Although the scrub forests do not afford monetary returns, commensurate with the area covered by them, their watershed values can never be over-emphasised. Efforts are required to be intensified to improve the range value of these forests through their scientific management.

Our irrigated forest plantations have got the highest potential for production per unit area. The irrigation system in these plantations requires complete overhauling and these are required to be brought under intensive management for increasing their present productive capacity. A large scope of afforestation exists in our riverain forests. These areas should receive high priority for the afforestation of their unplanted parts.

Keeping in view the importance of planting on farmlands and the achievements of the farm forestry projects already completed or under implementation in the Punjab,

this land resource if utilized fully for planting of trees in combination with agriculture crops can lead us to self-sufficiency in wood and wood products.

The advantage of proper maintenance of watersheds and their importance on the national economy are too well-known to be discussed here. Their role has become too obvious for sustained food production. Extension of watershed management activities over vast hilly and foot hill tracts is, therefore, urgently needed. The rangelands extend over a vast area in the province. Their grazing capacity is fastly deteriorating due to over-grazing caused by unregulated use and ever-increasing livestock population. The development of range-lands and their proper utilization alongwith their scientific management needs due priority.

Constraints in faster development of forestry

1. Inadequate funding
2. Unfavourable biotic, climatic and edaphic factors for afforestation.
3. Non-availability of adequate quantity of irrigation water.
4. Lack of participation by the people in watershed and range management activities.
5. Lack of involvement of rural community in social forestry projects at the desired scale.
6. Inadequate institutional arrangements for motivating the villagers.
7. Unfavourable socio-economic factors.

Future Strategy

Clearly, there is a need to increase the production of wood both from public and private lands with the objective of ameliorating the effects of obvious scarcity. Neither it is our aim nor it is possible with the limited area and resources to meet the demand in full from the public forests or the public lands. The aim is to increase our wood resources both on public and private lands to meet the huge projected demand. The following measures are proposed for this:-

1. Intensification of management of our existing forests to increase yield per unit area
2. New afforestation over blank areas under the control of forest department.
3. Planting of maximum number of trees on farmlands and other areas not under the control of forest department by persuasion of people through social forestry programmes.

The implementation of this strategy will require the following major actions.

- i. Rehabilitation of irrigation system in irrigated plantations.
- ii. Identification of suitable areas for afforestation.
- iii. Growing of industrial wood in irrigated plantations.
- iv. Adopting artificial regeneration through planting in coniferous forests.
- v. Development of proper manpower and infrastructure for scientific management of watersheds and rangelands.

- vi. Production of nursery stock of various species on scientific lines to meet the demand with sturdy plants of proper size.
- vii. Identification of the needs of the community in consultation with them and the involvement of local population at all levels.
- viii. Adequate research and training support and upgradation of Forestry Research Institute.
- ix. Provision of adequate infrastructure by creating a separate wing of Social Forestry within the Forest Department with a C.C.F. as its head.
- x. Provision of adequate financial resources to implement various plans.

Recommendations

Improvement of the existing forests, undertaking new afforestation activities and implementation of a big social forestry project will require considerable financial resources which will become a limiting factor in the implementation of the plan. It is, therefore, proposed that the Federal Government be requested to make a special grant of Rs. 500 million spread over a period of 5 years for the development of forestry in the Punjab province.

* Rs. 500 million over a period of 5 years will provide Rs. 100 million every year which is a minimum demand.