

# Developmental Impact of Joint Forest Planning and Management (JFPM) Programme on Forest Dependent Communities: Experiences from Joida, Karnataka

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## Abstract

*Joint Forest Planning and Management Programme was introduced in the state of Karnataka in the year 1993. A product of the National Forest Policy of 1988, JFPM was an effort in the direction of involving local communities in the management of forest resources. This programme marked a clear shift in the approach to forest conservation and brought forest dependent communities and the KFD on a common platform to plan and execute sustainable forest management strategies. The programme which became operational with the establishment of Village Forest Committees also gave people the opportunity to augment both individual and community assets by creating the space for sharing the proceeds of the sale of Forest produce from JFPM plantations and also collection of Minor Forest Produce from the neighbourhood forest. This paper seeks to examine the strengths and gaps of the JFPM, mainly as a development praxis. It may be recalled here that Joida was the first taluk in Karnataka where the JFPM programme was introduced.*

**Keywords:** Development, Forest, Joida, Joint Forest Management, Karnataka Forest Department, Media, Mining, Village Forest Committee

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## INTRODUCTION

Joida taluk is one of the eleven taluks of Uttara Kannada district in the state of Karnataka. The natural beauty of the Sahyadri mountain ranges has rendered this region a nature's paradise. Joida is the largest taluk in terms of geographical area in Karnataka and falls under the area identified as the biodiversity hotspot of Western Ghats. The sheer diversity of flora and fauna and the pattern of rainfall have given a unique character to this taluk. This region is emerging as a major tourist destination for nature lovers as the forest cover of the taluk is about 82 percent. The average rainfall of Joida is 2000 mm in the southwestern part and 4500 mm at the ridges of Western Ghats bordering Karwar taluk and

the state of Goa. One can see different species of vegetation in every 10 km of the region. There are 120 revenue villages in the taluk and the total population is 52,012 according to the 2011 census. The literacy percentage stands at 76 percent in spite of this being a dense forest region with a scattered population and schools concentrated in select places. Fifty two percent of the population of Joida taluk is concentrated only in 28 villages which have good road connectivity and also access to public transport. The rest of the population is scattered in the other 92 villages located in the dense forest region. Many of the villages are completely disconnected from road connectivity, especially during the rainy season.

The taluk is mainly inhabited by Kunbi, Maratha, Gouli and Devali communities. It is believed that these groups came to Joida from the neighbouring states of Goa and Maharashtra to protect their cultural identities.

The Kunbi community in Joida located themselves in that part of the forest which was conducive to shifting cultivation. They were growing *ragi* a type of millet in and around their habitats. They chose the evergreen and hilly forests areas of central Joida and areas bordering Goa for setting up their houses and also for continuing their traditional agricultural practices.

The traditional occupation of the Maratha was agriculture and their major crop was paddy. The Marathas inhabited the deciduous and moist deciduous forest areas in south and eastern parts of Joida. The cattle rearing Gouli community was found in the deciduous forest areas of Joida. The Devali are also traditionally an agricultural community and ever since they settled in Joida, they have been continuing to work on their lands. By and large even to this day all the traditional forest dwellers depend on agriculture as their main livelihood base and look up to the forest as the chief source of succor and sustenance (Indira 2002).

### **Forests of Joida**

The larger part of Joida consists of hills and valleys. Two different types of forests can be seen in the region. The southeastern part of this taluk contains forests with tall trees that border Yellapur taluk at Gund, Nagzari valley, Kalinadi and Kaneri slopes. Valuable species of trees in the region include teak, matti, rose wood etc. Evergreen patches are also found in the valley. The forests of the northern part of Joida taluk are located near Castlerock and Diggi areas and have grass lands and scrub forests.

The forests of Joida come under the jurisdiction of Haliyal territorial and Dandeli wildlife divisions. Fifty seven villages in the taluk come under the perview of Dandeli wildlife division and 63 villages are in the Haliyal division of the Karnataka Forest Department (KFD).

Before the development era began in Joida during the first decade of the present century, people of Joida were almost exclusively dependent on forest produce for income generation. As many as ten types of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) were collected exclusively for income generation and 16 varieties of MFP to meet their food needs. But now due to employment opportunities opening up in government sponsored schemes and the Forest Department the dependency on forest produce is gradually on the decline (Indira 2012).

### **Mining in Joida**

Manganese is one of the minerals of which there is an abundant supply in Uttara Kannada district. This region is characterized by high magnesium (Mn) contents with low phosphorous of low electro-negative elements. There are about 50 Mn deposits so far discovered in the Uttara Kannada district of which 36 deposits are found in Joida taluk. This attracted the government as well as private companies to enter Joida taluk for initiating mining activities. Over a period of time mining activities in the region became rampant and this led to the forest being severely disturbed. There were instances of the government giving parts of the forest on lease to some private companies. Local communities who found employment opportunities in these mines developed a sense of dependence on the mining sector. Since manganese deposits were available in most parts of Joida mining opened up several job opportunities to local people. When mines began to be closed, they had to look for jobs either in KFD or other state sponsored programmes.

### **Hydro Electric Projects**

Joida taluk's development has been severely affected by construction of six dams on river Kali, which is the lifeline of the region. Kalinadi originates in Kushavali village and flows in a southwardly direction for 187 kms before joining the Arabian Sea at Sadashivagad. A greater part of the Kali river valley was submerged under the dams that were constructed by Karnataka Power Corporation Limited for generation of electricity. Huge displacements occurred when the first dam was constructed at Ganeshgudi in the central part of Joida taluk. Forty five villages were submerged under the Kalinadi Hydro Electric Project at Ganeshgudi. A total of 13,960 hectares of land was also washed away. Out of the land area submerged under water 11,225 hectares was forest land. Displacement continued to happen even when the subsequent hydro electric projects were executed. It is very disturbing to note that five more mini hydro projects are proposed and if this plan is executed Joida's development will receive a further set back. Electricity generated from the projects is supplied to Goa state and other parts of Karnataka, but a clear development dichotomy is

noticed when we see that 32 human habitations in Joida still do not have electricity. Majority of these villages fall under the jurisdiction of Bazarkunang panchayat, which has borne the major brunt of the damage caused by the hydro-electric projects.

### **Joint Forest Planning and Management Programme (JFPM)**

The JFPM programme owes its origin to the National Forest Policy of 1988 which laid down that expansion of forests for commercial purposes must be stopped and efforts be made to conserve the soil and environment, while at the same time addressing livelihood needs of forest dependent communities (No.3A/86-FP, Ministry of Environment and Forests Department of Environment, Forests & Wildlife). The main objectives of JFPM were to:

1. Protect and maintain the fast depleting forest and water resources.
2. Regenerate the already degraded forests.
3. Offer forest dependent population a means of subsistence and income generation.
4. Empower local communities to take decisions regarding forest use, management and also to ensure their share in forest resources by bestowing upon them usufruct rights over forest lands.

The Joint Forest Management experiment indicates a clear shift towards sharing both responsibilities and accountabilities between Forest Department and local communities in the management of forests. The Government of Karnataka issued guidelines to make JFPM programme operational on 12-04-1993. The Village Forest Committee (VFC), which is the institutional mechanism for the implementation of JFPM is responsible for planning, managing and executing the goals of JFPM. It is also expected to manage the operation of Village Development Fund (VDF) and Village Forest Development Fund (VFDF), the two types of financial resources generated by VFC through the sale of forest produce either grown in VFC plantations or collected from the forest area in the jurisdiction of the VFC as per the JFPM guidelines.

### **JFPM IN JOIDA TALUK**

JFPM was introduced in Joida taluk in the year 1993 under the DFID (a British donor agency) funded by the Western Ghats Environment and Forestry Project (WGEFP) at Jalakatti village in Tinaighat range of Haliyal forest division with the formation of a Village Forest Committee. Since then, 64 more VFCs have been formed under schemes such as the National Afforestation Programme (NAP) and Karnataka Sustainable Forest Management

and Biodiversity Conservation (KSFMBC). In Joida, which has a predominantly Marathi and Konkani speaking population, there was little communication between the state government agencies, including the Karnataka Forest Department and local communities till JFPM was introduced. Because of the special efforts made by NGOs and KFD staff to motivate people to participate in JFPM activities, perhaps for the first time in the history of Joida region, issues affecting people's day-to-day life gained visibility in the public sphere (Indira, 2002). Facilitators supported by NGOs, representatives of KFD and the interactive meets organized by research projects sponsored by the Shastri Indo Canadian Institute motivated people to participate in JFPM initiatives. It is also true that the practice of participatory forestry, created a bridge between the local communities and KFD.

Till JFPM was introduced there was a general feeling of mutual distrust both among the KFD and people, because people were seen mostly as intruders and KFD as the sole vanguard of the forest. However, when local communities were involved in forest regeneration activities their interest in controlling encroachments and illegal grazing increased and the forest conservation activities gained momentum. Also, the space that JFPM created for laying new plantations and sharing the proceeds from the sale of forest produce between VFC members and KFD, attracted local residents to engage with increased vigour in forest re-generation and conservation activities.

One of the far reaching changes that JFPM brought in Joida was the participation of women in the public domain. It was the CIDA Shastri Partnership Project entitled "*Empowering Women through Forestry: the Role of Indigenous Women in Forestry Development Programmes*" ( R. Indira and Karim Aly Kassam 1999-2001) that was primarily responsible for bringing women out of their secluded existence and enabled them to raise issues that affected their lives. The project initiated the formation of new Self Help Groups (SHG), a federation of SHGs and organized interactive meets between KFD, Panchayat Raj Institution representatives and women. They traveled to select destinations to participate in exhibition of SHGs products and meet women entrepreneurs who were earning their livelihood by producing and selling homemade products and handicrafts. The very first exposure they got to meet other women and exchange notes with them impacted their lives, and one can see this impact continuing even to this day. This was indeed the very first step towards bringing the gender agenda into Joida's development efforts (see Correa 1996).

JFPM has definitely set the stage for a development regime to emerge in Joida, a region that had been marginalized by most development initiatives. It not only created a cordial relationship between the KFD and local communities, but also improved water tables,

encouraged soil conservation activities, opened up people's livelihood bases, cleared the area of the negative impact of mining and led to an increase in forest cover. In some habitats VFCs engaged in lake regeneration activities, created drinking water resources and opened anganwadi centers and primary schools. Opportunities for school development were also created through VFCs. In many parts of Joida VFCs created assets that could be used in income generation activities. On the whole, it can be said that JFPM set the stage for social development activities in Joida, a region that was by and large ignored by almost all development plans and programmes.

### **MEDIA INTERVENTION IN JOIDA'S DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS**

Print media has played a key role in promoting JFPM activities. Be it a lapse on the part of the state bodies or positive aspects of JFPM, media played a key role in bringing these issues into the public domain. Prior to the starting of JFPM activities mainstream newspapers or television channels hardly covered Joida in their programmes. But the visibility that the taluk got when JFPM activities were initiated in the region led to both Kannada and English print media focusing on the region's development issues. The entry of a few local journalists both into print and electronic media gave a further fillip to Joida receiving media attention. Media focus also attracted the attention of local politicians both at the state and national level to at least start focusing on matters affecting Joida's development. The public pressure, mounting on KFD to ban acacia cultivation which is gradually destroying grass lands and water bodies has received wide media coverage and has kept the momentum alive. The activities and publications of the Shastri projects also received good media coverage. Media interventions have led to people taking greater interest in local affairs and demanding change especially when state policies have not responded to their demands or concerns.

### **Development Gaps still Persist**

Though JFPM started as a movement for change, in Joida many grey areas in the region's development still persist. The government notification announcing the formation of the Dandeli Wild Life Sanctuary, which was issued way back in 1994, almost corresponding with the beginnings of JFPM in the taluk acted as a block to the participation of many communities that inhabited villages that come within the National Park boundaries. This apprehension was rooted in the fear that their villages would be annexed by the National Park and hence they would lose their ownership rights over their lands as well as the forest. Though private lands were not included within the national park, JFPM activities in general

received a setback, and one can see a clear difference in the development achievements of these villages and those in other parts of Joida.

With Joida gaining more and more visibility as a nature lover's paradise tourism activities were boosted. Today the taluk has nearly 20 home stay spots and most of these spots have come up during the last 5-6 years. But the ownership of most of these home stay facilities is with persons from outside the taluk or dominant groups within Joida. The traditional forest dwellers generally continue to serve as wage labour in these tourist spots and their economic situations have not changed significantly. Given the fact that they possess a deep indigenous knowledge of the region and its unique flora, fauna and biodiversity, true development can take place only when local human resources are tapped and financial resources flow into local communities.

Joida's development efforts have to be reviewed in a relative context primarily because the entire taluk was literally forced to suffer from a state of marginalization for decades. While the credit of bringing the region into public focus mainly goes to JFPM, the programme needs to be implemented with a more people centric and region specific vision.

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