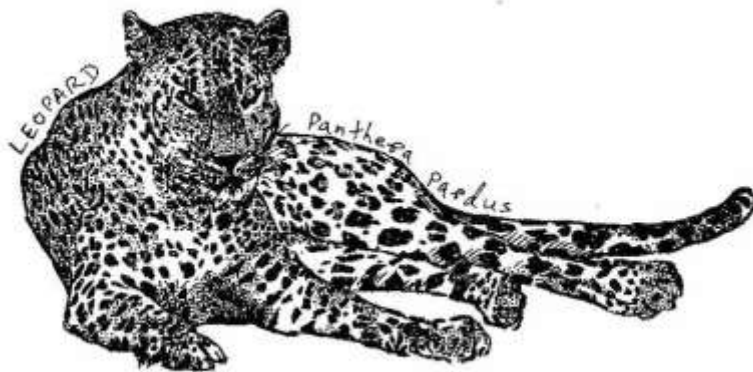


# DISCUSSION PAPER

## Ecodevelopment in India: Some Concepts and Issues

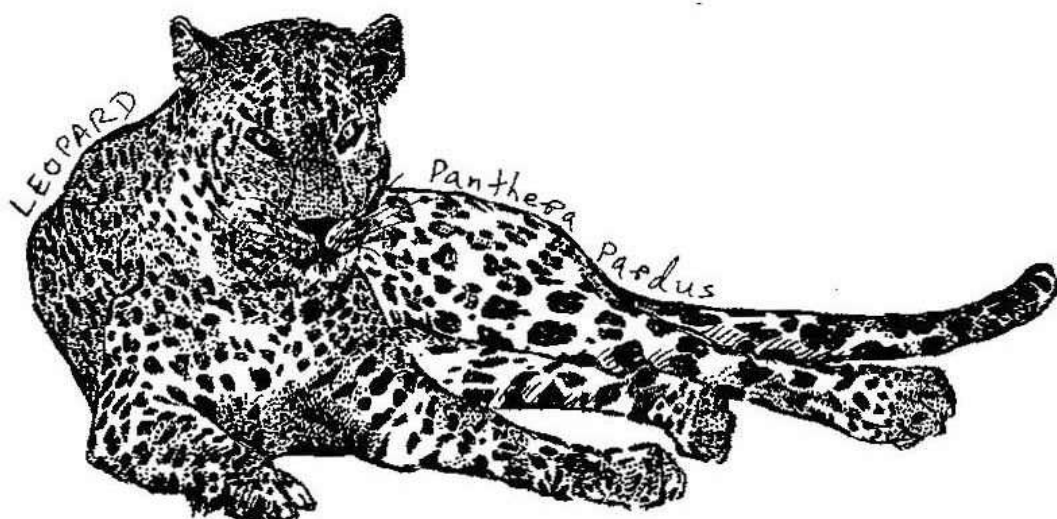
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The sketch above and on the cover is by Pratibha Pande.

This paper does not intend to repeat the discussions already available in various other papers and documents on ecodevelopment<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of this paper is to raise some of the major, broad, issues relating to the concept of ecodevelopment and to the way ecodevelopment projects are planned and implemented.

### History

WA Rodgers has already given (Rodgers 1998) a historical survey of ecodevelopment. All that needs to be added is a somewhat more detailed description of the process by which the centrally sponsored ecodevelopment scheme and the subsequent two ecodevelopment projects in India (the FREEP and the India Ecodevelopment Project<sup>2</sup>) came into being.

During 1990 and 1991, when the process of finalising the eighth plan was underway in the Planning Commission, there was great pressure on the Planning Commission to initiate a new centrally sponsored scheme on ecodevelopment. This pressure came primarily from the then Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) and the then Director of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). The scheme was quickly designed and was almost approved when the Government changed and the process of finalising the eighth plan was postponed. The Planning Commission then took a view that no new scheme would be approved before the eighth plan was finalised. However, due to sustained pressure

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Singh, Shekhar, *Biodiversity Conservation Through Ecodevelopment: Planning and Implementation Lessons from India*. UNESCO, Paris, 1997; Singh, Shekhar, *Integrated Conservation Development Projects for Biodiversity Conservation: The Asia Pacific Experience*, The World Bank, 1995

<sup>2</sup> The FREEP project had ecodevelopment as an add on. It supports ecodevelopment activities in Kalakad Mundunthurai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu and in Great Himalayan National Park in Himachal Pradesh.

on the Commission, ecodevelopment became the only new scheme in the environment and forest sector to be approved mid-plan, in 1991-92.

Meanwhile, the Government of India had been attempting to get the GEF to approve a biodiversity project for India. A proposal for ecodevelopment around wildlife protected areas was submitted in 1991 but was, for some reason, not approved. This resulted in the absurd situation where India, one of the mega biodiversity countries of the world, did not get a biodiversity project in the first round of GEF funding, while many other smaller and perhaps less biodiversity rich countries got one or sometimes even more than one.

The embarrassment that this caused to the GEF and the World Bank was well exploited by the Government of India which got the World Bank to agree to support a biodiversity conservation component in the Forestry Research, Education and Extension Project (FREEP). The FREEP was, in 1992, almost ready for approval.

However, if the FREEP was not to be delayed, there was a need to very quickly prepare the project document for the proposed biodiversity conservation (ecodevelopment) project. As such, the MoEF approached the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA), New Delhi to be the project consultants and to prepare the ecodevelopment plan and the project document within three months. This almost impossible task was accepted by the IIPA as it was seen as a way of keeping out a plethora of international consultants and keeping the cost of planning low. Two other conditions were also agreed to. First, it was agreed that the areas selected would be those where the IIPA had already been doing research and, as such, already had much of the information that would be required to prepare such a plan. Consequently, the Great Himalayan National Park (HP) and Kalakad Mundunthrai Tiger Reserve (TN) were selected. It was



also agreed that the plan prepared would be just indicative and firmed up later, in a participatory manner and with adequate time and other resources, after the project was approved (see later discussion on indicative planning).

In the meantime, the MoEF was proposing to again approach the GEF with another biodiversity conservation project. It again requested the IIPA to assist in the formulation of this project, with the support of UNDP. This was what is now known as the India Ecodevelopment Project. For this project also an indicative plan was developed. However, the time available was much longer and the process of developing and finalising the indicative plan took nearly two years.

Eight areas were selected by the MoEF for implementing this project. The selection was largely based on certain well considered criteria. First, it was felt that not more than one area should be taken up in any one state. This would ensure that the notion of ecodevelopment is spread as widely as possible to as many states as possible. Secondly, it was decided to initially select those areas that already had good management facilities so that this new approach could be tested and developed before being applied to really difficult areas. Consequently, all but one of the sites selected were project tiger areas<sup>3</sup>, the only exception being Gir NP in Gujarat. These were also places which had a need for ecodevelopment but were not either very light pressure or very heavy pressure areas.

The IIPA had been asked to develop a concept paper on ecodevelopment, which was finalised in consultation with the MoEF and became the basic concept paper for these two projects.

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<sup>3</sup> Nagarahole NP (Karnataka), Pench TR (MP), Palamau TR (Bihar), Periyar TR (Kerala), Ranthambhore TR (Rajasthan), Buxa TR (WB), Simlipal TR (Orissa), Gir NP (Gujarat)

## The Concept

There is no one definition of ecodevelopment, nor does there need to be. However, for the purpose of designing the ecodevelopment projects, a definition was formulated as a part of the concept paper. The basic concept is given below.

*Objectives: Ecodevelopment is a strategy that attempts to conserve ecologically valuable areas, especially protected areas (PAs), in a manner that :*

- *ensures that the negative impact of such a conservation effort, on people living in and around these PAs, is minimised.<sup>4</sup>*
- *empowers the local communities to have an increasing<sup>5</sup> say in the management of the protected area;*
- *creates among the local populations a sense of ownership towards the PA; and*
- *strengthens PA management capabilities.*

*Strategies: It seeks to meet these objectives by various methods.*

- *It seeks to conserve protected areas by stopping those activities that degrade the PA.*
- *It seeks to minimise possible negative impacts, on the local people, by identifying and developing alternative, sustainable, sources and locations for those basic needs which are no longer sustainably obtainable from the PA.*
- *It seeks to empower the local communities by involving them in the process of decision making for the PA. As a first step, this*

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<sup>4</sup> The term 'minimised' is used here because though ecodevelopment seeks to ensure that those who are dependent on the PA for their basic economic needs are not adversely affected, the social, cultural and religious dependence on the PA might not be easy to fully compensate for.

<sup>5</sup> The term 'increasing' signifies that what is anticipated is a transition process. Initially, the PA will continue to be managed by the government with the involvement of the local communities through committees and informal consultations. In time, the consultations would get formalised and the committees would become more powerful.

The next stage would be joint management, where the PA would be jointly managed by the government and the local community. This could begin by reserving certain PA management jobs for the local people. It could progress to a memorandum of understanding between the local communities and the government, spelling out their respective powers, functions and duties towards the PA.

The final stage could be the total taking over of the management by the local communities, with the government playing only a watchdog function and stepping in only when there is a breakdown of the management.



is done through the setting up of PA management advisory committees. These committee would discuss various management issues including the incidence of poaching and other illegal activities in the PA. Advice and co-operation of the local community is sought in trying to control such activities.

As local community leaders become conversant with management issues of the PA, and where they show an interest in getting more involved with its management, their role is enhanced by, for example, appointing some of them as wildlife wardens or as members of anti-poaching squads.

This relationship needs to be gradually formalised with a certain number of posts, in the PA staff, being reserved for the local people. Depending on the response of the local communities, an increasing role in the management of the PA, especially in the control of illegal activities, can be played by the local people. At some point, certain types of activities can be almost totally handed over to them. For example, they can, through co-operatives or other appropriate institutional structures, manage tourism facilities and activities in the PA. They can also take a primary role in protecting the PA by forming PA protection committees, similar to those formed by villagers as a part of joint forest management.

However, though in joint forest management the villages are compensated for their time and effort by getting a share of the forest's resources, this is not possible in the case of national parks and sanctuaries. This is because the extraction of resources for human use is prohibited in national parks and restricted in sanctuaries. Consequently, some other compensation package would have to be worked out around PAs.

- It seeks to create a sense of ownership among the local communities not only by empowering them to have a greater say in the management of the PA but also by ensuring that financial earnings from the PA, mainly in the form of tourism related activities, are also channelised solely or primarily to the local people.

Once the linkage between the state of the PA and earnings from tourism related activities has been established in their minds, the local communities will have a greater stake in protecting the PA.

- *It seeks to strengthen PA management capabilities by involving the local people in the management and by winning their support and cooperation. This not only reduces the pressure on the PA but also effectively increases the human resources available for its protection, as many of the local villagers start functioning as guardians of the PA.*

*The need of the local communities are not the only threats to the PA. In many cases commercial interests and even activities of other government departments pose an equal or greater threat. To counter these, the PA staff has to be made more effective through training and provision of equipment.*

*Management plans have to be developed and adequate finances have to be made available. Legal provisions aimed at conservation of the area also have to be strengthened. The ecodevelopment project attempts to do all this.*

*It also seeks to promote research activities designed to support PA management, and education and awareness activities related to the PA and to biodiversity conservation.*

### The Planning Process

There has been much debate on how participatory the planning process for the ecodevelopment project was. Many NGO representatives and activists and even some forest officers have expressed the view that the planning process was not participatory enough. Part of the problem lies, ofcourse, in the differing perceptions on how much participation is enough. Perhaps it is an endless process where the more there is, the better! By this yardstick, obviously the project was not and never could be participatory enough. All it could claim was that it was certainly far more participatory in its design process than any other world bank or government project till then and perhaps even since. The fact that it is perhaps the most widely debated wildlife project ever, bears witness to this fact.

But there were other types of dissatisfaction with the participatory process of the project. One such was about who was



consulted and who not. Many 'experts' were annoyed that they were not consulted. It is true that all experts were not consulted and neither is that possible. However, it is also true, looking back, that some of those who should have been consulted were regrettably and unwittingly left out.

Some of the experts who were consulted were upset that their views were not accepted. Obviously, where the views expressed were mutually contrary or contradictory, all the views expressed could not be accepted if a coherent design had to be evolved. What is more important is to assess whether, in retrospect, there were major errors committed in selecting the views to be accepted or rejected.

However, the most important of the dissatisfactions related to the consultations with village communities. First, it was felt by some that, in the formulation of the indicative plan, there was nowhere near adequate consultation with village communities. If true, such a complaint is not only very serious but actually undermines the whole philosophy of participatory planning. However, on closer inspection it appears that such a view mostly emanated from a misunderstanding of the purpose of an indicative plan and of the full process of ecodevelopment planning.

The indicative plan was not intended to contain any concrete proposals on what needs to be done at the village level. This was to be decided by the villagers in conversation with micro level planning teams. Therefore, detailed consultations with the villagers were envisaged in the ecodevelopment project, for reasons described in the section on indicative planning, only after the project was approved and ready for implementation. Meanwhile, no decisions were taken on behalf of the villagers in the indicative plan.

Some confusion was caused because the indicative plan contained a list of some of the income generating activities that villagers could take

up. This list led some people to conclude that the village activities to be supported by the project had already been decided without consulting the stake holders. This was again a misunderstanding. In order to develop the overall budgets for the project, it was necessary to look at a sample of villages and to assess what ecodevelopment for each village would roughly cost. In order to develop the costing, it was again necessary to cost the usual sorts of activities that the villagers would choose (and did choose in the sample villages). However, the indicative plan made it clear that these were only an indicative list of activities and that the villagers were not bound to accept any of them.

What, then, did the indicative plan contain and did this necessitate a detailed discussion with each of the villagers? The indicative plan contained a statement of the objectives of ecodevelopment. It also contained a detailed statement of the methods by which the detailed planning would be participatory. To insist that one must discuss how to discuss becomes a circular process!

The indicative plan also contained a profile of the various protected areas and the management and social issues thereof. Admittedly, our understanding of such issues would have significantly benefited from a discussion with village communities. However, nothing critical was decided upon in the indicative plan. As such, when micro level planning begins, there is total freedom to freshly prioritise the issues related to the management of the PA and to accordingly re-orient activities and investments.

In short, a conscious decision was made not to go to the communities (except in a sample of villages) till the project was approved and, yet, not to structure the project such that the subsequent consultations with the communities would be constrained or infructuous.



The other major criticism focuses on the manner in which consultations took place with village communities. There are complaints that these consultations were not participatory and were a farce. Part of this criticism again arises from the fact that many think that by the time the project is approved the consultations are over. They are then, and rightly so, dissatisfied with the nature of consultations, for all they have observed is some desultory or one sided conversations between some of the villagers and some officials and NGO representatives. These people will surely be reassured when they realise that consultations really begin only after the project is approved.

But there is also dissatisfaction with the real micro planning process and with the type and level of consultations that take place.

Admittedly, participatory planning and especially participatory decision making, is not easy to achieve. The first barrier is the bureaucracy itself, which works in a system that is hierarchical and almost totally non-participatory in its decision making process. To expect that people working in such systems will suddenly become totally democratic and participatory when they start dealing with the village communities, is unrealistic. The project envisages, explicitly, training and orientation for the PA staff. It also envisages that the project would be staffed by those among the foresters who are more inclined to be participatory. However, it would take a long time before the expectations of many of the NGOs, especially the more radical ones, can be met on this count.

To try and minimise this problem, the project envisaged that at least one NGO, and where required more than one, would be involved in each PA, to facilitate the participatory process. However, even where consultations are managed by NGO representatives, the age old and well



known divisions of caste, class, gender and age still make real participation difficult. Besides, NGO representatives have their own biases which also feed into the process.

In short, to make the process genuinely democratic and participatory is perhaps the greatest challenge in the ecodevelopment project. Clearly there are no easy answers. All that can be claimed is that the project takes some big steps towards a participatory model of decision making, though there is still quite some distance to go.

### Indicative Planning

As earlier mentioned, the MoEF proposed to plan for the project in two phases. First, a somewhat quickly formulated indicative plan, on the basis of which the project would be approved. Then a set of more detailed and participatory PA and micro level plans.

Initially the World Bank team was not willing to accept the concept of an indicative plan. What this really involved was that the broad objectives and strategies of the project would be identified in the plan and, based on a detailed survey of three or four sample villages, a costing per village would be indicated. From this, the over all budget would be extrapolated. However, the detailed items of expenditure would be decided only after the project was approved and initiated. This would be done in consultation with the local communities, on a site-specific basis, with authority at the local level to approve the expenditure so decided upon. Only the process by which such participatory decisions are to be made would be detailed in the indicative plan.

The World Bank team was not sure whether the Bank authorities would accept this as, in the past, all Bank projects required a detailed budgeting, item by item, of every paisa that was to be spent. However, at

the same time the Bank was keen to have a participatorily developed project.

It was pointed out to the Bank team that it was undesirable and inconsiderate to take up hours and days of the village communities time, in 'participatorily planning', only to tell them that if and when the project comes through they might get some of the things that they planned for. The lack of any immediate prospects of getting any of the planned facilities and services also takes away the motivation of village communities to participate in the planning process and to participate seriously. Besides, if the micro level planning is done many years in advance of implementation, by the time the project is implemented the ground realities might have changed so much that the plan is no longer valid. Also, if the gap between planning and implementation is too much, people forget what they had said and planned for, and do not feel a sense of ownership towards the plan.

All these arguments resulted in the Bank agreeing to allocate the bulk of funds as an 'ecodevelopment fund' without any further break-up. The concerned communities, during the implementation phase, would decide the details of how it was to be spent.

The issue of indicative planning is being discussed in detail partly because, by persuading the Bank to depart from its earlier practice of pre-planning for every paisa, the Government of India succeeded in introducing the sort of flexibility into Bank projects that had not been seen before. This also opened up the way for other projects and projects in other countries to demand and get similar flexibility. Also, in the context of the India Ecodevelopment Project, a lack of understanding of what an indicative plan meant, resulted in much unnecessary opposition to the project.



To give one example, some environmentalists opposed the project because in the indicative plan one set of activities that were mentioned as possible income generating activities in rural areas were those which involved the keeping of animals (mainly chickens and pigs). There was a demand that all such activities should be banned as they were intended to result in the slaughter of these animals (chickens and pigs) and would, therefore, be a violation of animal rights.

Whereas the project development team had great sympathy with such a view (many of them were vegetarians by choice), it was pointed out that a participatory approach meant that the people themselves decided what they should do. Just as it did not allow for any one else to prescribe what the people should do, it also did not allow for any one else to prohibit choices. The only guidelines prescribed in the project, for income generation activities, were that they must:

- Demonstrably reduce pressure on the PA.
- Be economically viable and sustainable.
- Not be socially and morally oppressive.
- Not be illegal.

Interesting examples of activities that violated one or more of these conditions emerged during the initial planning phase. For example, from one village there was a demand that ecodevelopment funds be used to provide street lighting on the main street. This proposal was objected to because providing street lights could in no way reduce pressures on the PA. However, the villagers argued that many young villagers sneaked out at night to poach animals in the PA. If the streets were lighted, they would be more easily spotted and prevented!



· Similarly, in a high altitude village the villagers agreed to stop extracting resources from the PA if the project helped them in cultivating and marketing *charas (cannabis)*!

#### Implementing Agency

This brings us to another question that is often asked: why is such a project being implemented through the forest department? One view is that the revenue department, through the office of the collector, should implement the project. This is because many of the components of the ecodevelopment project involve rural development type activities and major co-ordination efforts between various field agencies. But a more serious argument is that the forest department or for that matter the government is incapable of handling such a project and it should be implemented through NGOs.

In my view, there are large components of the ecodevelopment project that could perhaps be handled by good and sensitive NGOs. However, all NGOs are not necessarily, just because they are NGOs, up to the task. The project design does try and smuggle in an increasing role for NGOs, by setting up trust funds and PA level societies, but much more can be done. However, if the project is to work, it must have the involvement of competent and committed NGOs. It is not clear if adequate NGO capacity is available to handle the project in its entirety.

Also, to work, the project must have the co-operation and support of the forest department. When these projects were designed, it did not appear that the time was ripe to hand them over to NGOs. Perhaps, even now the time is not ripe for that. However, there is enough flexibility in the project design to allow an increasing role for NGOs, in case the PA director and the state government want it to be so.

## Displacement

Perhaps one of the most contentious issues associated with the ecodevelopment project was that of displacing the human populations living inside the PAs. It has been the dream of many wildlifers, both within and outside the government, to rid wildlife PAs of human populations and especially of livestock. Many saw the ecodevelopment projects as a good way of getting the resources required to shift out villages from within PAs. The Wild Life (Protection) Act also made it mandatory to clear all national parks of human habitations.

The project design team took a careful look at this issue. On the one hand there was a perception that if most or all of the people living inside PAs were not moved out, there was little use of doing ecodevelopment around the PAs and strengthening management capabilities. There was also a demand from the World Bank lawyers to explain how the project was going to tackle the problem, considering the Indian law was unequivocal on the subject. On the other hand, displacement was not something that should or could be imposed on the poor and often tribal populations living within the PAs.

The project formulated a policy of voluntary displacement. It laid down that only those families would be moved out who voluntarily wanted to go. The MoEF and the World Bank accepted this as a fair and practical solution.

The fact that the MoEF has now extended this policy of voluntary relocation to all project tiger areas can be seen as one of the contributions of the ecodevelopment project to wider policy.

Initially there was resistance from many wildlifers who felt that such a policy meant the end of any hope of shifting out people from PAs. However, discussions with people living inside many of the PAs established



that there were many among them who would be happy to shift out if they were assured a fair resettlement package and process. It was soon recognised that the only practical way was to resettle those who were willing, and to do it so well that others would also soon become willing. Even if some elected not to shift, the pressures on the PA would be significantly reduced because many others have left.

There was concern that, perhaps, in the guise of voluntary relocation, people would be forced to shift out. This could be done by making their lives so difficult inside the PA that they had no other option, or by claiming that they were willing, even when they were not. To guard against the latter, NGOs were selected for each PA. These NGOs were given the responsibility of surveying and recording the names of those families who were genuinely interested in shifting out.

To prevent people from being forced out because of deprivations, it was also decided to make those living inside the PAs, who opt to stay there, eligible for some of the benefits of ecodevelopment. Obviously these benefits have to be in consonance with the requirements of a wildlife PA. There was also a thrust on developing, among the youth living inside PAs, those skills that would encourage them finally to move out.

The project's credibility was tested in this matter even before the project started. In one of the areas selected, Simlipal, the state government decided to shift out four villages from the core zone even while the project was in the process of being finalised. This naturally led to huge protests and even to the charge that the hidden agenda was to shift out every body from every where even before the project officially started. Fortunately, a firm view was taken and Simlipal was dropped from the sites being taken up under the project.



It is, therefore, surprising that so much criticism was lodged against the project on the question of displacement when, in actual fact, the project was instrumental in making the displacement policy for PAs more humane.

#### The Market Forces Argument

Another attack on the project concept came from those who believe that the project was promoting the growth of market forces among the communities living around the PA. They believed that such market forces would lead to further pressures on the PA as the people would become better off and demand more resources. In the extreme version, such a view also demanded that the people living in and around PAs should continue to live as their fore fathers did, so that they are less of a threat to the environment.

The project design took cognisance of this view but responded by asserting that market forces were growing every where on their own. The ecodevelopment project would certainly not be the one which introduces them. In fact, the project would provide the people living around PAs with a legitimate way of earning their living so that they could satisfy their market needs without adversely impacting on the PA. Also, the people living in and around PAs have a right to decide how they want to live. We certainly cannot decide for them.

A second type of objection that came from this school of thought was that ecodevelopment around PAs would create a magnet syndrome resulting in people immigrating from neighbouring and even far off areas.

The project design team also considered this view seriously. Experiences from other parts of the country and from other countries

were reviewed<sup>6</sup>. The design team, after detailed discussions with others, recognised that this is a major problem where temporary surpluses are created because of large investments in infrastructural projects like major irrigation and industry. Such projects initially create a demand for labour that attracts immigration. However, the types of investments envisaged under the ecodevelopment project were very small and were not meant for such infrastructural projects. Besides, a study done as a part of the planning exercise established that most often the economic status of areas around PAs was lower than the rest of the region. Consequently, the investments that were coming in through the ecodevelopment project would not even bring the PA surrounds at par with the larger region, leave alone make them into magnets.

There was another criticism that the investments being made under the project were too high and that these would flood the area with money. In actual fact, the investments made under the project worked out to less than Rs. 2000 per family per year. This could not be considered, by any stretch of imagination, a heavy investment.

However, the argument that the local officials did not have the capacity to effectively spend all this money, was an important one. Early into the project design process it was recognised that some innovative financial mechanisms would have to be created. Consequently, the idea of setting up a trust fund was mooted. This not only allowed money to be spent as and when required but also did not bind the project down to a five year period. It also allowed money to be diverted to more PAs in case it was more than what was required for the original seven. The option of setting up a trust fund is still being investigated.

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<sup>6</sup> *Integrated Conservation Development Projects for Biodiversity Conservation: The Asia Pacific Experience*, *ibid.*



There was also concern that the influx of so much money would see a corresponding rise in corrupt practices. This is always a danger in such projects. However, to minimise this danger, a policy of transparency was suggested and it was proposed that project expenditure be subjected to a people's annual audit through *jan sunwais* or people's hearings.

There were also those who protested that the ecodevelopment project was further sinking us into the debt trap and that when the MoEF had to repay this debt then there would be serious implications on expenditure on wildlife in India.

In actual fact, even the loan component of the project was from the IDA soft loan window. Given the very low interest rates and the long repayment period, this works out to about 70 to 80% grant and only 20% loan. Besides, this loan was from the country committed funds for India and if we did not tap it for the wild life sector it would have gone to some other sector, like irrigation or transport. Further, repayment of international loans are not debited to the sectoral head, as they are considered to be plan assistance, and there was no basis for the fear that the MoEF would, sometimes in the future, have to repay this amount from its already meagre allocations.

Of course, there were those who felt that we should have no dealings with the World Bank and, for that matter, with any bilateral or multilateral funding agency. That is a legitimate perspective but outside the scope of the project design. The ideology that underlay the project design was that no one should be allowed to dictate what we should do in India. Considering the project was totally an Indian project, there was no need to feel shy of taking money from the GEF and the World Bank.



### PAs or JPAs

This, then, brings us to the next issue: why does the ecodevelopment project assume that PAs should be free of people? Much criticism has rested against the project on this count. Even today, there is hope in some quarters that the project designers will see the error of their ways and admit that they were wrong to think this way.

There is a more extreme version of this view, which questions the very rationale of a protected area and argues that all such areas should be disbanded and given over to the local communities.

The debate on what human use should be allowed in PAs and, indeed, should there be protected areas at all, is an important one that still has a long way to go before it runs out of steam. I am not going to enter the debate in this paper. Let it suffice to say that the ecodevelopment project was designed within the context of the prevailing law and policy in India. When that law and policy changes, certainly all sorts of new possibilities will open up for ecodevelopment.

The ecodevelopment project was not attempting to change social norms, but to get as much space as possible for animals, plants and human beings within the existing norms. The important thing is that it does not in any way inhibit the debate for greater social justice, nor does it compromise those who rightly believe that animals and plants also have rights.

### Conclusions

In general, the ecodevelopment project and at least one version of the approach has been criticised on at least three counts.

First, it has been criticised on an ideological basis. It is unacceptable to both extremes of the conservation movement. To those who can be described as 'deep ecologists', it gives away too much to the

people and does not retain enough for animals and plants. On the other hand, to those who consider 'wildlife conservation', at least in its present form, unjust to the poor and the tribal people, it retains too much for the plants and animals and does not open up enough spaces for the local communities.

The approach can then be seen as either 'falling between two stools' or 'adopting the middle path'. I am inclined to see it in the latter way and consider its equidistance from both extreme positions as a strength. However, the middle is always a lonely and uncomfortable position.

The second set of criticisms comes from those who agree with the broad approach but disagree with the details of the concept and the planning process. Here there is much scope for change and improvement. Clearly an approach like this must be progressively made more participatory. It must have in built checks and balances and an ability to learn from successes and failures. However, the truth about what works and what does not will best emerge in the doing and, therefore, the priority must be to get on with the projects.

Finally, there are those who might agree with the concept and the approach, but are dissatisfied by the way it is being implemented. To my mind, this must be the focus of our concern. Whatever the merits of the project design, if it is not implemented properly, we will never know if it could have worked, and how.

