

## GETTING CIVIL SERVICES TOGETHER FOR FOREST CONSERVATION *An Innovative Initiative that calls for sustainability*

*There is no alternative to this administrative system... The Union will go, you will not have a united India if you do not have good All India Service which has the independence to speak out its mind, which has sense of security that you will stand by your work... If you do not adopt this course, then do not follow the present Constitution. Substitute something else... these people are the instrument. Remove them and I see nothing, but a picture of chaos all-round the country.*

— Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in Constituent Assembly discussing the role of All India Services

Half of India's population and more than 70% of rural population depend on forests directly and indirectly. Forests concern ecological, social and economic security of the commons, specially the forest dependent communities. Consequently, forest conservation is not only the responsibility of the Forest Department, but is the responsibility of the entire civic society. All of us, individually and collectively, are responsible and accountable for the conservation of the natural resources for our future generation. The conservation of the forests, the mainstream natural resource, cannot be achieved only by the efforts of the Forest Department, because forests are linked with the communities, the rural development, the infrastructure development projects, and also the law and order.

Besides the technical management of the forests by the Forest Department, for the socio-political and the law enforcing protection dimensions, the involvement of the other wings of the governmental system, viz Revenue and Police has been realised very seriously over the last many years. The need for a better coordination at the field level functionaries of these wings has always been required for effective forest protection.

With this background, the three wings of the governmental system, the Revenue, the Police and the Forest of Bhopal Forest Conservancy, had been approached and convinced to resolve to join for effective collaborative measures for the best management of the forest resource of the State and set example for the Country. Besides the convergence of the efforts of the field functionaries of the three wings at all levels, special interventions had been ensured from the levels of Commissioner, IG and the Conservator for the long-term sustainability of the resource, so that its contribution to the economic development of the State is perceptibly accelerated and enhanced. This happened for the first time in the State and probably in the whole country through a state level consultation of the civil servants deliberating on the need and process of collaboration for forest conservation for the larger cause of human development. This historical event took place on 8<sup>th</sup> September 2008.

To achieve the goal of the collaboration, a consultation process had been adopted, instructions issued to all field officers for collaboration and finally a workshop organised, participated by the state, division, and district Heads of all wings including Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, DG Police, ACS – Forests, PCCF, Commissioner, IGs and DIGs of Police, Chief Conservators of Forests, Collectors, SPs, and the DFOs of all the Districts of Bhopal Forest Conservancy. The focused brainstorming sessions included deliberations from each wing followed by open house discussion leading to concrete action points. The deliberation highlighted the expectations, through pre – identified issues, of each wing from other two wings, and suggested pragmatic measures for long term conservation collaboration. All the three wings unanimously accepted the need for

collaboration, coordination and expressed commitment for the forest conservation. The key outcomes clearly indicated the importance of such collaboration for the mutual benefits of the three services as a common goal of the service to the people. The expression 'divided we lose, united we win' was considered to hold good for the cause of forest conservation as well. The joint participation of the three pillars of administration for microplanning at community level, management plan at the district level, and the vision document at the district level were identified as the actions to achieve the goal of the collaboration. The considered consistent participation and interaction of all stakeholders at all levels and regular structured consultation at district, regional and state levels are necessary. The necessity for organising such consultations at regular basis was appreciated by all for the sustainability of the collaboration. Various Forest Acts and Regulations provide prohibitory and regulatory powers to the Revenue and Polices Officers to curb forest offences, and powers reflect accountability and responsibility towards collaboration for forest conservation.

For the institutionalisation and sustainability of such an instrument, the Forest Department has to play a proactive role to involve the major stakeholders for the collaborative efforts and better coordination to make forest conservation as a common goal. It requires constant persuasion, effective communication, identification of common issues and creating an enabling environment to provide a common congenial platform of collaboration. The mindset and passion, that all of us are working for a governmental system and not for a particular sector, is a key component for such a strong collaboration for a bigger cause. The initiative needs to be reviewed and efforts should be made to develop an institutionalised mechanism to sustainably implement such collaboration. To strengthen such collaborative teamwork, a Forest Officer may be inducted in the CM Secretariate along with the present team of the Administrative (IAS) and Police (IPS) officers.

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