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CIRCULAR No. 6/2003/PMU.III/2.

Sub:- APFD - Empowerment of VSSs - strengthening of grass root level functioning in APFD - Certain Guidelines - Issued - Regarding

1. Of late, there has been a significant increase in workload of the Forest Department especially with respect to the implementation of the programme of Joint / Community Forest Management, Neeru-Meeru, Clean and Green etc. This is more so because of the workload for documentation and reporting. On the other hand, there has been a steady decline in number of staff at various levels mainly due to retirement without any corresponding recruitment. This calls for evolving a new strategy to strengthen the grass root level functioning of the Forest Department with a view to achieving the task easily and empowering the SHG (VSS & EDC) adequately.
2. The forest department has been implementing the initiative of participatory forest management since 1993. Till 2002 this has been implemented through Joint Forest Management after which the programme has been upgraded as Community Forest Management. Village level institutions like Vana Samrakshana Samithis and Eco-Development Committees are actively participating in protection, regeneration and general management of the forests allotted to them. So far we have constituted 7090 such committees. These institutions have democratically elected managing committees and their duties and responsibilities have been detailed in Government orders covering their constitution and functioning. These committees have been functioning as the visible arms of the forest department and assisting the lower level functionaries of the forest department in discharging their duties and responsibilities more successfully.

It is in fitness of things that the institutions of VSS and EDC and the human resources available in these institutions are properly utilized to supplement the efforts of the forest staff especially at grass root level in order to achieve the smooth and successful implementation of different forestry schemes / projects.

After careful examination of the entire issue in details, the following guidelines are issued to all the field level functionaries:-

1. Though VSS is a cohesive group of families living near the forests, a core group of 15 to 20 young and enthusiastic members within the group should be identified and trained in various aspects of forest management as detailed below so that they can act as a catalyst for forming a strong work force for implementation and monitoring of forestry works as per the approved Micro Plan. Members belonging to BPL families may be preferred while giving due importance to gender issues. These core group members within each VSS will be trained in forest

management, financial management and social development issues in order to upgrade their skill for better livelihood opportunity.

- 2 The role of the forest department functionaries will be to identify the core group members and train them in the above aspects, guide them and monitor their functioning. The entire exercise of identification of these core groups and their trainings must be accomplished and internalized within the shortest possible time. The benefit from the above arrangement will be huge which may be elaborated by a few examples as noted below:-

Example - I : As per the Circular No.5 & 5-A on Water Harvesting Structures inside the forest area, percolation tanks of different sizes mini, medium and big are to be erected on different order streams - 1st order, 2nd order etc.. The forest staff is supposed to select the points where the PTs are to be erected, and demonstrated with full justification as to why a particular point on the stream is selected for erection of a Percolation Tank to the members of the core group. Our staff should demonstrate also as to how to erect a mini, medium and big percolation tanks explaining clearly the steps involved like key trench, scuffling of soil in the bed of the key trench, excavation of soil from the fore shore areas for putting in the key trench, consolidation of soil layer by layer, formation of water passage (by-wash) etc.

Example - II: In the VSS area planting programme is a common item. Our staff will be raising the nursery, doing the alignment and stacking, digging of pits and planting of seedlings and maintenance. All these steps may be explained and demonstrated to the members of the core group, so that after some time the members of the core group can carry out this type of work with a minimum supervision and guidance from the Forester / Range Officer.

3. It may be necessary that required number of planting stock may be shifted to the VSS village before planting season from the Central Nursery under the care of one of the core group members for maintenance, who may be paid the approved maintenance charges.

All these activities are necessary not only for empowerment of the members of the VSS but also to build up the forward linkages for additional income to these members of the group by up-gradation of their skill.

4. It is observed that the functioning of the Forest Beat Officers and Asst. Forest Beat Officers are not integrated so far with the functioning of the other forest staff of higher level with respect to implementation of JFM/CFM programme which is not only most regrettable but also affecting adversely the implementation of the Project and its outcome.

Therefore, the Forest Beat Officers and Assistant Beat Officers should be fully integrated into this system and they should be involved in identification of these groups within each VSS in their territory and in training and monitoring of their functioning;

5. Training programmes will be organized at A P Forest Academy, Dullapalli, Regional Research Centres; Hyderabad, Tirupathi, Warangal and Rajahmundry, designated training centres in each forest division and in each VSS.

The Director A P Forest Academy, in consultation with the Chief Conservator of Forests (T&E) will develop suitable course curricula and training modules and training material which will be finally approved by this office.

Training in forest management: Training will be organized for the identified groups in actual field operations like SMC works, Block plantations, Avenue plantations etc., to be taken up in accordance with various circular instructions issued by this office.

Training in financial management: A separate financial management manual has to be prepared for use by the VSS. This specifies the book keeping activities, registers etc. to be maintained in each VSS. Training has to be imparted to 4 to 5 selected literate members in each VSS on financial management and book keeping activities required to be undertaken at the level of VSSs.

Training in social development: Training under this theme include training in conflict resolution, gender issues, issues of other vulnerable groups, social safeguards needed under the Project, leadership development, communication skills, health, family welfare etc. These trainings will ensure leadership development and better communication skills for the VSS members.

It goes without saying that a suitable member of a VSS may undergo training in more than one or all the subjects.

The subject is of utmost importance and therefore Conservators of Forests and the Divisional Forest Officers are requested to follow these instructions in toto.

Sd/- **(S.K. DAS),**
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