

Management of Social Forestry in Maharashtra

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SECTION

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Introduction*

Maharashtra has a forest area of 63,920 sq km which is 20.76 per cent of its geographical area. Such a large area of forest in the third biggest State in the country is, however, able to supply only a part of the forest produce required by the industries and the public in the State. The remaining part is met through imports from the other States. With the rapid industrialization of the supplier States and the depletion of forests even in those States, their supplies to Maharashtra have begun to wane.

The large rural population which constitutes about 70 per cent of the total population of the State consumes, on the other hand, wood for fuel on a large scale. The income level of the rural masses being still quite low, they cannot afford to use the sophisticated fuels which are priced high in the market. They are, therefore, compelled to cut the vegetation on the forest and the public lands for fuel, employing even illicit means at times. Cowdung which once formed the principal source of manure for agriculture, is also being used as a fuel. These consequences were a result of the depletion of forests on a large scale and they were inevitable because of the absence of a policy to develop the forests on the lines required to provide the day-to-day needs of the masses. The Commission on Agriculture (1976) considered all such eventualities of the depleting forests and it highlighted the need for a well planned Social Forestry Policy for the country. It was included in the 20 point programme for its implementation.

1.2 *Social Forestry*

Social Forestry connotes the management of forestry at a local level by the local people for the benefit of the local community. Besides providing for the conservation