

# Case Study

## The Baranaja System



Jardhargaon is a village at a height of 1500 metres situated in the hilly district of Tehri Garhwal in the State of Uttarakhand in North India. Jardhargaon has pine forests, village grasslands (Civil Soyam Forest) and dense Reserved Forests covering an area of 429.5 ha consisting primarily of oak and rhododendron trees. Cultivation is the main livelihood of the people of this region.

This is part of the Garhwal region where the Chipko Movement took place. The Chipko Movement started in the early 1980s as a spontaneous local protest against tree felling by contractors and it spread rapidly across the region. The Movement resulted in a 15 year moratorium on commercial felling at altitudes over 1000 metres in the Uttarakhand region. Jardhargaon, too, came under the influence of this Movement, primarily through the active involvement of one of its residents, Vijay Jardhari.

Since returning home from the Movement, Jardhari has been instrumental in ushering in a conservation movement of a quieter and deeper kind in his village. In 1980 a *Van Suraksha Samiti* or VSS (Forest Protection Committee) was set up by local people, in order to conserve the Civil Soyam Forest (reserved for the villagers' to use) as well as the Reserved Forest which is officialy owned by the government. The Reserved forest which earlier had broad leaved trees were severely denuded by the 1980s. The community decided to stop using it for grazing as well as for collection of fuel-wood and timber and to

control forest fires. They did not opt for any afforestation programme but let the forest regenerate on its own. Today, nearly 30 years later, the de facto control of the forests lies with the community and the once barren land is home to several hectares of dense mixed forest consisting of a diversity of oak (*Quercus incana*), burans (*Rhododendron arboreum*), horse chestnut (*Aesculus indica*), pine (*Pinus roxburghii*) and other species. An assessment in the 1990s by botanists of the G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development showed levels of diversity that were unmatched by government protected forests. The village is also home to black bears (*Ursus thibetanus*), leopards (*Panthera pardus*), wild boars (*Sus scrofa*), many deer species and over a hundred species of birds. Tigers (*Panthera tigris*) too have been occasionally reported from the area.

Another movement called the *Beej Bachao Andolan* (Save the Seeds Movement) started a few years after the forest protection activity. This movement was a response to the crisis that faced the agrarian community as a result of getting trapped in the government propagated Green Revolution. After an initial rise in productivity, the Green Revolution had over the years resulted in soil infertility, weaker seeds, and an increasing dependence of the local community on external government and private agencies. Besides this, as more and more land was devoted to growing market crops, the huge range of foods that were available in the wild and grown on the farms were disappearing, resulting in poor health of the community. Vijay Jardhari consulted the elders of the community for a solution to the problem and was advised to comb local forests and farms and find the wild cousins and cultivated varieties of indigenous seeds and bring them back to the farms. This also meant using traditional methods of agriculture which included systems like the Baranaja where atleast 12 species are grown on a field at a time in what looks like a messy arrangement of varieties of cereals, lentils, vegetables, creepers and roots but actually is a highly sustainable and time-tested method of agriculture. Today this movement has resulted in the revival of many species, including 200 varieties of beans, 100 varieties of paddy and 320 varieties of wheat. The surplus is sold in the markets of Delhi with the help of NGOs like Vividhara and Kalpavriksh. The increasing demand for organic food has also meant better economic returns for the inhabitants of

this unique village. Today more and more farmers in the surrounding villages are returning to traditional seeds and methods of farming.

While the advantages of this quiet, consistent and deep conservation effort are many, the community does have its share of challenges. The conservation efforts have led to an increase in the number of monkeys that raid the houses, of wild pigs that raid fields and of bears that attack millets, maize and wild fruit. The area officially is under the Forest Department and the officials do not have a solution to this problem as yet. Another challenge is the constant threat from lime-stone mining efforts in the area and the community has been fighting to stall the commencement of mining which will negatively affect the biodiversity of the region and the livelihoods of the people. Besides this, there was a lack of coordination and trust between the community owned VSS which lacks official recognition and the officially recognised Van Panchayat (VP) but in recent times there has been greater acceptance of each other.

This effort has been written about extensively and is recognised internationally as one of the most successful conservation efforts by a community. The Movement has also played a major role in bringing about international recognition to the existence of Community Conserved Areas.

**Source:** 'Jardhagaon Community Conserved Area', A Report by Kalpavriksh members following a field visit and consultation with the residents of Jardhagaon in July 2008

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