

Preface

Green beginnings: joint forest management in Jhabua is an attempt to capture the JFM (joint forest management) experience in Jhabua, in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India, in its entirety. This has proved to be a phenomenal task owing to the limited project documentation and the paucity of printed literature available on the programme's evolution and implementation. As a result the Jhabua JFM programme has remained an enigma while generating considerable interest in India and across the globe. 'The moonscape' was how the Jhabua terrain including the forests were termed in the 1980s. Against this background, the current day's green environs in Jhabua are an outcome of the partnership between the community and the FD (forest department) established over the past decade and the successful implementation of the few pioneering attempts at integrating development interventions with forest regeneration in India.

As reflected in the document, Jhabua's environmental crisis originated from heedless exploitation of forests initiated during the colonial era. Increasing commercialization of forest resources, lack of proper management systems, change of property rights, as well as insulation of the forests from people who traditionally depended on them, lie at the root of myriad problems related to the extent of degradation to which the forests in Jhabua were exposed. This situation is manifest even today in frequent droughts, poor productivity of natural resources – forest and agricultural lands, mass out-migration in search of a living and livelihoods, and illegal and illicit withdrawal of forest products. To capture the whole picture, the framework of *Green beginnings* encompasses not only the JFM programme and its impacts, but also delves into the historic timeline to highlight the major events that have influenced the patterns of natural resource use and management in Jhabua.

The JFM programme itself has been looked at with focus on the three distinct phases covering (1) the initiation of participatory forest management, (2) the introduction of watershed programmes along with JFM, and (3) the launching of the Rajiv Gandhi Mission on Watershed Development in Jhabua. While analysing the causes, strategies, and impacts of the Jhabua JFM programme, an attempt has been made to address a multitude of factors like population, overconsumption, technology, inequality,

and governance, among others, that have influenced the happenings in Jhabua over the course of time. The launch of the Jhabua JFM programme heralded the recovery of the denuded and parched soils of Jhabua. The establishment of a stable and promising base by the FD–community partnership created the pathway for the implementation of the Rajiv Gandhi Mission on Watershed Development, acknowledged as one of the largest watershed programmes to be ever implemented.

A review of literature and documentation available on Jhabua reveals the inadequacy of material on the pioneering innovations and initiatives undertaken by the FD. Therefore, an earnest attempt has been made to trace, from the very beginning, the changing relationship between forest-dependent communities in Jhabua – mostly tribals – and the FD. This has been done in the overall context of forest resource status, causative factors for forest destruction, and policy regimes, over both the pre- and post-independence periods.

Green beginnings is mostly based on primary data and information collected from the field by visiting a large number of programme sites. Major insights into the processes have been achieved with interactions and detailed discussions with both government officials and community members. The document aims to capture the thoughts and ideas of these different stakeholders in the manner they were communicated and thus, includes a number of local terms. For the convenience of readers, a glossary of local terms, a list of the scientific and local names of species, and a list of acronyms have been provided. The book also includes verbatim quotes at appropriate places. Some of these have been reproduced, with due credit provided to the source.

Through the ages, forests have played a pivotal role in human survival and development in not only Jhabua or India but for that matter throughout the world. This valuable resource has been decimated and destroyed mostly as a result of anthropogenic interventions – some as a part of larger development strategies and others due to a struggle for mere existence. Like many others, Jhabua is an example where the quest for survival and development has perpetuated a vicious cycle of increasing poverty, greater dependence, more destruction, and, in turn, greater poverty leading to scarcity of natural resources including forest products and basic development options. However, Jhabua is one of the few cases where a remarkable recovery from the brink of disaster has been achieved and beckons hope for those fighting a battle against natural resource degradation and destruction.

Green beginnings is, therefore, a tribute to the untiring efforts of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department and the unshakable faith of the forest-dependent communities in a better tomorrow.