With full moon on the horizon, the illuminated night was dead silent. Occasional shriek of the jackals would break the eerie silence. The dense forest developed along village Jaswant Nagar had become a night shelter for some wildlife. Only six years ago, this 70 hectare patch of revenue land was an open grazing field for cattle.

The stillness of the night was shattered as many an axe fell on the woodlot. With no one to worry about, a group of people were felling the trees indiscriminately. It was later learnt that about hundred people had indulged in the felony. By morning, the wood had disappeared to the hiding in the cowsheds and rooftops. Life was back on track during the day.

Jaswant Nagar is a village in district Tikamgarh, Madhya Pradesh. It has a 92-member Primary Farm Forestry Cooperative Society (PFFCS) that has been allotted, on lease, 314 hectare of barren land. Over the years, with technical support from IFFDC, over 2.04 lakh trees of diverse species have converted the abandoned land into dense forest.

The power tussle between two factions in the village had triggered the large-scale felling of trees. Though everyone in the village knew who were behind it, no one would utter a word for fear of retribution. It would seem that the hard work of the past six years was going down the drain. The members of the cooperative society were a scared lot, lacking courage to bell the cat.

At this point, IFFDC intervened and mobilised women members to take the bull by the horn. Some 80 women members complained the matter to the district administration and the police. A detailed inquiry was conducted, all the offenders were caught and the entre lot of wood was recovered. The wood was sold in the open by members of the cooperative and the money generated has been spent on re-planting the destroyed site.

The bad dream of that dreadful night has long been forgotten. The woods are lovely, dark and green yet again!
A Moment of glory

One fine evening a few months ago, a village in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh was re-born. Towards late afternoon on July 24, 2010, an enthusiastic group of 500 women drawn from as many as 14 villages planted 2,205 Mango and Aonla plants in the village. This was done in one stroke, with the blowing of a whistle. A sort of record was created for not only for the village but for the entire state.

Planting fruit saplings has never been a big deal but such a moment has symbolic significance. Symbolism is still a potent force in public life. Saying the right thing, doing a right thing, can still be hugely transformative in ways we seem to have completely forgotten. The social engineering of collective action was accomplished by IFFDC under a NABARD-supported ‘wadi’ project.

Over the years ‘wadi’ has become synonym to backyard garden, a flagship scheme of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). Across 4 states, IFFDC is implementing as many as 6 wadi projects in which over 5,500 households are being engaged in planting a future full of nutritious juices.

*NEST stands for Nutritional and Economic Security for Tribal & Marginalized Communities.

Sharing thoughts

During the recently concluded Asian Agri-History Conference in Udaipur, Chief Executive Dr K G Wankhede (centre) appraised the Hon’ble Chief Minister of Rajasthan Sh Ashok Gehlot on IFFDCs work on improving the livelihoods of the Kanjar tribe. Intrigued by the initiative, the Chief Minister advised scaling up of the livelihood improvement activities amongst the tribe to bring the stigmatised communities in the socio-economic mainstream.

(detailed report on Kanjar project can be seen in the August issue of this newsletter)