

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF POTENTIAL FOREST RESTORATION PROGRAMMES INITIATED BY LOCAL NGOS AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

GAYATRI SEMWAL

Department of Humanities, Graphic Era Hill University, Dehradun, Uttarakhand,
India 248002

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to assess the viability of local non-governmental organization (NGO) and tribal community-led initiatives to restore degraded forestland. In accordance with India's Forest Rights Act, forest-dwelling communities get collective rights and duties for the sustainable use of their customary forests known as Community Forest Resource (CFR) Rights. However, similar to previous rights-based decentralization reforms. The issue then arises as to what function the state must serve in order to realize this decentralization based on rights and obligations. Non-state players, particularly Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) focusing on tribal or rural development concerns, were shown to play a pivotal role in facilitating the shift to community-driven forest governance in such a setting. We compared activities taking place in communities with and without NGO help.

KEYWORDS NGOs, Tribal Communities, Forest Restoration. Community Forest Resource

INTRODUCTION

To ensure the success of big cat conservation initiatives and to sustain India's vast natural ecosystems, it is necessary to protect small cats, which provide critical economic and environmental services including pest and disease management. Protecting, restoring, and connecting habitats on a landscape scale is vital for the long-term conservation of small cats since a large portion of their range occurs outside the Protected Area (PA) network. Poaching and human-wildlife conflict (HWC) are other hazards to cats in these places, and they are becoming more common as human development and land use changes increase the human-wild cat interaction and the potential for local-level conflicts. Continual consequences from development diminish and fragment habitat, increasing human contact with wild cats. Human population growth and unsustainable economic development are major factors endangering wild cats. In accordance with the National Wildlife Action Plan 2017-31, the project will use a landscape conservation strategy that coordinates efforts across protected areas (PAs), tiger corridors, and buffer zones linking these locations in order to better protect wildlife and empower local populations. Because that PAs are biologically and socioeconomically interdependent on the mosaic of land uses in their surrounding landscapes, the landscape conservation strategy signals a change away from the previous practice of concentrating resources primarily on increasingly isolated PAs. The proposed project would aid the Government of India in establishing a nationally and internationally replicable integrated model for wild cat conservation at the landscape scale.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Manas Kumar JHA et.al (2022) Nevertheless, it has been encroached upon, extremely polluted, or silted over the years, diminishing its usefulness for things like groundwater replenishment and similar purposes. Eighteen percent of the world's more than a thousand smaller-sized water bodies have been encroached upon in some way; nine percent have been turned into parks; four percent are impossible to locate; eleven percent are polluted; etc. The coordinates of these bodies of water will allow for more efficient and long-lasting administration of each one, as well as opportunities for community involvement and self-sufficiency. This report provides a concise overview of the present state of surface water availability in post-monsoon Delhi (NCR). Surface water is a renewable resource that may be identified, mapped, etc. with the use of Geographical Information System (GIS) and Remote Sensing (RS) technology, as is suggested in the current work. This will aid in determining the catchment area and, to a lesser degree, the storage capacity. The research also highlights the need of coordinating government policy with associated legislation, as well as the administration and activity of the relevant regulatory body.

Dr. Sujit Kumar Biswas et.al (2021) For the last two decades, The Joint Forest Management Project has been a groundbreaking effort in forest conservation (JFM). The program's overarching goal is to improve forest management while simultaneously empowering local people. In India, the Joint Forest Management system has tried to integrate socioeconomic incentives with forest development in order to get local populations involved effectively and meaningfully. This study will provide policymakers a high-level summary of how well the program has been implemented in various sections of the nation. More specifically, it examines the regime of JFM in India and the elements that encourage community engagement in forest management under that regime.

Alice Di Sacco et.al (2020) We need immediate action to reverse global warming. Several large-scale tree-planting initiatives are already under way with the goal of storing vast amounts of carbon to mitigate the effects of human-caused carbon dioxide emissions, a key contributor to rising global temperatures. But, if tree planting isn't properly planned and implemented, it might end up increasing CO₂ emissions and having long-term, negative effects on bio-diversity, landscapes, and people's ability to make a living. Here, we detail the most pressing environmental concerns with widespread tree planting and provide 10 guidelines, based on cutting-edge ecological research, for restoring forest ecosystems in a way that boosts biodiversity and carbon sequestration without compromising human well-being. First, preserve what's already there; second, collaborate; third, aim to maximize biodiversity recovery in order to achieve multiple objectives; fourth, pick the right spots to restore; fifth, let nature take its course; sixth, choose species for maximum biodiversity; seventh, employ hardy plant material; eighth, prepare for infrastructure, capacity, and seed supply; ninth, learn by doing. Long-term strategies are what we're focusing on as we try to solve the climate and biodiversity problems and meet people's basic needs. By emphasizing the value of locals as keepers of traditional knowledge, we draw attention to the benefits that may result from a restoration effort that successfully restores ecosystem function and renews the supply of a broad range of forest commodities and services. Although there isn't a one, foolproof method for restoring forests, increasing public and

commercial interest in the subject is essential if we want to see actions that serve as enduring carbon sinks that provide the highest returns for biodiversity and humanity.

Laura Valencia (2019) Restoration of damaged lands is high on the agendas of nations looking to combat climate change and safeguard biodiversity. In my thesis, I use a political ecology lens to examine India's seven-billion-dollar compensatory afforestation initiative, which aims to understand the possible unintended repercussions of these enormous state-led restoration operations. By neglecting to prioritize local populations and institutions, confirm traditional rights, and secure livelihoods, this strategy runs counter to India's wider efforts to democratize forest administration. Instead, compensatory afforestation relies mainly on industrial tree plantings, which lead to displacement and instability. I analyze the effects of this policy on Adivasi shifting cultivators in Odisha, east India, using geospatial data that has been verified against the ground. Thus, I agree with requests from the area of Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) for rights-based and tenure-sensitive restoration.

Dr. Debajani Dhal et.al (2015) The Earth's environment has consistently supplied all the resources required to maintain life. Yet, as humankind has progressed, Earth's current condition has deteriorated, and the need of conserving the environment has become an urgent concern in our day and age. Educating the public, especially the younger generation, about the need of protecting the environment is more important than ever. Education on the importance of protecting and preserving the environment should begin at a young age and be a central feature of any environmental curriculum aimed at inspiring youngsters and the general public to take action. To better inform the public about environmental issues and the solutions being offered by the government of India, as well as to highlight the important role that young people can play in securing and protecting the planet, this study focuses on environmental education and communication channels. And to educate the public about the many environmental causes that exist. Data for this investigation came from many secondary resources. Research materials including books, articles from online journals, and seminar papers are gathered for this purpose. With the available data, it's clear that caring about the environment has become more crucial in recent years. Because to the power of the media and the influence of educators and young people at universities and high schools, the issue has received widespread attention. Even though there is a general understanding of the issue, its maintenance has lagged behind. There is a lack of education about the government-provided services in India. It is also discovered that although metropolitan regions have a greater demand for education, rural areas have a far lower level of awareness.

METHODS

The Western Ghats, the border with Madhya Pradesh in the north, and the state's eastern portion are the primary areas in which forests may be found inside Maharashtra (see Fig. 1). Vidarbha is located in eastern Maharashtra and is home to 53% of the state's forests and 28% of the state's tribal people.

To learn about the post-CFPR rights recognition reality in NGO-supported and unsupported rural areas, we (particularly the main author) made numerous trips to the region and spoke with important informants and networks. In light of these exchanges, we selected a subgroup of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a proven record of success in enforcing the Forest Rights Act. The Organizations

chosen for the research have been active in the area for over fifteen years. They participated in the social movement that sought acknowledgment of the rights of forest-dwelling communities, aided villagers in staking claims, and are now assisting communities in doing the same.

More than a hundred interviews with individuals from all walks of life were done by the first author. Sixty percent of those questioned were local residents. Participants included representatives from the CFR rights management committee and the gram sabha. To get a better understanding of local attitudes on the Forest Rights Act, Canadian Forestry Act (CFA) rights, and other forest management issues, snowball sampling was used to locate villagers to interview. Both sexes were represented in this sample from different socioeconomic backgrounds and age ranges. Social activists and independent researchers made up the remaining 10%, while bureaucrats and NGO workers accounted for the remaining 15%. In-person interviews lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to two hours, depending on the amount of material needed to be gathered, and were followed up by phone calls to ask questions and verify details.

SAMPLE SIZE

The study's sample size is set at 60 people, 30 of whom will be from Athirappilly panchayat's tribal population and 30 from the local non-governmental organization community.

RESULTS

Rights and obligations under the CFR in communities supported by NGOs

We found that NGOs in NGO-supported villages were active in three primary areas: community interaction, state actor interaction, and market actor interaction. Community engagement is mostly geared on strengthening local infrastructure. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) negotiate on behalf of local people with state and market players to boost the Forest Rights Act's chances of being fully implemented. The NGOs' primary focus in this area is on enhancing the villagers' interactions with market players like NTFP vendors. In this part, we provide our findings in detail to illustrate the post-rights-recognition reality in the communities sponsored by NGOs.

Interaction with communities: Awareness and capacity building

Community organizing and the pursuit of constitutional protections are not new phenomena in Maharashtra's Amravati and Gadchiroli districts. This stems from a string of demands made in the early 1970s for things like job security, land reform, and the preservation of traditional and customary forest resources. When a claim has been made, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focus their efforts in rural areas on encouraging and equipping locals to fulfill their sustainable use and conservation obligations while simultaneously exercising their CFR rights. The NGOs have achieved this goal using a variety of strategies, including: a) raising public awareness; b) enhancing the ability of certain groups to engage; c) Developing Capabilities and Specific Skills; and d) taking real-world actions that advance CFR rights.

The NGOs have worked to raise people's level of understanding, but they have also tried to teach the locals new skills. Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

have provided training in forest management, vegetation stock mapping, and GPS mapping (Table 1). These abilities are then put to use in following endeavors like mapping the boundaries of the CFR forest area (something the state agencies haven't done yet) and creating the forest management plans the state is urging them to do. Lastly, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have explored a number of forest-related initiatives. NGO workers are always thinking about concerns of "sustainable usage" and "conservation," in addition to assisting in the marketing of NTFPs. Afforestation, particularly in degraded forest areas, using native plant species is one activity that might help. The ecological environments in which various NGOs operate vary; for instance, NGO 4 operates in a very degraded forest belt. So, NGO 4 has put a lot of effort into reestablishing vegetative cover via various means.

Table 2 Activities carried out in the post-rights recognition phase in NGO-supported villages.

ACTIVITIES				
	NGO 1	NGO 2	NGO 3	NGO 4
Awareness and capacity building	• Rapport and trust building			
building	• Training workshops to educate and inform the communities about the FRA and their rights			
	• Engaging local villagers in NGO activities			
	• Mobilizing self-help groups (SHGs)			
	• Collective information sharing via <u>WhatsApp</u> groups			
	• Regular interaction with community members			
	• Exposure visits to other villages			
	• Mobilization to engage the communities in collective action for afforestation, erosion control, and other forest management activities			
	• Vegetation stock mapping			
	• GPS mapping		Convergence of all the	
	• Training workshop for women farmers	• Initiation of projects only	• institutions	• Convergence of all the

	• Mobilization of SHGs	based on requests from the community	and committees formed in the post-rights recognition phase	institutions and committees formed in the post-rights recognition phase
				• Youth engagement via Maharashtra VSTF
Reconciling with statutes, trouble-shooting administrative bottlenecks, & providing support for resource regeneration	• Rapport building • Creating pressure by demanding proper implementation of the FRA	• Rapport building • Creating pressure by demanding proper implementation of the FRA	Rapport building • Demanding proper implementation of the FRA • Confrontation	• Rapport building • Demanding proper implementation of the FRA • Confrontation • Litigation

	for state actors			
Forest produce marketing	• Networking with other NGOs for cross-learning about ways to navigate market systems, learn about new opportunities, and overcome obstacles in the marketing process			
	• Negotiation	• Alternative livelihood	NTFP • collectives	• NTFP collective
	• Alternative livelihood opportunity:	opportunity: honey	Alternate livelihood • opportunity:	• Alternative livelihood
	mahua (<u>Madhuca logifolia</u>) flower sweets		fisheries and herbs	opportunities: dairy, fruit, and

photographs documenting the regeneration of plant cover in a number of towns. Several government initiatives provided the necessary funding for these endeavors. Most villages' residents were paid by the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) for their participation in the laborious afforestation effort. Thirdly, NGO 3 has been working hard to alter NTFP harvesting and management practices by encouraging locals to abandon harmful methods, even if they are widely accepted as "traditional". In response, they claim that hundreds of towns have put a prohibition on these activities. Here, the duty of responsible use and conservation is being actively pursued.

Table 2 KNOWLEDGE ABOUT IMPLEMENTING PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING IN GOVERNMENT OFFICIERS

Answers	frequency	Percent
YES	5	8%
NO	28	47%
SOMETIMES	27	45%
TOTAL	60	100%

It stands for government officials' understanding of the decision-making process and how it may be put into practice. Just 8% of those who belong to the group are happy with how decisions are made. About half of the population agrees that this is a poor method of making important decisions. Hence, 47% of individuals think it would not lead to a more efficient implementation of decisions by government officials.

Table 3 KNOWLEDGE ABOUT YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Answers	Frequency	Percent
YES	55	92%
NO	5	42%
TOTAL	60	100

Youth engagement in vanavakasha grama sabha is shown in the following table. A whopping 92% of them are a part of it. When asked about the youth's involvement in the vanavakasha grama sabha, 42% had negative things to say.

Table 4 KNOWLEDGE ABOUT PROTECTION ABOUT FOREST RESOURCES

Answers	Frequency	Percent
YES	26	43%
NO	5	8%
SOMETIMES	29	48%
TOTAL	60	100%

It's a symbol of forest preservationist sentiments. Just 22% of those surveyed saw forest conservation as a positive thing to do. Several problems have been reported in the tribal administration. The conservation forest should be located in the vanavakasha grama sabha. As a means of controlled and methodical tree felling. Forest fire prevention or suppression, followed by forest preservation. The vanavakasha grama sabha is responsible for a wide variety of initiatives. The majority of people (72%) believe that the forest resources are being adequately protected by the vanavakasha grama sabha. This leads us to conclude that the vanavakasha grama sabha takes care to preserve its forestland.

CONCLUSION

This research looks at the involvement of the vanavakasha grama sabha's tribal group. The vanavakasha grama sabha attracts a large number of residents. Athirappilly panchayat in the Thrissur district was the site of the research. 60 of the respondents identify as tribal. Over half (48%) of respondents from vanavakasha grama sabhas think they can do a better job of preserving forest resources. The report also includes information that may be utilized by NGOs to evaluate their own performance. Our conversations with NGOs have led us to believe that the vast majority recognize the practical and ethical constraints placed on their efforts. At least one Organization has discussed the need of their eventual departure and the difficulty of leaving behind sustainable infrastructure. On the road to more responsive forest governance, studies like ours may provide nongovernmental players a chance to consider their options.

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