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Sustainable Forest Management and Community Forest Rights in Pandharkawada, Maharashtra, India

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Abstract

In the specific environment of Pandharkawada, Maharashtra, India, this study undertakes an in-depth study of the essential part played by community forest rights implementation and sustainable forest management methods. The study provides an in-depth account of the complex environmental and socio-economic situation by diligently researching the difficulties that are particular to this region, going beyond a simple summary. Analysing the proactive efforts led by the Joint Forest Rights Management Committee is at the heart of our research. The initiatives of this committee are carefully evaluated to figure out how well they meet the issues that have been identified. The study analyses the results of these actions with the goal to figure out how they impact the area and the community. This thorough evaluation provides useful data on the interaction between the well-being of those who are affected by conservation efforts and these efforts. The study focuses an abundance of attention on the significance that community-driven initiatives have in protecting biodiversity and natural resources. The research emphasises the interdependent relationship between sustainable forest management, community engagement, and the safeguarding of ecological assets by clarifying the crucial role that local communities play. In addition, the study raises awareness by highlighting the Joint Forest Rights Management Committee's notable accomplishments and initiatives. By doing this, it advances our understanding of the beneficial effects that community-based projects, particularly those in the complex field of forest management, can have on environmental sustainability and the general welfare of communities. The results of this study will help shape policies and practices in the future, promoting a more an extensive and community-focused strategy for managing forests sustainably.

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1. Introduction

The need for conservation and sustainable management of forests for environmental balance has become paramount today. As a solution to this, the Forest Department has increased its efforts in forest conservation, sustainability, and development to ensure the timely protection of natural resources such as suitable components or materials in nature. Natural resources encompass land, water, air, sunlight, and also include locally available minerals, mineral oil, and plant life. These resources are essential for the existence of biodiversity. Humans are an integral part of the environment. Due to changing human lifestyles, the natural cycle is undergoing transformations. It is the responsibility of every citizen, not just a specific group or government, to maintain

the balance with the environment, coexist with it, and strive to mitigate the damages caused. In this context, the importance of forests in environmental balance is exceptional. In recent years, extensive deforestation has disrupted this balance, leading to increased temperatures, environmental changes, pollution, and unexpected problems such as erratic rainfall. Therefore, the importance of conserving and expanding forests for environmental balance has become crucial today.

2. Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this research is to comprehensively examine the interplay between sustainable forest management and the implementation of Community Forest Rights in Pandharkawada, Maharashtra, India.

The Study Aims to Achieve the Following Specific Objectives

- i) **Assess Challenges:** To identify and assess the challenges and issues faced by the Pandharkawada region related to forest management, sustainability, and biodiversity conservation. These challenges may include deforestation, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and socio-economic concerns.
- ii) **Analyse Initiatives:** To analyse the initiatives undertaken by the Joint Forest Rights Management Committee in Pandharkawada to address the identified challenges. This analysis will explore the strategies, policies, and practices adopted to promote sustainable forest management and the conservation of natural resources.
- iii) **Evaluate Environmental Impact:** To evaluate the impact of the initiatives on the environment, particularly in terms of biodiversity conservation, forest cover, and ecological balance. This evaluation will involve assessing the positive and negative environmental outcomes resulting from the community-led efforts.
- iv) **Assess Community Impact:** To assess the impact of the Joint Forest Rights Management Committee's actions on the local community. This includes examining the economic, social, and cultural effects of the initiatives on the lives of the people living in the Pandharkawada region.
- v) **Highlight the Role of Community Action:** To underscore the critical role of community action in preserving biodiversity and natural resources. This objective aims to emphasize the importance of involving local communities in sustainable forest management and conservation activities.

The study seeks to provide insights into the complex relationship between community-driven forest management, sustainable environmental practices, and the well-being of the local populace. By achieving these objectives, the research contributes to a better understanding of the challenges and successes in Pandharkawada and serves as a reference for similar initiatives worldwide, promoting the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

- a) Conduct surveys and interviews with inhabitants of Pandharkawada, members of the Joint Forest Rights Management Committee, and local officials.
- b) Collect historical information on the region's biodiversity, deforestation rates, and management of the forests.
- c) Compile information on the Community Forest Rights Act's implementation, including the procedure for receiving rights and the committee's role.

3.2 Data Analysis

- a) Analyse Pandharkawada's socioeconomic and demographic data to better understand the local environment.
- b) Evaluate the Community Forest Rights Act's success in conserving biodiversity and forest resources.
- c) Evaluate how the committee's actions, such as afforestation, tree planting, and soil and water conservation, have affected the conservation of forests.

- d) Consider the difficulties the community and the committee have to deal with, such as encroachment, illegal logging, and forest fires.
- e) Examine how the money allotted under the Community Forest Rights Act is being used, and determine the causes of any underutilization.

4. Identification of the Village

4.1 Location and Demographics

Name of the Village	Pandharkawada
Name of the Joint Forest Management Committee	Joint Forest Rights Management Committee, Pandharkawada
Date of Forest Rights Grant	2016
Area where Forest Rights have been granted	444.4 hectares

Pandharkawada is a city and municipal council in the Yavatmal district of Maharashtra, India. It is located on National Highway 44, connecting Shrinagar, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Bangalore, and Kanyakumari. The city has a population of approximately 26,567 as per the 2011 census, with a literacy rate of 74%. It is surrounded by dense forests, including the Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, known for its rich biodiversity.

4.2 Initiatives and Importance

Pandharkawada is renowned for its agricultural produce, especially soybeans. The city is famous for the Jagdamba Bhavani Mata Temple, one of the oldest temples in the region. The presence of forests and wildlife sanctuaries in the vicinity makes it vital for biodiversity conservation. The Joint Forest Rights Management Committee, Pandharkawada, plays a pivotal role in the sustainable management of these forests.

5. Community Forest Rights Act

After obtaining community forest rights, guidance was provided to the committee by the Dilasa organization in the village. The committee for community forest rights in the city included members of the City Council, Gram Panchayat, Rojgar Sevaks, Anganwadi Workers, and also some selected young individuals. Through the Community Forest Rights Management Committee, organized information and guidance were provided to the villagers regarding important tasks and responsibilities. This included aspects like minor forest produce collection, community forest management, afforestation, and microplanning.

6. Pre-Conditions for Obtaining Community Forest Rights

Before acquiring community forest rights, there was no clear knowledge about the types of flora, fauna, and birds present in the forests or about the forest area in the city. Information about the city's forest region was also lacking. People's knowledge about forest rights had not yet been enriched. Livestock used to graze freely in the forests. Consequently, natural regeneration in the forest area was not occurring. The lack of defined boundaries for community forest rights allowed animals to enter the city for grazing. There were no restrictions in the city to control the cutting of fuelwood, minor forest produce, and even soil and water conservation activities were not being carried out.

7. Community Forest Rights and Public Awareness

7.1 Meetings/Gatherings

Public awareness and work related to activities like water conservation, employment opportunities, planting trees, etc., are carried out in periodic meetings and gatherings. These meetings serve as a platform for educating people about water conservation, employment opportunities in the forests, and tree planting. Training, village meetings, and employment planning for forest activities have been conducted on a large scale, promoting public awareness. The improvement of soil, water conservation, and mixed planting methods have been used to raise awareness among people about forest conservation.

7.2 Wall Painting

In the Jangodai Tekdi area, there is a temple dedicated to Jangodai Devi. Posters promoting the activities of the Community Forest Rights Committee and tree planting are displayed in the temple. Students from local schools are also encouraged to visit the temple once a week and engage in tree planting as part of their environmental awareness efforts. Various slogans and statements related to forest rights and forest conservation have been written in the local tribal language. Various programs and workshops have been organized to explain the concept of forest rights and laws. Guidance has been provided to farmers through letters to undertake sustainable farming practices. Additionally, awareness campaigns have been conducted in the city.

7.3 Active Participation of Community Forest Rights Members

In the city of Pandharkawada, members of the Community Forest Rights actively participate in initiatives to improve the forest area. Under the cooperation of Shivaferry, tree planting activities have been carried out, focusing on how to increase forest growth in the jungle. Mixed planting methods have been used for forest conservation, and under the SBI Foundation, funds of 26 lakhs have been provided for jungle conservation. Members of the committee have planted 4400 saplings in Jangodai Tekdi. Additionally, in terms of city planning, efforts have been made to create a healthier environment for citizens, including the preparation of working trucks. The construction of soil bunds has been initiated, and tree planting during the monsoon season has been promoted. Various fruit-bearing trees like tamarind, custard apple, gooseberry, amla, bitter gourd, bael, bamboo, etc., have been planted on 3.5 acres of land.

7.4 Forest Management and Care

The CFRMC actively plays a role in the protection and conservation of tree planting under SBI. Volunteers from the Vanamitra project have been appointed as full-time volunteers to take care, monitor, and ensure the well-being of the planted trees. Proper care, attention, and risk assessment are conducted regularly for the maintenance of plantations. Activities such as digging pits, preparing tree basins, fencing, watering all trees, and pruning are carried out to ensure healthy growth. In addition, local schools are involved in voluntary work every Sunday to promote tree care, and a tree planting drive is organized every Sunday.

7.5 Soil and Water Conservation Project

To protect the areas where trees have been planted, a barbed wire fence has been installed to deter animals. Approximately 600 meters of fencing has been completed with a cost of

around Rs. 3 lakhs. Due to differences in soil quality between Lahari and Utara, there was significant damage due to uneven sunlight and soil erosion. To achieve better results, soil and water conservation activities have been initiated, including the construction of a 1,575-meter water absorption trench (WAT) in the Janwan area. Ropewalks have been established, and 4,500 trees have been planted in the Jangodai Tekdi area, with some trees provided by the Forest Office. Some trees have also been brought in from nurseries, including tamarind, custard apple, gooseberry, amla, bitter gourd, bael, bamboo, etc.

7.6 Providing Water and Security

To maintain the well-being of trees and meet their water requirements, a Community forest rights committee, consisting of members, has dug a borewell on Jago Dai Tekdi, which is 300 feet deep, to provide water to the trees. To facilitate watering the trees and maintaining the forest area, a security guard has been employed.

7.7 Capacity Building of Community Forest Rights Committee Members

The Forest Department and Dilasa organization have educated villagers about Community forest rights and the employment guarantee scheme, providing them with training and guidance. This has resulted in effective implementation of the laws related to Community forest rights, helping in environmental conservation.

8. Main Threats to Community Forest Area

Human life primarily depends on three essential elements: water, forests, and land. People extract their livelihood from these resources. While farming is the main occupation, people also gather resources from nature, such as wood, soil, and firewood, which poses a significant threat to the forests. In urban areas, encroachments into forest areas for livelihood purposes have become common. Examples include.

8.1 Illegal Timber Logging

People often use forest wood for building their homes or constructing makeshift shelters, resulting in deforestation.

8.2 Encroachment

Community forest rights forests are often located near villages, and residents encroach upon these areas for agriculture or housing.

8.3 Illegal Tree Felling

In forests, people sometimes cut down trees to create open spaces for farming or to use the wood as fuel.

8.4 Forest Fires

Forests are prone to fires during hot weather, and people in the area sometimes set fires for agricultural purposes, leading to uncontrollable wildfires.

8.5 Hunting

Today, people can be seen hunting wild animals, endangering various species.

8.6 Fuel Collection

In rural areas, people use wood and cow dung for fuel, leading to deforestation.

8.7 Illegal Mining of Minor Minerals

Local communities, in need of quick income, often engage in illegal mining activities, such as sand and murum excavation.

8.8 Homogenization of Tree Species

Planting only one type of tree species, often exotic, limits biodiversity and disrupts the ecosystem.

8.9 The Slowdown of Traditional Medicinal Herb Collection

Modern methods of herb collection have reduced the need for traditional methods, affecting biodiversity.

9. Contribution to Forest Fire Control

To control forest fires, the committee collaborates with forest departments to provide necessary resources and educates citizens on fire prevention measures.

10. Water Conservation Efforts in Community Forest Rights Areas

Water conservation initiatives include tree planting, check dam construction, and solar energy bore wells, enhancing water availability and promoting sustainable practices.

11. Findings

1. Both suburban dwellers and tribal people in Pandharkawada have benefited from the adoption of the Community Forest Rights Act. Local communities now have the ability to actively take part in forest management and conservation thanks to the allocation of forest rights.
2. The community has benefitted greatly from public awareness campaigns, such as meetings, wall murals, and training programmes, which have helped to inform them about forest conservation and the Community Forest Rights Act. The committee's efforts to manage forests sustainably, including planting trees and preserving soil and water, have improved biodiversity and led to healthier forests.
3. Collaboration with organisations like Dilasa and the Forest Department has supported committee members' capacity building and training.
4. Threats to the forest environment still exist despite efforts, including illegal wood logging, encroachment, illegal tree felling, forest fires, hunting, and fuel collecting.
5. Concerning areas still include encroachment close to villages and an even diversity of tree types.
6. Up to 50% of monies provided under the Community Forest Rights Act are still unused, demonstrating the need for workshops and training to increase awareness and effectively use funds.
7. To ensure the efficient use of monies allotted for various programmes connected to forest conservation, government cooperation is essential.
8. Initiatives to conserve water, such as tree planting, check dams, and solar-powered bore wells, have increased the community's access to water.

12. Recommendations

- i) Increase the awareness of the Community Forest Rights Act through continuing outreach initiatives.
- ii) Offer committee members and the villager's opportunities for training and capacity-building to enhance how the funds are used.
- iii) To address ongoing threats to the forest area, the committee, the Forest Department, and various other organisations should work together more closely.
- iv) To increase biodiversity, encourage the planting of a variety of native tree species.
- v) Put additional controls in place to avoid illegal activities like hunting, encroachment, and logging in the forest.
- vi) To safeguard biodiversity, encourage the collection of traditional medicinal plants.

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