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Rights based approaches to forest landscape restoration

Learning from the Indian forest policy experience

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India has pledged to restore 26 million hectares of forest, an area approximately the size of the United Kingdom.

However, resolving conflicting policies, facilitating forest rights claims, and easing participation in decision-making is essential to maximise community involvement in forest landscape restoration.

The problem

Community forest rights and tenure are considered critical elements for environmentally successful and socially just forest landscape restoration (FLR).

National policy frameworks are a key mechanism through which community rights can be integrated into FLR.

However, our understanding of how existing policy frameworks can both strengthen and weaken community rights for FLR remains poorly understood.

Research approach

We documented the changing recognition of community rights in India's national forest policies from 1865 to 2018. We focused on enabling factors and barriers by examining:

- ⬡ What forest rights are provided
- ⬡ Who can claim these property rights
- ⬡ The processes for claiming these rights
- ⬡ The security of these rights
- ⬡ Their relevance to FLR

Enabling factors

Policies made post 1988, reflect a trend towards devolution of management rights and ownership of forest products to local communities, particularly through the 1996 Panchayat Extension of Scheduled Areas Act and the 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA).

Changes to the National Forest Policy in 1988 paved the way for Joint Forest Management (JFM) guidelines, which provide a complete share of revenue from minor forest products and up to 20% of revenues from the sale of timber.

Barriers

There remain key policy barriers that can affect rights in FLR processes, including:

- ⬡ Non-legally binding and partial management rights under JFM
- ⬡ Cumbersome processes for claiming rights under the FRA
- ⬡ Limited provisions for communities to participate in forest restoration
- ⬡ Conflicting policies on rights, wildlife conservation and afforestation (e.g., between the FRA and the Compensatory Afforestation Act, 2004)

Policy Implications

Enabling factors and barriers likely exist in other countries implementing FLR. Learning from the Indian experience offers the opportunity to strengthen policy frameworks both within India and across tropical FLR target regions.



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About the authors



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About Sustainable Forest Transitions

Sustainable Forest Transitions examines how drivers of reforestation can benefit the environment and local communities, while improving the design and evaluation of forest-sector interventions. The project was selected by the European Research Council (ERC) and funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under grant number EP/X023222/1.

For more information and outputs

<https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/sftresearch/>