Community Forest Management: Well Defined Strategy to Address Climate Change Challenges in India

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Abstract

Odisha, a forested state of eastern India, has the unique distinction of offering rich diversity in forest protection and management practices. The villagers forming into informal committees have been protecting the local forests as a response to forest loss and economic gains. The unique initiative popularly called as Community Forest Management (CFM) is based on the premise that ‘people are the best managers of their local resources’ and resources are managed for meeting the local needs of today and tomorrow. Presently, there would be more than 10000 village groups protecting nearly 2 mha of forest. These village communities could able to maintain diversity in need based and area specific forest management rules and practices. They have developed their own rule system to manage the forest resource sustainably in a time when climate change has posed serious threat to livelihood of forest dwelling communities, alter the species composition and affect the availability of species.

Over a period of time these committees have evolved rules and regulations for sustainable management of the forest. For protection for forest the village committee usually draws up a monthly chart of villagers who would go for patrolling on different dates. In some villages exists a method called ”thengapali” - a stick moves from house to house in the village to remind the person about his patrolling duty. When a person completes his duty he transfers the stick to the next in line so that the following day the latter patrols the forest. Whenever a person violates this rule the committee takes necessary steps to motivate him and sometimes also takes disciplinary measures. Some committees have appointed watchmen to protect the forest and the honorarium is being contributed by the villagers. In some villages the money earned from silvicultural operations in the forest is spent on the honorarium of watchmen. In case of forest fires or illegal felling they immediately rush into the forest and do the needful. In some cases the villagers are allowed to collect fuel wood from protected forest areas but they cannot enter the forest with an axe. Only dried leaves, sticks, lop and tops can be collected for fuelwood. If there is urgent need for small timber and if one does not have any alternative, the committee decides whether the person can be given small timber for his requirement. If they agree to give small timber, then some of the members will accompany the needy into the forest to collect the required timber.

CFM in Odisha provides a potential basis for resilience to climate change impacts. This paper demonstrates the significant contributions made by CFM in ways that are innovative and may be applicable to contexts of climatic and ecological change. While State driven initiatives to restore forest ecosystem to address climatic issues are often lacking, this age old
initiative has been able to play a valuable role in providing practical responses to adaptation needs.

**Keywords:** Climate change, community forest management, adaptation