

Project Update: February 2022

Achievements to date

Fully achieved:

- The project will generate baseline data on the status of FRA implementation in the Western Ghats of Karnataka.
- It will help understand the processes that were followed in the implementation of community forest right (CRs).
- It will also identify the significant factors that play a role in the implementation of the CRs.
- The project will also recommend areas of correction within the process to enable more efficient ways to implement FRA.

Partially achieved:

- It will increase village level awareness through 1-day workshops conducted in selected villages.
- Through creation of awareness among communities, the project aims to alert them to misuse of FRA.
- The project will also suggest appropriate policy tools that can enable local communities to govern their forest. This may not necessarily be within the ambit of FRA.
- At a theoretical level, I intend to build up further understanding on the dynamics involving collective action within a context of prior forest tenures.

Not achieved:

- It will also recommend the kind of support that communities require from various government and non-government institutions.

Difficulties

The second Covid wave and subsequent lockdown struck in April 2021, halting work for the following 4 months. As a result, I could not travel, and owing to a series of back-to-back conferences, I was unable to work in the field during September and October 2021. This has affected my data collection from the field. Even in December 2021, when the awareness workshops were held, it was under the spectre of the pandemic. As a result, participation from local communities was less than expected.

At the time that the proposal for this funding was being written, I had a key community leader in Uttara Kannada to help bring affected communities together for the series of awareness workshops that were planned. Unfortunately, this well-respected leader passed away in August 2021, leaving a lacunae in terms of local support and coordination for the workshops. This too has affected a successful conduct of awareness workshops.

Important outcomes so far

- FRA awareness workshops conducted in Uttar Kannada district during December 2021, has resulted in discussions and a renewed interest in collective forest rights under FRA, especially for other traditional forest dwelling (OTFD) community. (Photos attached)



Workshop registration in progress at Kirvatti, Yellapur taluka, Uttara Kannada



Attendees from villages near Kirvatti, Yellapur taluk, Uttara Kannada district



Concluding remarks by Dr Siddappa Setty, ATREE at Kirvatti workshop



Workshop in progress at Bhagvati, Haliyal taluka, Uttara Kannada



Training on filling claim forms

- A video presentation for the International Association for the Study of Commons (IASC) virtual conference in September 2021 and a paper submitted for RAI-Anthropology and Conservation virtual conference in October 2021.
- A draft manuscript that theoretically analyses the motivations for communities to make claims on their forests collectively through the lens of pre-existing forest tenures that I hope to publish soon.

Community involvement

In December 2021, two workshops were held in the Uttar Kannada district, as a consequence of which a number of conversations took place concerning how to proceed with making claims on Community Forest Rights. As a result, village task forces have been formed to assist indigenous communities with procedures such as filling out documents to claim forest rights, since the majority of tribal members are illiterate and unaware. The task force will be extremely beneficial. Their efforts will also help to raise awareness of the FRA in neighbouring villages.

Moreover, throughout the year, community representatives as well as lower-level government staff have reached out to me for information and clarification regarding the law and the procedures to be followed while claiming forest rights.

Continuation

Yes, most definitely, there are plans to keep working on this project. I hope to continue hosting awareness workshops in other areas and districts of Karnataka. Unfortunately,

the annual waves of the pandemic have been frustrating my plans and efforts, not to speak of its demoralising effect on the researcher.

Sharing results

Yes, I'd like to share the outcomes of my work in a variety of ways. I've already had a couple of well-received articles published in Down to Earth magazine and in the newspaper – Deccan Herald. These articles have been translated and published in regional publications to ensure that the information reaches the widest potential audience. I intend to write more popular articles, not just in English but also in local languages in order to reach out to those for whom forest rights matter the most.

I also plan to make presentations and present them at conferences.

ATREE, the host institution with which I am currently associated, has been working with local communities in various parts of India for over two decades. I intend to use this network to disseminate my study findings and keep the information flowing. In addition, my involvement with Kalpavriksh Environment Action Group has resulted in interactions at various levels – from the bureaucracy to advocacy NGOs to grassroots level activists and community-based organisations. I am a member of several networks that work on community-based conservation initiatives, including the International Consortium of Community Conserved Areas (ICCA – South Asia); Community Forest Rights – Learning and Advocacy (CFR-LA) network and a newly initiated network of researchers working on advancing theoretical knowledge of forest rights issues in India

Timescale

While the research project is part of my PhD work that began in August 2018, this particular funding was used to collect data from my field sites as well as to carry out information dissemination activities to the local communities affected by the denial of their traditional forest rights. The funding has been utilised from January 2021. Due to the pandemic situation and subsequent lockdown as well as travel restrictions placed on citizens, planned activities could not be carried out for the period of April to July 2021.

Next steps

The crucial next steps, especially in Uttar Kannada district, are to run additional awareness workshops and to continue to support tribal groups by providing them with the knowledge they need to make claims on community forest rights. Another crucial stage is to identify local community leaders in areas where there is a leadership vacuum. Handholding is required in Mysore District, as well as providing information to local NGOs that have been assisting tribal groups in Mysore in filing claims and maintaining pressure on the administration to process their claims and acknowledge their rights.

Publicity

Yes, the video presentation that was made at IASC conference acknowledged the funding support provided by Rufford and the logo was used in my presentation slides.

Similarly, FRA awareness workshops carried the logo in the banner that was put up at the venue where workshops were held. During the vote of thanks, Rufford was gratefully acknowledged for the funding support that made the conduct of these workshops possible. FRA manuals were also distributed to participants as Rufford contribution.

Team

This research project is being conducted by me as part of my PhD thesis. The project team comprised of the following members – their experiences and skills are enlisted below:

Ms. Roshni Kutty, PhD student, Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bangalore, India – Has an MSc. in Botany with specialisation in Plant Ecology. Has researched and documented indigenous knowledge systems in Maharashtra and Kerala, worked on community-based conservation issues in Maharashtra, Kerala, Orissa and Goa for 10 years.

Dr Siddappa Setty, PhD, Fellow and Centre Convenor, ATREE – is an ethnobotanist with 24 years of experience working in tribal areas in South India on community and biodiversity conservation. He is focused on ecological, social and economic aspects of forest resource, sustainable use and participatory resource monitoring. His support and guidance during the conduct of FRA awareness workshops in Uttara Kannada is gratefully acknowledged.

Dr Made Gowda, PhD – District Committee member of Soliga Abhivrudhi Sangha, an indigenous community-based organisation in Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka and who has played a key role in getting community forest rights recognized in Biligiri Ranganatha Temple Tiger Reserve, where he resides. He served as a resource person to communicate as well as answer queries regarding FRA, from local participants during the workshops in Uttara Kannada.

Mr Manuvel Juav Soz - who is from the landscape and local community, and reasonably qualified to understand the demands of my research as well as able to converse between Kannada and English language assisted me during data collection as well as in coordinating and making arrangements for the workshops. Members of Communication for Development and Learning (CDL), which is a media research-based NGO working in development communication for 22 years. Their translation work helped me to analyse the data collected from official sources over the years for my PhD.

I also wish to thank the timely help extended by friends and acquaintances – **Harisha, Nakul, Nataraja, Nagaraj, and Manu** – in completing the translation work within a matter of weeks, when CDL could no longer help out with the remaining translation work.