

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Roshni Kutty
Project Title	Understanding the impediments in implementing community forest rights in a biodiversity hotspot: Western Ghats of Karnataka, India
Application ID	32268-1
Date of this Report	21 st October 2022

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
1)The project will generate baseline data on the status of FRA implementation in the Western Ghats of Karnataka.				A few activists and a couple of government officials have sought my inputs on implementation status and details.
2)It will help understand the processes that were followed in the implementation of community forest right (CFRs)				A training manual for street level bureaucrats and Gram Sabha members has been brought out in the local language (Kannada) to serve this purpose.
3)It will also identify the significant factors that play a role in the implementation of the CRs.				Two Karnataka Wildlife Board members keep in touch with me for information on the issues surrounding FRA implementation.
4)The project will also recommend areas of correction within the process to enable more efficient ways to implement FRA.				Couple of newspaper/ magazine articles have been published in this regard.
5)It will increase village level awareness through one-day workshops conducted in selected villages.				Two workshops have been conducted; 25 to 30 people participated. Level of participation was low partly due to Covid restrictions on gathering and partly due to passing away of key community leader to provide ground support.
6)Through creation of awareness among communities, the project aims to alert them to misuse of FRA.				A training manual on claim filing and subsequent processes to be followed by village Forest Rights Committees has been published and will be circulated soon. Help from the state tribal department is being sought for its distribution.
7)It will also recommend the kind of support that communities require from				This is yet to be done as I have not yet completed my thesis, based on which I intend to write popular articles and

various government and non-government institutions.				present my findings at various public fora.
8)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.				Couple of newspaper/ magazine articles have been published in this regard.
9) Contribute to theoretical understandings of power brokerage among different state agencies, dynamics of collective action within a context of prior forest tenures and, state-NGO relationships that influence NGO strategies to influence policy implementation				Two manuscripts are in the pipeline, but not yet sent for publishing. A third is in the drafting stage. Will share the papers with Rufford once it is published.

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

a). 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).



Left: Workshop registration in progress at Kirvatti, Yellapur taluka, Uttara Kannada.
 Right: Attendees from villages near Kirvatti, Yellapur taluk, Uttara Kannada district.



Left: Concluding remarks by Dr Siddappa Setty, ATREE at Kirvatti workshop. Right: Workshop in progress at Bhagvati, Haliyal taluka, Uttara Kannada.



Training on filling claim forms.

b) 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.

c) A training manual on FRA in the local language (Kannada) that simplifies the implementation procedure for street level bureaucrats and for Gram Sabha members.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

The second Covid wave and subsequent lockdown struck in April 2021, halting work for the following four 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.

To compensate for my inability to conduct satisfactory workshops, I developed a training manual (a demand that I met with during my interactions with bureaucrats and village FRC members), that is published in the local language and will help in guiding key stakeholders through the implementation process.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

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 most 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. We are also positive that the training manual provided to village FRCs will be useful to guide them through the process of claiming forest rights, thus enabling their participation in conservation of their forests.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

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 and build a network where information on forest conservation related issues for communities will be shared widely through innovative methods, with the help of human resource trained in mass communication and media.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

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 Deccan Herald newspaper. 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 to reach out to those for whom forest rights matter the most. I have plans to generate communication material (in local language) in the form of short WhatsApp videos that will help reach a wider audience in Karnataka.

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

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

The crucial next steps 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. Strategising among community organisations 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.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

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 booklets were also distributed to participants as Rufford contribution. Further, I developed a training manual that was translated to the local language which will help street level bureaucrats and village FRC members to understand the correct procedure of implementation. These manuals also exhibit the Rufford logo to acknowledge the financial contribution towards its development and printing expenses.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

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 Kuffy, 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, Senior Fellow and Centre Convenor, ATREE – is an ethnobotanist with 28 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.

10. Any other comments?

I am grateful to The Rufford Foundation for the financial help rendered during my field work as well as in helping to disseminate information on Forest Rights Act, in general and community forest rights, in particular. Although, I had identified the problem of lack of awareness among street level implementing bureaucrats as well as village FRC members, and a need for a training manual to guide them in a step-by-step manner, I was able to bring out the training manual only because of the funds I had with me through RSG. In future, I hope to bring out more awareness and

information material for the communities using other innovative methods (mentioned earlier) and I am hopeful that I shall receive support from RSG in this regard.



Tribal hamlet in Nagarhole National Park, Mysore.



Displaced tribal hamlet in Hunsuru, Mysore.