

## *Forest policy implementation on rural livelihood: in India*

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Forests have a crucial role in tackling global issues such as climate change, food shortages, and providing better lives for a growing population. India has a significant forest cover, and many rural communities depend on it for a living. In 2021, total forest cover in India is 80.9 million hectares; Madhya Pradesh is the leading forest cover in the country followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra (**Forest Survey Report, 2021**). For the majority of them, the forest not only provides economic sustenance, but it also serve as a social and cultural hub. It meets fundamental necessities such as wood, food, medicine fuel fodder fiber and small timber and non-timber products such as (gum, resin, dye etc) which are important for rural people and their cattle (**Neumann and Hirsch, 2000**). Forest policies play a crucial role in determining how these resources are managed and utilized. It is a dynamic and may evolve over time based on scientific knowledge, changing environmental conditions, and societal needs. The effectiveness of these policies often depends on their successful implementation, enforcement, and the level of collaboration between various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and the private sector. According to **FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2024)** defines a “forest policy” as, “a negotiated agreement

between government and stakeholders (i.e. all those who depend on or benefit from forests or who decide on, control or regulate access to these resources) on the orientations and principles of actions they adopt, in harmony with national socioeconomic and environmental policies, to guide and determine decisions on the sustainable use and conservation of forest and tree resources for the benefit of society”. In contrast, **the National Forest Policy, (1988)** A forest policy is a deliberate course of action, or inaction, implemented by an individual or an organization that is dealing with a concern regarding the use of forest resources. This might be as basic as locking the gate when you leave a resource area or as complex as ensuring adequate habitat for an endangered species (**Cubbage et al., 1993**). Policies can be explicitly defined through legislation, or informally applied through budgetary processes (**Cubbage and Newman, 2006**).

Forest policy can help forest officials and people affected by forests to express their expectations of forests and contribute to their fulfillment. Core issues addressed in forest policies may include the extent of forest resources (including goods and services); forest biological diversity; forest health and vitality; the productive functions of forest resources; and the legal, policy and institutional frameworks. Comprehensive forest policies address issues such as land tenure, land use, climate change,

employment, community forestry, financing and investment, payments for environmental goods and services, wood consumption, international markets, and forest industry. Degradation and depletion of forest resources contribute to rural poverty and suffering. As a result, rehabilitating damaged forest resources is critical for the survival of rural communities. Therefore, it is imperative to rehabilitate degraded forest resources in order to sustain rural livelihoods. This is possible only through devolution of power to the people for the management of forest. There have been several popular movements in India to protect the rights of the local people. Chipko Movement (1970) was a forest conservation movement in India. It created an example for starting non-violent protest in India (**Bandopadhyay and Shiva, 1987**). The movement was given a proper direction by Sunderlal Bahuguna, and its success meant that the world quickly became aware of this nonviolent movement. Over time, it would inspire many other similar eco-groups by aiding in the showing down of the rate of deforestation, exposing vested interests, raising social awareness of the need to save tree, ecological awareness, and demonstrating the effectiveness of people power. His motto was “The Permanent Economy is Ecology” (**Rafiqi et al., 2023**). Bishnoi movement (1730) was one of the first organized movements of ecological conservation led by a lady named Amrita Devi Bishnoi, along with others 362 Bishnois living in the Khejarli village, Marwar region of Rajasthan state. The main aim of this movement to protect sacred trees from being cut down by the soldiers sent by the Maharaja of Jodhpur by hugging them (**Alam and Halder, 2018**). Other movements such as Appiko Movement (1983) in Karnataka, Jungle Bachao Andholan (1982) in Bihar etc (**Karan, 1994**).

Forest policies are a set of guidelines, rules, and regulations established by governments or relevant authorities to govern the management, conservation, and utilization of forest resources. These policies aim to balance environmental conservation, sustainable development, and the socio-economic needs of communities that depend on forests. Forest policies typically cover a range of issues, including land use, resource extraction, biodiversity conservation and community engagement. The specifics of forest policies can vary widely between countries based on their unique ecological, social, and economic contexts. The following are some prominent features of forest policies implementation and their impact on rural livelihoods in India:

#### **Community Forest Management (CFM):**

- Community Forest Management has been implemented in India since the British colonial period, with revitalization in the 1980's (**Ghosal and Liu, 2018**). It refers to forest management that has ecological sustainability and local community benefits as central goals, with some degree of responsibility and authority for forest management formally vested in the community (**Charnley and Poe, 2007**)
- Some forest policies in India such as, National Forest Policy (1988), Government Resolution of June (1990), Forest Right Act (2006) etc. focus on community forest management, where local communities are involved in the sustainable management of forest resources. The concept of CFM involves various relationships between states and communities, categorized into three

ideal types based on theoretical literature:

- a) **Self-governance, distant state:**  
In this model, local communities govern their forests independently from the state with minimal state involvement.
  - b) **Co-management, decentralized state:** Here, state agencies play an active role in forest management but delegate some responsibilities and authority to local communities.
  - c) **Territorial recognition, facilitating state:** This model involves the state recognizing and supporting community forest management through formal mechanisms, facilitating the relationship between the state and communities.
- CFM initiatives empower local communities to participate in decision-making processes, ensuring that their livelihood needs are taken into account.
  - In India, the state of Uttarakhand, which has a ubiquitous 'van panchayat' based community management system (Baland *et al.*, 2010).

## 2. **Joint Forest Management (JFM):**

- The major achievement of National Forest Policy, 1988 is follows: Involvement of local communities in the protection, conservation and management of forests through joint forest management.
- Joint Forest Management is a collaborative approach to forest management in India that involves the participation of local communities,

forest departments, and other stakeholders in the planning, decision-making, and implementation of forest management activities. The concept of JFM is based on the philosophy of "care and share" in planning, decision-making, and usufructory benefits from assigned forest areas (Pandey, 2003)

- As a result, National Forest Policy (1988) suggested starting a citizen movement to save the nation's forest resources. To implement participatory forest management and address community forest conservation initiatives in India, the Central Government followed suit and released a circular on Joint Forest Management in June 1990 (Nayak, 2002) wherein state forest departments support local forest dwelling and forest fringe communities to protect and manage forests and share the costs and benefits from the forests with them. For working in coordination with villagers, Forest Committees are constituted. A Micro plan for development of forests and villages is prepared by the Forest department and the forest committees. Along with the protection and development of forests, the main purpose of this plan is to fulfill the forest based needs of the local population like small timber, minor forest produce, fuel wood, leaves, grass, fodder etc. by regulated use of the forests.

**(Department of Forests, Government of Madhya Pradesh February, 2015).**

- This model aims to strike a balance between conservation and meeting the needs of local communities by allowing

them to benefit from forest resources sustainably.

- Ghate (2000) concluded that the success of JFM in Maharashtra has been attributed to the provision of avenues for immediate income generation, which has addressed the problem of little to offer to people in the short run. The income generation is done through forestry work like plantation, transporting dead wood from inside of forests, and undertaking activities of coppicing, singling, and dressing of tree stumps in the forest area adjoining these villages.

### 3. **Livelihood Diversification:**

- Forest policies that encourage livelihood diversification in India are community forest management (CFM) and joint forest management (JFM) which advocates for the diversification of forest stands to achieve sustainable forest management goals. These policies promote survival-led livelihood diversification among forest-fringe communities, reducing forest dependence and encouraging alternative livelihood interventions. However, households face complex risks and institutional factors that may restrict access to more lucrative forest products, leading to distress-push diversification (Mawa *et al.*, 2023).
- Forest based livelihood diversification strategy for livelihood security and ecological stability. Livelihood diversification is that people engaged in a range of activities (NTFP gathering, fuelwood, fodder, timber, medicinal plant extraction, NTFT domestication etc.) that produce livelihood outcomes by drawing from a range of livelihood

assets. Livelihood diversification strategy is a reflection of their socio-economic characteristics (Kimengsi *et al.*, 2019).

- Providing alternative sources of income, such as skill development programs or agricultural initiatives, can be part of a comprehensive forest policy.
- Agarwalla and Saha (2021) studied whether livelihood diversification among forest dwellers is a necessity or choice within the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF). Restrictions imposed by the government on natural resource usage and seasonality in Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) have forced inhabitants to seek other livelihoods throughout the year. Their participation in many economic endeavors argues that diversifying their sources of income is justified by need rather than preference. Results may also be relevant for strategic planning towards to ensure sustainable livelihood while minimizing dependence on forests resources.

### 4. **Legal Recognition of Forest Rights:**

- The Forest Rights Act of 2006 in India aims to recognize and vest the forest rights and occupation in forest land in forest-dwelling communities, particularly Scheduled Tribes (STs) and others Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs). This act, officially known as the Scheduled Tribes and others Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of forest Rights) Act, 2006, is an important piece of forest legislation approved in India on December 18, 2006 (Mahawar, 2021)
- Implementation of this act is crucial for ensuring that local communities have

legal rights over forest resources, contributing to their livelihood security.

- One prominent success story in India's legal acknowledgment of forest rights is the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in Maharashtra, notably in the Vidarbha area was studied by (Sahu, 2020). In this region, Gram Sabhas, non-governmental organizations, grassroots groups, and state implementing agencies have worked together to influence the implementation of Community Forest Rights (CFR) rights. The Vidarbha region's particular instance demonstrates the FRA's capacity to uphold the rights of forest-dwelling populations, especially Scheduled Tribes (STs). Dr. Ananya Samajdar, GRAAM's Deputy Director, underlined the significance of educating stakeholders about FRA processes and enhancing the implementation process in order to fully realize the FRA's potential for forest-dwelling people.

#### 5. **Environmental Conservation and Sustainable Practices:**

- Forest policies often include measures to promote sustainable practices and conservation efforts. The aim of National Forest Policy is to ensure environmental stability and maintenance of ecological balance including atmospheric equilibrium which is vital for sustenance of all life forms, human, animal and plant or maintenance of environmental stability through preservation and, where necessary, restoration of the ecological balance (Ministry of Environment and Forests, 1988).

- Balancing conservation with the socio-economic needs of local communities is essential to ensure that livelihoods are not negatively impacted.
- Government of India awarded a pilot study study title “**Natural Resource Accounting for the States of Himchal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh for land and forestry sector**” to the India Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal in 2003. The objective of the project was to, develop methodologies and framework for Natural Resource Accounting of forest and land in the states of Himchal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Major output of the study comprises the generation of various sources accounting for land (land, soil resources etc.) and forest sectors (degradation and depletion etc.) respectively (Verma and Kumar, 2006).

#### 6. **Capacity Building and Education:**

- Effective implementation of forest policies requires capacity building and education programs for local communities. Policy that support capacity building and training programme for staff and local communities or village representative enhance their ability to effectively manage forests sustainably. This may include training in forest conservation techniques, sustainable harvesting practices, and forest monitoring (Kvarnstrom, 2004). Training is one of the important components of the capacity building.
- Building awareness about sustainable resource management practices can empower communities to actively participate in policy implementation.

- For the example Madhya Pradesh State Forest Policy 2005 recognizing the importance of the role of local communities in protection and development of forests, the Madhya Pradesh State Policy has emphasized their involvement in management of forests through Joint Forest Management programme and at the same time development of communities through the forests (**Chaturvedi and Godbole, 2005**). In view of the environmental, economic social and cultural linkages of these communities with forests, sustainable development of weaker sections of the society, especially forest dependent tribal communities and women has been included in the basic objectives of this policy. At the same time, need for providing traditional and modern techniques and skills as well as healthy work atmosphere to forest officials and members of the forest committees in order to encourage them to work with full capacity and zeal, has also been emphasized through training.
- 7. **Monitoring and Evaluation:**
  - Regular monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation are crucial to ensure that the intended benefits reach the target communities. Monitoring will help forestry-related stakeholders to assess their situation vis-à-vis the policies and measures agreed in the Non-legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forest (NLBI). They will gain a better understanding of progress achieved and the challenges they are still facing. By identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the National Forest Programme stakeholders will be able to pinpoint those areas that need the most urgent attention. (**FAO, 2011**).
  - Several institutions monitor policy implementation at the central and the state levels. State governments have two types of monitoring mechanisms. Mid-level and senior-level officials of the department monitor the progress in implementing forestry schemes. Policy analysis units have been set up in some states and some states have independent monitoring and evaluation units. Further, the state finance and planning departments also monitor policy implementation as do independent agencies like the Office of the Accountant General and legislative committees (**Verma and Kumar, 2006**).
  - The upper level of the forest bureaucracy plays a crucial role in initiating policy analysis mainly because of its technical knowledge. Officials undergo a rigorous three-year training course at Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy (IGFNA) that focuses on building policy analysis capabilities. The Research and Training division of the MOEF is organizing short-term training courses for forest officials to update their policy analysis capabilities. Indian Institute of forest Management (**Verma and Kumar, 2006**).
  - Feedback mechanisms can help in making necessary adjustments to policies based on ground-level realities by providing valuable insights into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and the threats of the organizations services, policies and system (**Mirzoev et al., 2021**). They can help identify areas of improvement, prioritize

feedback based on criteria such as urgency, impact, feasibility, alignment and validity and avoid biases or assumptions that may cloud judgment.

Successful forest policy implementation necessitates collaboration among government agencies, non-governmental groups, and local communities. The goal should be to achieve a balance between conservation objectives and rural communities' socioeconomic requirements, ensuring long-term and inclusive development. Forest policies often comprise the following major components and features: