

IMPACT OF FOREST RIGHTS ON VALUE OF MELGHAT LANDSCAPE

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Abstract: The forest rights act 2006 has created considerable ethos among conservationists since its enactment. The present study is an attempt to value the forest loss due to land allotments under forest rights act in melghat forests. The value of forest landscape is referred from earlier researches and the loss of value is quantified with respect to land allotments data with forest department. The loss is compared with gains from cultivation. The gains of 7.07 crore by farmers are reported much scanty as compared to forest land loss of 447 crore rupees. Considering huge loss apart from fragmentation of ecosystem, the forest right allotments needs to be clubbed and re-settled to get undisturbed habitat.

Keywords: Forest rights, Community rights, Growing Stock

INTRODUCTION

Forest right act (FRA), 2006 is one of the most debated acts since its inception. It provides individual and community rights on forest land. The tribal communities cultivating in forest land till 2005 were given forest land in their actual possession. For non-tribal forest dwellers a proof of three generation has to be produced before district level committee. The community forest rights (CFR) were allotted over forest area to collect NTFP's, grazing etc. livelihood related activities.

The process of awarding forest rights has become so lengthy that no encroachments are evicted even for the cases in appeal at the District level Committee headed by District Collector. Sharma et al. (2015) studied impact of forest rights on carbon sequestration capacity of forests in Gondia district of Maharashtra and also assessed impact of land use change in ecosystems. The study reported loss of 9017 tons of carbon dioxide per year. The loss of above ground biomass was reported 112.28 t/ha. It has been recommended that the the government should revisit the process of recognising forest dwellers rights. The study had considerable utility in comparing FRA impacts vis a vis productivity, which was a separate objective in the present thesis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Area of study was entire Melghat forest landscape is representative Satpuda forest located in Amravati District of Maharashtra at the northern extreme of

district. Based on information available in working plans (Joshi, 1974) and forest resource survey (FRS) records the total growing stock in *Melghat* Forests was quantified in the research published by Shaikh, et al. (2019). The values of total Growing Stock (GS) which was worked out by using FRS data by line plot sampling and GS/ha was worked out and taken as reference value for this study. Forest rights act, 2006 has considerable debates since inception. Sharma et al (2015) has done impact of FRA on forests of Maharashtra State with emphasis on Gondia District. But the landscape valuation is not done in entire landscape case based on GS.

For this study, the data regarding individual and community forests rights conferred by district level committee by assessing claims was collected from revenue as well as Forest Department. The area affected by FRA was worked out from available data as per Government Records. The per ha value of landscape is taken from published paper of Shaikh et al. (2019), which gives the forest value sacrificed due to implementation of FRA. The benefits of livelihood are worked out from reports of agricultural productivity in Amravati District. Livelihood benefits vis a vis forest degradation are compared to quantify forest rights act (FRA) allotments impact on *Melghat* Forests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data collected from revenue and forest department, the forest land allotments under FRA in Melghat landscape are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Present allotments under individual forest rights and CFR

Division	Individual Forest Rights in ha.	CFR cases in numbers	Remarks
East Melghat	382	35	Pending 88 ha

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West Melghat	484	32	Pending 161 ha
Sipna MTR	642	13	Balance evicted
Gugamal MTR	062	02	
Total	1570 ha		Total allotted

The pending cases may add some more allotments under FRA, if approved by district level committee headed by collector. FRA allotments being in plots or group of plots, it is presumed that as such water conservation, biodiversity, NTFP, grazing values will not be affected at gross landscape level. Plots are created by removing trees and carbon also gets removed by default with trees, hence only these 2 values considered while calculating loss due to FRA. Whereas in case of CFR area, being overlapping allotment no trees are removed, hence CFR areas not considered to quantify FRA losses. There could be other many losses, but not part of present study. Hence loss due to FRA is worked out as follows.

The growing stock value/ha is Rs. 27 lakhs/ha as worked out in chapter 4.1.3. Considering FRA allotted area of 1570 hectares, the GS loss will be Rs. 424.15 crores. Carbon Sequestration worked out per hectare, by using IPCC (2006) formula was Rs. 146.96 lakhs/ha. For the FRA allotted area of 1570 ha, the carbon sequestration loss was obtained as Rs. 23.08 crores. Thus total direct loss of FRA allotments was reported Rs. 447.23 crores in entire Meghat landscape. This loss is again going to increase once the pending cases are finalised.

FRA has been enacted to provide land ownership to forest dwelling communities and to create livelihood opportunities. The income generation from FRA lands was also a subject of present study. As per report of Superintending District Agricultural Officer (SDAO) Amravati (Anon. 2019), submitted to District Planning Committee, Amravati district has 4,15,858 number of farmers, out of which 1,40,423 farmers are marginal with land holding less than 1 ha. FRA allottees mainly belong to this class. Melghat landscape is corresponding to Dharani & Chikhaldara blocks of Amravati district. Farmers of these blocks mainly cultivate soyabean, tur, cotton, mung, urd, jowar, rice etc. Rice was found cultivated only in these two Melghat blocks due to high rainfall received in Melghat. Productivity reported in SDAO report for soyabean as 835 kg/ha, Tur/Arhar 829 kg/ha and 429 kg/ha in Mung. Considering the moderate to low level of productivity in these crops and actual random survey the farmers hardly earn Rs. 45000/-, as agricultural income. The Gawali forest dwellers get some more income from livestock rearing and milk products. The Rabdi milk product of Melghat is attraction for tourists in Melghat. Khadi Gram Udyog (Industry) Department, alongwith Joint Forest Management Committees and Village Eco Development Committees in Melghat is attempting to improve livelihood through milk processing and

honey processing units on cluster basis. Considering average income per hectare, the gain of FRA land is only Rs. 7.07 crore, where as comparative loss of GS is Rs. 447.23 crores. Means the loss is 63.26 times higher as compared to gains.

Sharma et al. (2015) had done similar studies in Gondia district of Maharashtra. For 2181 hectares of forest land 570881 tonnes carbon was emitted through deforestation. Though it was not quantified in monetary terms, by using the studies of Shaikh et al (2019) which mentions quantification methodology in monetary terms, we may say loss of Rs. 316 crores carbon sequestration is reported by him. This loss along with fragmentation of habitat is beyond recovery. Agricultural Universities may further required to do refined studies with respect to productivity. Considering huge losses as per research in the present study, it required to reconsider FRA act itself or attempt club shifting of FRA allotments on the lines of earlier shifting of villages inside forests scheme, with handsome compensation, to avoid further honey combing of forest landscape. The FRA allotted farmers may get better land in less remote areas and further generation may receive good education and employment opportunities, which seems more viable than allotting lands in remote forest areas.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In the view of the findings, the following conclusions have been drawn with few suggestions for future work.

1. As per the departments record the FRA allotments reported as 1570 hectares. Quantifying GS and carbon sequestration loss was Rs.447.23 crores, as compared to gains by farmers through FRA were merely Rs. 7.07 crores in totality. This indicated loss of nature is 63 times higher as compared to gains through subsistence farming.
2. Agricultural Universities may further required to do refined studies with respect to productivity.
3. Considering 63 time losses as compared to agricultural earnings in FRA areas, club shifting of FRA land holders through handsome package will reduce habitat fragmentation and bring remote FRA allotted farmers to mainstream.

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