Assessing the Capacity of Villages in the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve to Attain and Secure Community Forest Rights

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Abstract

The Government of India passed the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in 2006 to remedy historic injustices borne by indigenous communities throughout India. The FRA aims to rectify these injustices in part through the recognition of Community Forest Rights (CFR), Despite FRA’s widespread promise, its benefits have failed to reach tribes across India. In order to understand the resources communities have at their disposal to advance CFR claims – and gaps in capacity - we conducted research in four communities in Sathyamangalam in spring of 2017. We primarily collected data through interviews with individuals in each village including the village leader, members of the Forest Rights Committee (FRC), and the president of Village Forest Council (VFC). The data we collected highlighted that villages A, B, C, and D attach different levels of significance to CFR, thus impacting their willingness to employ resources to advance a FRA claim. Research on the capacity of communities to make effective claims under FRA and to develop/demonstrate capacity to manage forests independent of the Forest Department is important for understanding the slow pace of FRA implementation and the implications of FRA for community wellbeing and forest ecology. In applying an existing conceptual framework to assess community capacity, we find that attention to resources, relations, and beliefs can support analysis and interventions.