

Initiatives to Reform Tenure in India

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Property Matters: Collective Forest
Policy Issues and Opportunities

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Bio-diversity in India

- 45000 Plant Species
- 81000 Animal Species
- 1228 Identified birds (14% of World)
- 446 Reptile Species
- 204 Amphibians
- Includes 60% of Tigers of the World

Anthropic Diversity

- 91 Eco-cultural Zones
- 4635 Communities
- 325 Languages
- 80 m Tribal People
- Studies suggest that the two diversities are linked

Forest Tribal Poverty Nexus

- 67% forest in North East, Central Belt, Eastern India and Western Ghats
- Almost similar % of tribal people reside there
- Almost similar % of poor people are found there
- 170000 villages (Pop.: 146m) account for 32.2 m ha forests

Four phases of Indian Forestry

- Colonial period from 1857 – 1947: Eminent Domain and Revenue
- Post-Independence 1947 – 1976: Colonial continuum and Industrial Influence
- Confused period 1976 – 1988: Perversion of Public Policy and new environmentalism
- New National Forest Policy 1988 onwards: Promise and lack of performance

Consequences

- Transition from Centralization to Co-management has not resolved forest land tenure problem
- Unrest among forest dependent communities
- Industry increasingly relying on supply from outside forests and outside country
- Government revenue decreasing, low investment
- Emergence of Active Green judiciary

Competing Claims

- Rights on Forest land and forests as a livelihood resource (poverty reduction and human rights)
- Forest as a revenue resource (economic benefits)
- Forest as a biodiversity resource (environmental services)

Emerging Lessons

- Resolve land claims of Tribal and other forest-dependent Communities as guaranteed by constitution and policy
- Forests offer a huge potential for poverty reduction and economic growth but require market, institutional and regulatory reforms
- Without resolving property claims, none of the forestry objectives can be achieved

Some tentative steps

- Government agreeing in principle to settle forest land right claims but facing judicial obstacles
- Setting up of NFC
- Political acceptance and huge grassroots support
- Community mobilisation

Agenda for Reforms

- Reform JFM to secure full property rights
- Conservation essential but builds on security of tenure
- Legalistic and exclusion solutions not feasible: Rethink PPA and remove threat of evictions
- Reform markets to achieve (a) higher income opportunities for people (b) trade in environmental services and © higher revenue for government and forest product supply for industry
- Reform forest institutions and regulations