



COMMUNITY FOREST RIGHTS AND THE PANDEMIC

GRAM SABHAS LEAD THE WAY

Volume 2

of the Extraordinary Work of 'Ordinary' People:
Beyond Pandemics and Lockdowns

and

Bulletin 5 of COVID 19 & Forest Rights

October 2020

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INTRODUCTION

India is currently among the most affected countries by COVID19, recording over 6 million cases, by September 30, 2020. The pandemic and lockdown measures have had a drastic impact on a large population of poor and marginalised communities, causing loss of livelihoods and employment, food insecurity and socio-economic distress. Although the severe hardships being faced by migrant workers in India became global news and concern, the Indian government in its monsoon session has [responded](#) saying it has not maintained the data on lives and jobs lost, because of which no compensation could be provided to them. These migrant workers in all likelihood include Adivasi and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFD), as these communities often migrate to cities in search of better livelihood options.

Over the course of time, a complete disempowerment of indigenous communities over their traditional ecosystems due to lack of access, use, management and conservation rights; lack of meaningful support for conservation and development of sustainable nature-based livelihood mechanisms; ineffective or poor implementation of welfare schemes such as under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) - a job guarantee scheme in rural areas; diversion of forest communities' traditional ecosystems for industrial and mining purposes further disenfranchising them, and often in the face of stiff resistance from them; these are just a handful of reasons causing severe economic, social and ecological crises, including distress outmigration, for Adivasi and OTFDs in India.

As per the findings of a [preliminary assessment report](#), the vulnerabilities, atrocities and injustices that forest communities face due to forest, conservation and economic policies increased many fold during the pandemic. Lack of tenure security has emerged as one of the major reasons for the vulnerable situation of the communities. Additionally, certain pre-existing conditions in tribal areas such as severe shortage and lack of basic [healthcare](#) facilities, lack of healthcare professionals, lack of information and awareness, breakdown of traditional health care systems, among others have created greater difficulties and made tribal areas more susceptible to the pandemic. In most areas the lockdown has seriously affected the local livelihoods of the communities. Nearly [100 million](#) forest dwellers depend on various kinds of forest produce for food, shelter, medicines and cash income. The collection season for these however is mainly in the months from April to June which coincided exactly with the lockdown.

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Despite these problems, **hundreds of examples of Adivasi and OTFD communities' remarkable resilience in coping with the crisis have also been reported**, particularly where they have been **legally empowered**. This has been most evident in areas where land and forest rights have been recognised under The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 (FRA) and Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act 1996 (PESA)- two laws that recognise the rights of Adivasis and OTFD communities over their lands and resources. Recognition of these rights in many cases has led to overcoming constraints and crises situations.

This publication is an attempt to document some of these examples that can help us in understanding the coping mechanisms of communities during times of wide scale distress. **The case studies present examples which may lead us to an understanding that community empowerment, particularly by ensuring tenure security and devolving natural resource governance and management power, can restore ecosystems, create sustainable economies and community resilience to cope with the natural and human induced calamities such as the COVID19 pandemic.**

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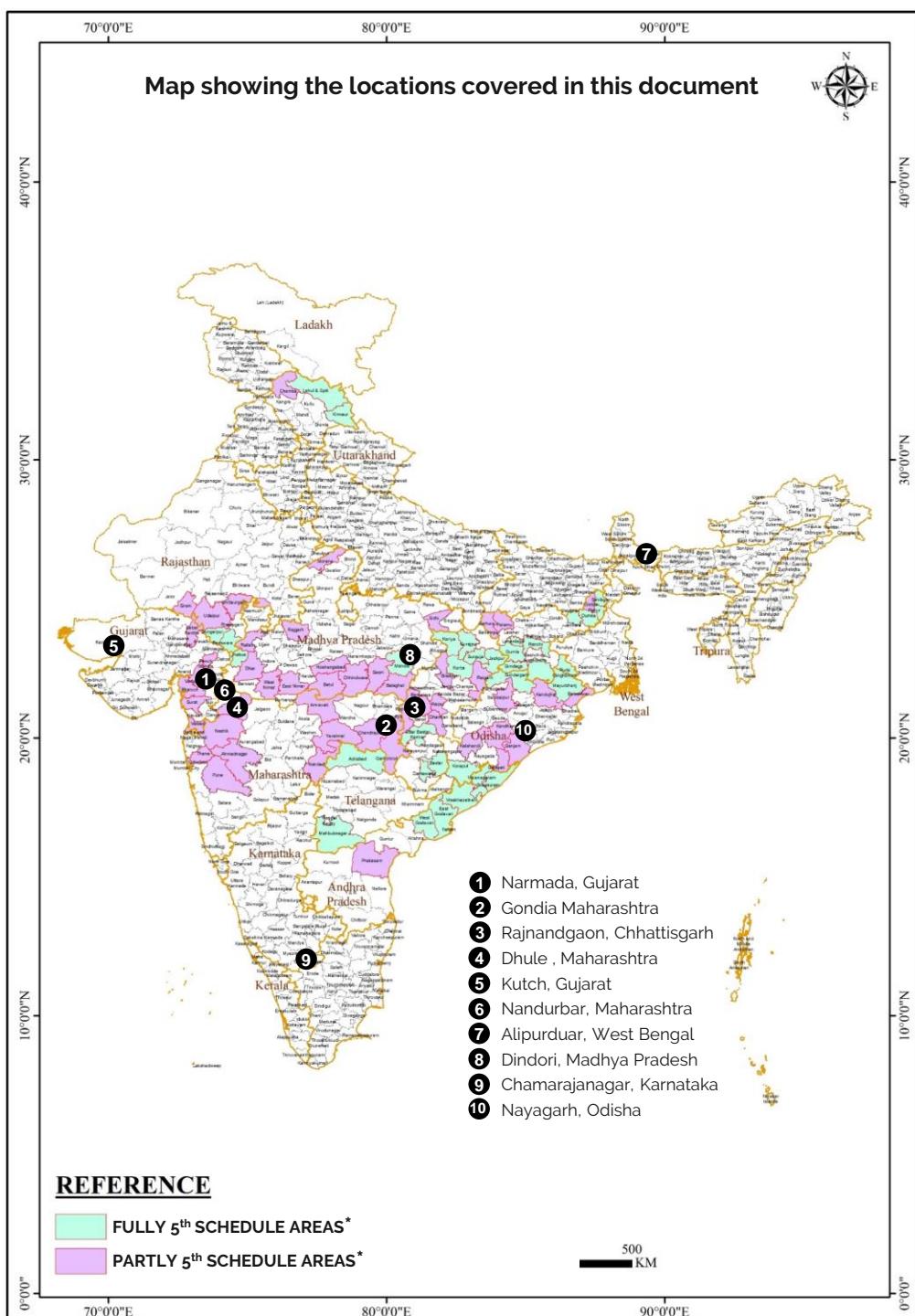
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INTRODUCTION



* As per the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India, Schedule Areas are areas in Nine states of India with a "preponderance of tribal population" and "economic backwardness". PESA, 1996 is implemented in fifth schedule areas giving Gram Sabhas the power of self-governance.

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BACKGROUND

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) is a law that was brought into force after decades of long struggles by indigenous communities in India for their land resource rights. The FRA recognises the historical injustice committed against Adivasis and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs) by recognizing and vesting their rights, which have gone unrecorded so far. This Act includes both individual rights for cultivation in forestland, community rights over common property resources and habitat rights. FRA recognizes that forest communities are integral for the survival of forest ecosystems, and vests rights and responsibilities in them for conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecological balance, resulting in the strengthening of conservation regimes while ensuring their livelihood and food security.

Community Forest Resource Rights (CFR) are rights of Adivasi and OTFDs over customary common forest land within the traditional or customary boundaries of the village or seasonal use of landscape in the case of pastoral communities, including reserved forests, protected forests and protected areas such as Sanctuaries and National Parks. Section 3 (1) (i) of FRA vests the 'right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any community forest resource which they (Adivasi and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers) have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use'. Section 5 provides the power and responsibility to the Gram Sabha to protect, preserve and manage the biodiversity, natural resources, wildlife and water sources in its CFR, and also its cultural and spiritual resources, and to prevent any activity that causes harm to these resources.

The Gram Sabha or village assembly, is the primary unit of local self-governance. As per FRA, the Gram Sabha, which must be composed of at least $\frac{1}{3}$ women, has been given the authority to decide about vesting of claims. Apart from that, the Gram Sabha has the power to control, plan and manage minor water bodies (Section 4 (j)), Minor Forest Produce (Section 4 m (ii)) and Resources (Section 4 m (vii)). Section 4 (d) of Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) 1996, says that the Gram Sabha is competent to safeguard among other things the community resources. Gram Sabhas maintain an account where any funds received, be it voluntary contributions, or sales of minor forest produce and minor minerals, or transfers under any devolution schemes, are held. The rights of usage of the funds are under the control of the Gram Sabha.

Community Forest Rights Management Committees (CFRMCs) are constituted by Gram Sabhas as per Rule 4 (1)(e) for protection of wildlife, forest and biodiversity in exercise of Section 5. Rule 4(1)f gives power to the Gram Sabha to monitor and control these committees which are entrusted with the duty to prepare conservation and management plans for community forest resources.

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SUPPORTING MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

THEMES

**GRAM SABHA GOVERNANCE, SUPPORT FOR MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES,
FOREST PROTECTION**



(L) Adivasi communities make their CFR management plans; (R) Mapping of Community Forest Resources

This story is about a cluster of 24 villages situated in the eastern-most part of Dediapada block in Narmada district. All these villages are exclusively Adivasi villages, predominantly inhabited by Vasava tribe, with some Tadvi tribe families in two villages. These villages are also a part of Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary, which was declared in three phases- in 1982, 1987 and 1989- on 61,542.40 hectares of forest land, and has a total 104 villages, including 25 uninhabited villages.

While communities confronted several decades of violence by the Forest Department and a Paper Mill factory, it was when the Forest Rights Act, 2006 was enacted that people began to see a possibility of change. In 2013-14, after a long period of struggle, these village Gram Sabhas got *Adhikar Patras* (titles) for all the CFR claims for the entire 19220 hectares of forest of their villages. Unlike in many districts in Gujarat, these *Adhikar Patras* observe all conditions of the FR Act and Rules. After they got the CFR titles, the Gram Sabha again elected new Community Forest Rights Management Committees (CFRMCs), each with at least one third women as members.

During the months of mid-March to mid-June 2020, most of the families lost close to INR 50,000. The months of the lockdown coincided with when communities would migrate for labour in agricultural fields and other small industries, where they earn INR 20-40,000 and furthermore they lost out on around INR 5000 due to non-availability of MGNREGA work in their villages. They

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SUPPORTING MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

also incurred a great loss in the sale of their Rabi crop, especially Maize, Green Tur (*Pigeon pea*) and other vegetables, as they had to sell them for half the normal price.

The months of March to June are also important months for collection or harvesting of a variety of Minor Forest Produce (MFP). Bamboo and Tendu leaves are two important MFPs that have to be cut or collected during February to May. Many village Gram Sabhas had heaps of Bamboo from last and current years' harvesting in their forests or on the road side. The paper mill was about to take them away, but then came the Coronavirus and the sudden lockdown. Many of the Gram Sabhas and families suffered a substantial loss. Again, neither the Forest Development Corporation nor the Gram Sabhas could complete the process for auction/ sale of Tendu leaves. As a result, many of the families, especially women, lost their income from Tendu leaves, which usually amounts to INR 5-10,000 per family per season. Some families, especially women and children, lost some income from sale of some other MFPs like seeds of Kanji (*Pterocarpus Marsupium*), Galweda (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Baheda (*Terminalia bellirica*), etc. also.

While the lockdown resulted in major financial losses, this was also the first time when the Gram Sabhas were set to be a decentralized authority. In each village, there were a few families, especially Govaliyas (shepherds) and widows with small children, who had difficulty getting two square meals a day. These families do not usually cultivate land and only depend either on labor or on MFP collection and sale. The CFRMC members and other village leaders took upon themselves to find out such families. As all the Gram Sabhas did not have much income, they decided to themselves give some grains to these families and then approached ARCH Vahini, which gave 3 months' ration, including oil and spices, etc. to 116 such families.

As though Gram Sabhas could not hold big meetings during the lockdown, the CFRMC members of some Gram Sabhas, on the basis of previous discussions, took initiatives and initiated land leveling work on each family's private or FRA land for fixed hours each with the help of tractors from their Gram Sabha funds. During lockdown, most of the Gram Sabhas / CFRMCs continued protecting their CFRs, as they perceived there might be more threats to the forests during this severe time. For that, they were patrolling in a group of 3-4 persons, so as to observe the precautions during the lock-down.

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SUPPORTING MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

Trupti Mehta, a member of the CSO ARCH Vahini who has been working with communities here since 1980s narrated: *"Till now, communities had chartered their ways through difficult terrain, but this crisis? Nobody had ever imagined that communities would have to face the situation that was totally beyond their imagination, and control---Covid-19 pandemic in 2020! The situation of the people in general was bad during the lock-down, not because they, except a few families, did not have food in their houses, but because they lost almost half of their annual income from various sources. Yet this was the first time when the Gram Sabhas were actively involved, in fact, were entrusted in the management and protection of the forest resources. The main challenge remains that they carry out their processes in a democratic and transparent way and continue the forest management and protection work."*



Communities manage the watershed in their CFR areas

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FEDERATION GUARANTEED MFP LIVELIHOODS

THEMES

MINOR FOREST PRODUCE LIVELIHOODS, GRAM SABHA FEDERATION GOVERNANCE



(L) Forest dwellers prepare bundles of Tendu leaf; (R) Women collect MFPs using masks and keeping safe distance

In Gondia district, 75% of the population are Adivasi, mainly Gond and Halba Adivasis. Over here, more than 250 villages have their CFR rights legally recognised, and in Deori block, 29 villages have formed a Federation to carry out their minor forest produce collection and sales. The Federation acts as an elected body that supports and assists the Gram Sabhas. It is governed by two representatives (a president and a secretary), from each of the 29 villages. Each year, the Federation ensures that collectors-the Adivasis and forest dwellers- are paid for all 11 days of their work during the season, unlike the Forest Department which would only buy and pay Tendu collectors for 2-3 days of their labour. Also, while the Forest Department, through its traders, pays collectors only INR 220 per day and seasonal bonuses are as low as INR 25, the Federation pays INR 300 per day and a seasonal bonus of INR 200.

In March 2020, when the lockdown was announced, villagers in Deori block were confused about the process of collection of Tendu Patta and Mahua, given the difficulties to assemble and work in groups. In this context, the Federation took permission from the Maharashtra government to collect Mahua and Tendu Patta.

Narayan Salame, Secretary, Dhamaditola CFRMC spoke about minor forest produce sales during the lockdown "*Both Tendupatta and Mahua are a source of sizable income for the community members. Income from Mahua on an average*

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FEDERATION GUARANTEED MFP LIVELIHOODS

is INR 15-20,000 per family during the collection season while income from Tendupatta is usually around INR 10-20,000 per family. While the Tendupatta collection lasts around 11 days, Mahua collection lasts 30 days and each family earns up to INR 30 - 40,000 during the season. While Tendupatta is sold through the federation, Mahua is sold individually. During lockdown , the rate of Mahua initially was INR 30 per kg, while in the month of April it went up to INR 60 per kg. "

The income that people earn through the collection is used for their individual requirements and also is used for other agriculture activities, paying wages to labourers, paddy cultivation, etc. During lockdown, every adult of all genders of 5069 families in the 29 villages were involved in the collection of forest produce and received payment for the same. This season, when traders came to purchase, the collection centre was made on the outskirts of the village. Furthermore, people constantly practiced handwashing and maintained social distancing.

This year during lockdown, the Federation of 29 villages earned INR 2.5 crores by selling Tendupatta, while managing everything themselves and taking precautions against the spread of COVID19. Furthermore, the Federation had used the substantial profits from sales in 2017 of Tendupatta to rent machinery to dig ponds or waterbodies in the Gram Sabhas for rainwater harvesting. The groundwater was recharged in these areas and therefore villagers could also focus on paddy cultivation. When members of the support NGO Vidarbha Nature Conservation Society (VNCS) went to the community to provide relief kits, the community felt self-sufficient and therefore refused to accept these kits.



Forest Dwelling woman with the Tendu leaf harvest of the day

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GOVERNANCE LED BY GRAM SABHAS

THEMES

**COMMUNITY FOREST GOVERNANCE, FOREST FOODS, MINOR FOREST PRODUCE
LIVELIHOODS, ADAPTATION AND COPING MECHANISMS**



(L) Women clean the Mahua flower harvests; (R) The community carries out their regular CFR management work while maintaining safe distance

"The Gram Sabhas ensured food security for all families, including an estimate of the quantity of food required, especially by the most marginalised. They arranged a free and dry cooked meal for people. Due to the high number of migrant workers returning home, quarantine facilities were made in the district and food was provided to the workers." Keshav Gurnule, a member of SRISHTI-a community support organization -commented on how the Gram Sabhas led the COVID management plans.

Ambagarh chowki is one of the nine development blocks within the district Rajnandgaon in the state of Chhattisgarh. In this development block, the majority of the population is Adivasi: Gond, Kanwar, Halba and Baiga, who are dependent on forest and agriculture. In 2012-13, the villages of Pangri, Khairi, Kesaldabari, Padaki, Sonoli and Durretola got their CFR recognition certificate in the name of the Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMCs are composed of both Forest Department and forest communities) under which minor forest produce, grazing and Nistar (community rights recognised at the time of Princely States and Zamindari systems) rights were obtained.

The Gram Sabhas rejected the JFMC plan and independently formed Community Forest Rights Management Committees (CFRMCs are composed entirely by Adivasi and Forest Dwellers to guide the management of community forest resources) to exercise their rights, patrol the forests and practice CFR

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conservation. The proper implementation of CFR, through the CFRMCs has always been very important in this district.

During the COVID19 lockdown, the community exercised their CFR as per the management plan previously passed and approved by the Gram sabhas. At the same time, the Gram Sabhas initiated and led a COVID lockdown governance process. The government and police administration, Forest Department and Health Department only followed and supported the Gram Sabha-led initiative at a later moment. In fact, the local administration praised and supported the plans of the Gram Sabhas that encouraged local and forest based food security, thereby preventing crowding in market places. We can see that Gram Sabhas created plans around forest protection and conservation, minor forest produce collection and sales, food security and distribution and livelihood management.

When COVID19 was declared a pandemic and nationwide lockdown was to be announced, the Gram Sabhas declared a full lockdown. However, soon after, communities faced difficulties in getting grocery items, medicines and vegetables. Therefore, the Gram Sabhas made a decision to cope with this difficulty through a solidarity process. They decided to build a system to distribute medicinal plants grown around homes, farm vegetables and forest vegetables while banning villager's from going to or consuming from commercial markets for the same. Only village shopkeepers were issued a pass to bring some necessary grocery items and medicines. In the case of ill villagers, the Gram Sabha decided that two people could accompany them in the ambulance to the main town.

As part of CFR management plans and MGNREGA scheme, a forest pond and Nistar pond were made and fisheries businesses were initiated in these ponds for employment. At the same time, indigenous plants like Jimikanda (Elephant Foot Yam/ *Amorphophallus paeoniifolius*), Kochaikanda (Vine Potato/ *Colocasia esculenta*) and Kewkanda (*Costus speciosus*) were planted.

The CFRMCs gave identity cards and passes to the villagers/ locals to carry out the daily collection of forest goods. For daily use and consumption, they decided that three women and three men from each hamlet should be assigned a different section of the forest, to collect fruits, flowers, tubers, vegetables, firewood and fodder grass everyday. The committees devised a plan for the collection of Minor Forest Produce (MFPs) such as Mahua fruits and flowers(*Madhuca longifolia*), Char (*Buchanania lanzan*) and Tendu (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) leaves. They decided to assign two persons from each family a

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specific place in the forest, and each person wore a mask while maintaining a gap of 10 meters between each family's place of collection.

People were barred from going to the markets outside the village. Inter village movement was also restricted. All the routes within the forest were sealed and the community kept check on trafficking and theft of forest tubers, fruits and other minor forest produce by outsiders. In these ways, overcrowding in the forest was avoided and community members could manage to keep different areas of the forest safe from smuggling.

In both forest produce collection and food distribution it was important to safeguard communities from the possibility of infection. The Gram Sabhas decided to prohibit food distribution at the Public Distribution Centres in order to avoid overcrowding. Instead they decided to distribute food to each and every household doorstep, via the Gram Panchayat, after keeping the food in the sun for 48 hours. Prior to food distribution, in order to spread awareness about COVID19, the Gram Panchayats were instructed to paint slogans with health information on walls in public locations and to use a loudspeaker to share information.



An Adivasi woman painting the walls with awareness slogans about coronavirus and social distancing

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LOCAL AUTONOMY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

THEMES

FOOD SECURITY, FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, ADIVASI FPO LED LIVELIHOOD GENERATION



Villagers of Baripada are self-dependent on their own agriculture and forests

In 2017, the individual forest rights (IFRs) and CFRs of around 130 Kokni and Bhil Adivasi families, residents of Baripada village, Gram Panchayat Manjri, in the District of Dhule were legally recognised. Since the forests here are not very dense, villagers are agriculturalists and grow grains and vegetables throughout the year.

Chaitram Pawar, a social-worker and community member of Baripada village shares: *"For people in cities development maybe a big building, a four wheeler, a big TV screen, for us in Adivasi rural areas it is land, forests, agriculture, livestock and food security. And most importantly, self-governance. The villagers of Baripada respect the interconnection between these 5 elements: jan(human), jal (water), janwar (animals), jangal (forest), jameen (land). In addition, we have added three more central processes: collective water management, collective farming and collective marketing."*

As part of community farming, 1016 dryland farmers of 45 villages in the district are organised as a Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO) that has been operating since 2014. The company, the Deshbandu Agro Research and Producers company is the first big Adivasi managed company in Maharashtra. The company is not for profit as it focuses on guaranteeing the correct rate to farmers. However, in years when there is a profit, 30% is distributed to the accounts of farmers, while the rest is invested in building up the infrastructure

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LOCAL AUTONOMY AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

of the company (for eg. one year the FPO invested in a piece of land to open a rice processing mill).

The Gram Sabha of Baripada has been working on long-term cluster development. Around 7-8 years ago, the villagers carried out a survey and came up with a micro plan for the village. This included an understanding of each family's access and ownership of land, water, energy, livestock, food, school-going children and elderly family members. The focus of this survey was to come up with local solutions so that in a situation of crisis, villagers did not have to go to a *sahukar* (money lender) itself. Due to this long-term work, the coronavirus lockdown has not had any drastic impact on this community.

For several years now, families in Baripada have been growing enough vegetable and food produce for their households in order to store the excess, and therefore even during a lockdown there were no food shortages. There is also a good diversity of food. In kharif season, villagers grow rice, urad (split black gram), chauli (cow peas), mungfali (peanuts), soya bean and jowhar (sorghum), while in rabi season they grow wheat, sugarcane, masoor (red lentils), onions and corn. The community has also been involved in conserving traditional forest vegetable varieties, which they showcase and exchange at a yearly Van Bhaaji Mahotsava (Forest Vegetable Festival), and this knowledge is helpful in a time of crisis. During COVID lockdown, the Gram Sabhas involved in the FPO sold 50 tonnes of rice collectively through their company which provided a good income for people.

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CFRMC ORGANISED FOR PASTORALISTS AND LIVESTOCK

THEMES

FOREST RESTORATION, WATER MANAGEMENT, LIVELIHOODS



(L) CFRMCs discuss their water and forest management plans ; (R) CFRMCs hired JCBs to pull out the invasive plant, Ganda Babul

*"While we have been living a nomadic life with our buffaloes for over 550 years, after the Indian Forest Act, 1927 and the 1955 notification of Banni Protected Forests were brought into force, we were compelled to live a sedentary lifestyle," Ishabhai, a Maldhari pastoralist from Gorevale village reminisces. He says, "Subsequently the Forest Department began aerial seeding of an invasive tree species called Ganda Babul (*Prosopis Juliflora*). The Establishment of the Forest Division in Banni and a new working plan in 2009, which led to closure of grazing areas has affected us. However, since then we have filed our CFR claims that are still under process."*

The Maldharis of the Banni grassland, one of Asia's largest grasslands located in Gujarat's Kachchh district, are the first pastoralist group in India to have successfully filed for CFR under FRA. The area claimed for CFR is 2500 sq km.. Prior to 1947, the dependence on the grassland has been community based—there is no individual ownership, and no physical boundaries exist within the grassland area. Between 1947-55 the Banni grasslands was brought under the Revenue department and in 1955, it was designated as a protected forest. In 1998, the Forest Department was officially given the responsibility of the grassland by district authorities. Following this, there has been ambiguity about the ownership of the grassland- neither the Forest Department nor the Revenue Department have acknowledged or accepted the ownership.

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CFRMC ORGANISED FOR PASTORALISTS AND LIVESTOCK

There are 54 forest villages of 19 Gram panchayats in the Banni Protected Forest. The CFR claims of 47 of these villages had received approval from DLC but despite having made multiple representations to the Tribal and Forest ministries and the collector, the community has not yet received their RoRs and titles. The Gram Sabhas have formed CFRMCs, who in their plans had consulted elders of the area who know about the numerous varieties of grass and indigenous shrubs in different areas, the varieties of soils as well as the wildlife such as cranes, jackals and foxes of the area.

In January and February 2020, the CFRMCs in 15 villages were busy trying to carry out their conservation and management plans, as the pre-monsoon period is critical. In particular, the removal of Ganda Babul (*Prosopis juliflora*), the invasive species that propagates rapidly and thereby destroys native grass and herbs. CFRMCs in Shervo village used machines to get this invasive species on 200 hectares of land removed, while in Misriyado village, 150 hectares of land was being cleared of this invasive species. When lockdown was announced, the CFRMCs had to put their work on hold.

The Maldhari communities are mainly dependent on indigenous livestock herding: the Kankrej cattle and Banni buffalo being the most common. Most families have 50-100 livestock, each village around 5000 and the entire area has over 1,00,000 livestock. While the pastoralist community could largely survive on their own milk production, some community members had food shortages. In



Maldhari pastoralists stand near a sign board proclaiming the Banni Grassland CFR area

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CFRMC ORGANISED FOR PASTORALISTS AND LIVESTOCK

such instances, neighbours and villagers would assist them. At the same time, though the price of commercial fodder was rising, communities were able to rely on their own grasslands due to the timely management and removal of the invasive plants.

Lockdown coincided with the summer months of March to May, where the Banni grassland is very dry, and water harvesting is very important. As not just humans, but also close to a lakh of livestock depend on this water system, it becomes imperative to take care of these systems each year. Once Lockdown 2.0 was lifted, the CFRMC fund was used to pay people to carry out the labour of water management by recharging traditional ground water *jheels*. Through a collective system of work called *aabat*, communities worked to dig wells, called *viradas*, that collect sweet rain water. In July and August, the rains began in most parts of Kutch, yet communities are faring well due to the timely management of the lockdown, of the Banni grasslands and of people's livelihood needs.

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DECREASE IN OUTMIGRATION

THEMES

REDUCED OUTMIGRATION, MINOR FOREST PRODUCE LIVELIHOODS



(L) Communities are employed and work for their own forest management; (R) Community planted local trees on CFR areas

Nandurbar district has the second highest acreage of CFR recognition in Maharashtra, where in April 2018, communities had titles [over 2,16,723.10 acres of land](#). The forests have plenty of Bhutya (Gum tree/ *Sterculia urens*), Mahua flowers (*Madhuca longifolia*), Cuddapah Almond (Char tree/ *Buchanania lanzan*) trees and as part of CFR Management plans, the CFRMCs are guiding to plant more trees that help to support livelihood of forest dwellers.

The community is organised into MFP collectives, comprising members who collect the produce. The CFRMCs gather the minor produce from each collective and give them competitive prices and a bonus. This is possible as they sell the MFPs directly to traders and avoid all middle men. The committee also has guidelines to allot funds to support a person who is unable to collect forest produce for one season, due to some difficulties, to guarantee everyone livelihood during the season.

Pratibha Shinde, part of a local NGO Lok Samanvay Pratisthan, shares "Until 2016, a lot of people used to migrate out of Nandurbar district for work. Workers would go for six months as laborers to work in agricultural fields, however now that has stopped. During the COVID19 lockdown, the villages had livelihood: in collection of forest produce, tree plantation through MGNREGA and building ponds and water harvesting for irrigation and other purposes through the CFRMCs. In fact, an entire blueprint for water management in the district, focused on the Toranmal region, is

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DECREASE IN OUTMIGRATION

being implemented by the committees. The workers on an average received INR 250 -INR 300 per day for their work. Staying in the village has benefits, they were able to protect the forests, and also look after the education of their children."

During the COVID19 lockdown, CFRMCs in Nandurbar were organised and sold gum to cities like Indore and Mumbai at INR 70/kg. The villagers were paid INR 50/kg. for the labour of collecting and INR 10/kg. as a bonus of the profit. They also sold Mahua at INR 50/kg. and paid villagers INR 40/kg for collection with an additional bonus of INR 5/kg from the profits. People could take their earnings from forest collection and purchase necessary items at shops in the village, even during lockdown.

Over the years, the communities have planted tree species that can be used to extract MFPs. During this lockdown, villagers planted mango trees etc., which could be beneficial for future livelihoods and food security. This year communities have harvested forest produce, been paid for the labour, and received bonuses from the profits of the sales on Mahua and Gum trees. For some of the other MFPs, the committees are awaiting a better price in order to sell.



(L) Communities conserve and care for their forests; (R) Preparing a dish using diverse forest foods

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COMMUNITY PROTECTION OF FORESTS

THEMES

FOREST PROTECTION IN PROTECTED AREAS, COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE OF FORESTS



(L) A board at the entrance of Kodal Basti, proclaims Community Forest Rights!; (R) Dakshin Mendabari self-proclaims Community Forest Rights

While CFRs are still officially unrecognised by the government of West Bengal, the Adivasi communities- Rawa, Santhal, Oraon, Mech and Koch and other forest dwelling Van Taungya communities, living in and around the Jaldapara National Park and Buxa Tiger Reserve in Alipurduar district in West Bengal, have been accessing and conserving the forests for several years.

During the colonial period, the taungya communities, better known as forest villagers, worked on forest lands cultivating commercial plantations, mostly without wages and deprived of rights. Up until 2009, the Forest Department continued cutting [Clear Felling Coups \(CFC\)](#) in which villagers would labour without any forest rights. However, after the FRA (2006) came about and since 2008 when many communities filed claims and started exercising their rights, the CFCs have become rarer.

Villages such as Kodal basti, Uttar and Dakshin Mendabari have been leading the way for other forest villages to exercise their forest rights, protecting the forest from looting, collecting fish, firewood and forest produce, and managing forest resources. Kodal basti, located in the Jaldapara National Park is the first village to self-proclaim their CFR in West Bengal. After filing their CFR claims, the villagers [put up a board](#) in 2010 indicating that the forest in their area was managed and protected by their community. Thereafter, there was a steady movement of villages putting up boards, some boards are even made of concrete, to demarcate community forests.

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COMMUNITY PROTECTION OF FORESTS

While the FD has created and tried to push for Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs), the Gram Sabhas reject these JFMCs that usually only work in favour of the Forest Department and do not recognise the rights of the community. In 2014, using provisions in FRA, 99 forest villages in Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri were converted to revenue villages on paper. However, once again bureaucratic indifference has meant that in reality people have not received entitlements to their legal rights.

In May 2020, during the initial days of COVID19 lockdown, cyclone Amphan ripped through various parts of West Bengal. In Alipurduar district, although there was heavy rain, there was no large-scale damage. Sunder Singh Rava of Kurmai Basti said, “*For several years, communities have been mobilised to protect and conserve their own forests and exercise their community forest rights. In the past, the village of Kodal Basti is known to have protected the forests from theft and looting.*

This year, the cyclone season coincided with the lockdown so there were fewer people in the forests. The Forest Department took advantage of less people in the forest and the reality of cyclone damage in other districts, to cut down many trees when in fact, only around 10 trees had fallen due to the rains in our area. The villagers of Kodal Basti intervened and stopped them from doing so. In recent years even the local police have grown in sympathy towards us forest dwellers. While earlier the police would unquestioningly support the FD, over time, they began to notice when people were taken to the police station that in fact the FD was being brutal to poor people who were defending their rights to the forest.

In the neighbouring village of Garobusti, located in the Buxa Tiger Reserve, Lal Singh Bhujel of the Van Taungya community narrates “*During the lockdown as well we entered the forests. We use the forests for grazing, or for MFP collection such as Kachu (Colocasia araceae), Chatu (wild edible mushrooms), Narikeli fruit (Ber, Zizyphus mauritania), and Lali seeds (Amoora wallichii King). Forest food is a source of nutrition and many families have depended on it during the lockdown period and beyond. We are now planning to start a process of collective farming in our villages to ensure food security and boost livelihood. The migrant workers have come home in many villages and there is a shortage of rural jobs. We are trying to provide jobs through creating a self-government in our Gram Sabhas.*

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COVID19 RELIEF SYSTEMS BY PVTG WOMEN

THEMES

**PVTG COMMUNITIES, WOMEN LED COPING MECHANISMS,
CAMPAIGNS AND SUPPORT GROUPS**



(L) Baiga women walking towards the forests; (R) A meeting of Gramdut Karyakram campaign and a Baiga Gram Sabha

Baiga Chak, an area of dense forests, is primarily inhabited by the Baiga Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). There are close to 70 villages in Umaria and Dindori districts that are part of this forested belt. Since 2008, the communities with the support of the Gramdut Karyakram and Jangal Adhyayan Mandal, two campaigns working on rights-based awareness, have been working towards recognition of forest rights. While in the initial years of the campaign, individual forest rights were recognised, it is since 2017 that the campaign has focused on the legal recognition of CFRs. Currently, 10 Gram Sabhas of Dindori block have their documents and evidence ready to claim CFR. These Gram Sabhas were ready to submit these to take forward the process of CFR when lockdown was announced.

Balwant Rahangdale, a leader of the two campaigns shares, *"In Madhya Pradesh, there has been very little institutional support in favour of CFRs, and communities have mainly been granted Nistar rights. The Department of Tribal Affairs should be providing documents, empowering Gram Sabhas and facilitating the process of claiming community forest rights. Instead, we have a situation where the Forest Department is supreme and routinely violates not just the Forest Rights Act but the Constitution as well. Furthermore, Gram Panchayats tend to have more authority than Gram Sabhas."*

Therefore, in Dindori district particularly in the 22 villages that form Baiga Chak, our campaign has worked on forming a team of gram dut or village messengers

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who work on awareness-building about CFRs. While many communities across the district and even state have their individual and nistar forest rights recognised, we are working on the recognition of CFRs starting with 10 Gram Sabhas. To have Nistar rights is like renting a space, whereas to have CFR is to own and live well in a space!"

Ever since 2009, there has been a growing movement and at present close to 24 villages in Baiga Chakka are conserving, managing and protecting their community forests. Communities exercise CFR by protecting the forest from fires, by building fire lines, in February-May each year, by prohibiting tree-cutting without prior consent of the Gram Sabhas, by preventing outsiders from encroaching on the Gram Sabhas forests and by organising the community for collection of MFPs and medicinal plants.

Most communities in Baiga Chakka are quite cut off from outside information and even mobile phone networks. When lockdown was announced, there was quite a lot of confusion as people were unclear as to what a lockdown meant. At the same time, as most community members depend on going to the forests, towns or markets on a daily basis for everyday necessities, a lockdown with no prior notice was very difficult. There were reports coming into villages of Baiga villagers who were beaten up by police officers in town and there was a growing fear of the lockdown.

Between March 24- April 29, there was not much support or hardly any information that reached Baiga communities about the COVID19 lockdown. The campaign of volunteers, health workers and panchayat approached the District Collector of Dindori on April 29, and demanded that they be allowed to carry out support work in the district. They made sure that communities got rations for three months and that radios and other systems were put into place to provide isolated villages with information about the health and other implications of the lockdown. The campaign also worked to communicate the issues of communities directly with the Tehsildars and District Collector. From May 15 onwards, as migrant workers returned to the villages, the campaign demanded that people be quarantined in the district head quarters itself. At the Gram Sabha level, many villages put up barricades as there was a fear of outsiders coming into their villages through the forests, which are contiguous with the Chattisgarh border.

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Women played the leading role in the Gram Sabhas, organising systems to work with social distancing:

1. Women ensured that when they went to fill water at springs, hand pumps and pipelines that there was no overcrowding.
2. During ceremonies of death, birth or weddings, women ensured that there was social distancing maintained when visiting or supporting the necessary spiritual ceremonies
3. At Ration shops, the women ensured that each hamlet had a specific day and time for collection in order to guarantee no overcrowding at the shops.

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ADIVASI COOPERATIVES AND ORGANISATIONS

THEMES

LOCAL ADIVASI INSTITUTIONS, DEMANDS FOR GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY, FOREST RIGHTS IN PROTECTED AREAS



(L) Collecting Amla and other MFPs; (R) Soliga communities battle Lantana creepers, that grew alongside the teak planted by the Forest Department in earlier decades

The Soliga community, who live in and around the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve forest area, have a symbiotic relationship with nature. Over here, in Chamarajanagar district, CFR of 25 Gram Sabhas was recognised in 2011, and later 10 more were recognised in BRT Tiger reserve. At present, out of 61 Podus or settlements, 42 Podus of 35 Grama sabhas have their CFR legally recognised while the claims of 10 Podus are at the Sub divisional level and 9 Podus claims are at the Grama Sabha level.

Coronavirus and the lockdown brought about old fears among the Soliga community of BRT Tiger reserve as such "Mahamari" diseases were experienced by the community several years ago. Yet still, this time around people were not aware of COVID19 and its implications, therefore local organisations carried out awareness sessions. Local sanghas, *Zilla Budakattu Girijana Abhivrudhi Sangha* and *Taluk Soliga Abhivrudhi Sangha* or people's forums have worked along with Gram Sabhas to cope during the lockdown.

Before the lockdown, around 290 Soliga wage labourers migrated within the BRT tiger reserve or even to Kodagu and Hassan districts to work in coffee estates and some of the families migrated to Tamil Nadu and Kerala state. For these migrant workers, the lock down came as a sudden shocking news and they were faced with a food crisis when coffee estate owners stopped the work in the coffee estate. Once again, the Soliga community people approached the Sangha leaders who demanded that the District Administration provide food items. It is important to note that many more families used to migrate out to other districts

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ADIVASI COOPERATIVES AND ORGANISATIONS

or states for four to five months of the year seeking employment. After community forest rights were legally recognised, most of the households stopped migrating and became actively involved in NTFPs collection.

The lockdown came as a sudden shock for Soliga families as they do not have the practice of storing food items stocked up for such a long period. Soligas families go everyday to the forest for NTFPs collection, tubers, fruits and green leaves, and use the same day's wages to buy the food items for that day. The Adivasis leaders of the Sangha approached the District Commissioner and District Tribal welfare officer to demand distribution of nutritious food items and free rice. This acted as food security for communities who in the initial phases of the lockdown supplemented these with the tubers and greens they had managed to harvest.

An important source of livelihood is from the harvests of honey. The phases of lockdown, from April to July, coincided with the honey seasons when communities harvested the honey from the forest and sold it to the Large Scale Adivasi Multipurpose Cooperative societies (LAMPS). This year during lockdown, each honey harvester received INR 185 per kg honey, while the honey was sold for INR. 200 per kg by the agents.

Kethegowda of Bangale Podu in BRT Tiger Reserve said: "*Soligia communities harvest around 28 types of NTFPs (honey, lichen, amla, soap nut) and more than half of our incomes are from forest produce. My community people and I went to the forest for tuber, fruits, and green leaves collection for our consumption and also collected honey that we sold to LAMPS. These LAMPS societies, initiated by the government some decades ago and now managed by our Adivasi Sanghas, have been an important source of support. The LAMPS societies assisted us for survival and provided income throughout the lockdown period*"



Soliga communities harvested honey during the lockdown

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FOREST CONSERVATION AND FOOD DIVERSITY

THEMES

**FOREST PROTECTION, COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AND REGENERATION,
FOREST FOOD DIVERSITY, NUTRITION**



(L) The dense forests around Nathapur; (R) A portrait of Nathapur village

The Kondh Adivasi community of Nathapur village in Nayagarh district have been protecting the Tangi range forests for several decades. In fact, in the Ranpur block, women have had [a long tradition](#) going back to as many as 40 years of conserving forests. Despite this, their CFR rights have not been legally recognised. Nathapur villagers had realized the importance of forest and the role played by them in their lives early on, before the current climate crisis was apparent to many.

The community started protecting the forest in 1993 when [the local timber](#) mafia stripped off the green cover and left the village forest barren. Later on, in 2004-5, the Forest department had plans to grow plantations of non-native plants and bamboo in the community forest resource areas of Nathapur and Karadapalli village. The forest department did not take the consent of villagers, and this increased the suspicion towards them. The villagers opposed this plan stating that there was already a lot of bamboo: both Salia (*Dendrocalamus strictus*) and Kanta (*Bambusa bambos*) growing in their village.

Furthermore, the villagers resisted any form of unhelpful, human intervention by guarding the forest on a rotational basis, through their traditional practice of *thengapalli* or forest patrol. They also allowed for natural regeneration: birds,

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FOREST CONSERVATION AND FOOD DIVERSITY

insects and seeds acted as seed dispersers, the winds and water also carried seeds to barren lands. Slowly native trees and their associated species began to take root and form a lush forest. The forest around Nathapur village is an example that it is possible to regenerate to the previous state of forests by just leaving the forest on its own. In the district, 24 CFR claims have been pending since 2013, however Nathapur village is one of the many Gram Sabhas exercising their rights to manage and conserve the forests.

During the COVID19 pandemic, the inhabitants of Nathapur village have set an example by securing food, nutrition and livelihood during the lockdown period. As a traditional practice, villagers rely on a number of forest plants to supplement their diet. They collect and gather a number of tubers, roots, leafy shoots, flowers and fruits as regular food material and also consume it at the time of food scarcity. These are consumed raw, boiled, roasted, fried or cooked as vegetable curry along with pulses or rice flour during day meals or any time of food shortage.



(L) A display of the Siali leaf plates prepared; (R) Women prepare Siali leaf plates

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Sachala Pradhan, an elderly woman of Nathapur village said, “*We have consumed tubers, fruits, leafy vegetables, mushrooms and fish from our community forest resource areas during this lockdown period. Not only are we, a forest community, getting benefits but also the weaver communities of more than fifty nearby villages depend on the bamboo and other MFPs from our forests for their livelihood. We would not be alive to enjoy all the fruits of our efforts, but our future generation would surely remember us for our work we have done for them.*”

Pramila Pradhan added in “*Tendu leaves, Siali leaves and other commercial MFPs take care of the livelihood of many of us and play a role as a social safety net during this pandemic situation. Our forest is also crucial for livestock and domesticated animals as it provides fodder security too.*”

In the face of a health crisis, the Nathapur villagers were eating a diverse food plate. There are macro and micro-nutrients present in different forest plants that have a greater potential to eradicate mal-nutrition, nutritional shortage and related diseases. Even though this evidence is circumstantial, it is a reasonable and compelling fact that the increased plant biodiversity leads to a more varied diet which in turn improves community health outcomes.

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KEY LESSONS

As illustrated by the case studies in this document, **recognition of forest rights to use and manage community forests under the FRA has made it possible for many Adivasi and OTFD communities to swing into action and address the situation created by the COVID pandemic and the lock down.** From these stories, a set of key lessons emerge, which one also witnesses in several other cases which couldn't be documented here:

- 1. Local actors understand local complexities and can act faster when empowered:** An important lesson has been that the local people and institutions better understand the immediate and long term complexities of a specific context, when compared with the local administrations. Consequently, when empowered by FRA through their rights recognition, they come up with contextually appropriate actions and are also able to act faster than the administration in addressing the situation.
- 2. Secure tenure and empowered Gram Sabhas can help reduce distress out migration:** Secure tenure, recognition of individual and collective rights and support for Adivasi and OTFDs towards effective management, restoration and conservation of their customary forests could ensure availability of a resource base and also diverse sources of livelihoods, which reduced and/or arrested the need for distress outmigration. Recognition of CFR rights and local self-autonomy in the Gram Sabhas reduced out-migration, and instead created ample livelihood options in the village itself. This is an important learning, in the background that migrant workers' lives are extremely vulnerable and often, also economically unviable.
- 3. Healthy and diverse ecosystems resulted from long term conservation efforts of the local people help communities be more resilient:** Healthy and diverse ecosystems which have been well managed, restored and conserved have a greater potential to support the needs of the local communities and even more so during difficult times like the pandemic. The conservation efforts combined with the fact that their CFR rights have now been recognised helped the villagers access the forests for food and other requirements during the lockdown.
- 4. Ecosystem conservation and restoration strategies and plans based on local knowledge are more effective than forest departments plantation schemes in creating resilience:** CFRMC-led timely forest restoration and community forest management plans implemented in the Banni grasslands of Kutch Gujarat ensured water and sustenance for these pastoralists and their livestock during the difficult summer months when movement was restricted due to the

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KEY LESSONS

lockdown. These plans were based on local Maldhari communities' knowledge of water, soil, forest and wildlife in this unique landscape.

- 5. When empowered and in possession of resources, local institutions invest in local needs:** Community rights and ownership over forest, combined with the power of Gram Sabhas to manage and use forests, allow Adivasi communities to invest in activities that secure livelihoods and food, investment in social welfare programs such as education, health etc. Such recognition of rights also helps Gram Sabhas to make use of adaptive practices and innovations to cope with a crisis situation like the pandemic.
- 6. Ownership rights over forest produce ensured better and timely livelihood opportunities even during the lockdown:** Ownership rights over MFP (such as Mahua, Bamboo, Tendu leaves) has ensured enhanced income to the households and contributed to the Gram Sabha funds thus created sustainable economies and resilience which provided the much needed financial support to the Adivasis and OTFDs.
- 7. When local institutions have resources and power they can help the most vulnerable in the society:** The case studies show many important examples of how the Gram Sabhas have helped the most vulnerable among the forest communities such as women and children, landless families, pastoralists, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) through collective resources generated from community forests.
- 8. Long term strategies for protection and preservation of biodiversity and agrobiodiversity help the communities be more resilient in crisis situation:** Another important lesson that emerged during the COVID 19 pandemic was that community strategies for protection and preservation of biodiversity and agrobiodiversity (seeds) through innovative practices such as promotion of indigenous vegetables and seed festivals are important for creating local systems which are sustainable and climate resilient and in overcoming crisis situations such as created by the pandemic.
- 9. Convergence of FRA and MGNREGA and scaling up efforts for employment generation from IFR and CFR lands can be an effective strategy to boost local economy in tribal areas:** The loss of employment has emerged as a major problem for the migrant workers and local communities during the COVID crisis. Access to land and community forests enabled the Gram Sabhas to create employment for community members as well as for migrant workers, and even traditional systems of collective community work have been revived/used in some places during the crisis.

1 NARMADA GUJARAT

2 GONDIA MAHARASHTRA

3 RAJNANDGAON CHHATTISGARH

4 DHULE MAHARASHTRA

5 KUTCH GUJARAT

6 NANDURBAR MAHARASHTRA

7 ALIPURDUAR WEST BENGAL

8 DINDORI MADHYA PRADESH

9 CHAMARAJANAGAR KARNATAKA

10 NAYAGARH ODISHA

CONCLUSION

A vast majority of forest and other ecosystem dependent communities in India still do not have secured rights and access to the forests and other ecosystems and therefore are vulnerable to social, political, economic and ecological distress, consequently exacerbating the already existing vulnerability in the face of an evasive or a crisis situation like the COVID 19 pandemic. The bare minimum [estimated potential forest area over which Community Forest Resource](#) (CFR) rights can be recognized in India (excluding five north-eastern states and J&K) is approximately 85.6 million acres (34.6 million ha). Rights of more than 200 million Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs) in over 170,000 villages are estimated to get recognized under FRA. However, by 2016 only 3 percent of the minimum potential of CFR rights could be achieved.

At the same time **natural ecosystems are facing severe degradation and several wildlife species are endangered, especially due to massive intrusions into habitats** by ill-conceived and exclusionary 'development' policies as well as Forest, wildlife and biodiversity conservation laws and policies. Impacts of climate change are only making the matters worse. Keeping the above key lessons in mind it is important to take some **short term and long term measures** that help the local self government and empowerment processes, and ensure that such processes reach where they are not thus far.

A few immediate steps towards achieving this would be to:

Take up the implementation of the laws like the FRA and PESA in a campaign mode to ensure that local self-governance institutions are fully empowered. Ensure that the Gram Sabhas, area/ward sabhas, and other relevant local institutions, are part of all decisions affecting their lives and resources. **Ensure that the local institutions of decision making have mandatory participation of the marginalised sections such as women, landless, Dalits, nomadic communities and Adivasis, among others.**

Ensure mandatory legal compliance of the decision making authority of the concerned local Gram Sabhas and other institutions, including their prior informed consent as specified in FRA and PESA in spirit and letter, before the diversion of forests and other ecosystems is implemented (instead of attempts being made to scuttle or undermine them). Ensure that in the decision making and consent processes special efforts are made to guarantee

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CONCLUSION

that the voices of the marginalised sections such as women, landless, Dalits, nomadic communities and Adivasis, among others are meaningfully included and heard.

Ensure that institutions are supported to build capacity and to generate resources, including financial resources, independence in planning (using all forms of knowledge including local and traditional knowledge), budgeting and handling of local funds and bank accounts, as already provided for in the FRA and PESA, without any bureaucratic interference and with social auditing process in place (instead of the current practice of restricting their capacity to be able to do so). **Ensure transfer of government funds available under CAMPA, MGNREGA, TSP etc to the Gram Sabhas as per FRA and PESA instead of handing over the funds to the forest dept.**

Provide all possible support to existing efforts of the local communities to govern, sustainably manage, regenerate and conserve natural ecosystems, including as Community Conserved Areas (CCAs). Effective implementation of FRA would provide legal backing to such CCAs. For ecosystems such as coastal and marine, wetland, grassland, desert and mountain ecosystems laws in line with FRA and PESA need to be enacted.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

Compensatory Afforestation (CA) is defined as the process of afforestation, and associated regeneration activities done to compensate for destroyed forest land that has been diverted to non-forest activities. In line with FRA, the Forest Department should seek free, prior, informed consent from the Gram Sabha for plantation work, as the Gram Sabha has the power to self-govern the community forests and resources under FRA.

District Level Committee (DLC) is the body that makes the final approval of forest rights claims and ensures their recording.

Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO)- A legal entity, a company or a co-operative, of farmers formed to organise for better income and markets for all producers.

Federation of Gram Sabhas are a political and economic organisation of Gram Sabhas coming together to lobby and make collective actions.

Forest Department (FD) is a government agency for forest administration. The FD was formed during British colonial era, and the State continues to exert control over Indian forests through it.

Forest Rights Committee (FRC) is a body formed by the Gram Sabha to facilitate the process of claiming forest rights.

Forest Villages (FV) are villages that historically have fallen under Forest Department control or old habitations, unsurveyed villages and other villages in forests whether recorded, notified or not. As the villages did not fall under the Revenue Department, they received very few developmental benefits and no legal entitlements.

Individual Forest Rights (IFR) include the right for Adivasi and Forest Dwellers to live in (housing) and cultivate (agriculture) forest lands.

Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs), composed of Forest Department and Gram Sabha members, most often have an imbalance of power where the FD dominates decision-making and profits, and the role of communities is tokenized.

Large Scale Adivasi Multipurpose Cooperative societies (LAMPS) are government scheme supported organisations for providing economic support in which Adivasi communities can buy, sell, get loans and market their produce through agricultural cooperatives.

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Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005 is a law that guarantees the right for rural inhabitants to a fixed number of days of work.

Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) is the nodal agency in the administrative structure of the Central Government for the planning, promotion, coordination and overseeing the implementation of India's environmental and forestry policies and programmes.

Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) is the nodal Ministry for overall policy, planning and coordination of programmes for development of ST's. MoTA is the nodal agency for implementation of FRA.

Minor Forest Produce (MFP) & Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) includes all non-timber forest produce of plant origin that provide cash income and sustenance for forest communities. Section 3(1)(c) of FRA recognises the 'right of ownership, access to collect, use, and dispose of minor forest produce which has been traditionally collected within or outside village boundaries.'

Nistar Rights are community rights for access and use of forests recognised earlier in Princely states, Zamindari or such intermediary regimes. Records of nistar rights are found in govt documents and reports in many states.

Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs) are inhabitants and communities who have resided in and depended on forests for generations.

Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, 1996 (PESA) is a legislation that vests the control, management and governance of forests and resources in the hands of local tribal communities. PESA also intends to reduce impoverishment, food insecurity, malnutrition and out-migration among tribal populations by providing them better control and management of natural resources which will improve their livelihood and standard of life. Equally important is the recognition that for tribal communities, their economic, social and cultural connection to their lands and forest resources are integral to their identity

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) is a government classification of tribal communities that have been systematically excluded to such an extent that they possess very low developmental indices.

Protected Areas (PAs), as per the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, include areas demarcated by the government for conservation purposes such as National Parks, Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves. The

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definition of forest land in FRA includes protected areas, and the rights of Adivasis and Forest Dwellers are recognised in all PAs. Section 5 of FRA says that these Gram Sabhas have the power to protect the wildlife, forest and biodiversity. They have the duty to ensure that adjoining catchment areas, water sources and other ecological sensitive areas are adequately protected.

Record of Rights (RoR) is the final step in recording of forest rights, when the rights are entered into the Government records of the Revenue and Forest departments.

Reserved Forest (RF) and Protected Forests (PF) are defined as per the Indian Forest Act (1927), referring to different levels of protection that the State executes over these forests.

Sub-Divisional Level Committee (SDLC) examines resolutions for forest rights claims by the Gram Sabhas and pass it to the DLC.



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This bulletin is a collaboration between Community Forest Rights-Learning and Advocacy (CFR-LA) and Vikalp Sangam. This document would not be possible without the support of Vasundhara (<https://www.vasundharaodisha.org/>) and Kalpavriksh.

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Citation: Vikalp Sangam and CFR-LA, *Community Forest Rights and the Pandemic: Gram Sabhas Lead the Way -Volume 2 of the Extraordinary Work of 'Ordinary People – Beyond Pandemics and Lockdowns' Series and Bulletin 5 of COVID 19 & Forest Rights*, Vikalp Sangam Core Group, Pune, October 2020.

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This document emerged as a collaborative effort by both CFR-LA and Vikalp Sangam, in order to highlight the importance of recognition of rights, tenure security and community forest governance by Gram Sabhas to build resilient communities in the Covid19 and Post- pandemic scenario.

To learn more about the research and documentation work done by both teams, do follow the links below:

COVID19 and Forest Rights Bulletin [One](#), [Two](#), [Three](#), [Four](#)
Extraordinary Work of Ordinary People: [Volume 1](#), [Graphic Novel](#)

The Community Forest Rights-Learning and Advocacy (CFR-LA) process was initiated in 2011 to facilitate exchange of information and experiences related to Community Forest Rights (CFR) provisions of the Forest Rights Act 2006. The COVID19 and Forest Rights bulletin series was envisaged in the light of widespread distress in Adivasi and scheduled areas. The bulletins highlight voices of forest dwelling communities during the pandemic.

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.cfrla.org.in/resource.aspx> and www.fra.org.in

Vikalp Sangam is a platform to bring together movements, groups and individuals working on just, equitable and sustainable pathways to human and ecological well-being. It rejects the current model of development and the structures of inequality and injustice underlying it, and searches for alternatives in practice and vision. About 60 movements and organisations around the country are members of its Core Group (listed below). For more information please see:

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