

TN MARGINAL WORKERS ASSESSMENT

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ABSTRACT

Data were gathered on demographic, forest-related and geographic parameters to understand the pattern of forest cover change in the Indian subcontinent and discern any underlying factors contributing to forest cover change. Observations indicated that the marginal worker force in many states influences the forest cover change. The states with a lower percentage of forest cover to their geographical area undertook large-scale plantation activity to enhance the forest cover in the state. Incidentally, these states also had a higher proportion of marginal worker population to their total population. However, the states with high proportion of forest area had a lower proportion of marginal worker population, indicating there is a relation between the proportion of marginal workers in the population to the proportion of forest cover in the state.

Source of data and analytical process

The data were collected from various sources. Data on forest cover change in different states were collected from the Forest Survey of India (1999) report along with other forest statistics such as area under reserved forest, open forest, national parks and sanctuaries. Change in population for each state was collected from Census of India (2001) Web site as accessed between December 2002 and February 2003.

Data on demographic factors such as total population, rural population, population for villages with forests, population density, population of marginal[1] and non-workers were procured from Census of India (2002). Similarly, data on total geographical area, area of plantation, area under reserve forest, forest cover and change in forest cover were procured from Forest Survey of India (1999). Using these data, annual forest cover change, plantation area, percentage of forest area to total geographical area, percentage of reserved forest area to total forest area, villages with forest to the total villages in the state, proportion of marginal workers to total rural population, proportion of non-workers to total population were also computed. Using these demographic and geographical variables for each state, Spearman's rank correlations, as given by Zar (1984

There were three distinct categories found among states with change in forest cover.

The states that were having decreased forest cover were Mizoram, Nagaland, Dadar &

Nagarhaveli and Bihar. The states that exhibited enhanced forest cover since 1997

were Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal

Pradesh, Punjab, Tripura, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Haryana. The remaining states did

not show a pronounced difference i.e., ^1 per cent of forest cover. Average of the

observed parameters in different clusters formed indicate that change in forest cover

and annual population growth are significantly different among these three clusters

(Table II).

Discussion

Marginal worker population seems to influence the forest cover in Indian provinces. Marginal workers, consisting mostly of women, also indicate that women workers can influence significantly the forest cover change. The government policies to enhance forest cover and to enhance area under plantations seem to look at the work force available for undertaking such plantations, particularly part time women workers. The data suggest that states with a lower proportion of marginal workers have a higher proportion of forest to their geographical area, indicating most people in forested areas are gainfully employed and therefore there are less marginal workers in those states. On the other hand, migration of workers, may be of agricultural labourers, is low in these states during the non-agricultural season due to their dependency on the forests. Similarly, there is an emerging pattern that a higher proportion of plantation area in a lower proportion of forested states indicates that these migrating labourers were effectively used in plantation work. Thus such states enhanced their area forest cover through plantation forestry. It can thus be concluded that there is strong link between the worker migration, forest cover change and the plantation forestry in different states in India.

Note

1. Marginal workers are those who are involved in work for fewer than 183 days a year, consisting mostly of women. Non-workers are those who answered no to work during census data collection (Census of India, 2002).

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