



FOUNDATION FOR ECOLOGICAL SECURITY

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2013-2014**



# Contents

Our Mission >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	1
Our Organisation >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>	3
The FES Signature >>>>>>>>>>>>>	4
Cornerstones >>>>>>>>>>>>>>	6
Ecological Restoration >>>>>>>>>>	9
Community Institutions >>>>>>>>>	10
Enhancing Livelihoods >>>>>>>>>	11
Our Approach >>>>>>>>>>>>>	12
Forests in a Landscape >>>>>>>>>	15
Farming and Farming Systems >>>>>>	16
Working with Panchayats >>>>>>>>	17
Tenure over Common Lands >>>>>>	18
Rights to Employment and Resources >>>>	19
Strategic Overview >>>>>>>>>>>>>	20
Prakriti Karyashala – Building Capacities >>>>	23
Studies and Documentation >>>>>>>>	24
Networking and Collaborations >>>>>>	27
Spatial Information >>>>>>>>>	28
Indian Biodiversity Information System >>>>	29
The Commons Initiative >>>>>>>>	30
Our Presence >>>>>>>>>>>>	32
Rajasthan >>>>>>>>>>>>>>	34
Andhra Pradesh >>>>>>>>>>>	36
Karnataka >>>>>>>>>>>	38
Odisha >>>>>>>>>>>	40
Madhya Pradesh >>>>>>>>>	42
Gujarat >>>>>>>>>	44
North-Eastern Region >>>>>>>>	46
Maharashtra >>>>>>>>	47
Financial Highlights >>>>>>>>>	48
Acknowledgement >>>>>>>>	50
The Staff >>>>>>>>	52



**COVER: The Himalayan Monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*)** is one of the most colourful members of the pheasant family. The male Himalayan Monal (*in photo*) is a highly communicative bird which uses several different call types to communicate with its mate, other birds in its foraging group or intruding birds. Although listed under the 'IUCN Red List Least Concern' category, loss of habitat, and being hunted for its crest feathers and for food are a matter of concern.

Cover Photo: Arpit Deomurari

# Our Mission

**“As ‘ecological security’ is the foundation of sustainable and equitable development, the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) is committed to strengthening, reviving or restoring, where necessary, the process of ecological succession and the conservation of land, forest and water resources in the country.”**

## To this end FES:

WORKS towards the ecological restoration and conservation of land and water resources in the uplands and other eco-fragile, degraded, and marginalised zones of the country; and to set in place the processes of coordinated human effort and governance to this end and provide relief to the poor, in particular;

WORKS either directly, or with and through a range of democratic village institutions, their federal bodies, and civil society organisations, set up through initiatives that are ecologically sustainable, socially and economically equitable;

ENSURES the ecological integrity of all efforts by working, as far as possible, with entire landscapes and with all the inter-related communities within it, through a range of arrangements on their land and aquatic resources, whether Commons, Public or Private;

WORKS for and promotes stability of the ecosystems through protection and restoration of biological diversity, including the diversity of species, age diversity, genetic variability as well as that of structural composition;

COLLABORATES with Panchayat Raj and other democratic village institutions, as well as appropriate civil society organisations, in their efforts to fulfil the objectives of the society, and to provide technical and financial assistance to them.

## Board of Governors

### CHAIRMAN

Amrita Patel

### MEMBERS

Samar Singh  
A N Yellappa Reddy  
Nitin Desai  
Deepak Tikku  
Mahendra Vyas  
Sudarshan Iyengar  
Usha Thorat

### Representatives of

National Dairy Development Board (NDDB)  
National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD)

Jagdeesh Rao  
(Ex-officio Member Secretary)

# Our Organisation

Registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI 1860, the Foundation for Ecological Security was set up in 2001 to reinforce the massive and critical task of ecological restoration in the country.

The Foundation strives for a future that is based on a holistic understanding of the principles that govern the inter-relationships of various life forms and natural systems. By working on systemic issues that can bring about a multiplier change, we look forward to a future where the local communities determine and move towards desirable land use practices based on principles of conservation and social justice.





# The FES Signature

Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) works towards centre staging ecological agenda alongside priorities of economic growth and reorienting progress with a perspective of conservation and social justice.

FES helps decentralise the top heavy approach to environmental management and demonstrates the strength of local communities to collaborate and deploy local knowledge to cost effectively manage complex problems in managing shared resources.

FES brings two fundamental slants to the practice – an ecological leaning to the dominant views of ‘rural development’ where ‘nature and natural processes’ are often disregarded, and, secondly, a Commons paradigm in the governance of natural resources.

In India, FES has played a pioneering role in furthering the concept of Commons as an effective instrument of local governance, as economic assets for the poor and for the viability of adjoining farmlands. It has also highlighted that by strengthening the institutional dimension, the collective action spins off from effectively managing natural resources to other spheres of village life such as education, health and access to economic opportunities.

In its approach, FES

- > Executes MoUs with governments on long-term tenure for common lands, undertaking campaigns and cost-sharing arrangements for programme execution.
- > Collaborates with leading international universities and research institutes on areas such as socio-ecological approaches, adaptation to climate vulnerability and collective action & property rights. Introduces concepts such as system dynamics and experimental games at village and organisation level – such engagements are aimed at improving the rigour, developing tools and advancing professional zeal.
- > Conducts training programmes through its *Prakriti Karyashalas* to village communities on aspects of natural resource management and local self governance to build leadership, knowledge and skills and improve the utilisation of public investments.
- > Works at local to national level and is well poised to feel the pulse on the ground, undertake comparative assessments and spread good practices across geographies.
- > Has a high-end Remote Sensing and GIS facility with rich non spatial data and experience in bringing out spatial atlases to assist planning (<http://fes.org.in/atlas-of-development-trends-orissa.pdf>) and also hosts a biodiversity portal (<http://www.indianbiodiversity.org>) with about 2,800 unique visitors per month.



1.8 million acres of common lands are being managed and governed by local communities in 7,393 villages across eight states of India benefitting 3.84 million men and women. Of the 1.8 million acres, about 0.66 million acres have received formal recognition. Unique to FES, governments have leased 114,000 acres of revenue 'wastelands' to village Cooperatives on a long-term basis for a period ranging from 15-99 years with a provision for renewal. About 350,000 men and women have been trained on ecological restoration and management of village institutions through programmes and material designed by FES. Building on the long-standing relationship, FES is successful in partnering with three State Governments in drafting policies, designing programmes and influencing public investments.



Recognising our contribution in regenerating common lands and community empowerment, FES was honoured with the Certificate of Appreciation by Hon. Minister Shri Prakash Javadekar, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, on the occasion of the World Day to Combat Desertification, on 17th June 2014.



*Globally, FES hopes to see an increasing influence on two fundamental issues in governing shared natural resources – a ‘socio-ecological systems’ approach and a ‘Commons paradigm’, which together could have far-reaching impact on world views on ‘development’.*





## CORNERSTONES

Degradation of natural resources is among the most pressing problems confronting us worldwide in current times, creating immediate adverse economic and ecological conditions in rural society, and inexorably in urban society as well, though seeming tangibly indiscernible. Like in other parts of the world, in India, the people's survival, sustenance and growth are intimately connected to the health and productivity of the natural resources they live amidst and depend upon.

Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) aims to work towards a society that meets the needs of the present while ensuring the sustained functioning of our ecosystems to generate benefits for the future. Our objective is to centre stage an ecological agenda alongside priorities of economic growth, or, to put it differently, reorient progress from the perspective of conservation and social justice.

The three fundamental dimensions or cornerstones of FES are:

- > Ecological Restoration: Conserving nature, restoring and managing natural resources, such as land and local biodiversity, hydrological and nutrient cycles;
- > Local Governance: Strengthening institutions and enhancing the capacity to self-govern, promoting inclusionary processes and collective decision-making;
- > Livelihoods: Securing livelihoods that are dependent on natural resources, and assisting communities to determine and adopt consumption levels within the ecological capacity of the area.

# Ecological Restoration

FES works within an expansive geography comprising hills, streams and all villages that lie in contiguity, building upon the natural, social and cultural landscapes. Our 'field' of work spreads across scrublands, grasslands, ravines, tidal mudflats, dense forest and open farmland, where we improve the soil health and structure, replenish nutrient and moisture levels, and provide better habitats for biodiversity. Working on common lands adjacent to forests provides additional habitats for a variety of life forms and reduces the pressure on forest resources.

Often building on the local knowledge base, we assist communities to design plans to conserve soil and moisture, improve water availability and accelerate natural regeneration. We highlight the value of birds, insects, amphibians and reptiles in sustaining the robustness of agriculture so as to highlight the value that forests play in maintaining farming systems. Typically, such conservation measures have resulted in marked improvements in soil health, groundwater levels, biomass productivity and biodiversity – leading thereon to increased crop productivity, double cropping, fodder and water availability.

We undertake studies to estimate the availability and use of biomass, water and biodiversity so as to determine ecological thresholds and trigger corrective action on irresponsible practices such as growing water-intensive crops in dryland areas, large-scale sand mining on river beds, and deforestation beyond regenerative capacity.



We bring in an ecological slant to the practice of Rural Development in India – where nature and natural processes have been largely disregarded or unappreciated.

We work on 1.8 million acres of common lands including scrublands, grasslands, tidal mudflats and open forests to dense forests and another 1.5 million acres of adjoining farmlands.

We highlight the value of 'Forests in Farming systems' so as to build a larger farmer constituency for conservation.

We help estimate both the availability and use of biomass, water and biodiversity so as to highlight threshold levels and advocate judicious use of resources.

Kumar Rupam





Jagdeesh Rao

## Community Institutions

The tried and trusted norms of village life form the basic foundation of our efforts to craft institutional arrangements for governance of shared natural resources. We work with a diverse range of village-level institutional forms such as the Village Forest Management and Protection Committees, Grazing Land Development Committees, and Tree Growers' Cooperatives so as to strengthen collective action around natural resources, in particular, Common Pool Resources.

The village Panchayats however, by virtue of the constitutional recognition they enjoy, are accepted as the most appropriate institutions for governance of natural resources. While we assist the communities in obtaining rights of ownership or use of resources within the available legal framework, we lay equal emphasis on attendant duties and responsibilities of the community.

To build a larger stewardship for governance of natural resources, we bring together representatives of communities, government personnel, NGOs and interested citizens by assisting them to steer issues related to judicious use of local natural resources.

Community institutions compare favourably with State and private-run organisations not only in terms of efficiency but especially on grounds of equity and sustainability. They enable a code of locally-agreed behaviour – a code that gives the rural poor access to shared resources, while keeping individual exploitation in check.



Kiran Kumar

We build in a Commons paradigm in the governance of shared natural resources so as to improve the entitlements of local communities, the poor and women in particular.

We work towards nesting user-based institutions under the larger ambit of Panchayats, both to benefit from the constitutional recognition that Panchayats enjoy as well as strengthen the management of shared resources like pastures or forests which require devolved institutions at habitation level and Panchayats at a larger level.

Conceive groundwater as a common pool resource, and arrive at institutional arrangements on water rights (and cropping patterns) based on hydrology and equity considerations.

# Enhancing Livelihoods

The work of FES is located in the larger debate on whether conservation of nature is a value that must be pursued even if it be at the expense of human livelihoods – or access to natural resources is integral to the basic right to livelihood. FES addresses both issues without pitching one against the other. Where farming systems are linked inextricably with nature and natural resources, we believe that conservation and securing local livelihoods go hand in hand.

We believe that in rural livelihood systems, infrastructure must first be understood as soil, water, nutrients, biomass and biodiversity as they are fundamental for the viability of farming systems and the rural economy. Besides activities that strengthen low-input agriculture, water-use efficiency and energy conservation, FES initiates dialogue on crop-water budgeting, conservation of natural species for aiding pollination and pest control.

Our effort is also to leverage government programmes to add value to farm-based activities, improve access to markets and thereby augment household incomes. We believe that the Right to Employment as envisaged under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act tied together with Rights over Resources could play a significant part in creating durable community assets, such as forests, pastures and water bodies.



K.P.Seeamulli

**While debates continue on whether nature conservation contributes to poverty alleviation or the other way around, we believe that degraded and poverty-stricken areas require imaginative initiatives that view nature and people together.**

We strive to highlight the threshold limits of the given agro-ecological context so as to aid communities in determining consumption levels that are within the ecological capacity of the area.

We believe that the Right to Employment Act if clubbed together with Rights (and Responsibilities) over Resources, could have a significant impact in creating durable assets (such as forests, pastures and water bodies) in addition to democratising Panchayats.

Vaibhav Bhatia





*Working with local governments (Panchayats) and Village Institutions as partners, FES helps decentralise the top heavy approach to manage shared natural resources such as forests pastures and water bodies and demonstrates the strength of local communities to collaborate and deploy local knowledge to cost-effectively manage complex problems. FES espouses the value of Commons as a paradigm for ecological governance with a potential to unleash transformational change.*





## OUR APPROACH

FES works in areas with a preponderance of Common Pool Resources governed as common property regimes since they give the rural poor equal access to a share in the common good. Besides assisting in improving access, we work through local self-governance institutions to promote the judicious management of forests, pastures and water bodies.

By strengthening these institutions for collective action around the Commons we build spaces that enable poor and marginal groups to engage with the rest on a more equal footing. Importantly, the principles agreed upon for the governance of shared resources rarely remains restricted to them alone but spill over into other facets of rural life.

Working alongside village communities and their federating bodies, we seek to restore biomass productivity, improve moisture regimes, and protect biodiversity on forest and other common lands. We monitor long-term changes in the ecological health of the area so as to record the changes effected by restoration measures, as also to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our interventions.

In response to favourable programmatic developments on common lands in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, FES set up *Prakriti Karyashalas* or rural colleges in these states – colleges which help capacitate rural communities and reach out to thousands of Panchayats engaged in restoring the efficacy of common lands and water bodies.

We partner not only with a large and robust constituency of village communities but also with civil society, academia, local elected representatives and government functionaries to promote concerted action for restoring the ecological health of the various affected parts of our country.

Our experiences on the ground give us valuable insights into the working of the rural mind, the villagers' views on conservation and development, and their perception of public policy. Building on networks of partners, we seek to create an even larger constituency for community lands and water bodies – and mainstream its significance in all discourse on governance of natural resources.

# Forests in a Landscape



FES considers human society as part of a larger ecological whole which also harbours many other forms of life. Our efforts are directed towards reviving water, nutrient and energy flows and conserving biodiversity across landscapes thus enabling conditions for stable production systems and more forms of life to thrive. By acting on the inter-linkages between the various components of this larger system, we are able to activate systemic drivers that can bring about a multiplier change. At the heart of our efforts is the conservation and restoration of forests and other common lands at the level of villages and village conglomerates. We seek to bring to the fore the invaluable role that forests play in providing critical support to agriculture, animal husbandry and other rural livelihoods.

One of the drawbacks in practice of forest conservation has been to view forests in isolation, both from the demands and forces from outside, and the influences that the forests wield in turn. Whereas, locating forests within the larger ecological, social and economic landscape offers opportunities to institute arrangements which balance the interests of preservation, conservation and exploitation of natural endowments. On the one hand, this helps sustainable management of forest resources, and on the other, highlights the positive contribution that forests make in providing hydrological supplies to distant cities as well as to the resilience of nearby farming systems and local livelihoods.

In every location, we work with all communities inhabiting contiguous stretches along a watercourse or hill-range. By connecting forests and Commons with other production systems, we connect those involved in agriculture and livestock-dependent livelihoods with forest conservation, thereby building a larger constituency for conservation.

Locating forests within the larger ecological, social and economic landscape, offers opportunities to institute arrangements which balance the interests of preservation, conservation and exploitation of natural endowments. In order to enable an administrative and planning architecture that fosters such inter-linkages, or at least prevents working at cross-purposes, umbrella institutional arrangements are needed at the block level institutions that span across administrative and sectoral domains, and build on natural boundaries, customary forms of use and access, and the visions and aspirations of local communities.

## The Way Forward

- > **Rerorient forests policies so that provision of water is the fundamental conservation objective of management and governance of forests.**
- > **Highlight the importance of soil, moisture, nutrients, biomass and biodiversity that connect forests and common lands with associated production systems in the landscape (such as agriculture, livestock-keeping and fisheries).**
- > **Explore the areas that require assistance in implementing the Forest Rights Act, community forests in particular, from settlement of claims to next generation issues such as mapping, restoration of degraded areas, improving democratic functioning, value addition and trade of forest produce, and developing frameworks for sustainable forest management.**
- > **Increase forest cover on the non-forest government lands, such as, revenue wastelands, so as to take the pressure off existing forests.**
- > **Bring together development programmes aimed at improving forest cover, viable farming systems and stable groundwater supply by conceiving a common administrative apparatus such as a Department of Natural Resources.**

# Farming and Farming Systems

## The Way Forward

- > **Coordinate the Rainfed Livestock Network of different organisations working on issues of livestock, and collectively articulate an alternative narrative for livestock development which respects a diversity of species, breeds, practices and outcomes.**
- > **Address the knowledge and information gap on location-specific social, economic, ecological variables to develop appropriate location-specific natural resource conservation and management plans to make the most of public investments.**
- > **Position water as Commons and devise institutional mechanisms that both check its mindless extraction and provide equal access to it.**
- > **Highlight the high dependence of farm viability on the stability of the larger farming system so as to influence public investments for long-term sustainability.**
- > **Promote a range of agriculture crops and practices that are less input-intensive, resilient to shocks and fortify natural cyclical processes.**
- > **Develop a knowledge platform on rainfed issues using different datasets such as on climatology, cropping patterns, demography, livestock, etc.**

Courtesy of Mark Katzman



Rainfed agriculture accounts for most part of the cropped area in the country, with the rainfed area alone covering over 500 million acres and constituting 60 to 70% of the total net sown area. With diverse topographies, agro-climatic conditions, farming systems, cultures and populations, these areas are facing severe crises – both widespread ecological degradation and the largest concentration of poverty.

Instead of transposing solutions that suit other areas, there is a need to evolve an alternative development narrative based on a better understanding of the dynamics of rainfed production systems, the myriad ecological conditions they represent, and ways in which they contribute to livelihoods and economies of rural households. By choice, FES works in areas where agriculture and livestock production is predominantly rainfed in nature.

Our work with land, water and people is governed by an in-depth understanding of interrelationships – interrelationships between natural and human systems, different ecosystems within a landscape, and different elements within an ecosystem. We value not only the inter-linkages between Commons, livestock and agriculture but also between their ecological, social and economic aspects.

As it is untenable to view elements of the farming system in isolation, our efforts focus on strengthening systemic drivers such as soil, moisture, nutrients, pollinators and biodiversity and the inter-linkages between its various elements. Our objective is to fortify natural processes which are cyclical in nature, rather than focus on the linear progression of single elements.

A fundamental part of our strategy is to reposition livestock as a crucial component of the farming system and to strengthen crop-livestock integration. We work towards a farming approach that favours diversified cropping (according to land capability, soil health, availability of soil-moisture, and rainfall variations) rather than promoting monocrops and intensification of inputs.

We also develop appropriate climate-resilient farm strategies for rainfed areas by building on the logic underpinning local practices, and learning how local communities have learnt over time to exploit the ecological and economic dynamics of their environment.

# Working with Panchayats



Vaibhav Bharati

Increased availability of public funds for village-level development through innovative schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, have helped create an environment favourable to improve the democratic functioning of Panchayats and channel funds towards ecological restoration.

With its constitutional backing and democratic mandate, Panchayats are best positioned to mediate human-nature interaction, find locally-suited solutions to the complex problems of natural resource governance, and optimise opportunities for rural livelihoods.

At the same time, a major drawback is that more often than not, Panchayats are distanced from habitation or village-level settlements and their viewpoints. Hamlet-based institutions offer spaces for inclusive processes and evolving operational rules which are critical for institution building. Nesting these institutions under the overall governance framework of the Panchayats makes it possible to draw on the strengths of both kinds of institutional arrangements – the smaller institutions for their effective role in building dialogue at the village level, and the larger Panchayats for overall regulation.

FES addresses institutional deficiencies at village and inter-village levels by setting in place robust systems for management and governance of natural resources. We assist Panchayats and habitation-level institutions to articulate their perspectives of local development, draw up structured action plans, and devise appropriate rules and mechanisms based on customary resource-use regimes.

We assist in building a cadre of rural youth from the community to assist Panchayats and other village institutions to draw up ecologically sound and socially just development plans, as also implement government and other ongoing programmes.

We support local platforms that bring together representatives of communities, government personnel, NGOs, universities, research bodies and interested citizens at the level of blocks or talukas, to articulate and steer issues related to judicious use of natural resources of the area.

We have set up pilot information and service hubs to make information easily accessible to communities for informed decisions on natural resource management.

## The Way Forward

- > **Strengthen Panchayats to make informed decisions based on principles of conservation and equity. Build their capacities to manage them as organisations in developing long-term plans, evolving roles and responsibilities, and for undertaking monitoring and review functions.**
- > **Address the gap in leadership capacities at the village level by developing a cadre of local volunteers to take on stewardship of the area, who will better represent and voice concerns of local communities and help better implementation of programmes.**
- > **Streamline interactions between Panchayats and village institutions so as to recognise and build on customary practices of land use of all the constituent villages as well as improve the execution of plans.**
- > **Work within the legal framework to both mainstream natural resource governance in Panchayats by setting up specific Committees at the village and Panchayat level as much as devolve functions from higher levels to Panchayats.**
- > **Collaborate with other key organisations working on Panchayats so as to build wide leadership for viewing community self-governance as a viable alternative alongside state-led governance.**

# Tenure over Common Lands

## The Way Forward

- > **Highlight the economic value on formalising and recording property rights on Commons at national and global levels.**
- > **Share information widely on progressive policies and programmes for improved governance of Commons showcasing favourable tenets on land tenure, institutional design and programme architecture.**
- > **Assist village communities in claiming forestlands which are under customary use under Community Forest Rights and converting revenue wastelands into grazing lands.**
- > **Train village communities in identifying, mapping, restoring and managing Commons. Invest in technologies both for mapping and claiming the Commons.**
- > **Assist village communities that secure rights on common land prepare plans for ecologically sound restoration plans and leveraging funds through Right to Employment Act to create durable community assets.**
- > **Facilitate formation and evolution of village institutions and assist in obtaining rights to own, access, manage, harvest and sell (produce) from Commons under the Forest Rights Act.**

Dawa Pemba Sherpa



Besides being repositories of biodiversity, common lands contribute significantly to water and nutrient flows and add resilience to farming systems. Secure tenure over Commons is critical to stimulating collective action and management of shared resources ensuring continued commitment to their conservation. Secure tenure, improved vegetation and strong village institutions together offer enduring solutions to complex problems such as hunger, poverty, ineffective development and conflict.

Rural society as elsewhere is laden in hierarchies, with most advantages flowing into the hands of the powerful and the moneyed. Efforts towards establishing a secure tenure must therefore be made an integral part of the larger process of building democratic institutions based on principles of inclusion, representation, rights and responsibilities of the poor, in particular.

In India, over the last half century, common lands have shrunk by as much as 31-55%. This alarming decline can be attributed to a variety of factors such as the absence of or weak tenure in favour of local communities, the breakdown of local institutions, and more importantly a widespread apathy on the ability of village communities to manage shared resources such as forests, pastures or water bodies.

The mainstream view – that common resources are better managed by the state or by individuals instead of a community – has helped to shape tenure laws which bestow land ownership on governments or individuals. But the recent recognition of community ownership under the Forest Rights Act as well as the role of local communities in managing forests under Joint Forest Management arrangements and water under Participatory Irrigation Management is a growing realisation of the ability of local communities to manage their shared resources.

FES is continuously involved in efforts to secure rights of access, management and ownership for the community over Common Pool Resources like forestlands, revenue wastelands, pasture lands and village water bodies. FES engages with some state governments to lease revenue wastelands to communities on a long-term basis and entering community lands in Prohibitory Order Books or the Immovable Assets Register at the Panchayat level to restrain diversion to alternate us. Efforts are underway under the recently-enacted Forest Rights Act (FRA) and Joint Forest Management arrangements to secure community forest rights over produce and land.

# Rights to Employment and Resources



Kumar Rupam

## The Way Forward

- > **Highlight the need for investments in appropriate institutions alongside the huge financial investment made under the Right to Employment Act. Combined with rights (and responsibilities) over common land and produce, the Right to Employment Act can create durable assets, both as biophysical resources and as institutional systems.**
- > **Based on agro-ecological, demographic and other characteristics at district and block levels, prepare comprehensive land and water-use scenarios to guide annual action plans, and improve synergies between different government programmes.**
- > **Capacitate Panchayats and other village institutions in preparing long-term plans, provide technical support for participatory and transparent implementation, and introduce monitoring systems for purposeful use of public funds by reviewing baseline information on natural resources together with incremental improvement.**
- > **Innovate on more avenues for sustaining employment demand to alleviate poverty and reduce distress migration.**
- > **Supplement the Rajiv Gandhi Soochna Kendras with information on subjects like biodiversity, geohydrology and landscape perceptions.**

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) was hailed as one of the largest social security schemes when it was launched in 2006. With provisions for minimum wages and equal pay for men and women, the Right to Employment Act was considered a powerful opportunity to redress rural poverty. It opened up livelihood options for rural Indians, by offering the poor much-needed financial assistance through local self-governance institutions. By making Panchayats the pivotal institution in implementing the Act, it offers scope to communities to determine their developmental needs and, in the process, revitalise local decision-making processes.

The funds of the Right to Employment Act are largely allocated towards soil and moisture conservation, re-vegetation, and restoration of degraded natural resources, especially land and water. As much as 60 to 75% of the annual budget of INR 400,000 million of the Right to Employment Act, goes towards restoring degraded natural resources on common and public land. It therefore becomes imperative to back such huge financial investments with suitable institutional arrangements such as secure tenure, so that activities promoted under the Right to Employment Act are linked to the roles and responsibilities of local communities, and rules and regulations on access to benefits.

FES assists Panchayats in aligning their visions for development with those of the Act, and collaborates with like-minded organisations and decision-makers for better implementation of the Rights to Employment Act. We also help by training local resource-persons in villages who can assume stewardship of the area, assist in planning and implementation, and raise community awareness of its rights under the Act. Through social-audit procedures and vigilance committees, we help establish transparent systems for democratic decision-making and for effective implementation of programmes.

While the Rights to Employment Act has already begun making a significant impact in bringing a long overdue adjustment in rural wage rates and hopefully an appreciation for dignity of labour, we would need to highlight its relevance for investing in future – to meet challenges posed by food security and climate change as much as improving the purchasing capacity of the rural poor.



*Our strategic action is guided towards outcomes on – establishing self-regulating Community Institutions, arranging tenure on common pool land and water resources, building capacities at local level to strengthen last mile outreach, strengthening measures to decentralise management of natural resources, engaging with partners to inform practice with theory, and expanding public investments on common lands.*



A photograph of a woman in a white sari with red embroidery on the shoulders, working in a field. She is bent over, her hands in the soil. The background is a soft-focus view of other people and the landscape.

## STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

FES works towards centre staging ecological agenda alongside priorities of economic growth by weaving in a perspective of conservation and social justice in the larger world view about progress. FES aims to centre stage Commons as a viable and promising property regime and alongside state-led governance and its tenure as legitimate as individual ownership. FES believes that 'Commons need Commons' to reinforce one another and sees this materialise as it joins hands with others, form alliances, energise momentum, build visibility and influence.

- > With a socio-ecological approach on landscape management, FES places equal emphasis on ecological well-being, social justice, and access to economic opportunity and the unique spaces that such an interconnected world view offers.
- > Promotes greater democratisation in institutions of local self-governance and partners with large and robust constituency of village communities committed to restoring ecosystems and landscapes and crafting suitable institutional spaces that safeguard the interest of the poor.
- > Identifies and capacitates cadres of volunteers and technically trained para-workers, enabling mechanisms such as multi-stakeholder platforms and Information and Services hubs which are critical in strengthening village institutions, expanding our reach as well as maintaining the quality of our work.
- > Conducts a range of capacity-building programmes for Panchayat representatives, government officials, non-government functionaries and rural communities, to help hone local stewardship and promote analytical temperament for improved natural resource management in general, and governance of Commons in particular.
- > Engages with decision-makers, academe and practitioners on areas such as forests, pastures and water as well as collective action and local governance so as to gain from one another's perspectives and experience.
- > Builds knowledge platforms and shares information with a range of audience on issues concerning land and water use practice, nature conservation, natural resource management, local self-governance and rural development.
- > Collaborates with civil society, local elected representatives, government functionaries and like-minded organisations across the domains of forests, pastures and water so as to build a larger constituency for conservation and Commons as a paradigm for ecological governance.

# *Prakriti Karyashala – Building Capacities*

*Prakriti Karyashala* (Rural College) has been conceived to respond to the learning needs of rural communities, village institutions, Panchayats, non-government organisations and government officials who can steer processes at the village level and help in the development of their region, in areas of local governance and stewardship of natural resources. The *Karyashala* offers large-scale, cost-effective, good quality learning opportunities, and plans to work closely with government programmes, schemes and institutions.

The *Karyashala* joins hands with rural communities so as to help them build skills, knowledge and stewardship to manage resources of forests, land and water at the village level; strengthen rural livelihoods through improved natural resource management in general; and strengthen Panchayats for effective local self-governance of natural resources. It favours experiential and experimental learning as its method, and is designed to be a local centre for exchange of ideas and experiences between communities.

During this year, the *Karyashala* stabilised its model of training delivery and was able to deliver low-standardised trainings in each of the three states – Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan. The training programmes focused on improving the perspectives and skills of NREGA Mates, and on Claiming and Securing Commons. Delivered at the habitation and Panchayat levels, during the year, a total of 417 field trainings were conducted with over 10,000 trainees.

In Rajasthan, the *Karyashala* also delivered trainings, in close collaboration with the Zilla Parishad, to elected PRI representatives in Ajmer on protecting and developing grazing lands by utilising Right to Employment provisions. In Andhra Pradesh, the *Karyashala* assisted in offering capacity-building programmes for functionaries associated with Right to Employment Act, members of Panchayats and government officials involved in the Commons-NREGA programme. In Karnataka, in collaboration with the respective Zilla Panchayat, training programmes on Right to Employment have been initiated in 257 of 300 Gram Panchayats of Kolar and Chikkballapur districts.



Lakshmi Bhag Choudhury

Communities must not be seen as mere passive recipients of the programmes designed to benefit them. By assisting communities in mapping the complexities of natural resource management and in articulating their common concerns, we aim at community driven processes that effectively shape and use government policies and programmes for conserving their natural resources.

# Studies and Documentation

Kartik Chandra Prusty



Experiences on the ground give us vital and valuable insights into the working of the rural mind, their views on conservation and development, the complexity of conservation action at local and regional levels, and their perception of public policy.

We undertake studies to improve the understanding of nature, interactions between human and natural systems and adaptive collaborative action to inform and improve field implementation and large scale practice. Over the years, we have developed a comprehensive framework to monitor and study ecological, social and economic changes over time. Conducted both internally and in collaboration with reputed universities and research institutions, these studies firstly help locate FES's work in the larger social, economic and ecological context, secondly design pursuits that are both grounded and technically rigorous, and thirdly provide sound evidence of results and impacts over time. The studies are designed to engage local communities in search of appropriate solutions and build on their knowledge base for informed community level actions.

The broad range of thematic areas covered is:

- > Assessments of human-nature interaction in diverse social, economic and ecological settings, captured through the Socio-Ecological Systems Framework.
- > Identification and analyses of institutional arrangements for local governance of natural resources at village and inter-village levels.
- > Consolidation of economic evidence on criticality of Common Pool Resources and collective action in diverse production systems.
- > Measurement of changes in biodiversity, biomass, soil and water resources through the Biophysical Monitoring Framework with view to supporting communities in ecological health monitoring and conservation priorities.
- > Developing spatial and non-spatial databases to capture development trends, and longitudinal surveys to assess ecological, economic and social changes at household, village and landscape levels over time.
- > Analysing biophysical processes in ecologically-important areas such as sanctuaries and wildlife habitats which helps developing appropriate conservation plans.
- > Understanding the implications of climate change on natural and production systems, and mapping community-level institutional adaptations to climate-induced vulnerabilities.

# Documentation

- > **Methods and Tools for Improving Collective Action:** Advancing efforts to test and develop simple tools and approaches for triggering debates on local level regulation of land, forest and water resources, we continued our collaboration with International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Arizona State University and University of Andes (Columbia) on Experimental Games. Similarly, in collaboration with Systems Design Lab at Washington University in St. Louis, we have developed exercises on Community-Based System Dynamics to help village communities diagnose cause and effect interrelationship of complex problems. Field manuals and process steps are being prepared for wider application and usage at community level.
- > **Adaptation to Climate and Environmental Risks:** To improve our understanding and design strategies to strengthen the resilience of climate and environment-vulnerable populations we continued with the study titled 'Studying Poverty, Agricultural Risks and Coping Strategies' in 100 villages across the states of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. Preliminary findings show that over the last decade communities have been experiencing significant changes in farming systems and livelihood portfolios attributable to a variety of social, environmental, climatic, market and policy stressors. Further, we have been able to identify key livelihood risks faced by communities in different locations and will now assess the effectiveness of indigenous and introduced coping strategies and adaptations in mitigating these risks. Alongside this initiative, we are also investigating the impact of community institutions for water governance on the resilience of rural households.
- > **Ecological Health Monitoring:** Continuing our efforts of detailed ecological health monitoring in select watersheds of pastoral, mixed farming and forest dominated ecosystems, this year we added layers of 'Odonates' as ecological indicators of habitat quality (especially water quality), valued the role that hedges play in maintaining biodiversity in agro-ecosystems, and inventoried herpetofauna and migratory birds to assess environmental changes. Dissemination materials were prepared to engage communities on the findings and their plans for conservation action.



- > Continuing to improve our understanding of the interactions between human and nature interactions and better valuation of ecosystem services, we have initiated monitoring of 10 sites in Rajasthan and Odisha using **International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI) protocols and Natural Resource Accounting System**. Designed as a longitudinal study to assess changes in forest conditions and institutional arrangements for governance of forest and other common lands, the study aims to develop a consistent database to monitor changes in social, economic and ecological outcomes.
- > **The Case for the Commons – an ePublication:** To analyse and facilitate larger dissemination of the implications of the various judgments and orders on Commons passed by the Supreme Court, High Court and the state governments, in a commonly understandable form, FES in association with a group of professionals is bringing out a periodic publication on the Commons. *The Case for the Commons* is a bimonthly e-publication aimed at facilitating informed decisions while also contributing to the better governance of Commons in the country.
- > **Studies on Progress and Impact of Forest Rights Act (FRA) especially Community Forest Rights:** With support from UNDP, we undertook studies to understand the factors impacting implementation of Forest Rights Act in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha to identify mechanisms for better implementation of FRA. The studies appraised the implementation of provisions of Community Forest Rights.
- > **Water Sustainability – A Beginner’s Guide:** As part of our partnership with Hindustan Unilever Foundation and NABARD, for the project titled ‘Water Commons – Influencing Practice and Policy’, we brought out a beginner’s guide on water sustainability as an internal capacity-building tool or primer on water sustainability issues. It consolidates some of the essential and contemporary concepts, discussions, trends and practices in water conservation and governance.



# Networking and Collaborations

Collaborating with like-minded organisations, individuals, government and non-government officials, and academic institutions over the years has been an intrinsic part of the work culture at FES. We continue to work with several practitioner and academic bodies engaged in ecological restoration, decentralised governance of natural resources, community institutions and collective action and rural livelihoods towards furthering our understanding, representing a common view and expanding the horizons of our work.

- > Our collaboration with Dakshin Foundation through the publication of *Common Voices*, has paved way for a continued partnership in bringing out *Current Conservation*, a conservation magazine which highlights cutting edge research and on-the-ground initiatives and experiences relating to conservation and livelihoods.
- > With Kalpvriksh, we bring out the *Protected Area Update*, a bimonthly containing news and information from protected areas in India and South Asia, and *Forest Case Update*, an information dissemination service for forest and wildlife cases in the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal.
- > We collaborate with different universities: Washington University, St. Louis, to study subjects related to systems dynamics, energy conservation, coupled human and natural systems; Clemson University, USA, on hydrological studies; University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and Indiana University, Bloomington, on forest resources and institutions and climate change.
- > We collaborate with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Arizona State University, USA, to improve our understanding on the application of experimental games in strengthening collective action in managing groundwater and extend it to designing a series of games for other resources.
- > We anchor the Rainfed Livestock Network (RLN), a consortium of NGOs which works to put forth an alternative narrative for livestock development for rainfed areas of India focusing on the low-input and extensive livestock production systems.
- > We are a member of the International Land Coalition (ILC) and the UN Economic and Social Council (UNECOSOC) as a part of our endeavour to promote secure and equitable rights over community land for the poor. We are also a member of the Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCA) Consortium which strives to bring to light the criticality of biodiversity-rich natural or modified ecosystems voluntarily conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities.
- > We are in discussion with The Energy Research Institute University (TERI) to develop long-term collaborative research plans to understand human-nature interactions involving students and faculty from different disciplines. We are also collaborating with the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Hyderabad, to design a course on Natural Resource Governance to be offered at the Masters level with a strong emphasis on field level learning.
- > Working with forest-dependent communities in claiming their collective rights under the Forest Rights Act, we collaborate with Odisha Jungle Manch – a people's organisation, and NGOs – SEWAK and Nirman in Odisha; and with the 'Environics Trust' in Himachal Pradesh.
- > We collaborate with *Ananta Paryavarana Parirakshana Samiti* (APPS), a network of NGOs involved in protecting and managing common lands and water bodies in Andhra Pradesh. New collaborations were initiated with eight NGOs in four districts following the scaling up of the Common Pool Resources (CPR) – NREGA programme through IWMP watersheds to 10 additional districts, by the State Government.
- > In collaboration with the district administration of Kolar and Chikkaballapur districts in Karnataka, we aim to reach out to around 1,500 villages in the two districts through engaging 300 Gram Panchayats in implementing common land restoration programmes.

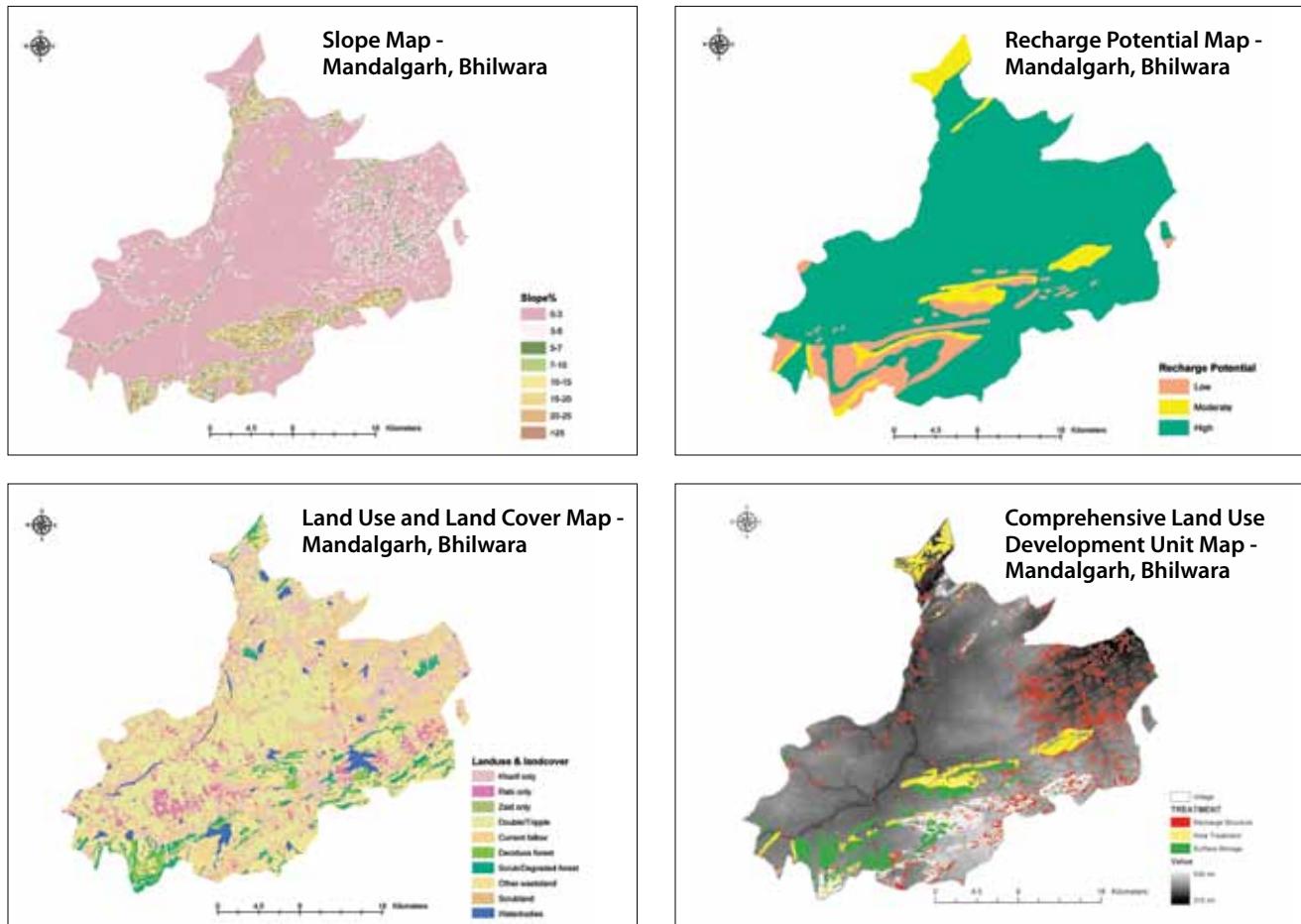


# Spatial Information

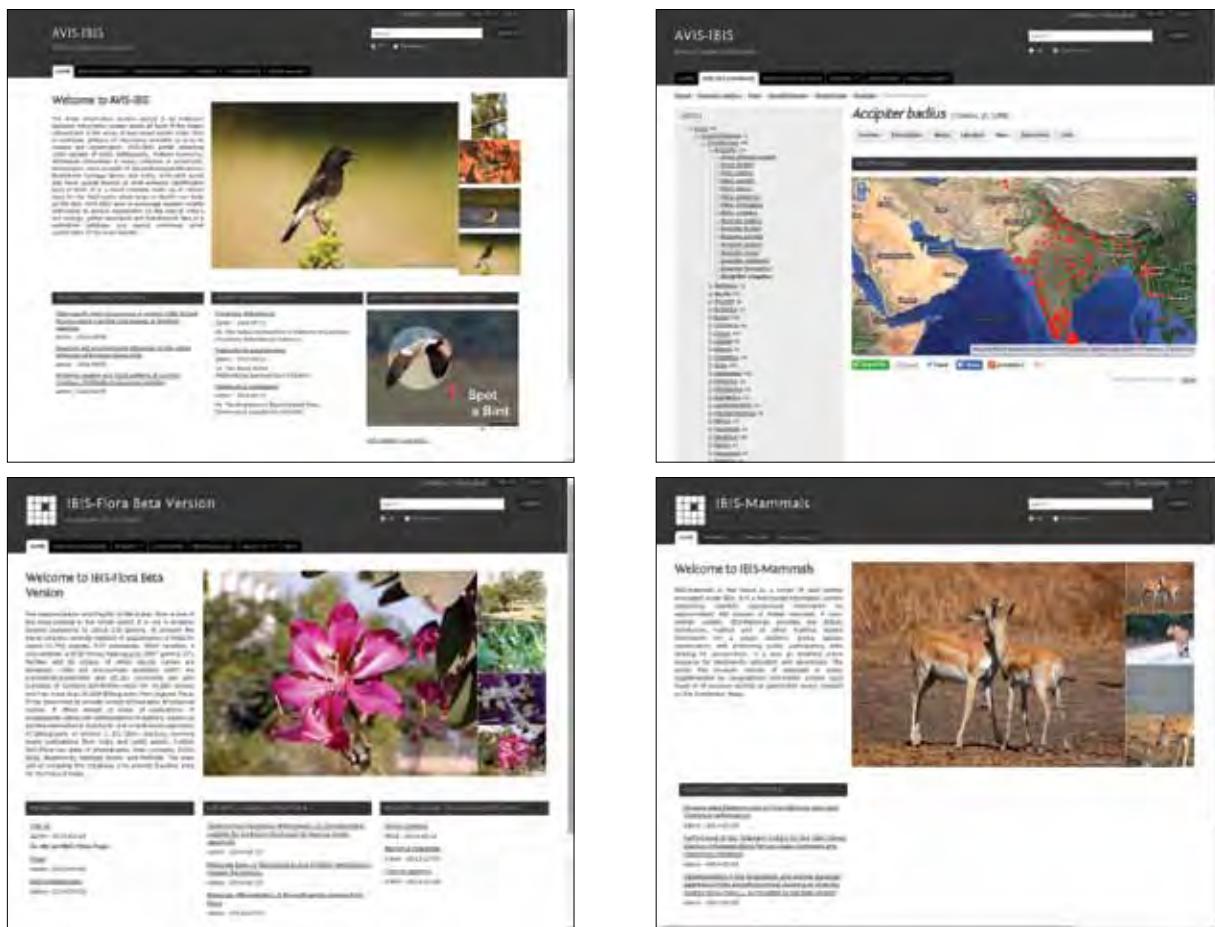
Public investments through programmatic interventions could immensely benefit from well analysed information which is, more often than not, available in a compartmentalised manner and difficult to access by civil society. General public and development planners find that the information does not render itself presentable for analysis, failing to provide insights on location-specific ecological and socio-economic trends, public investments and results of previous development interventions. Rather than being determinants that diagnose and decide their local development agenda, rural communities are commonly seen as passive recipients of development programmes. Developmental expenditure is mostly reduced to blueprint prescriptions rather than location-specific needs and does not effectively utilise or build on the capacity of village communities in determining their collective future.

Over the years, FES has developed 'India Database', a compilation of longitudinal data on more than 300 parameters for all the districts of India, inclusive of spatial information, such as, river basins, soil, geology, land use and vegetation changes, forest types, eco-regions, flora and fauna, and non-spatial information, such as, demographic trends, market-potential indices, infrastructure and availability of amenities. The data has been useful in preparing atlases for blocks, districts and states, in guiding prioritisation of areas for development interventions, and in developing conservation action plans for selected areas including protected areas.

Our aim is to support the larger trend of decentralised planning at block and district levels through easy access to critical local information by village communities, civil society organisations, technocrats, government officials and development planners, so as to promote collaborative development planning at local levels. We are also building two dynamic online monitoring platforms tentatively titled as Protected Area Observatory and Drylands Observatory that would empower a range of stakeholders to engage and access near real time information. They will use an integrated geo-informatics platform built using Open Source GIS, Remote Sensing and Satellite Imageries, Big Data and Crowd Sourcing technologies and improve access to information and analysis of inter-sectoral temporal and spatial parameters. The platform will serve twin objectives of assisting decision makers in better management of protected areas and also block (sub district) planning of land use (and water) in dryland areas.



# Indian Biodiversity Information System (IBIS)



Initiated in the year 2010, Indian Biodiversity Information System (IBIS) is a web-based, modular and searchable biodiversity database which provides resource-rich, state-of-the-art species-level information on a single user-friendly format. IBIS is a crucial tool for achieving conservation goals and can be used by a wide range of stakeholder groups, ranging from amateur wildlife enthusiasts to serious researchers, conservationists and educationists.

Following the portals on Birds and Mammals titled AVIS-IBIS and IBIS-Mammals respectively, work has been completed for the launch of the IBIS-Flora. Scheduled to be launched in 2014, IBIS-Flora, a first of its kind portal, caters to an extensive database carrying information of a total of 21,764 species, 515 sub-species, 2,514 varieties, 4 sub-varieties, 58 formas and 1 sub-forma belonging to 3,667 genera, 271 families and 50 orders. Around 95,161 synonyms have been compiled of which 40,000 are sourced from various Indian literatures while others from international open access sources. Approximately 50,000 bibliographies from regional floras have also been prepared; distribution data collected from various sources and distribution maps have been prepared for more than 14,000 species.

The AVIS-IBIS carries information pertaining to 1,664 species of birds, bibliography for 685,000 species, multiple taxonomy, distribution information including 874,402 point locations and maps, collection of sound/calls, photographs, 23,191 book excerpts of old ornithological literatures, Biodiversity heritage library and more. It also has a special featured radical search engine, a unique identification tool to assist enthusiasts identify any bird of the Indian subcontinent.

A user-friendly system, IBIS-Mammals provides the status, distribution, habitat and all other mammal species-related information on a single platform, aiding species conservation and promoting public participatory data sharing for conservation. The Data Archives include general species profiles, excerpts from copyright-free books, a wide range of literature, all indexed on one platform. The portal has 75,000+ museum records of mammals in India, supplemented by Geographical Information System (GIS) maps of all museum records as geo-spatial layers, overlaid on the Distribution Maps.

Continuing to strengthen its collaboration with individuals, organisations, researchers and scholars across India, IBIS ([www.indianbiodiversity.org](http://www.indianbiodiversity.org)) will soon come up with similar portals on reptiles, amphibians and spiders.

# The Commons Initiative – Influencing the Common Mindset



Following the Apex court's judgement of January 2011, directing the Governments on the protection of common lands and restoration of their management rights to Panchayats, 104 judicial pronouncements and 54 orders on Commons issued by various High Courts and state governments respectively, as also resultant actions, have been captured on the Claim for Commons blog (<http://claim-for-commons.blogspot.in>).

Initiated in 2009, Commons Initiative aims at influencing the common mindset, stressing the role of two hitherto neglected albeit fundamental aspects of village life – Common Pool Resources such as forests, pastures and water and collective action in self-governing institutions, as crucial components of the rural economy. FES furthers the concepts of Commons as an effective instrument of local governance, as economic assets and for the viability of the adjoining farmlands. FES believes that 'Commons need Commons' to reinforce one another and sees this materialise as it joins hands with others, form alliances, energise momentum, build visibility and engage decision makers and civil society alike.

At the global level, taking forward the Practitioners Perspective, we organised two action-focused Policy Forums on 'Theory in Action' at the 14<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC) 2013, in Mount

Fiji, Japan. The first policy forum was on 'Whose water? Between the local and the global', and the second was on 'A Global Initiative on Secure Tenure at the Community Level'.

As members of the International Land Coalition and of the Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCA) Consortium, we strive to promote secure and equitable rights of local communities and indigenous people over forest, land and water resources.

At the national level, we actively engage with the Government and Planning Commission, to bring to the fore the Commons Agenda and secure financial investments under Right to Employment Act for developing common lands and water bodies. Additionally, in order to analyse and facilitate larger dissemination of the implication of the Supreme Court's January 2011 judgement on the Commons, directing all state governments to draw up schemes to evict encroachments on common lands and restore them to Panchayats and Gram Sabhas; and the subsequent orders by other lower courts and state governments, in a commonly understandable form, we are bringing out a periodic publication on the Commons – *The Case for the Commons*.

In Rajasthan, we continue to work with the government in taking forward their decisions on restoring and safeguarding Commons to the Gram Sabhas. Taking forward the *Shamlat Abhiyan* – the Campaign for Commons in Rajasthan, this year too we helped following up the government orders with a comprehensive mass media and community level campaign including letters, SMSs, newspaper and television advertisements.

In Andhra Pradesh, following the decision by the state government for scaling up the Common Pool Resources (CPR) – National Rural Employment Guarantee (NREG) programme through Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP), to additional districts, we are assisting the government as a facilitating agency in implementing the programme through non-government organisations.

In Karnataka, we continue to engage with the District administration of Chikkaballapur and Kolar as a follow-up of the Lok Adalat's judgement on the immediate need for restoration of common lands and water bodies. Following the execution of MoUs with the respective Zilla Parishads, we initiated the Commons Campaign, by organising district and block level workshops and following it up with a letter campaign calling for action to all the 297 Gram Panchayats of the two districts.

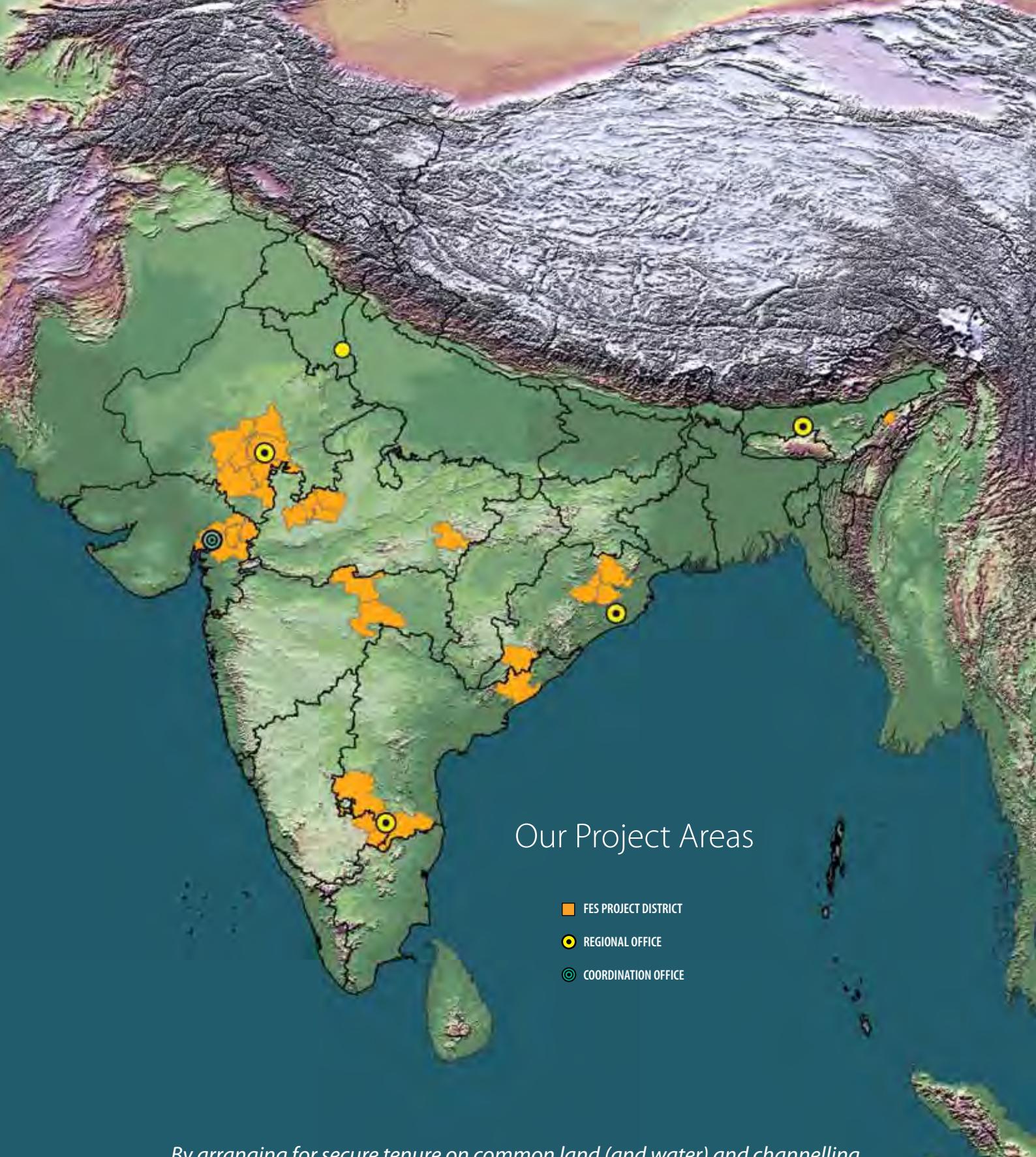


M.Rambabu



Shantanu Saha Roy

With the prime focus of *Shamlat Abhiyan* as raising awareness regarding the criticality of common lands, FES has been conducting workshops for the government and Panchayat functionaries at the division, district and block levels as well as for the NGOs, milk unions, legal and media fraternity across Rajasthan. Similar efforts were also made in Karnataka highlighting various decisions of the government in restoring Commons.



*By arranging for secure tenure on common land (and water) and channelling public funds, FES assists village communities in building on their existing norms and wisdom of village life, building spaces for women and marginalised, mapping and inventorying their resources, claiming their rights over land and produce and surfacing attendant duties and responsibilities.*

*Our work is spread across 1.8 million acres of common land across 7,393 villages in 30 districts across 8 states, reaching out to 3.98 million people.*

# OUR PRESENCE

We are working with 7,393 village institutions and reaching out to 3.98 million people in 30 districts across eight states, spanning different socio-cultural and agro-ecological conditions of India. FES is known for its large-scale work on strengthening community institutions around common lands and water bodies. By working with village institutions, Community-Based Organisations and partner NGOs, a total of 1.8 million acres of common land is brought under community governance along with improved productivity of adjacent 1.5 million acres of privately-owned lands.

FES has sustained the momentum gained in the past by expanding field operations during the year to 380 additional habitations and set in place institutions for community-based natural resource management and governance. Our operations have been extended to Amravati and Yavatmal districts of Maharashtra. Alongside our focus on common lands, we have undertaken initiatives during the year to improve our articulation on the issues of Water Commons and adaptations to climate change so as to enrich our engagement with communities and other stakeholders. With the addition of water resources to common lands within the domain of governance of village institutions, the principles of effective management of Commons are likely to get reinforced as well as bring in a fresh set of challenges.

While each location is guided by specific strategies, the broad organisational strategies across locations are:

- > Revival of the criticality of forests and other common lands and Water Commons, and focus on inter-linkages with associated production systems – thereby highlighting the value of forests, common lands and water Commons and the necessity for conservation action.
- > Establishment of institutional design principles and mechanisms that provide spaces for the poor and enable village communities to access, share and conserve common lands and Water Commons. Highlight the strength and potential of collective action in cost, effectively handling complex problems at local level.
- > Development of linkages between village-level institutions and the Panchayat and promote platforms to help build dialogue and capacity for adaptive management of natural resources.
- > Assistance to Panchayats to build their capacities and to leverage funds available under the Right to Employment Act to restore degraded ecosystems and to evolve rules and regulations for governing them.
- > Strengthen platforms for discussion at village and inter-village levels by inviting government functionaries, academia and larger civil society to jointly deliberate on issues of conservation, and use of natural surroundings to meet the consumptive and non-consumptive needs of village communities.
- > Execution of pilot-level land use planning in diverse ecological and socio-economic settings, and tackle biomass and water scarcities, to guide block and district-level land use planning.
- > Assessment of impact of climate change on various natural and production systems, and introduce mitigation and adaptation measures.

# Rajasthan



Vishal Bhagat

- River
- Project Districts
- Project Tahsils
- Wildlife Sanctuary
- Kathiar-Gir Dry Deciduous Forests
- North-western Thorn Scrub Forests

Falls in Lower & Middle Indus, Ganga Delta & Plain and Narmada-Tapi Freshwater Eco-region

Situated between 23°31'N to 26°58'N and 72°45'E to 75°49'E

Length of Growing Period (LGP) ranges from 90 days in the north to 150 days in the south

The annual average rainfall ranges from 522 mm to 809 mm and the no. of rainy days from 18 to 35

## FACT FILE

**River Basin:** Mej, Menali, Khari, Lilri; Jhakham, Erav of Mahi, Siwna, Gir of Chambal; Mansi, Wakal, Sei; Luni

**Forest Types:** Tropical Dry Deciduous and Dry Thorn; Tropical Dry Deciduous, Grasslands; Tropical Dry Deciduous; Tropical Dry Deciduous

**Threatened Species:** Great Indian Bustard, Long-billed Vulture; Rusty-spotted Cat, Four-horned Antelope, Lesser Florican, Fat-tailed Gecko; Aravalli Red Spurfowl, White-naped Tit, *Commiphora wightii*, *Sterculia urens*; White-naped Tit, *Anogeissus sericea*, *Commiphora wightii*

**Principal Crops:** Jowar, groundnut, pulses, wheat, gram; Maize, sorghum, paddy, cotton, sugarcane; Wheat, maize, barley, sugarcane; Wheat, bajra, jowar, maize

**% of Common Lands other than Forestlands:** 52.2; 15.02; 64.52; 38.61

**% of Forest Cover:** 3.42; 29.33; 23.21; 5.34

**% of Population Living Below Poverty Line:** 32; 39.36; 55; 21

**% of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes:** 23; 67.26; 54; 17

**Year in which FES Initiated Work:** 1995; 2005; 2000; 2012

**Total Common Land under Protection (acres):** 117,195; 35,658; 43,450; 3,980

**Total Lives Touched:** 317,676; 72,305; 126,383; 7,380

**Village Institutions Associated with:** 398; 228; 363; 5

**Funding Agencies:** Omidyar Network, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and The Allied Trusts, NABARD-IGWDP, NABARD-WDF, NABARD-TDF, ITC-Rural Development Trust, ITC-MGNREGS, Sunehra Kal-ITC, Government of Rajasthan, Rajasthan Forestry and Biodiversity Project, UNDP-Small Grants Programme, Grow-Trees, Fondation Ensemble, GIZ India, Washington University in St. Louis, International Land Coalition, Hindustan Unilever Foundation

**Bhilwara Pratapgarh Udaipur Pali**



Collective efforts of the local communities of Gyangarh village have addressed serious issues like restoration of grazing lands, reduction in local desertification and improved rainwater penetration within its boundaries. Over the years, grass production increased from 1.1 tonne/ha to 2 tonne/ha with an increase in vegetation diversity.

S Singh

## Update 2013-2014

### Commoning the Commons

The enabling directions from the Government for protecting and developing grazing lands of 125 acres per village under the Right to Employment Act were disseminated widely using local television channels, newspapers and SMS apart from using folk theatre and display vans in rural towns and local markets. Simultaneously, meetings with Panchayats and villages were conducted with the help of *Paryavaran Jan Chetna Manch* and *Paryavaran Premi Samaj* – two associations of village institutions which are managing their grazing lands for collective use. As a result of the campaign and subsequent Panchayat meetings in the past two years, a total of 1,482 villages of 365 Panchayats in Udaipur, Bhilwara, Pratapgarh, Ajmer and Pali districts have passed Gram Sabha resolutions to protect, restore and secure their grazing lands (about 150,000 acres) and use funds from Right to Employment scheme to improve grass cover and restore water bodies.

In Rajasthan, we work with agro-pastoral communities in the central districts of Bhilwara, Ajmer and Pali, and with tribal communities of Udaipur, Pratapgarh, Rajsamand and Chittaurgarh located in the southern forested areas of Vindhyan and Aravali ranges.

The survival of poor livestock-keepers of the region is dependent on the Commons which meets the highly crucial requirement of fodder and water. Though used as *defacto* Commons, Revenue wastelands suffer due to unfavourable tenure, and grazing lands which are under the custody of Panchayats, quite often suffer from weak governance resulting in neglect, over-exploitation and illegal encroachments.

Owing to the criticality of Commons in the area, we work towards the restoration and protection of the degraded forestlands and common lands, strengthen institutional mechanisms, promote local federations of village institutions and support in securing tenure over common lands. In the districts of Ajmer and Bhilwara, our efforts have led to a marked improvement in fodder and water availability and thereby improved animal husbandry and agriculture.

In the tribal dominated districts of Udaipur, Pratapgarh, Rajsamand and Chittaurgarh, we work with communities to strengthen the protection, regeneration and management of forestlands by building on existing customary patterns of access and use. In Udaipur, Chittaurgarh and Rajsamand districts, our work under the Rajasthan Forestry & Biodiversity Project (RFBP) is located in the periphery of several protected areas where the communities are supported in developing plans to safeguard and improve their forest Commons – a key component in their livelihoods. We also support communities in undertaking watershed development projects to improve the farmlands as well as the farming systems.

We continue to engage with the state and districts officials on issues concerning restoration of Commons through Right to Employment Act. Taking forward the *Shamlat Abhiyan* – the Commons Campaign – we organised several workshops for Government and Panchayat functionaries at the district and block levels and continued the state-wide media campaign using folklore, print media, short films, documentaries and animation films.

- > Supported village institutions that have 2,002,834 acres of common land under community management with 54,875 acres of common land added during the year across 994 habitations.

Kumar Rupam



- > 355 training programmes were conducted for 4,410 trainees by the *Prakriti Karyashala*. The *Karyashala* also trained a cadre of field trainers on themes such as technical aspects of Right to Employment Act, process of claiming and securing Commons capacity-building of Panchayati Raj representatives, among others.

- > INR 92.5 million was leveraged under Right to Employment Act and Rajasthan Forestry & Biodiversity Project for undertaking activities aimed at restoration and re-vegetation of common lands and forestlands.

- > Undertook a study on 'Impact assessment of common land' in Joramahua village, Pratapgarh, covering 127 acres of common land. The study found that the soil and moisture conservation and re-vegetation measures coupled with institutional mechanisms have yielded marked improvements in soil health, biomass productivity and biodiversity – in essence, the returns are more than three times the investments, over a period of four years.

Shantanu Sinha Roy



- > Under the *Shamlat Abhiyan*, two district-level workshops were organised in Chittaurgarh and Rajsamand and six block-level workshops were organised for the Government representatives, PRI representatives and NGO functionaries furthering the Commons agenda in the region and thereby reaching out to more than 750 habitations. As part of the Campaign, two rounds of SMSs were also sent to 63,000 community representatives across all 9,166 Panchayats, besides telecasting short films and animated spots in the local TV channels.



# Andhra Pradesh



- River
- Project Districts
- Project Mandals
- Deccan Thorn Scrub Forests Eco-region
- East Deccan Dry-Evergreen Forests Eco-region

Falls in Southern Deccan Plateau & South-eastern Ghats Freshwater Eco-region  
Situated between 12°37'N to 15°13'N and 76°45'E to 80°3'E  
Length of Growing Period (LGP) ranges from 120-150 days  
The annual average rainfall ranges from 655 mm to 867 mm and the no. of rainy days from 22 to 47

## FACT FILE

**River Basin:** Papagni

**Forest Types:** Mixed Dry Deciduous, Tropical Thorn, Scrub

**Threatened Species:** Yellow-throated Bulbul, Starred Tortoise, *Chloroxylon swietenia*, *Anogeissus latifolia*

**Principal Crops:** Groundnut, paddy, chilli, mango

**% of Common Lands other than Forestlands:** 30.29

**% of Forest Cover:** 8.24

**% of Population Living Below Poverty Line:** 58

**% of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes:** 20

**Year in which FES Initiated Work:** 1991

**Total Common Land under Protection (acres):** 56,723

**Total Lives Touched:** 94,801

**Village Institutions Associated with:** 325

**Funding Agencies:** Omidyar Network, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and The Allied Trusts, NABARD (Distress Districts Programme), NABARD RSO Programme, NABARD-TDF, NABARD Community Managed Hydrological Monitoring and Water Management Programme, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Grow-Trees, Hindustan Unilever Foundation

Over the past several years, cohesive efforts of the local communities have been successful in warding off illegal mining activities in two villages of Gudlavipalle covering an area of 300 acres. They have also shared their experiences with the neighbouring villages of Anantapuram district which were facing similar threats.

## Update 2013-2014

### Commoning the Commons

Learning from the programmes that we implement in restoring degraded forests and common lands and strengthening collective action of community institutions, we along with *Ananta Paryavarana Parirakshana Samiti*, were involved with the State Government in implementing the Common Pool Resources (CPR) - NREGA pilot programme in Anantapuram and Chittoor districts. Considering the positive results of the pilot initiative in restoring about 62,000 acres of common land, the government has dovetailed the programme with Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) in five districts. Coordinating the programme on behalf of the Government, FES is also undertaking capacity-building programmes for government officials and NGO partners. A total of 55,000 acres of common land has been identified in 82 Gram Panchayats of five districts and detailed project reports were developed to restore common lands by leveraging funds under IWMP-NREGA initiative.

In Andhra Pradesh, we work in the eastern districts of Chittoor and Anantapuram of Rayalseema, known for its unique ecological features at the tri-junction of the Eastern Ghats, the Western Ghats and the Deccan Plateau. Traversed by River Papagni and located in the rain shadow region of the Deccan Plateau, the region is characterised by broken hill ranges, scrub forests on the ridges, with valleys and slopes marked with numerous cascading irrigation tanks.

Degraded Commons, depleted water resources and distress due to frequent drought conditions are the critical issues that largely affect the livelihoods of the local communities in the area, necessitating communities to migrate to neighbouring towns. Our work in this drought-prone region is primarily aimed at strengthening local village institutions and their conglomerates in restoring the landscape, securing tenure over common lands and in evolving regulations to manage water as Commons. The efforts of the rural communities have led to a visible improvement in vegetation resulting in a decrease in migration for want of water and fodder for animals.

The Common Pool Resources in the state are largely governed by village institutions such as *Vana Samrakshana Samitis*, Tree Growers' Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies, watershed committees, water users associations and their local federations. Assisted by a group of trained rural volunteers, these institutions have begun deliberating on reducing consumption of firewood and water in the region.

We collaborate with *Ananta Paryavarana Parirakshana Samiti* – a network of NGOs, in furthering assistance to village communities to strengthen the institutional arrangements in managing Commons and leveraging resources under the Right to Employment Act for the restoration of land and water resources. Scaling up this initiative, the government of Andhra Pradesh issued orders for restoration of common lands of five Drought Prone Area Programme districts, appointing us as the nodal agency of the NGOs to facilitate the programme and restore the common lands. The government has also issued directions to the District Administration to enter the land details of the Commons into the records of the 'Prohibitory Order Book' so as to refrain from their diversion from customary local use to alternative land use.

- > Assisted about 95,000 individuals across 325 habitations in restoring 628,564 acres of common land with 250 acres added during the year. In collaboration with *Ananta Paryavarana Parirakshana Samiti*, we reached out to additional 1,243 habitations bringing 488,040 acres of common land under community management and benefitting a population of 1.4 million.



- Snehasi KD
- > 249 training programmes were conducted for 6,573 trainees through *Prakriti Karyashala* to influence the process of claiming, restoring and setting in place the governance mechanisms over Commons.

- > Developed a pictorial guide on 'Plants of Rayalseema' and posters on ecological indicators such as Herpetofauna and Odonates identified through Ecological Health Monitoring Studies conducted in Kadiri, Anantapuram.

- > In collaboration with Washington University at St. Louis, conducted the fifth consecutive Annual Winter Institute and effectively used System Dynamics (SD) as a participatory tool for engaging with communities and developing a holistic understanding of groundwater resource systems and cropping patterns in the region.

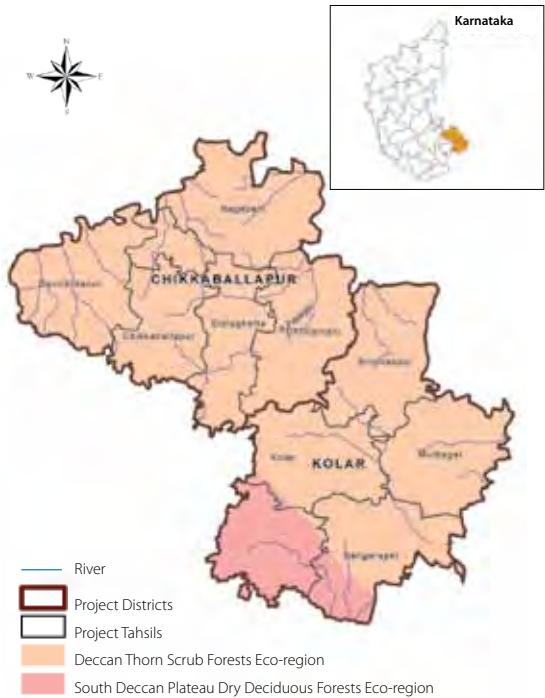


- Jagadeesh Rao
- > In order to better understand the water use dynamics and promote collective action regarding groundwater usage, innovative experimental games were undertaken with village communities in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute and Arizona State University.

- > New collaborations were initiated in five districts following the state government order for scaling up the Common Pool Resources (CPR) – NREGA programme by dovetailing it with Integrated Watershed Management Programme.



# Karnataka



Falls in Southern Deccan Plateau & South-Eastern Ghats Freshwater Eco-region  
Situated between 12-45°N to 13-57°N and 77-21°E to 78-35°E  
Length of Growing Period (LGP) ranges from 120-150 days  
The annual average rainfall is 842 mm and the no. of rainy days ranges from 36 to 45

## FACT FILE

**River Basin:** Papagni

**Forest Types:** Tropical Dry Deciduous, Tropical Thorn, Scrub

**Threatened Species:** Yellow-throated Bulbul, Starred Tortoise, Red Sand Boa, Kolar Leaf-nosed Bat, *Wrightia tinctoria*, *Shorea roxburghii*

**Principal Crops:** Ragi, paddy, maize, oilseeds, pulses

**% of Common Lands other than Forestlands:** 47.92

**% of Forest Cover:** 6.18

**% of Population Living Below Poverty Line:** 23

**% of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes:** 29

**Year in which FES Initiated Work:** 1998

**Total Common Land under Protection (acres):** 59,935

**Total Lives Touched:** 142,624

**Village Institutions Associated with:** 314

**Funding Agencies:** Omidyar Network, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and The Allied Trusts, Arghyam Trust, Grow-Trees, Hindustan Unilever Foundation

In the daunting boulder-strewn landscape of Sajjupalli, determined efforts of the local communities have led to the prevention of forest-fires and the protection and restoration of common lands, thereby leading to a considerable improvement in water levels and vegetative cover of the region. The area is now home to rich wildlife and also records the presence of threatened floral species and medical plants. These efforts have also been extended to the neighbouring Yerrakonda forest range.

## Update 2013-2014

### Commoning the Commons

Yerrakonda forest range of 1,350 acres which lies on the border of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh in Bagepalle taluk is being protected by the members of the local association of four villages since 1995. Beginning with protection and restoration of 500 acres of *gomala* (grazing land), the village communities extended their collective mechanisms to the neighbouring forest for protecting it from tree-felling and forest-fire. When the forest department undertook activities in 2012 to uproot the natural rootstock and plant exotic saplings, the association sought support of the Panchayat, filed an application under the Right to Information Act, represented their case to the Deputy Commissioner, Chikkaballapur, and was able to stop the activities. The protected forest Commons cater to fodder and drinking water needs of livestock of about 12 villages and are home to threatened floral species such as *Chloroxylon swietenia* and fauna such as blackbuck, cheetal and sloth bear.

In Karnataka, our activities are spread across the upper catchment region of the Papagni River and two of its feeder streams in the districts of Kolar and Chikkaballapur. The terrain is hilly with rocky boulders and sparse vegetation on the hills slopes and is characterised by silted-up tanks, degraded shrub forests and encroached grazing lands. The degraded forestlands are mostly bereft of indigenous species and high incidence of the invasive *Lantana*. In recent decades, there has been unrestrained use of groundwater for raising cash crops which has resulted in depleting groundwater and rising inequalities.

The Karnataka Government encourages communities to set their own priorities as well as prepare and implement their development plans. Seizing these opportunities, we promote formation of hamlet-level subcommittees under Panchayats and capacitate rural volunteers and para-workers to assist village institutions in managing and governing their natural resources.

We undertake capacity-building programmes for the elected representatives and other Panchayat functionaries, assist Panchayats in preparing village perspective plans and in leveraging Right to Employment Act for activities aimed at creating durable community assets such as forests, pastures and water bodies, which are critical to livestock-dependent communities of the region.

In order to provide Panchayats with sound information on groundwater and options to curtail rampant extraction of groundwater and develop collective rules to regulate use, we conduct hydro-geological studies and water audits along with rural cadre and share the information with watershed communities. As possible actions to cope with reduced water availability and climatic variations, we promote agricultural crops and practices that are less water intensive and support Panchayats to develop institutional mechanisms to regulate and promote judicious use of water and other natural resources.

Following the execution of the MoU with the district administration of Kolar and Chikkaballapur for drawing up conservation plans to restore common lands and water bodies, we reached out to 40 Panchayats during the year. We also imparted training to about 7,400 *Kayaka Bandhus* (NREGA mates) and plan to reach out to all 300 Gram Panchayats for engendering community action for restoring grazing lands and water bodies in the coming year.

- > With 85 habitations added during the year, we work with a population of about 140,000 across 314 habitations bringing around 59,935 acres of common land under community management in the districts of Kolar and Chikkaballapur.

Shipra S Nalavade



- > 297 farmers were supported to showcase Low External Input Sustainable Agriculture (LEISA) practices in 149 acres of groundnut crop and 284 acres under ragi crop, which not only reduced the risks in production but also resulted in better yields.

- > Soil and moisture conservation activities have been undertaken on 1,910 acres of land, with a total of 95,000 saplings of 14 native species planted on both farmlands and common lands. An amount of INR 9.8 million was leveraged under Right to Employment Act by Panchayats for the above activities.

P Vijay Kumar



- > From the total 163 farm ponds constructed in the recharge zone of 10,000-acre watershed, 32,000 cubic metres of water was recharged during the year (2% of the total surface run-off), which suffices the watershed area's total demand of water for livestock.

- > *Prakriti Karyashala* conducted one-day training programmes on securing and restoring Commons and water bodies for 7,400 *Kayaka Bandhus* (NREGA mates) of 257 Gram Panchayats of both Kolar and Chikkaballapur districts.

- > In its eighth year of publication, two issues of *Gram Vani* the rural newsletter, on development issues and events of the area, was circulated widely. The newsletters covered topics on restoration of Commons, role of Panchayats, Right to Employment Act, success stories and experiences from the field.



March 1999

A photograph showing a vast expanse of dense green foliage in the foreground, likely a tea plantation or similar crop. In the background, a large, rounded hill covered in thick green trees rises against a clear, pale sky. The lighting suggests a bright, sunny day.

October 2010

A photograph showing a steep, densely forested hillside. The foreground is filled with various green plants and shrubs. The hillside itself is covered in a thick layer of green trees and bushes, extending from the base to the top of the frame. The sky above is overcast and grey.

October 2014

Restoration efforts by the local communities of Thenga village in about 100 acres of common land has resulted in improving water retention period in seven ponds downstream for over a month, increased the moisture in the foothills where crop growth was reported in about 30 to 40 acres of adjoining land, thereby enabling a much needed debate in the village on the linkage between the various components of the landscape.

Odisha



- The legend consists of eight entries, each with a colored square followed by the name of the geographical feature:

  - Project Districts (Red)
  - Project Tahsils (White)
  - Wildlife Sanctuary (Green)
  - Chhota-Nagpur (Yellow)
  - Dry Deciduous Forests (Light Green)
  - Eastern Highlands Moist Deciduous Forests (Light Blue)
  - Northern Dry Deciduous Forests (Dark Green)
  - Odisha Semi-Evergreen Forests (Dark Blue)

Falls in Northern Deccan Plateau Freshwater Eco-region  
Situated between 18-14°N to 22-11°N and 82-5°E to 86-25°E  
Length of Growing Period (LGP) ranges from 180-210 days  
The annual average rainfall ranges from 1273 mm to 1300 mm and the no. of rainy days from 55 to 67

## FACT FILE

**River Basin:** Mahanadi, Brahmini; Kolab

**Forest Types:** Tropical Dry and Moist Deciduous, Bamboo Brakes and Scrub; Tropical Moist Deciduous

**Threatened Species:** Tiger, Elephant, Gharial, *Barringtonia acutangula* (Hinjal), *Entada phaseoloides* (Gila); Elephant, *Themeda saxeola*, *Strobilanthes jevporensis*

**Principal Crops:** Paddy, maize, ragi, gram, oilseeds; Paddy, maize, ragi, wheat, pulses, niger, sugarcane, potato

**% of Common Lands other than Forestlands:** 19.11: 42.91

**% of Forest Cover:** 37.06; 19.05

**% of Population Living Below Poverty Line:** 61; 84

**% of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes:** 29: 63

**Year in which FES Initiated Work: 1987: 2008**

**Total Common Land under Protection (acres):**

**56,775**

**Total Lives Touched:** 190,291; 60,333

## **Village Institutions Associated with:**

**Funding Agencies:** Omidyar Network, Sir Dorabji Tata Trusts

The Allied Trusts, NABARD-WDF, Grow-Trees, NABARD-PDBI, Seva Mandir, Government of Odisha, International Land Coalition, UNDP

Angul Koraput

## Update 2013-2014

### Commoning the Commons

*Charmalik Anchalika Vikas Parishad*, a local collective of 42 villages which are conserving their common lands and adjoining forests, mobilised community members from villages that are abutting Satkosia Gorge Wildlife Sanctuary to dialogue and influence the government to lay a road in 2007 to connect the remote villages with the local market at Tainsi, which is seven kilometres away. Recently, the collective of village institutions contributed their labour and material worth INR 300,000 to renovate the 65-year-old local market. While the road connectivity helped in getting numerous social security schemes of the government, quality education and health services to the remote villages, it also brought in vegetable cultivation which is resource intensive. The collective and its members are presently exploring ways to find better opportunities for sale of their farm produce and at the same time are deliberating on alternative options for cultivation which are within the ecological thresholds of the region.

In Odisha, we work in the undulating landscapes of Angul, Dhenkanal and Keonjhar districts of central Odisha, and the tribal dominated Eastern Ghats of Koraput district. Both the areas are covered by dense forests which are home to a wide diversity of flora and fauna. The area is rich in minerals and faces threat to its ecological diversity owing to the growing industrialisation in the region.

The dependence of local communities on forest resources is evident in their strong customary norms of use, regulation and management. Odisha's economy is expanding through sectoral shifts from agriculture to industry which have led to a rise in economic disparity between the affluent and the poor and conversely resulted in faster degradation of the natural resources.

Our efforts in the central region are aimed at fortifying linkages between forests and farming systems along with strengthening village institutions and local federations. We support village institutions like *Gramya Jungle Committees*, Joint Forest Management Committees in improving the vegetative cover and strengthening customary norms for use, regulation and management of the forest, land and water resources that exists in the region.

In southern Odisha, we work with the communities in increasing the vegetative cover on the uplands, thereby addressing the issues of soil erosion and water run-off in the lower reaches of the hills. With a larger landscape overview, several constituent habitations come together in framing rules and regulations to protect and restore their forest Commons as well as benefitting from improved stream flows.

In collaboration with the Odisha Jungle Manch, we assisted village communities in submitting 500 Community Forest Rights claims under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 in different districts of Odisha. Furthermore, we are assisting the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India and the UNDP in exploring the reasons behind the high rates of rejection of claims in the Left Wing Extremism dominated areas of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. We are also assisting them in understanding the impact of recognition of community forest resource rights on traditional systems of management to suggest possible models that may be adopted by the village communities in the post recognition scenario.

> We assisted local communities across 2,812 habitations managing a total of 814,473 acres of common land in Angul, Dhenkanal and Koraput districts.

> Soil and moisture conservation measures were taken up in 2,833 acres of land in eight micro watersheds in Angul and a total of 40,000 agave suckers were planted.



> Besides ensuring irrigation facility to 220 acres of farmland covering 437 households under nine Diversion Based Irrigation (DBI) systems, discussions with communities on water so harvested being a common resource, resulted in systems for collective resource management and inclusion of poor and landless.

> A total of 208 training programmes were conducted for team members of Angul and Mandla, Odisha Jungle Manch volunteers and staff of NGO partners on Forest Rights Act and claim process for Community Forest Rights.



> Entering its ninth year, *Krishak Mela* (Farmer's Fair), organised annually in remote locations in Angul and Dhenkanal are usually attended by around 3,000 to 4,000 local people. Held this year in the periphery of Satkosia Sanctuary, the Mela provided a platform for rural communities to showcase their best practices pertaining to land, water management and agriculture, reinforce informal exchange networks between communities and engage with government functionaries.

> Ten editions of *MGNREGS Update*, an e-newsletter, were circulated among different stakeholders across the country. It covers news, views, government orders, circulars, guidelines published/issued related to the Right to Employment Act.



# Madhya Pradesh



- River
- Project Districts
- Project Tahsils
- Wildlife Sanctuary
- Kharthar-Gir Dry Deciduous Forests Eco-region
- Eastern Highlands Moist Deciduous Forests Eco-region

Falls in Northern Deccan Plateau, Ganga Delta & Plain and Narmada-Tapi Freshwater Eco-region

Situated between 22-12'N to 24-19'N and 75-8'E to 81-11'E

Length of Growing Period (LGP) ranges from 120-210 days

The annual average rainfall ranges from 942 mm to 1417 mm and the no. of rainy days from 26 to 50

## FACT FILE

**River Basin:** Gaur, Balai, Banjar of Narmada; [Lakhundar, Garhganga, Kalisindh](#)

**Forest Types:** Tropical Moist Deciduous; Tropical Dry Deciduous, Scrub

**Threatened Species:** Tiger, Swamp Deer, Green Avadavat, Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*, *Gyps indicus*, *Neophron percnopterus*), *Sterculia urens*, *Terminalia arjuna*; Indian Wolf, Striped Hyena, *Adina cordifolia*, *Dolichandrone falcate*

**Principal Crops:** Paddy, minor millets, maize, wheat, red gram, lentil, niger, mustard; Wheat, jowar, bajra, gram, millet, maize, pulses, til, cotton, soybean

**% of Common Lands other than Forestlands:** 13.40; 33.94

**% of Forest Cover:** 48.86; 48

**% of Population Living Below Poverty Line:** 56; 42

**% of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes:** 66; 30

**Year in which FES Initiated Work:** 2006; 1996

**Total Common Land under Protection (acres):** 20,898; 35,750

**Total Lives Touched:** 37,256; 78,846

**Village Institutions Associated with:** 239; 109

**Funding Agencies:** Omidyar Network, Royal Bank of Scotland, ICRISAT, Sunehra Kal-ITC, Grow-Trees, GIZ India, Welthungerhilfe, Government of Madhya Pradesh, Hindustan Unilever Foundation, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and The Allied Trusts

**Mandla**   **Agar**

Sustained conservation efforts by the local communities in Moya Kheda since 2003, has led to a considerable improvement in the vegetative cover and the period of water availability in the nearby wells increased from six to eleven months, resulting in doubling of area under Rabi crop. Few species of reptiles that were hitherto not found in the area have also been observed besides frequent sightings of wild animals and migratory birds in the area.

## Update 2013-2014

### Commoning the Commons

When about 100 of the 365 acres of land leased to the tree growers' cooperative of Nipania-Bajnath was allotted to commercial agencies for mining red ochre and laterite in 2013, *Gram Vikas Sangh*, the local association of village institutions represented the case to the district administration and invited government officials for field visits. Since 1999, Nipania village has been protecting the common land and has undertaken measures to improve vegetation and water regime. The barren land with sparse vegetation of about 10-12 species, is now home to about 89 species of grasses, shrubs and trees. It is also a critical source of livelihood for 140 households of the village. When the Magistrate and Tehsildar visited and saw the common land restoration and how it is critical to rural livelihoods, the collective represented that existing land use offered livelihood to almost all in the village whereas its diversion to mining would benefit only one or two. Their representation is under consideration.

The Malwa and the Mahakaushal regions in the western and eastern parts of Madhya Pradesh respectively, form the backdrop of our work in the state. Located in the catchment areas of the rivers Lakhundar and Shipra, the Malwa project location is characterised by undulating topography, staggered small hillocks, water bodies and narrow valleys. The area is also predominantly inhabited by communities dependent on agriculture and livestock for their livelihood. On the other hand, our work in the Mahakaushal region is spread across the biodiversity rich zone of Kanha National Park in Mandla district, nestled in the Satpura ranges. The area is predominantly tribal and is drained by Gaur and Matiyari rivers.

In the Malwa region, we have been working at improving the vegetation on common lands and the productivity of farmlands through watershed development programmes. We have also facilitated dialogues on water and biomass sharing arrangements between groups, habitations and various pastoral groups. The numerous water harvesting measures have not only increased water availability in the region but also recharged shallow wells in the downstream, leading to a marked increase of area under double cropping. In the recent years, we have gradually expanded our operations to the degraded regions of Ujjain and Rajgarh districts.

On the other hand, Mandla in the Mahakaushal region is inhabited by around 65% tribals, mostly Gonds and Baigas. Though the region is gifted with abundance of natural resources, it is considered to be one of the most backward regions of the state as the region is characterised by degraded forests, low productivity of farmlands and high incidence of migration. Our efforts in the region are aimed at strengthening tenure arrangements on natural resources and improving farm-based livelihood options, thereby reducing the dependency of communities on forest Commons.

In Mahakaushal region, we have begun extending our operations to the Kanha-Pench Corridor, with an aim to help village communities and Park Managers reconcile conservation and livelihood priorities in the region, and enable Panchayats to engage with various stakeholders such as Forest, Animal Husbandry and Agriculture departments.

> Reaching out to local communities in 348 habitations, we helped in bringing a total of 56,648 acres of common land under community management.

> Soil and water conservation measures and revegetation measures were undertaken on 1,575 acres of common land, with 30,000 saplings being planted in the periphery villages of Kanha National Park.

Ishan Agarwal



> Capacitated 80 village institutions on aspects of perspective planning, developing byelaws and about 25 villages were trained on Community Forest Rights.

> Conducted intensive training of 60 *Gram-mitras* to improve their knowledge and skills on legal provisions in securing common lands, provisions of Right to Employment Act, Forest Rights Act, and on accessing various government schemes so that they could be resource persons for village institutions.

> By providing sluice gates worth INR 0.07 million to water harvesting structures which were in disuse, and by introducing mechanisms for collective management, villages in Mandla restored abandoned structures worth INR 50 million.

Smita Ranjhanie



> The baseline study in the Kanha-Pench Corridor shows an alarming rise in invasive species and high incidence of biotic pressure. Conservation action plans include eradication of *Lantana*, forest-floor management for improved biomass production and usage of fallow farmlands for agro-forestry along with community norms for regulating access and use of forests.

> By resolving disputes over the use of forest Commons and developing rules for protection, five villages in the buffer zone of the Kanha National Park cleared *Lantana* on 350 acres and are presently getting the benefit of year-round availability of grasses for their livestock.



# Gujarat



- River
- Project Districts
- Project Tahsils
- Khathiar-Gir Dry Deciduous Forests Eco-region
- Narmada Valley Dry Deciduous Forests Eco-region
- Indus River Delta-Arabian Sea Mangroves Eco-region

Falls in Narmada-Tapi Freshwater Eco-region

Situated between 21°49'N to 23°27'N and 72°20'E to 74°28'E

Length of Growing Period (LGP) ranges from 120-150 days

The annual average rainfall ranges from 687 mm to 950 mm and the no. of rainy days from 28 to 39

## FACT FILE

**River Basin:** Mahi, Sabarmati; Valai, Bhe, Kali, Khan

**Forest Types:** Tropical Dry Deciduous; Dry Teak, Mixed Dry Deciduous, Grasslands, Scrub

**Threatened Species:** Sarus Crane, Black-necked Stork, Hyena; Lesser Florican, Sloth Bear, *Dalbergia latifolia*, *Dolichandrone falcata*

**Principal Crops:** Paddy, wheat, tobacco, jowar, maize, cotton; Maize, paddy, sorghum, pulses

**% of Common Lands other than Forestlands:** 26; 20.45

**% of Forest Cover:** 5.15; 14.34

**% of Population Living Below Poverty Line:** 33; 59

**% of Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes:** 22; 91

**Year in which FES Initiated Work:** 1986; 1997

**Total Common Land under Protection (acres):** 15,410; 37,155

**Total Lives Touched:** 301,591; 131,018

**Village Institutions Associated with:** 208; 422

**Funding Agencies:** Omidyar Network, NABARD-IGWDP, NABARD-WDF, Government of Gujarat, Collectives for Integrated Livelihood Initiatives (CINI)

Anand Dahod

Continuous efforts of the local communities towards restoring and reclaiming the ravine-affected areas in Khorwad by utilising low cost soil and moisture conservation and revegetation techniques have led to a marked improvement in soil fertility and biodiversity of the area with 72 new plant species being recorded.

## Update 2013-2014

### Commoning the Commons

Over the years, the collective forum of village institutions in Santrampur area emerged as a local self-regulating body of village communities who are interested in protecting their forests. The forum and the rural cadre who were trained on the provisions of Forest Rights Act conducted meetings with communities and Panchayats on the procedures for filing claims under Community Forest Rights (CFRs). They also undertook campaigns in the area to highlight the importance of good forest cover on the ridges to improve the resilience of their agriculture. The rural cadre helped eight villages and their respective Panchayats in filing community rights over 1,800 acres of forestland being protected by them under Joint Forest Management arrangements. The government granted legal recognition to the eight communities over 1,500 acres of forestland with use rights over collection, processing and selling of forest produce (non-timber) and rights over grazing and fishing.

In Gujarat, we work across five districts of central Gujarat, with the terrain of our work ranging from the saline mudflats of Gulf of Khambhat, the wetlands of Anand, the ravines on the banks of river Mahi and the central highlands of Dahod and Mahisagar districts.

In the ravine-affected areas along the banks of river Mahi, we work in collaboration with Panchayats, watershed committees, and habitation-level institutions, in assisting communities to leverage Right to Employment funds for restoring the vegetative cover in the area. The ravine-affected villages in the area have also formed a collaborative platform – *Mahi Kantha Vikas Manch* – to address land degradation along the banks of the river. The nomination of FES as a Support Agency for Thasra taluka of Kheda district by the Government has helped formalise our role and we are now supporting 245 villages of 104 Panchayats in effectively leveraging the Right to Employment Act to create durable community assets like water bodies and pastures.

In coastal Khambhat, we continue to address salinity issues by supporting communities in creating a vegetative barrier along tidal mudflats so as to reduce the effect of salt-laden winds and boost farm productivity of the hinterland.

Our efforts in the poverty-laden and tribal dominated districts of Dahod and Mahisagar are aimed at developing institutional arrangements for safeguarding forestlands and improving resilience of their dry land farming systems. Trained rural cadre assist the communities in filing community claims over forests under the Forest Rights Act and in planning their restoration measures. In a joint initiative with the District administration, the cadre has also been able to improve the last mile connectivity in the delivery of government-provided social security benefits. The cadre is now exploring institutional innovations aimed at organising themselves as service providers to the village institutions as well as earning a reasonable source of regular income for themselves.

By promoting a range of interventions aimed at protecting the ravines along the Mahi river, claiming community rights and strengthening local stewardship of the area, a 'Mahi riverfront network' is taking shape to steer and guide a development agenda that is embedded in the conservation of the fragile river front as well as providing means of livelihood to local communities.

> We work with communities across 630 habitations, bringing a total of 52,565 acres of common land under community management of which 9,730 acres of common land were added during the year.

> Soil and conservation measures have been carried out on 1,470 acres of common land and 1,125 acres of private land. 26,000 saplings of indigenous tree species were planted on 250 acres of common land and 125 acres of farm land.



> As an organisation identified by the government to improve the implementation of the Right to Employment Act in Thasra block, Kheda district, '*Kaan Mango Abhiyan*' was undertaken with active participation of Panchayats and the employment demand has increased by five-fold. An amount of INR 2.47 million was leveraged for eco-restoration activities of the total expenditure of INR 11.78 million under Right to Employment Act.

> 300 rural volunteers and para workers of 55 villages of Anand and Kheda were trained on technical and institutional aspects so as to assist village institutions in management and governance of common lands. With effective leveraging of capacities of volunteers, training on improved agricultural practices has been provided to 2,050 farmers in Dahod Project area.



> Trained rural cadre helped old and vulnerable sections of the tribal community in Santrampur and Kadana blocks in leveraging various social security schemes worth INR 19.1 million in the year 2013-14.

> Two issues of *Mahisagar Samachar*, a newsletter for generating awareness on ravine issues, were circulated to villages and government officials in the region.

# North-Eastern Region



- Community Conserved Areas
- River
- Project Districts
- Wildlife Sanctuary
- Brahmaputra Valley Semi-evergreen Forests
- Eastern Himalayan Broadleaf Forests
- Meghalaya Subtropical Forests
- Mizoram-Manipur-Kachin Rain Forests
- North-East India-Myanmar Pine Forests

Falls in Ganges Delta & Plain, Middle Brahmaputra, Sitang-Irrawaddy Freshwater Eco-region

Situated between 25-10°N to 27-03°N and 93-18'E to 95-15'E

Length of Growing Period (LGP) ranges from 270-300 days

The annual average rainfall of Nagaland ranges from 1430 to 2000 mm and the no. of rainy days from 135 to 171

Characterised by a rich biodiversity of the forests and cultural diversity of the people as also the strong customary nature of local self-governance, the North-Eastern region of India is marked by unique climatic and topographic conditions, with habitats that harbour diverse biota with very high levels of endemism. The demands for infrastructure development projects pose fresh challenges to this region of diverse ecological and cultural landscapes.

In collaboration with the Nagaland Empowerment of People through Economic Development (NEPED), we assist communities in mapping their Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) and in preparation of Management Plans. After designing the Framework of the Management Plans, we assisted 17 villages in managing three CCAs in evolving management plans which cover approximately 62 sq km of community forests. Representatives of eight CCAs from different corners of the state came together in Mokokchung to discuss the needs of bringing all CCAs of Nagaland into a common forum for mutual support and evolving a long-term plan for CCAs in the region.

Field studies were conducted in select villages of East Jaintia hill district of Meghalaya to understand the involvement of local communities in village level planning processes in the Integrated Basin Development and Livelihood Promotion programme of the state government. We are in the process of identifying programme areas where we could add value in implementation of their Integrated Village Development Plan.

Exploring opportunities in Assam, scoping visits have been carried out in three districts of the state i.e. Kamrup, Goalpara and Karbi-Anglong (West). We would further explore opportunities in Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh in the coming year and assess the scope for possible collaborative efforts as well as the feasibility of directly engaging with village communities.

In Nagaland, we assist communities in mapping their Community Conserved Areas (CCAs) and in preparation of Management Plans. To assist the communities demarcate and map their CCA boundaries and further our understanding of the area, we trained the village communities of Mount Pauna CCA in conducting mapping exercises using GPS, and collecting data on the local biodiversity and their usages.



# Maharashtra



Falls in Narmada -Tapi & Northern Deccan Plateau Freshwater Eco-region  
Situated between 19°40'N to 21°75'N and 76°55'E to 79°20'E.  
Length of Growing Period (LGP) ranges from 120-150 days  
The annual average rainfall ranges from 874 mm to 974 mm and the no. of rainy days is 48

Initiated in 2013, our efforts in Maharashtra are beginning to take root in Ghatanji block, Yavatmal district and Chandur block, Amravati district in Vidarbha region, an area ill-reputed for agriculture distress and farmer suicides. Though rich in forest and mineral wealth, the region's economy is primarily based on agriculture. While 32% of the population in Ghatanji belong to mainly Gond and Pardhan tribes more than 20% of Chandur belong to scheduled castes. The forests in the region are severely degraded in many places. Both the districts form part of the Penganga tributary of Godavari river basin, and are characterised by compact Deccan basalts which allow very little water recharge.

Agriculture is primarily rainfed with majority of area under cotton cultivation. High-risk cultivation of cash crops, rising input costs, low productivity, low water recharge capacity, crop failure, absence of formal credit and prevalence of high level of borrowings at usurious interest rates are some of the main reasons of agrarian distress in the region.

More immediately, in Ghatanji block of Yavatmal, we are assisting Panchayats in planning for conservation of natural resources and in devising working arrangements for implementing the convergence programme of National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and Right to Employment Act with an aim to improve the functioning of Panchayats. In Chandur, we facilitate effective implementation of Right to Employment scheme in 12 Panchayats with activities aimed at conserving water and soil in farmlands and protection of neighbouring forestlands.

We are aiming at building a parallel conversation on the value of natural resources and local self governance in securing farm-based livelihoods in this distress-prone area. Eventually, along with the local communities, we hope to make a local level assessment of the contribution, significance and relevance of improved natural resources and local governance to their livelihood security and evolve a long-term action agenda.



Having started operations recently in Maharashtra, we are developing a deeper and wider understanding of the physical and economic attributes of the area, understanding the complexities of the region and identifying areas to add value to the local efforts.



# Financial Highlights 2013-14

Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) is a Society registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860, New Delhi. FES is also registered under Section 12A & 80G of the Income Tax Act of 1961, and the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) of 2010.

## Sources of Funds

During the year 2013-14, the receipts totalled INR 235.41 million (includes interest on corpus to the extent of utilisation), as against the previous year's income of INR 218.43 million, an increase of 8% over the previous year.

- > Of this, domestic sources accounted for INR 152.10 million (65%). The major share of domestic contributions came from private donors, that is, INR 111.01 million (47%), while Government agencies supported with projects worth INR 27.32 million (12%). Interest on corpus to the extent of utilisation and other receipts were INR 13.30 million (6%). Interest and other receipts were INR 0.47 million.
- > The balance of INR 83.31 million (35%) is from foreign sources.
  - o Covered by FCRA : INR 78.80 million (33%)
  - o Not Covered by FCRA : INR 4.51 million (2%)

At the end of the year, the corpus fund was INR 209.33 million & reserves and surplus amounted to INR 38.14 million.

## Utilisation

During the year, the total utilisation of funds was INR 225.33 million as against the previous year's INR 202.40 million – an increase of 11%. The major heads of fund utilisation were:

Particulars	INR in million	Percentage
Strengthening Community-based Institutions for Conservation of Natural Resources	129.84	58
Survey, Capacity-Building, Studies, Commons Initiative	62.75	28
Administration and Recurring Expenses	27.39	12
Capital Expenditure	5.34	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>225.32</b>	<b>100</b>

## Leverage of Funds

Besides utilising funds sourced from donors and Government agencies, the organisation leveraged funds to the tune of INR 241.04 million from the following sources for implementing various project activities:

Particulars	INR in million	Percentage
NABARD	46.26	19
IWMP	31.15	13
MGNREGA	44.68	19
Departments such as Agriculture, Horticulture, Forest, etc.	111.70	46
Community Contribution	7.25	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>241.04</b>	<b>100</b>

Sharp & Tannan Associates were the Statutory Auditors for the year 2013-14.

Auditor's Report & Financial Statements for the year ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2014 are available at <http://www.fes.org.in/balance-sheet-2013-14.pdf>

# Acknowledgement

We thank the Government of India, the Department of Land Resources, the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Environment and Forests, New Delhi. We thank the District Administration of Anantapuram, Chittoor, Cuddapah and Vishakhapatnam of Andhra Pradesh; Chikkaballapur and Kolar of Karnataka; Angul, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar and Koraput of Odisha; Agar, Mandla, Rajgarh, Shahapur and Ujjain of Madhya Pradesh; Ajmer, Bhilwara, Chittaurgarh, Pali, Pratapgarh, Rajsamand and Udaipur of Rajasthan; Anand, Dahod, Kheda, Mahisagar, Panchmahal and Vadodara of Gujarat; and Amravati and Yavatmal of Maharashtra. Our effort would not have been possible without the assistance and support from the respective State Governments. We also thank the National Dairy Development Board, Anand, for nurturing and supporting our work over many years.

We thank International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Collective Action and Property Rights (CAPRI), Washington University at St. Louis, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, University of Illinois at Urbana – Champaign, International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI), Indiana University Bloomington, Arizona State University, Universidad de los Andes in Colombia, University of Iowa, Sri Ramachandra University at Chennai, South Asia Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Programme (SAPLPP), Worldwide Fund for Nature (India) at New Delhi, Kalpvriksh, ACWADAM, Dakshin Foundation, WOTR, Lokhit Pashu-Palak Sansthan (LPPS), Anthra, Sahjeevan, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in Hyderabad, Kanchi Kohli, Meenakshi Kapoor, Pankaj Sekhsaria, Pushkin Partyal, Sanjay Upadhyay, Shalini Bhutani and Ritwick Dutta, for collaborating with us on various initiatives.

We would also like to thank Anita Cheria, Artabandhu Mishra, Blake Ratner, Bryan Bruns, Chris Short, David Bollier, Edwin Daniel, Gautam Yadama, Liz Alden Wily, Marco A Janssen, Michael Taylor, Peter Hovmand, Ruth Meinzen Dick, Satish Sharma and Ton Dietz for helping us in many ways. We are also thankful to Ajay Pandey, Ashwini Chhatre, Binoy Acharya, GB Mukherjee, Harini Nagendra, Jayant Sinha, Lakshmi Lingam, NC Narayanan, ND Khurody, Rita Brara, Rucha Ghate, Stephanie Cohn Rupp and VS Prakash for continued support and guidance.

We also thank Andy White, Arun Agarwal, David Bollier, Karol Boudreaux, Fernando Canto Carbaja, John D Liu, Melecio Martin Colin, Peter Veit, Patrik Augenstein and Silke Helfrich.

We offer our thanks to the Survey of India, National Bureau of Soil Survey and Land Use Planning in Nagpur, Forest Survey of India, Census of India, National Remote Sensing Agency (NRSA) in Hyderabad, The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), USA, and ESRI-New Delhi, for providing data and technical assistance to our GIS Cell.

We also thank Aasheesh Pittie, Adesh Shivkar, BM Parasharya, L Shyamal, Lavkumar Khachar, MR Almeida, PO Nameer, Ramki Shreenivasan, P Lakshminarasimhan, Shashank Dalvi, Sumit Sen, S Biswas, S Halder, S Bandyopadhyay, T Paul, VP Prasad, Yashodhan Bhatia, Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL), Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), Birdlife International, and Xeno-canto Encyclopedia of Life (EoL) in supporting us in developing the Indian Biodiversity Information System (IBIS).

We are also thankful to Binoy Acharya, Kumarappa Naidu, KV Raju, M Chandaka TVS Murthy, Rucha Ghate, Sanjeeth Peter and Shahnaz Balachandani for being part of the FES Institutional Review Board; and K Srinivas, PN Ganju and YY Patil who were always available for us even at short notice.

Xavier Institute of Social Sciences (XISS) in Ranchi, Tata-Dhan Academy in Madurai, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai and Tuljapur, Maharashtra and in Hyderabad, College of Agricultural Engineering - Jawaharlal Nehru Krishi Vishwavidyalaya in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, Roshini Nilaya in Mangalore, TERI University in New Delhi, College of Agricultural Engineering in Bapatla, Andhra Pradesh, and the Institute of Rural Management (IRMA) in Anand, with all of whom we have had a fruitful association.

In Rajasthan, we thank the Departments of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Finance (Revenue) and Forest, SLNA (IWMP-Rajasthan), the Institute of Development Studies-Jaipur, RTI Manch-Jaipur, NCPRI-Jaipur, AK Upadhyay and UM Sahai for their support.

We acknowledge the support of Arvind Lodha and Sanjeet Purohit, Advocate, LIBRA for supporting the Commons Campaign across Rajasthan.

In Bhilwara, we thank the Bhilwara Dairy, Mewar Sewa Sansthan, BAIF, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Dryland Farming Research Station, DFRS Arjiya, RUDSETI, One World, Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), the Forest and the Animal Husbandry Departments, NABARD, as well as the District Watershed Management and the MGNREGA units. In Udaipur, we acknowledge the support from the MGNREGA unit, Territorial and Wildlife division of Forest Departments of Chittaurgarh, Rajsamand and Udaipur, Rajasthan College of Agriculture, College of Home Science, College of Technology and Engineering of MPUAT, Vidya Bhawan, Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Gandhi Manav Kalyan Society, Astha Sansthan, Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development, Seva Mandir, Prayatna Samiti, Samarthak Samiti, Jagran Jan Vikas Samiti, Ubeshwar Vikas Mandal, Van Uthan Sangh, BAIF-RRIDMA, Centre for Environment Education, Anita Mathur, BL Paliwal, and the Programme Management unit of IGWDP. In Pratapgarh, we thank the support of the MGNREGA unit, the Forest Department, Pratapgarh

Agriculture Research Centre, Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Department, Prayas, IFFDC, WASCO, WOTR and KVK in Mandsaur, and the Chairman of Pratapgarh Nagarpalika. In Ajmer, we thank Sharad Gemawat, Superintendent Engineer, IWMP, Ramesh Bohra, Sr. Accounts, NREGA, Zilla Parishad, and Kaushal Kishore Sanwariya, AEN, NREGA, Zila Parishad, and the Chairmen and Board members of Ajmer Milk Union and Bhilwara Milk Union.

In Madhya Pradesh, we thank the Departments of the Revenue and Agriculture, Panchayat and Rural Development, Animal Husbandry and the Department of Forests for their support. Our work is supported by the CCF and Director, Kanha Tiger Reserve, PCCF, the Chief Wildlife Warden, Narendra Kumar, Rajiv Gandhi Watershed Mission, MGNREGS Parishad, Snake Research Organisation-Ujjain, Lac Vikash Samiti-Janamkhari, Seoni, Forest Department, Agar, Malpani Trust-Nemavar, Jaivik Gram Sansthan-Rangvasa, GN Enterprise-Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh Bio-Diversity Board, Zila Panchayat Mandla, Agar, Shajapur, Ujjain, Rajgarh, Center for Rural Bio-Technology, State Forestry Research Institute, Tropical Forestry Research Institute and Jawaharlal Nehru Krishi Vishwavidyalaya of Jabalpur, Krishi Vigyan Kendra of Shajapur, Ujjain, and Mandla, Climate Change Cell of EPCO, WWF-India-Mandla, DISHA-Jabalpur, Department of Horticulture and Agriculture-Agar, Jan Abhiyan Parishad, TAAL, Jan Sahas, Samaj Pragati Sahyog (SPS)-Bagli, NIRMAAN, PRADAN and NWCRYED, Mandla.

In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, we thank the Department of Rural Development and Office of the Commissioner Rural Development, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Government of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka Regional Offices of NABARD, Ananta Paryavarana Parirakshana Samiti (APPS) in Anantapuram, and Arghyam and Avantika, Bengaluru. We acknowledge the support of Agriculture Man Ecology Foundation, Outreach, WASSAN, Centre for World Solidarity, Centre for Peoples Forestry and Andhra Pradesh Mahila Abhivruddhi Society (APMAS)-Hyderabad, Abdul Nazir Sab State Institute for Rural Development (ANSSIRD)-Mysore, Fodder Research Institute-Dharwad, and Central Fodder Seeds Production Farm (CFSPF)-Hessaraghatta, Bengaluru. We acknowledge the support of Principal Secretary, RDPR and Commissioner, RD, Karnataka and MD, KOCHIMUL for supporting Commons initiatives.

In Odisha, we would like to thank the Departments of Panchayati Raj, Forest and Environment, Rural Development, Agriculture, Water Resources and SC and ST Development Department, Board of Revenue, NABARD, OLM, OMEGA, SIRD, OTELP, OFSDP, OCTMP, RCDC, Vasundhara, Xavier Institute of Management, SC and ST Research and Training Institute, KIIT School of Rural Management, CWS-Bhubaneswar, CYSD, Odisha Jungle Manch, Sambhav-Nayagarh, SWWS-Gajapati, SEWAK-Sundargarh, WOSCA and Prakalpa-Keonjhar, Seba Jagat and Jan Kalyan Sansthan-Kalahandi, NEWS and District Environment Society-Angul, Ranger's Training College-Angul, ATMA-Angul and Dhenkanal, DSMS-Angul; COATS, Koraput Farmers' Association, TCRC and SPREAD of Koraput. We are also thankful to Namita Mishra, Raj Kishore Mishra, Shri Jagadananda, Sudhir Pattnaik, Sisir Pradhan and Shahid Ummar for their support.

In Gujarat, we would like to express our thanks to the Center for Environment Education (CEE), UNNATI, ANANDI, Bhaikaka Krishi Kendra-Ravipura, Panchmahal Milk Union-Godhra, Central Soil Salinity Research Institute (CSSRI)-Bharuch, Central Soil & Water Conservation and Research and Training Institute (CSWCRTI)-Vasad, Anand Agriculture University, Vidyanagar Nature Club, Gramin Vikas Trust, Utthan, SARTHI, NM Sadguru Foundation-Dahod, Prakriti Foundation, Gujarat Vidhyapith, MSW colleges of SP University, Gujarat Nature Conservation Society-Sindhrot, Krishi Vigyan Kendra-Vejalpur, Maize Research Station-Godhra, National Seed Corporation-Godhra, Gujarat State Seed Corporation-Godhra and Gujarat State Watershed Management Agency (GSWMA), Gandhinagar, State Institute of Rural Development, District Watershed Development Unit (DWDU), Anand and Kheda, and the Community Science Centre, Vadodara.

In the North-East region, we thank the Government of Nagaland, Nagaland Empowerment of People for Economic Development (NEPED), Nagaland Remote Sensing and GIS Centre; the Department of Forest and Environment, Nagaland University, Dibrugarh University, Assam, communities of Nagaland and Meghalaya, Village Councils of Nagaland, Meghalaya Rural Development Society (MRDS); Samrakshan Trust, Baghmara and WWF India-West Arunachal, Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA), Kalpavriksh-Pune and the ICCA Consortium. We also thank Amba Jamir, Gautam Narayan and Nimesh Ved for their support in our initiatives in the region.

In Maharashtra, we would like to thank the Department of Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), Department of Forest, Department of Agriculture, Government of Maharashtra, Krishi Vigyan Kendras-Amravati and Yavatmal, NABARD, National Bureau for Soil Survey and Land Use Planning (NBSSLUP), Survey of India, Geological Survey of India, Pune, CAIM, Maharashtra State Rural Livelihoods Mission (MSRLM), DILASA, KHOJ, BAIF-MITTRA, AFPRO, AFARM, Dilip Gode and Mohan Hirabai Hiralal.

In Himachal Pradesh, we offer our thanks to Environics Trust.

We also thank the village communities of project areas, families of the staff members and the many individuals and organisations who have been associated with us over the years and have provided encouragement and support to our endeavour and whose names do not find mention here.

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As on March 31, 2014

# Our Funders

We are thankful for the support of funding agencies:

Omidyar Network, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust and The Allied Trusts, Hindustan Unilever Foundation, The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), NABARD - Watershed Development Fund, NABARD - Indo-German Watershed Development Programme, NABARD - Tribal Development Fund, NABARD - RSO Programme, NABARD - Distress Districts Programme, NABARD - Backward Block Development Programme, ITC Ltd. (Mission Sunehra Kal), ITC - Rural Development Trust, Sir Ratan Tata Trust & Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust, RBS Foundation, The Ford Foundation, Grow-Trees.com, United Nations Development Programme, UNDP-GEF Small Grants Programme, The Ministry of Environment and Forests - Government of India, Fondation Ensemble, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Welthungerhilfe, International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Collectives for Integrated Livelihood Initiatives (CInI), South Asia Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Programme, Washington University in St. Louis, The Regents of the University of Michigan, International Land Coalition, Hilton Foundation, Arghyam, The Duleep Matthai Nature Conservation Trust, Rajasthan Forestry and Biodiversity Project, Integrated Watershed Management Programme in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, and various Governments departments of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan.

We are also thankful to Ms Stella Knight for her individual contribution.

We are members of:



United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNECOSOC) – Special Consultative Status



International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC)



International Union for Conservation of Nature



International Society for Ecological Economics



International Land Coalition (ILC)



Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCA) Consortium



International Forestry Resources and Institutions



Rainfed Livestock Network



Indian Society for Ecological Economics

National Consortium on NREGA

Future of Conservation in India Network

*We are grateful to Mark Katzman and Hilary Skirbol for contributing their wonderful photographs.*



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