State level policies on Sustainable Forestry and the experience in the North Western Ghats

Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF)
Introduction

AERF is registered NGO based out of Pune, India, is active in the field of participatory Conservation for last 17 years. The geographic focus of AERF’s work has been the Western Ghats and Eastern Himalayas.

A member of IUCN, AERF is working for mainstreaming biodiversity conservation in development and business sector through five thematic programs:

- Sacred Groves’ conservation
- Applied Biodiversity Research
- Communities, Conservation and climate change.
- Energy and Biodiversity
- Business and Biodiversity
The Western Ghats
– a global biodiversity hotspot

• 78% amphibians, 62% reptiles, 38% plants, 12% mammals endemic to the W. Ghats
North vs. South

Protected areas few and sparse – 11 in north Western Ghats vs >30 in south

Source: CEPF, French Institute
North vs. South

Between 0.6% to 5% of area currently being protected

Source: CEPF, French Institute
Status of forest cover in Sahyadri-Konkan Corridor landscape

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Name of the District</th>
<th>Geographical area (sq km)</th>
<th>Total forest cover (sq km)</th>
<th>Percentage of forest cover w.r.t Geographical area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Raigad</td>
<td>7152</td>
<td>2864</td>
<td>40.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ratnagiri</td>
<td>8208</td>
<td>4199</td>
<td>51.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sindhudurg</td>
<td>5207</td>
<td>2573</td>
<td>49.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Thane</td>
<td>9558</td>
<td>2912</td>
<td>30.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sahyadri-Konkan Corridor (SKC) - salient features

• The SKC is one of the five major corridors within the Western Ghats.
• Unlike other corridors, the SKC is the most fragmented (due to high population densities and rapid economic development) and has a sparse protected area network.
• Only 2% of forests in the districts of Ratnagiri & Sindhudurg within the SKC are currently protected within statutory forest reserves.
• Participatory forest management strategies are necessary to ensure ecological connectivity.
Recent dynamics influencing forest governance in the SKC (Maharashtra)

• A blanket ban on felling of tree issued in the four districts of Konkan region by the Ministry of Forest and Environment, Govt of Maharashtra in April 2010.

• Special report on Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg district prepared by the WGEEP

• Formation of state level committee to make recommendations for arresting deforestation and promote sustainable forest management.
Policies and rules governing forest management in SKC

• No clear policy to encourage sustainable forest management
• Joint forest management – a complete failure in the districts of concern
• Key regulations - Tree felling act 1964 and Land Revenue Code 1966
• Social forestry schemes mainly focusing on monoculture plantation of teak and other exotic species – *Acacia mangium*, *Casuarina sp*, *Eucalyptus sp*
• Agriculture department promote subsidy driven monoculture plantations of Cashew and mango
Major drawbacks of the existing policies/regulations

- According to the Tree felling act only 15 tree species in the list of scheduled species require permission for felling from the Forest department.
- No consideration given to endemic species and IUCN red list species in the schedule.
- Plants of economic importance such as native timber species, medicinal plants excluded from the list of schedule species.
- Ecological sensitivity of the region completely neglected while promoting plantation forestry-moniculture plantation of exotic species.
Landscape level threats

- Unchecked felling on forests - industrial demand for fuel wood accelerating deforestation
- Soil erosion, frequent land slides
- Widespread presence of invasive species
- Loss of habitat for mammals, birds, herbivores.
- Loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services
Private Forests – sites of conservation significance
The challenge of conserving private and community forests

- Lack of economic opportunities in the region
- Fuel wood trade a major source of livelihood
- Conservation will require foregoing some economic benefit
AERF’s approach to sustainable forest management in SKC

- Conservation agreements – launched country’s first ever incentive based private forest conservation initiative in 2008
- Incentives also include economically important native species based agro-forestry
- Sustainable collection of medicinal plants through FAIRWILD certification with assured long term purchase agreement
- Community managed native species based bio-fuel resource centers
- Use of endemic and rare species in restoration of degraded habitats
AERF’s impact on ground

• Ensured long term (5-10 years) protection to 500 hectares of forests on private lands in Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg district through agreements

• Established two decentralized bio-fuel resource centers creating income generation opportunities for 1000 members from forest dependent community in Raigad district

• FAIRWILD certified collection of medicinal plants to offer direct benefits to communities from 100 villages from Raigad and Pune district.

• Conservation of key biodiversity areas measuring 150 hectares through restoration and participatory management in Ratnagiri district
Thank you

www.aerfindia.org
www.myforest.co.in