

NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS EXCHANGE PROGRAM NETWORKING FORUM, INDIA: ANNUAL REPORT

2020

NTFP-EP

INDIA

NTFP - EP NETWORKING FORUM, INDIA

'Growth' was the great new term – new, that is, in its application far beyond the bounds of scientific biology; and in order to apprehend what growth was, you had to have a special inner sense capable of apprehending the invisible kingdom, an intuitive grasp of the impalpable principle in virtue of which a thing grows as it does; grows not by successive increments of 'dead' parts, but by some kind of occult vital process that needs a quasi-mystical power of vision, a special sense of the flow of life, of the forces of history, of the principles at work in nature, in art, in personal relationships, of the creative spirit unknown to empirical science, to cease upon its essence.

Isaiah Berlin, Russian Thinkers, 1978.

Foreword

The pandemic caused by the Covid-19, and the devastating impact that it continues to have, has made 2020 a year of misery for many of India's (and the world's) peoples. The wrong decisions and the state's bungling and complacency in handling the problem worsened the situation. Even as India heard of the virus' coming into the country from Wuhan, in early January, the protest against the Citizen's Amendment Act was at its peak and had spread from Shaheen Bagh in Delhi to other parts of the country. The movement against the Act has now been sidelined, in spite of the horrors and killings that followed its quelling, in Delhi. (It is worth remembering that in August 2019, the Article 370 granting autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir was abrogated without due consultation, leading to immense protests across the country. The dust had hardly settled from the unrest in that state.)

In February (24-25) Donald Trump came to India on a state visit. Both Modi and Trump ignored the pandemic that was spreading across America and India, showing scant respect for safety measures. In March (24th) the Modi government announced a lockdown across the country, forcing lakhs of migrants to leave the cities (and other places of work) and return – many walking – home to their native villages; the heart-rending stories of these weeks have been documented enough by the media to require repetition here.

Across the country most NGOs and social workers functioned in an overall atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, in some cases even in circumstances of state apathy, to keep the morale of the rural and indigenous communities high. It needs to be mentioned that several philanthropic institutions pooled in their resources to help; so also many donors, who allowed the funds meant for specific projects (that could not happen in these altered conditions) to be channeled to more immediate necessities.

In September 2020, the three farm acts were tabled and passed in parliament. These were contested by farmers from Punjab and Haryana (and later by farmers in other states) who traveled to Delhi by November. Despite the peaceful protest and clear demands there was little or no dialogue between the farmers and the state: the sit-in continues at the outskirts of Delhi. Essentially, the Acts were interpreted by the farmers as handing over the 'farming sector' to private players. Thousands of other farmers, also from other states, and other citizens sympathetic to their cause, joined in and created one of the largest peaceful protests across the world.

Meanwhile, the government also did not slow down any of its actions that have been questioned or scrutinized. Coal mining continued and 41 mines were auctioned anew, justified by the Modi government as it would bring in revenue during the lock down. In September the parliament passed the FCRA (Amendment) Bill which was promptly made into an Act in October, 2020. This was a huge impediment in the way NGOs function; extra scrutiny, unnecessary compliance's, and even the way networks work have been disrupted. This is a shame as it was obvious that the pandemic would have affected marginalized communities much more if it had not been for the large civil society groups that function across the country.

Ultimately, this decision to amend the FCRA will affect the smaller community based organizations and the marginalized communities in the hinterland. Fewer questions will be asked of the state, which will undermine democracy. In fact, India has slipped two ranks in the World Press Freedom Index, from 140 to 142 out of 180, in the years 2019-20; in 2015, India had ranked 136th.

Taken altogether, the overall trend in the country is the handing over of land and natural resources – whether through farm laws, coal auctions,

revised forest policies, or the proposed revision of the Environmental Impact Assessment – to the private sector. The amendment to the last, the EIA, has been revoked after more than a lakh citizens protested against the proposed changes. Most of these decisions have been unilaterally pushed by the government, with little or no consultations with the opposition or other stakeholders, the latter the common people of India. Dissent and questioning has been clearly unwelcome.

Despite the covid-19 pandemic and its disastrous impacts on the livelihoods of many indigenous communities across the country, and the restrictions imposed as part of the safety measures, there has been much to report from the ground. Most of the network partners responded to the covid crises in its initial stages, providing dry rations to the communities they work with; creating an awareness about the pandemic and the required safety measures; and finding ways to keep at least some of the activities, such as seed collection and nurseries, kitchen gardens, revival of traditional crops, etc., ongoing. This annual report of the NTFP Networking Forum is a summary of activities performed through 2020. It needs to be read and assessed keeping in mind the backdrop provided in the above sections.

Madhu Ramnath

Native seeds being dried before being sown in Bastar



Conservation

In Tamil Nadu's Western Ghats, Keystone Foundation worked on spring conservation as a part of a larger effort around wetlands and water. Spring Box repair was undertaken in Kookalthurai, Aracode and Wayanad. This involved community mobilization for protecting river and stream beds and hill wetlands. Plastic waste, that block drains and pollute water sources, causing problems to humans, domestic cattle and wildlife, was collected by households for safe disposal.

Several nurseries were established to raise plants for many restoration efforts. These included agriculture crops, forest species, wetland plants and grasses. Training was undertaken to help make ecological calendars in all resource centres. Keystone continued work within the IUCN (Sustainable Livelihoods) SuLI and the Western Ghats Specialist Group. Meetings and assessment of plants, especially grasses, were initiated with partners along the Western Ghats.

In Karnataka, Prakruti continued its activities throughout South India, begun after re-launching the Save Western Ghats Movement. Extensive lobbying led to the formation of the Western Ghats Expert Ecology Panel and the submission of a detailed report to the central government to conserve the Western Ghats and known as the Gadgil Committee Report. This report was rejected and another committee and report, the Kasturirangan Report, was put in place. The consistent pressure built up by the SWGM had forced the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change to accept the findings/recommendations of Kasturirangan report by issuing a notification to demarcate the Ecological Sensitive Areas (ESAs) in certain critical habitats of Western Ghats. So far four notifications on Ecologically Sensitive Areas have been issued by the Ministry.

However, state governments of all the six states, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Goa and Gujarat have deliberately delayed the process of demarcation of the ESAs and have diluted the recommendations of the report.

In some states the ESA notification is very limited, defeating the purpose of this notification. The lack of political will to initiate actions to protect the fragile mountain range has had disastrous impacts: the floods during monsoons have led to massive landslides and loss of human lives and property in Kerala and Karnataka. Despite this tragedy and suffering the politicians are not willing to change the policies that have resulted in destruction of Western Ghats.

Prakruti initiated dialogues with a media team on the issue of Western Ghats, providing exposure trips to the Kali and Caverry valley. This was to create an awareness and provide media coverage across the region to understand how Western Ghats are being destroyed, the key players in this process, and also creative solutions to conserve the natural resources of the region. Prakruti took the issue of Western Ghats to the Supreme Court, filing a petition seeking to implement the recommendations of both Kasturirangan and Gadgil Report. Three webinars were held to discuss conservation in the Western Ghats to inform a wider range of people.

In Chhattisgarh, PRERAK's awareness campaigns at the community level in Raigarh district led to the closure of 4 mining companies. The effect of the closure was a significant improvement in air and water quality, and the revival of several species of fish in the local streams and rivers. These fish include Mogri, Pothri, Gina, Aandhi, Khopshi, Gaja and Bambi. Many butterflies have also made a comeback. Trees that would habitually be cut down for the mines, such as the Mahua, Saja, Khamar, Khair, etc., have now been left standing; these are useful for the local people as they are an important part of their livelihoods. Plans are afoot to protect them. In the same region conservation and promotion of native and traditionally grown vegetables and grain is being undertaken; a seed festival, Akti, was celebrated to create awareness in the community about the collection of wild seeds.

PRERAK established 40 nurseries and raised a total of 80100 plants to be planted in the areas claimed under the Community Forest Rights, along ponds and village paths, around schools and Anganbadis.



A community nursery by PRERAK in Chhattisgarh

Also in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, the Legal Environmental Action Foundation (LEAF) focused on the collection of seeds of native forest trees and NTFP species. Together with the SHGs that they work with, a total of 45 species of seeds were collected; these were then used to grow saplings in their 4 nurseries. A total of 1.9 lakh plants were available in the nursery; during the monsoon 2020, 35,000 plants have been planted in six village forest areas.

In the Yavatmal district of Maharashtra, Gramin Samassya Mukti Trust (GSMT) held a forest seed collection & sowing campaign. In collaboration with the Department of Tribal Development, 560 villages in the district have got Community Forest Rights. Of these, 26 villages have prepared forest conservation and management plans for sustainable use and management of the forest. Seed collection of several useful native tree species, the treatment of the seeds as well as the sowing has been ongoing in 14 villages; these initiatives have been supported by the gram sabhas. The sowing has been done in 63 ha of land in and around 11 villages with the participation of the FD, other government departments and community level stakeholders. In addition to these activities two nurseries with 13000 saplings in Jalka and 13685 saplings in Darara host plants for the coming year; 5500 bamboo saplings have been received from the forest department under Maharashtra Bamboo Mission and distributed to 10 farmers for sowing.

In Ahmednagar district of the Western Ghats in Maharashtra, Lokpanchayat continued to work in establishing seed banks. Those formed in the villages Dhamanvan, Lavhali Otur and Ratanwadi continued making efforts to promote cultivation of indigenous crop seeds for sustainable agriculture and to nurture the farm ecosystem, and produced nutritious food grains and vegetables. During the year, 425 kg seeds of paddy and 30 kg seeds of nachani (millet) were purchased from 8 farmers by the seed banks for sales and exchange. In addition, the banks sold 35 kg seeds of indigenous paddy varieties and 9 kg of vegetable seeds to 320 farmers. During this period 169 students, government officials, farmers, NGO representatives visited the seed banks. The exchange and trade of the seeds was affected by COVID 19 epidemic.

In the Pandharkawda region of Vidharbha (Maharashtra) Naviumed set up a nursery of 25,000 saplings, in Limguda village, with support from the Employment Guarantee Scheme. Saplings of guava, mango, lemon, mogra and shevaga have been raised; the plants are to be distributed in Limguda, Rajunagar and Kherguda during the monsoon.

In addition, keeping in view the food security factor, Naviumed established kitchen gardens in 6 villages, where a total of 135 families now have gardens in their homes; a collective kitchen garden was set up at Jarurkhedi and Limguda. Limguda is a village in the adjacent state of Telangana with a Kolam habitation. With consultation with the local vaidus, plants of black dhotra, adulsa, nirgudi and asparagus have also been distributed.

In the Udaipur and Rajasmand districts of Rajasthan, Sewa Mandir has been implementing forest conservation and management based livelihood initiatives. There are two major forest based livelihood activities are viz. ecological restoration of both community and private non cultivable land (pastureland) through afforestation, and conservation-management of Community Forest Resources (CFR) under FRA 2006.

In Odisha, the Regional Centre for Development Cooperation (RCDC) established nurseries in Raighati and Boula (Keonjhar district) of 5000 saplings of Rare, Endangered and Threatened (RET) species. These plants were distributed among the households to plant in their backyards and fields to ensure their survival. The plants survived despite elephant visits to the area; the saplings include medicinal herbs; RCDC is in the process of convening a state level traditional healers meet and formation of a Mahasangha.

In Mayurbhanj district, Gram Swaraj worked to map farmers in 64 villages who use native seeds. A total of 215 farmers have been identified. A seed inventory among them yielded 21 varieties of indigenous paddy, 7 varieties of vegetables, 3 of pulses, 2 kinds of maize, all of which were collected after the harvest. These farmers were sensitized about the value of their practices and trained to further multiply their seeds; there will also be exchanges between farmers of native seeds.

An indigenous seed centre and nursery has been initiated and made functional after harvest in 2020; seed storage and exchanges will happen from here and 9 farmers have been provided with incentives for good practices. A rice de-husker has been procured to produce brown rice. A Self Help Group (SHG) of ten women will engage in the production of rice and add to their present income.



The Keystone team with food relief for covid

Biodiversity Registers have been prepared in five villages and include lists of plants, domesticated and wild animals, birds, fruits, and wild foods. Similarly, the knowledge related to biodiversity and good practices in conservation were also documented; in two villages, short documentaries were prepared on these themes.

In Andhra Pradesh and Telengana, Kovel Foundation teams from different District/s and State/s have concentrated on collection of NTFP/medicinal plant seeds of forest species. These include Gum Karaya, Syonaka, Bael, Nannari, Arjuna, Sirish, Nux vomica, Cashew, Gannara, Gambhari, Padal/Patal, and Safed Musli from various districts, viz Chittoor, Kurnool, East Godavari, Visakhapatnam, Mahaboobnagar and Mulugu. The seeds were sown in nurseries.

Kovel has been successful in collaborating with Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI) and was able to promote the cultivation of two species viz *Rauvolfia serpentina* (Sarpagandha) and *Decalepis hamiltonii* (Nannari) in private lands of tribal people. A total of 30000 sarpagandha and 11500 nannari seedlings have been planted in Kovel's operational areas. An additional 20000 saplings of sarpagandha has been planted with the help of the Telangana State Medicinal Plants Board (TSMAB), Hyderabad.

Livelihood

Due to the Covid lock-downs many aspects of livelihood were affected adversely. The Aadhimalai Producer Company established by Keystone Foundation in Tamil Nadu suffered due to lack of markets and Keystone tried to integrate their products in the relief packages. Fund raising was at its peak during the pandemic for covering relief measures. Crowd funding worked well as new NGO networks like RCRC; donor partners, Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies and Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives also gave grants to Keystone and some of the partners of the NTFP EP network.

Keystone raised resources for Aadhimalai to buy products from the Adivasi members – both NTFPs and agriculture products were procured during the pandemic. A combination of NTFPs, agriculture and craft are the sources of livelihood for Adivasi communities which were supported by Keystone by establishing nurseries for coffee, pepper and silk cotton as cash crops. Traditional seeds of millet and related crops were distributed to farmers and training held on seed selection for setting up individual seed stocks. Many vegetable seeds were conserved with women seed keepers, who also helped distribution in villages. In Wayanadu and Nilambur, the promotion of rare varieties of paddy and tubers was also undertaken on a large scale. 1200 households were part of this program.

For NTFPs, the largest support was the timely and fair price purchases made by Aadhimalai Producer Company. The products were bought from 700+ families across 100 villages were as shown in the table below.

Product	20-21 (kg)	Value (Rs)
Honey	3432	12,27,303
Coffee	8472	9,30,556
Pepper	2462	6,15,047
Millet	5913	2,17,476
Shikakai	2285	1,29,202
Wild Amla	1580	20,133

In Karnataka, Prakruti, in order to conserve the indigenous honey bees, organised two Honey Festivals in Sirsi Taluka, in Islur and Bengi villages. Bee colonies and boxes were distributed to initiate bee keeping among the youth and about 350 youth is now engaged in beekeeping. The successful work on bee keeping has helped rural youth to find alternate employment and they have contributed towards pollination of agro-biodiversity and the forest diversity.

However the increased use of pesticides for horticulture crops like areca and pepper has had disastrous impacts on bee keeping, killing thousands of bees and destroying bee colonies. Prakruti campaigned against the use of these pesticides, supported by the state horticulture department and scientists. The issue of pesticide use and their impact on honey bees was taken up with the state government, and a ban was sought on their use. As part of Save Honey Bee Campaign, technical sessions were held to impart skills of management and propagation of bee colonies.

In PRERAK's project area of Chhattisgarh's Gariyaband district, 21 villages were supported in their livelihood options, and there were 970 beneficiaries. In addition, 125 farmers were supported in paddy cultivation and mixed farming, 200 female farmers for kitchen gardening, 71 women of SHGs in goat rearing, 51 in poultry, and 391 families have been supported for fishery.

In Maharashtra's Yavatmal district, GSMT worked on mahua seed collection and oil extraction. 4 groups from Parsodi, Shiradhoki, Bhimnla and Khekadwai villages together purchased 490 kg mahua seeds at Rs. 25/kg; they have extracted the oil and are looking for buyers. Nine groups from 9 villages sold 214 quintals mahua flowers in the market at Rs 25/ kg. An NTFP outlet has been established in Jalka and Yavatmal; products like honey, gum and its products are displayed; wild foods too are expected to be displayed and sold in the future. 11 Mahua banks were established in 10 villages namely Khekadwai, Pandavihir, Vagdara, Vasantnagar, Shiratoki, Gopalpur, Pendhari, Mudhati, Mandwa; the members of the banks updated the documents like Gram Sabha resolution, SHG resolution, purchase register etc. Mahua Bank buys mahua at Rs 2,500/quintal; the Bank has invested Rs 4.77 lakhs. The group made

Sl.no	NTFP	MSP/Govt Rate	Market price (actual)
1	Mahua	Rs30.00 per kg	40 to 60 Rupees per kg
2	Chaar (Chironjee)	Rs 126.00	Rs. 130.00
3	Tamarind	Rs. 36.00	Rs40 to 45 per kg
4	Hill broom	--	Rs 50/- per mutha
5	Sal leaf	Rs. 35	Rs.35/-
6	Siali leaf	--	Rs 40/-
7	Kendu leaf	Re 1.00 per Keri	Rs. 1.50 per Keri

a profit of Rs 286,500 on the sale of 191 quintals.

Forum, RCDC gave press releases on this issue.

Other work undertaken to improve the livelihoods of the communities are honey collection, where 301 kg of honey was sold by Disha Mahila Federation; in addition, 5 quintals of honey were collected from 4 villages at Rs 160/kg. 3000 standard bags of tendu leaves were collected in 50 villages and the income accrued was Rs 66 lakh. Meetings were organized about the MGN-REGA work in coordination with district officials. Water and soil conservation work was taken up on 100 ha of CFR lands at Titavi and Rajegaon, providing employment to 60 people. The Forest Department began nursery work in May under the MGNREGA scheme providing employment to 257 people from Avalgaon, Jalka, Madanapur, Gopalpur, Ghoguldara.

In the Ahmednagar region Lokpanchayat helped an SHG (Pragati) from Lavhali Oturhave village to operate a paddy de-husking machine, as a small scale economic activity. They processed 327 kgs of rice and earned an income. Lokpanchayat helped an NTFP cooperative to submit the project proposal on NTFP processing and marketing to Unlimited India. The proposal has been short-listed and it's in the pipeline for the final sanctioning.

In Odisha, RCDC made a survey of the ongoing market price of the NTFPs at the community level and compared it with the official MSP. It was seen that the MSP for all products were less than or equal to the community level prices. This is primarily due to crop loss in the forests. RCDC also tried to impress upon the forest department that 2020 should be considered as a forest drought year. In collaboration with the District Forestry

However, the NTFP collectors sold their produce at good prices. Due to the pandemic the people initially suffered for two weeks, as there were several uncertainties. The major problems were loss of employment, workdays, and income; no access to ATMs and no cash in hand; loss of crops as they were not able to harvest in time, and loss due to little or no sale; lack of storage capacity (and the produce not lifted by the traders); no alternative sources of income in families; local NTFP traders not able to reach the marketplace. However, the Government of India, especially the MoTA clarified that MFPs could be bought and sold by maintaining physical distance. Later on, following a communiqué from Odisha SC & ST Department, the Central Government came out with a revised MSP of 49 items. Accordingly, state government also accepted the revised MSP. In total MSPs for 74 items are now in force in Odisha.

In Mayurbhanj Gram Swaraj worked with the Millet Mission programme and enabled to bring 413.8 ha under millet cultivation in Bangiriposi and Bisoi blocks. Involved in the mission were 742 farmers from 59 villages of Bangiriposi and 52 villages of Bisoi blocks. A participatory trial yielded 12 varieties of ragi. In order to promote these indigenous varieties of ragi 5 community managed seed centres were opened; 6 millet kiosks were established, 3 in each block. In addition, food festivals on millet-based food were organised to educate the community on nutritional value of millets and their cultivation, stressing the fact that it is a climate resilient crop suitable in dry and upland areas.



Native forest plants being planted by Kovel

In Andhra Pradesh, Kovel Foundation is the Geographic Resource NGO for tribal areas and supports the implementation of Community Managed Natural Farming (APCNF) program. This is implemented by Rythu Sadhikara Samstha (RySS) with the Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI). Kovel works with 54000 farmers in Natural Farming in 5 districts of AP. Kovel has been enhancing tribal livelihoods by adding various economically important medicinal plants as part of their livelihood option; this has also significantly reduced the pressure on the forest. Since a few years Kovel has promoted medicinal plant nurseries, especially Brihat Panchamool species, along with important tree-bark species and plantations in the private lands of tribal people across its operational area. This program is being supported by Jiwanti Welfare Charitable Trust (JWCT), a CSR wing of Dabur India Limited and turned the journey into its 3rd phase of implementation during the reporting year. Efforts are on raising another 156000 seedlings which will be planted during 20-21.

In Visakapatnam, D. Gonduru FPO has been one of the first among Kovel promoted FPOs to begin Organic Certification. Kovel with support of Tata Quality Certification Agency has been extending support to the FPO in this regard. Since the process is in its 1st year of the prescribed period of 3 years, they have a long way to go. In spite of the challenges faced due to COVID pandemic, the

FPOs from Kovel Operational area were able to support their members by taking up marketing of various commercial crops such as coffee, turmeric, tamarind, cashew, etc., and food crops surplus including pulses, millets, etc. with support of Kovel. 3 of the FPOs from Visakhapatnam and East Godavari have been able to establish linkages with a few companies and bulk buyers besides their regular local traders based on the volume/s of each product. The total turnover they could reach during the year 2020 is around Rs 40 lakhs.

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During the pandemic period, Kovel has been intensively involved in COVID-19 relief programs. Daily provision kits with rice, dal, oil, salt, tamarind, onions, potatoes, Dettol soaps, detergent soaps, chilli powder, turmeric, vegetables, etc., have been distributed to a total of about 8000 tribal families in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Kovel has carried out preparation of Kharif Action Plan 2020 which included plan for SRI Paddy, line sowing, millets, guli ragi, kitchen gardens, etc., besides various other food & nutrition security models. As part of the "COVID-Response - special livelihood support initiative", a total of 10500 farmers have been supported with various interventions including inputs such as providing part support to seed of paddy, navadhanya, black gram, red gram, etc., besides providing natural farming inputs such as ingredients other than cow dung/urine for Ghana Jeevamrutham preparation, Yellow & White Sticky Plates, pheromone traps, etc.

In Srikakulam district, Velugu formed two FPO's, one in Boodaguda village of Bhamini Mandal, and another in Konduru. Two Vandhan Vikas Kendras (VDVKs) from ITDA, Seethampeta, totally of 600 members have been formed. Velugu provided food grains to 427 PVTG families of 27 villages to assist them through the pandemic period.

In the Vidharba region of Maharashtra, Naviummed worked with the Kolam people on honey harvesting and marketing. These were in the villages of Kajipod, Javarla, Palshidag, Shivramkhed and Shivshaktinagar. The honey was also sent to various exhibitions and was sold in the open market. Work on bamboo, especially craft, continued; this was alongside planting bamboo saplings of the species most utilized in the craft. Workshops were also conducted for community members who wanted to learn about the craft or about new items.



Seeds of traditional food crops, in Rajim, Chhattisgarh

Nannari roots being washed in a stream in Andhra Pradesh



Policy and Advocacy

Over the year the implementation of the Forest Rights Act moved very slowly in the Nilgiris. Keystone mobilized communities across 102 villages and set up their Forest Rights Committees, enabling an understanding about FRA processes with the government. Due to the pandemic, no District Level Committee meetings were held and, despite reminders, the government machinery did not consider this as a priority. Due to lack of information on the status of the Community Forest Rights, Keystone filed 15 RTIs in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. In addition, training sessions were held with the community members to start developing sustainable management plans for their CFRs and asserting their rights of protection, harvest and monitoring.

In Karnataka, Prakruti held eight village level meetings on the implementation of FRA and CFR in Siddi and Kunbi communities, the indigenous people living in the forest regions of Uttara Kananda. There is some success in getting individual rights, but claiming CFR, especially in the protected area like Anshi Naitonal Park is a long struggle where work is at present ongoing with communities and local forest department officials to grant CFR.

In Srikakulam district, Velugu Association facilitated Palavalasa village of Bhamini Mandal in understanding the regulations concerning granite quarries and helped prevent quarrying in their village. The process of collecting relevant information and proper submission of representation to the authorities was explained to them. Velugu assisted Adivasi communities in the region to obtain their Individual Forest Rights titles; 856 families have received IFR titles to an extent 1389.16 acres. Additionally, the provision of Habitat Rights under the FRA has been explained to villages Kotakonda and Mulaguda of Bhamini Mandal, Rangamvalasa, Ekuva Dwarabandam, Diguva Dwarabandam and Peddaguda of Seethampeta Mandal; most of these villages have submitted Habitat Rights claims and joint surveys have been completed.

Velugu has lobbied along with the Adivasi people for the district administration and state authorities to provide an additional 50 work days under MGNREGS to those who have received IFR titles; this helped 997 families avail additional 50 working days (100+ 50) under MGNREGA.

In Chhattisgarh, the state level consultation was organized by Van Adhikar Manch for the smooth implementation of the CFR rights. A function was held on 23 January 2020, where the Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel participated; other relevant officials who attended were the Tribal Minister, officials of the Forest Department and the Tribal Department. PRERAK had a meeting with spokesperson of Congress party, Mr. Sailesh Nitin Tripathi, and discussed the problems and challenges being faced in implementation of CFR. In December 2020, meetings were held with the Panchayat and Health Minister to discuss the Panchayati Raj guidelines.

In Bastar district, LEAF held meetings and workshops in its work area to create awareness about the CFR process as well as about the PESA Act. These workshops included discussions about other laws that are helpful and play a part in the everyday lives of the Adivasi people; these include the 5th Schedule, the Right to Information, the Panchayat Raj Institutions, and the Gram Sabha. As these were the 'covid times' information was provided about safety measures with respect to the pandemic.

LEAF was also involved in two campaigns. The first, to protect the sacred grove in Sandh karmari village (Maulikot), which was being threatened by the forest department. The FD had begun to clear "ungainly" trees in and around the grove, and take up plantation activities. This was without any consultation with the local people. LEAF and the community resisted this activity successfully; a petition has been submitted to the governor as well as to the officials concerned. The other matter concerned the felling of trees from a tract of forest under the jurisdiction of Kakalgur village. The trees were meant for the construction of the rath festival in Jagdalpur. This struggle, to defend the tract of forest, lasted all of 10 days, with no forest official or conservation groups helping the local community. It was covered by the newspapers and the proposition to fell was finally dropped.



Meeting to discuss the problem in a sacred grove in Sandh Karmari village, Bastar

District level program on Forest Rights Act by PRERAK, Chhattisgarh



In Yavatmal, GSMT held a District Convergence Committee meeting on 21st July 2020 with District Collector and other government department officials, where the secretary of Gram Sabha Federation also participated. The following issues were discussed at the meeting:

- Review of Conservation and Management Plan prepared by GSMT as per government GR
- Planning for conservation and management preparation of 560 villages collectively with the coordination with the government.
- Formation of CFRMC and bank account opening in the villages that have received CFR titles
- The Forest Department will review the prepared management plans and incorporate the planned activities with those forest department working plan and
- To organize a Convergence Committee Meeting at sub divisional level in presence of SDO to resolve issues at the divisional level.

In Udaipur district, Rajasthan, Seva Mandir tied up with a Community Based Organization (CBO), Van Utthan Sansthan (VUS), and worked on strengthening community institutions to sustainably manage and develop common forest lands. The idea is to use the provisions of Community Forest Resource Rights to empower village level institutions to govern their forest commons. 17 villages have received CFR titles where VUS & SM have taken up activities which are summarized below.

Orientation and consultative meetings were held with village level institutions e.g. Gram Vikas Samuha for constituting of Community Forest Resource Management Committee (CFRMCs) in the villages who had newly received CFR titles, and meetings were organized with the committees for preparation of management plans. A total of 350 meetings were conducted with village level institutions involving members of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), members of CFRMC, VFPMC (Village Forest Protection & Management Committee). A transect by the community and the VUS team was conducted to cover the respective CFR sites to mark the boundaries.

During the same period, CFR management plans of 7 villages has been prepared and approved by the respective Gram Sabhas. Efforts were made with the forest department and the Tribal Area Development Department for recognition of pending claims of CFR. A review workshop of Van Utthan Sansthan was conducted to evaluate the progress and other issues related to community forests in the area.

A Community Conserved Area portal (CCP) is being constructed with the active involvement of Seva Mandir along with other national networks. The CCP will include field level information related to common property resources e.g. community forest resources, common pasturelands, etc. by community themselves.

In Odisha, RCDC has facilitated 16 villages in Keonjhar to make their claims for their CR/CFR rights. Now RCDC has helped their self-initiated CFR area protection, conservation and management activities. In a meeting with the forest department on the context of plantation with CAM-PA funds, RCDC demanded that focus should be given to the planting of Asan, Kuruma, Fasi, Bija and other species required for the rath festival of Lord Jagannath. Though the state government initiated such a scheme (Jagannath Van Prakaalpa) a decade ago it has been discontinued. RCDC involved local communities to make this initiative sustainable, hoping that the cultural and traditional bonds between communities and their festivals will facilitate this process. Focus was given for similar initiatives in Nayagarh, Boudha, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Deogarh forest divisions.

In Andhra Pradesh Kovel has been piloting and improving the Multi-layer (5-Layer) Agro-forestry model/s as part of Andhra Pradesh State Community Managed Natural Farming (APCNF) program. It has established different models with different crops/plants suitable to different parts including its operational area.

In this backdrop, the Rythu Sadhikara Samstha has taken up this initiative with Rural Development Department for scaling up the plan and incorporating this into MNREGS' Shelf of Works. As a result, after a series of state level consultations with concerned officials, the 5-Layer Agro-Forestry model has been considered and added in NREG Scheme's Shelf of Works.



World Environment Day celebrated by PRERAK

In Mayurbhanj, Gram Swaraj supported 420 Gram Sabhas to prepare claims for their CFR rights; of these, ten villages have been selected where the Gram Sabha already submitted their claim for CFR area. In these villages CFR management committees (CFRMC) were constituted for management of the CFR area which is vested with the Gram Sabha, and management plans have been prepared. The management plan is a guiding document prepared by the gram sabha members for sustainable use of resources and restoration of ecosystem.

In the Sahayadri region of Ahmednagar Lokpanchayat continued its efforts with the Forest Rights Act. Through the the year, the communities collected documentary evidences, including photos and hand drawn village maps showing customary village boundaries (with areas of NTFPs, traditional water bodies, spots for fuel wood, grazing grounds, etc.) Lokpanchayat helped 3 gram sabhas (Lavhali Kotul, Kothale and Pachanai) to prepare proposals to receive electricity; the poles for the electric lines pass through forest land and comes under "Basic Infrastructures" of the article 3(2) of FRA.

Unfortunately, Lokpanchayat could not complete the procedure of filing CFR claims because of ban on gram sabha meetings. The lockdown was announced and guidelines put in place for social distancing by the state government. Lokpanchayat also facilitated the verification of forest rights claims rejected or not approved by the District level Committee. The Governor has given another opportunity to the forest rights claimants to file appeals for verification of their claims once again through the notification. A total of 139 IFR claimants were willing to file appeals and approached Lokpanchayat for this support; together

with Vanpanchayat, the appeals were drafted for requesting re-scrutiny of the claims, fulfillment of the supporting documents, and evidences.

Despite lockdown and pandemic, Lokpanchayat followed up with advocacy once with the Forest Rights Cell was established at the district level in Nashik. Gaps and drawbacks in the implementation of the FRA (while approving and disapproving claims) were brought to the notice of the authority. Besides, the gram sabha of Ratanwadi followed up twice with the district collector to get their approval to the CFR claim.

Meetings at the block level were held to motivate the van panchayats on issues including pending forest rights claims, community organization and solidarity for the tribal rights, key provisions of PESA Act, the powers of PESA and gram sabhas, the financial provision under PESA fund, participatory decision making through gram sabhas, the FRA, and examples of income generated from the CFR management.

In the Vidharba region Naviummed completed preparing Village Development Action Plans for 5 villages that have received collective forest rights. Discussions are underway with the government regarding further work. Meetings were held with the Tribal Development Department and Forest Department. The communities have completed the work to create the collective rights plan. Plans were discussed about businesses that people need and can be initiated. The forest department planted 15000 trees in the forest area after discussions with Naviummed and the communities. Jarura (687.9 ha), Kajipod (290 ha), Palsidag (65.87 ha) and Jawarla (1572 ha) have received their CFR titles and various activities are in progress within these areas.

Health and Nutrition

Keystone made interventions across the Nilgiri region, setting up camps and made referrals, ensured social entitlements, and conducted training programmes. These were aided by 16 Adivasi women as community health workers, across 65 villages. As part of the focus on health, nutrition and immunity building, nutrition kits were distributed to identified vulnerable families, especially women and adolescent girls. Approximately 1223 kits were distributed, which comprised of millet, horse gram, turmeric and amaranthus.

the district against COVID-19 and its preventions measures. In July these measures continued to include more families.

In addition, a survey was conducted in the district to understand the situation of migrants, sanitary workers and disabled peoples for further planning and preparation. Many problems like malnutrition and anemia are seen in rural and tribal areas; in addition, traditional seeds of food crops are disappearing. Keeping these factors in mind, a kitchen garden campaign was launched to reduce malnutrition and HB deficiency and anemia in women and adolescent girls; promote non-toxic vegetables in the diet; to get fresh and nutritious vegetables daily; to improve immunity; and conserve endangered wild vegetables and food. In this campaign seeds were distributed



Tuber festival in Karnataka

In Chhattisgarh, PRERAK worked with the affected marginalized people (small farmers and migrants) during the covid period, mainly in Gariyaband district. Food rations were distributed to 196 families in the project area; kits for maintaining personal hygiene were also given, as also awareness programs to reduce the risk of virus infections. 320 targeted families were supported by distribution of 23 varieties of paddy seeds.

In Yavatmal, GSMT worked in collaboration with the district collector's office, getting support for 11000 families for food kits, safety kits for 10000 families, Arsenic 30 album homeopathic medicine for 36000 families, and created awareness in

to 2750 families. The staff was trained through various webinars. Also, training was given regarding the pre-preparation of kitchen garden planting. The organization staff is regularly monitoring the kitchen gardens.

Kovel has been working with the tribal herbal healers in Andhra Pradesh and Telengana; the capacities and skills are being built with an aim to improving their existing knowledge. Efforts are on providing certification to those who are qualified by collaborating with FRLHT & QCI. However, the planned training programs and the said certification processes were unfortunately halted due to COVID pandemic. Nevertheless, the healers continued to extend primary health care services to the local communities involving the field cadre and community collectives wherever necessary.

Other engagements

Keystone

Keystone continued the secretarial and administrative role for NTFP Networking Forum India and the Using Diversity networks, and initiated the work with PVTG communities on Habitat Rights. The GAGGA project support to NTFP Forum – phase I came to a close in 2020 and many reports and surveys were finalized for this phase. Project documents for phase II were also finalized during this year.

Habitat Rights

To work on the Habitat Rights provisions under the Forest Rights Act, the focus was on 12 communities. These are the Baiga, Bharia (Madhya Pradesh); the Abujmaria, Bihor (Chhattisgarh); the Pahadi Korwa (Jharkhand & Chhattisgarh); the Korwa, Mal Paharia (Jharkhand); the Dongria Kondh, Kutia Kondh, Paudi Bhuyan, Juang (Odisha); the Kolam (Maharashtra); the Kurumba (Tamil Nadu); and the Cholanaicken & Kathunaicken (Kerala). Support has been received from Misereor (Keystone) & Caritas (RCDC)

The profiles of these communities have been created and community fellows identified for continuation of the work at the local level. Two trainings/consultations have been held for partner organisations led by Tushar Das and Amitha Bachchan.

Using Diversity

The network covers communities across central India and the Western Ghats and is in its fourth year of implementation. The work in 2020 brought together all the field data and reports to culminate in several publications covering uncultivated foods, crop diversity and FRA. The publications are both in local languages and English. Ecological Calendars were printed as posters for 2 communities and will be the method for the future work. All these publications are available for circulation and can be accessed at <https://using-diversity.keystone-foundation.org/publications/>

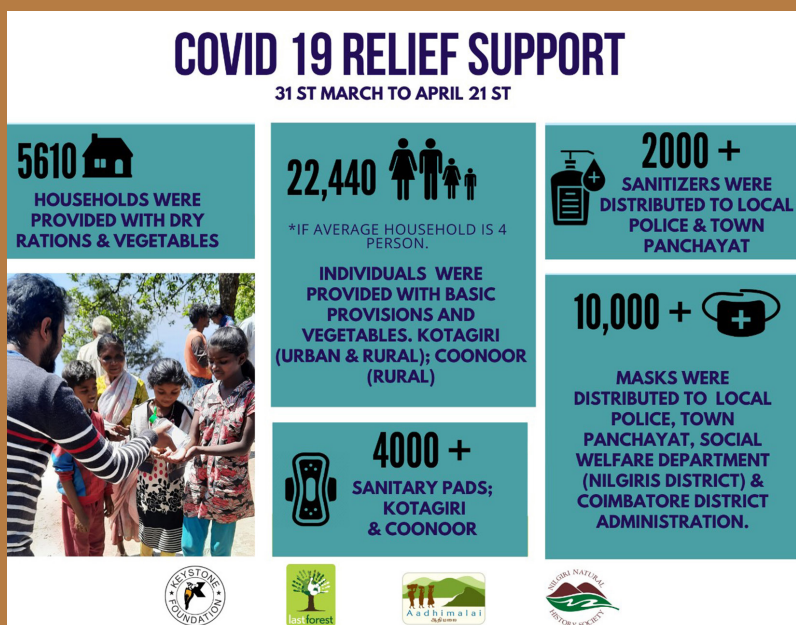
NTFP Forum

Publication on Gender and NTFPs and Photo Document on our network was coordinated by Keystone.

Covid 19

Between March and June work focused on relief, and health and nutrition for local Adivasi communities. Community Radio and all the teams engaged in awareness building at a very large scale. This was both for rural and urban communities. Due to the lockdown, Adivasi communities went back to their land and forests. Large scale millet cultivation was taken up this year, including NTFP collection. However, they did not have access to vegetables, medicine and other food items till PDS came into the district.

With the markets closed, Last Forest shops suffered a huge loss and the Ooty establishment, Green Shop and Place2 Bee had to close. Keystone had to lay off 10 staff members and tried to compensate them with a golden handshake, and covered their travel costs. It was heart rendering moment for our team to let them go.



A poster put up by Keystone in the Nilgiris

PRERAK

A tree planting programme was taken up on the World Environment (5th June 2020) in Kamepur village of Gariyaband district and various project locations.

Eight district level FRA programmes were conducted to raise awareness among the communities regarding CFR claims and related activities; a one day workshop on Community Forest Rights and PESA was organized for smooth implementation of the process. These programs were attended by more than 1000 people from eight districts.

The celebration of International Women's Day (8th March) was held at Amleshwar in Raipur with 15 female farmers who were invited to share their views; the Day was also celebrated in the Dhawalpur village of Gariyaband district and more than 100 women attended.

Gramin Samassya Mukti Trust

The Nirguda river originates from Jalka in Maregaon taluka and is in a bad state. A survey was conducted with an aim to improve the state of the river, especially the water level in river as well as overall water conservation. Help was sought from the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) and other experts; the ICICI bank supported the work financially. The total 2335 m of Nirguda river from upper catchment area has been treated with Doha Model techniques. This structure will create a potential of gross storage capacity of 100 TCM that will impact 227 ha of the command area.

SMART bunding works has been proposed to rebuild soil quality of the cropland area so as to increase water holding capacity as well as soil fertility. The GSMT Technical team conducted net planning survey and around 62% of the area (88ha of 140ha) is done; around 11% of the costs has been obtained through farmers contribution in kind and labour.

Seva Mandir

Pradhan Mantri Van Dhan Kendra has been established in village Medi of Kotra block with the support of TRIFED for collection and marketing of NTFPs in Udaipur district. The Van Dhan Vikas Kendra, Medi includes 306 women members

from 24 SHGs of five villages. Sewa Mandir will explore the potential and present status of NTFPs in adjoining villages of Phulwari Wild Life Sanctuary. A business plan has been prepared and submitted to TRIFED through Rajas Sangh and a separate bank account opened and applied for an FSSAI license for marketing of agri-produces, food products, etc. A training of 18 days has been conducted for SHG leaders for entrepreneurship development through agri and forest produce.

RCDC

To overcome the lack of income during the lockdown RCDC had the authorities implement the MNREGS for specific work relevant to the village communities. 10 ponds were excavated in 2020 to provide employment and income to the tribal communities in the Gram Panchayat through a collaborative effort between community and the government officials. The Tahasildar and BDO of Thakurmunda visited village Boula and Jambani to ensure the free PDS distribution. The village committees along with Golak, our volunteer, highlighted the issue of unemployment and the difficulties people faced. The BDO took note of the community voice and instructed the Sarapanch to create community ponds in each village with MGNREGS and link all the ponds with pisciculture scheme. This provided both employment of 250,000 person-days and income to the people. This activity brought in about 16 lakhs for this 'earth' work to the village; another 10 lakhs were spent to develop one model pond.

40 households of Raighati were identified for Covid relief (they did not have ration cards to avail the 35kg of rice and Rs. 1000/- in cash). These lapses were also corrected with the support of the media. For the last two years the six villages of Golamunda where kendu leaf deregulation has taken place earned Rs 26 lakhs and Rs 41 lakhs respectively. This year the business was reduced again to 26 lakhs because of bad weather condition. The Block Jungal Muncha demanded the deregulation to 26 villages that have received CFR rights. This year another 9 villages were deregulated for free kendu leaf trading.

These communities have prepared the forest conservation plan in which kendu leaf operation is an inherent part. The community conservation is both traditional and scientific with a synergy developed with collective effort.

Kovel

On the occasion of International Women's Day, Kovel organized an event at one of the resource villages in Visakhapatnam where Adivasi women from around 30 habitations participated. The best women entrepreneurs and farmers were felicitated with certificates and tokens of appreciation. Kovel's partner, Techno Serve Team, played an active role in along with Kovel. The Adivasi women celebrated the event with traditional dance and local folk songs before concluding the event.

Gram Swaraj

Gram Swaraj is engaged with three PVTGs, the Mankdia, the Khadia and the Lodha, living in different villages of Mayurbhanj district. PVTG families/villages are supported by Gram Swaraj team in claiming their rights under the FRA, the Food Security Act and other entitlements under different government schemes. In March, representatives of Gram Swaraj participated in a national consultative meeting on building a strategy for the development of PVTGs.

Gram Swaraj provided support during the lockdown and also held awareness programmes about the pandemic. In particular, these programmes were organised in 82 villages regarding the use of masks, washing hands appropriate behaviour and dry rations were distributed to 435 families in Mayurbhanj district. In addition, convergence with MGNREGA schemes in 12 villages led to employment in these places. A revolving fund of Rs 1.5 lakhs to five SHGs for procurement and trade of NTFPs was organized to help them tide over a difficult period.

Lokpanchayat

On the occasion of 'World Environment Day', a tree plantation event was organized in Ambit village, and an overall plantation drive. The saplings of indigenous trees were planted in sacred groves and CFR areas by the children, youth and local villagers. More than 250 saplings were planted with the participation of local villagers. Lokpanchayat assisted and facilitated tribal farmers residing in the project villages to cultivate bamboo saplings on their farms and farm bunds. Some 23000 bamboo saplings were planted by 56 farmers under the scheme of Maharashtra Bamboo Board.

An assessment survey of the plantation was done by the Board to disburse the subsidy in the bank accounts of the farmers.

Lokpanchayat helped create an awareness on prevention and care to be taken during the pandemic in all the villages in its working area, which included 4000 people. In addition, masks were distributed to 1000 health workers, officials of forest department, policemen, government officials, the youth, SHGs and PRI members. Lokpanchayat distributed a total of 1200 grocery kits with self-protection equipment. Ajim Premaji Philanthropic Initiative (APPI), Bangalore provided financial support for this relief work in the project area.

Naviummed

Six farmer groups have been formed with a total of 75 members; together they have developed an organic pesticide in January. Discussions are now on regarding importance of organic manure; work is underway to make compost using farm waste. Seeing this work, the people from nearby Dongargaon village have asked for similar help and now two farmer groups of 20 farmers have been formed in Dongargaon.

Prakruti

In order to create awareness on the issues related to Western Ghats, September 8 is celebrated as Sahyadri Day. On September 9, 2020, a program was organized in Shivamogga. The main focus was the link between biodiversity and school children in Western Ghats. As part of Covid restrictions, the rural students participated by studying biodiversity in and around their villages. Students and teachers participated in this discussion and took oath to conserve the nature.

Despite covid restrictions Prakruti organized 10 literary programmes to discuss the present trends in literature, reviewing books on environmental issues. This is held on 15th of every month in Sirsi.

Publications/Articles

Leaf Litter, Spring Equinox Issue, March 2020

Leaf Litter, Summer Solstice Issue, June 2020

Leaf Litter, Autumn Equinox Issue, September 2020

Leaf Litter, Winter Solstice Issue, December 2020

Wir Schaffen Das! The Democratic Spirit Must Live in the Face of the State's Repressive Power. (<https://thewire.in/rights/democratic-spirit-india-state-unrestrained-power>) 16/11/2020

The Storm of Linguistic Decline in India. (<https://raiot.in/shudh-hindi-queens-english-or-mundari-have-we-forfeited-the-debate/>) 28/07/2020

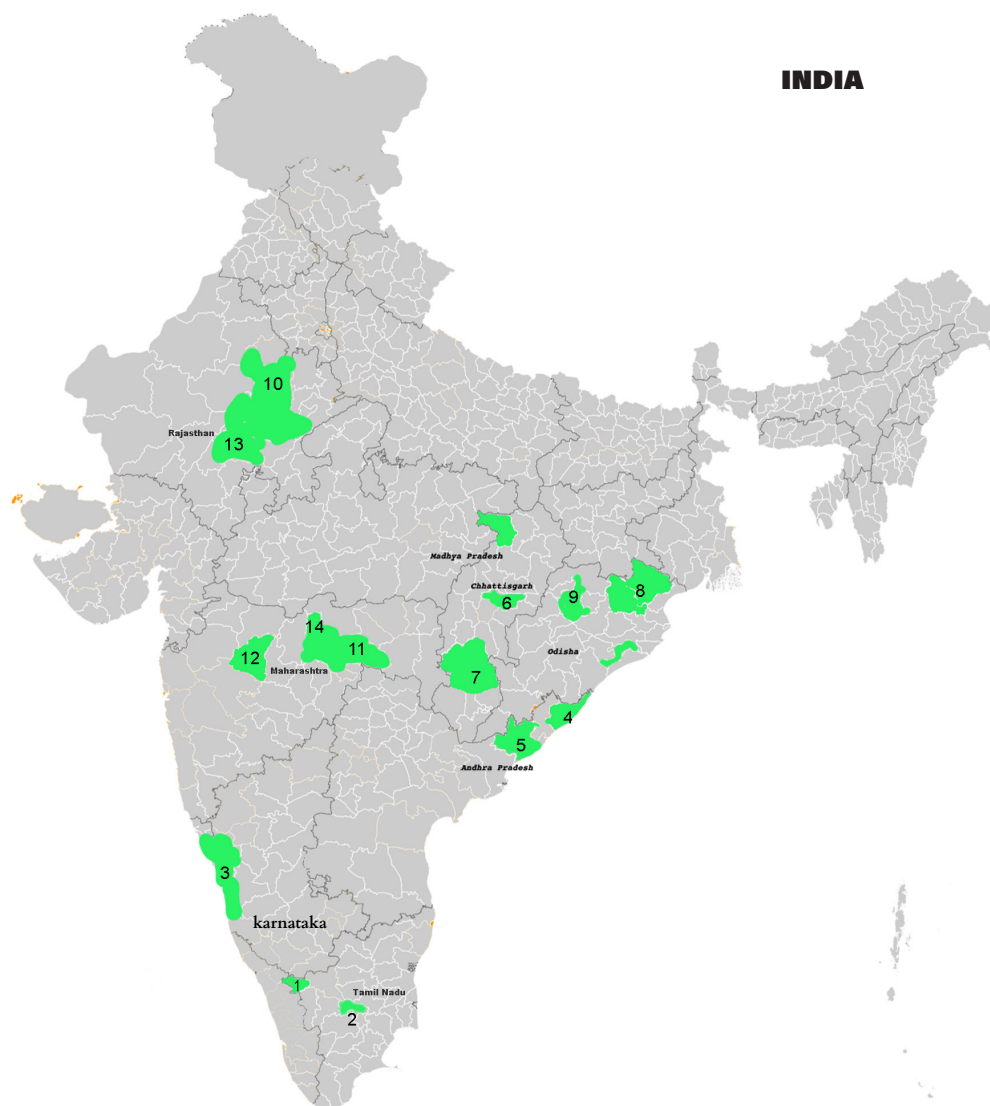
To save their trees, Bastar's tribal sentinels stand up to tradition. (<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/to-save-their-trees-bastar-tribal-sentinels-stand-up-to-tradition-6722434/>) 13/10/2020

Don't Understand CPWD's U-Turn on Wood Use? Try Modi Govt's Climate Double-speak. (<https://science.thewire.in/environment/cpwd-memorandum-wood-use-construction-unfccc-ndc-ativasi/>) 12/08/2020

Something Is Wrong With the Language of Climate Change. (<https://science.thewire.in/the-sciences/climate-change-carbon-economy-conservation-ecology-narrative-language-exclusion/>) 18/10/2020

Girivani, Newsletter. Kovel Foundation 2020

Forest Plants of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve A Pictorial Field Guide. Keystone Foundation 2020



1. Keystone Foundation, Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu.
2. NTFP Forum Resource Centre, Adukkam Village, Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu.
3. Prakruti, Uttara Kannada District, Karnataka.
4. Velugu Association, Srikakulam District, Andhra Pradesh.
5. Kovel, Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh.
6. PRERAK, Rajim, Chhattisgarh .
7. Legal Environment Action Foundation (LEAF), Bastar District, Chhattisgarh.
8. Regional Center for Development Cooperation, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.
9. Gram Swaraj, Mayurbhanj District, Odisha.
10. Seva Mandir, Udaipur District, Rajasthan.
11. Naviummed Social Organisation, Yavatmal District, Maharashtra.
12. Lokpanchayat, Akole Block, Ahmednagar District, Maharashtra.
13. Samarthak Samiti, Udaipur District, Rajasthan.
14. Gramin Samssya Mukti Trust, Yavatmal District, Maharashtra.

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