

Forest Degradation and Implications for Rural Livelihood in Kaimur Reserve Forest of Bihar, India

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Abstract : In India, forest and people are inextricably linked since millions of people live adjacent to or within protected areas and harvest forest products. Indian forest has their own legacy to sustain by its own climatic nature with several social, economic and cultural activities. People surrounding forest areas are not only dependent on this resource for their livelihoods but also for the other source, like religious ceremonies, social customs and herbal medicines, which are determined by the forest like agricultural land, groundwater level, and soil fertility. The assumption that fuelwood and fodder extraction, which is the part of local livelihood leads to deforestation, has so far been the dominant mainstream views in deforestation discourses. Given the occupational division across social groups in Kaimur reserve forest, the differential nature of dependence of forest resources is important to understand. This paper attempts to assess the nature of dependence and impact of forest degradation on rural households across various social groups. Also, an additional element that is added to the enquiry is the way degradation of forests leading to scarcity of forest-based resources impacts the patterns of dependence across various social groups. Change in forest area calculated through land use land cover analysis using remote sensing technique and examination of different economic activities carried out by the households that are forest-based was collected by primary survey in Kaimur reserve forest of state of Bihar in India. The general finding indicates that the Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste communities, the most socially and economically deprived sections of the rural society are involved in a significant way in collection of fuelwood, fodder, and fruits, both for self-consumption and sale in the market while other groups of society uses fuelwood, fruit, and fodder for self-use only. Depending on the local forest resources for fuelwood consumption was the primary need for all social groups due to easy accessibility and lack of alternative energy source. In last four decades, degradation of forest made a direct impact on rural community mediated through the socio-economic structure, resulting in a shift from forest-based occupations to cultivation and manual labour in agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Thus there is a need to review the policies with respect to the 'community forest management' since this study clearly throws up the fact that engagement with and dependence on forest resources is socially differentiated. Thus tying the degree of dependence and forest management becomes extremely important from the view of 'sustainable' forest resource management. The statization of forest resources also has to keep in view the intrinsic way in which the forest-dependent population interacts with the forest.

Keywords : forest degradation, livelihood, social groups, tribal community

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