

Declining access to and control over
Natural Resources in
National Parks and Sanctuaries

Presentation by

Centre for Environment Education
Thaltej Tekra, Ahmedabad - 380 054

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Do we want to conserve our scarce natural resources, especially forests ?

Yes

Why ? No need to justify

Why are they scarce ?

- Mismanagement
- Over-exploitation
- They were the responsibility of the government and were misused
- People got separated from forests.

When they become scarce, what did we do ?

- Created Protected Areas (PAs)
- Provided them a shield
- Created protection infrastructure
- Gave the PAs legal armour
- Converted them into national parks and sanctuaries
- Identified enemies from whom to protect
- Any addition you would like to make
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What Was the Effect ?

- People got alienated
- We failed to protect forests
- Our identification of the enemy was wrong
- We created problems-new ones, this time with the people
- When protective machinery failed-forests suffered, when it succeeded-people suffered.
- The protective machinery became the new centre for corruption.

So

We tried to put the blame on someone :
the miserable, uneducated, unaware villager.

What went wrong ?

- As usual, implementation.
- Implementation was associated with the "powers to do so".
- Power corrupts-absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- Notification process not appropriate.
- Implementation inflicted with ills of the government .
 - * Inefficiency.
 - * Lack of orientation, conceptual clarity down the line.
 - * Large gaps between thinking of policy makers and implementors.
 - * No special attention.
- We misunderstood the problem: we tried administrative solutions when the problem was socio-economic.
- We destroyed any harmony that existed between forests and people.
- We created unfair entities (National Parks & Sanctuaries).

What has happened in these so many years ?

- * To the National Park and Sanctuaries
 - they have steadily shrunk (forests)
 - People have continued to use them but now by paying bribes.
 - NP's and sanctuaries have increased in number but effective protection area has reduced.
- * To the protectors
 - A whole bureaucracy has been formed
 - They have established rights on the forests like never before.
 - They have looked at forests as independent of humans except themselves and tourists.
 - They have managed to protect to some area but have been partly responsible for the destruction of other area.
- * To the villagers
 - They have been classified as enemy no. 1
 - They have been deprived of their traditional resource base.
 - Their relationship with forest has broken.
 - They have remained uneducated, unaware.
 - Government schemes brought subsidies and corrupted them.
 - There has been a fall in social and moral standards.
 - Agriculture not developed, water became scarce, livestock degenerated.

So what do we have ?

- An Irresponsible bureaucracy.
- Uneducated/unware people on the brink of destitution
- Vanishing forests.

How can the two groups develop a relationship and save forest ?

- Bureaucracy becomes responsible and aware
and.
- People become aware, educated and responsible.

In the light of all this let us analyse the question of "Access"

What does access provide ?

- Direct income
- Immediate benefits
- Rights to use/abuse
- Rights to land and benefits from the land
- Ownership ?
- Freedom

Is this Sustainable ?

- Ownership does not necessarily imply sustainability of management.
- No village mechanism to ensure management.
- No homogeneity in villages.
- Divergence of professions.
- No uniformity in thinking.
- Corruption is high.
- Rights are not linked to responsibilities.
- Tendency to abuse is high.

This is unfortunately the situation today.

And it is a constraint.

Is there something people are missing out on ?

For example

- Rights to conservation
- Rights to benefits from conservation
- Rights to sustainable use of forest resources
- Rights to a secure environment
- Rights to a secure future.

How can people get all that ?

As mentioned above, just access is not enough

So then what ?

Developmental and environmental objectives have to be reconciled

Hence the concept of Ecodevelopment

Development that

- is environmentally sound
- is ecologically viable
- is socially acceptable
- ensures sustainability

What are the various aspects of Ecodevelopment

- * Health and family planning
- * Education
- * Infrastructure: roads/markets/ business opportunities
- * Livestock management
- * Agriculture management
- * Water management
- * Forest management

Let us understand things this way

- * We have to fight the ills of the present system of conservation.

Increased access will only

- * perpetuate deprivations
- * delay the shift to activities that are sustainable
- * provide mental satisfaction but never sustainable security.
- * widen the supply demand gap for forest resources.

We all agree, it is unfair but isn't that the kind of situation we are in today ?

We have to shift from people-centred sentimentality to people-centred thinking : people's long term as well as short term benefits

There is great inefficiency in the use of our basis resources- land, water, livestock and forest.

- * Reducing water retention and water levels
- * Decreasing land productivity.
- * Degenerating livestock

are as important as

- * (Declining) Access.

They have to go hand in hand

The first three are our responsibility
The fourth is our right

So

Lets talk of our responsibility

- * Better utilization of land
- * Better utilization of water
- * Better utilization of livestock
- * Education of children
- * Family planning.
- * Adoption of technologies which reduce dependence on forest
- * Protection of forest from
 - outsiders
 - ourselves
 - forest department
- * Better utilization of forest resources; specially, management of MFP

How will this happen ?

1. forest department will do it alone

or

2. with the help of NGO's who must educate

NGO's will have to fight for all this-not just increased access-

To ensure

- * People have greater say in forest management.
- * NGOs become partners of both the people and the department.

i.e. We must all fight for greater say in protected area management

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PARTICIPANTS LIST

Sl. No	NAME AND DESIGNATION (IF ANY)	ORGANISATION NAME, POSTAL ADDRESS WITH TELEPHONE NUMBER (IF ANY)	SIGNATURE
1.	Sh. Goverdhan Yadav	Prayas Devgarh Vai Pratap Garh Distt. Chittorgarh - 312621	
2.	Sh. Meghraj Garasiya	- do -	
3.	Smt. Chaturi Bai	- do -	
4.	Sh. Man Singh Sishodiya	ASTHA SANSTHAN 39, Kharol Colony Udaipur.	
5.	Sh. Nisar Ahmed Sekh	- do -	
6.	Sh. Suraj Mal Pargi	Adivasi Vikas Manch, Kotra Distt. Udaipur.	
7.	Smt. Napi Bai	Van Suraksha Evam Advasi Raksha Samiti Phulwari Ki Nal, Kotra Distt. Udaipur.	
8.	Sh. Chagan Lal Damare	Jagaran Jan Vikas Samiti, 282, Chungi Naka, Fatal Pura, Udaipur.	
9.	Sh. Dilip Surkar	Centre for Environment Education Field Office Station Road, Jasdan, Distt. Rajkot - 360050 Gujarat, Phone No. 02821-20469	
10.	Sh. Keshu Lal Ji Badla	Jagaran Jan Vikas Samiti 282, Chungi Naka, Fatal Pura, Udaipur	
11.	Sh. Bhanwar Singh Chadana	Astha Sansthan 39, Kharol Colony, Udaipur.	
12.	Sh. Harjeet Singh	Sahbhagi Shiksha Kendra, Lucknow.	
13.	Sh. Vinod Kumar	Sampurn Gram Vikas Kendra Rediya Panthi Road, Dalton Ganj, Bihar	
14.	Sh. George Monippally	Kisan Mazdur Sanghatan, GARU, P.O. Palamu, Bihar	
15.	Sh. Jagabandhu Das	ISED, Bhubneshwar Ph:54337	
16.	Sh. C.P. Krishanan	D-6/G Rockview ■ DDA, Munirka, New Delhi - 110067	
17.	Sh. Bharat Dogra	C-27 Raksha Kunj Paschim Vihar New Delhi - 110063.	
18.	Sh. K.A. Lathey	National Law School of India University, Bangalore - 560072	

PARTICIPANTS LIST

Sl.No	NAME AND DESIGNATION (IF ANY)	ORGANISATION NAME, POSTAL ADDRESS WIHI TELEPHONE NUMBER (IF ANY)	SIGNATURE
19.	Sh. Basavaraj Hebbalu	Equations Bangalore, 168, 8th Main Road, Behind Indira Nagar Club	
20.	Sh. Santosh Mohanty	S.R.D.C. Baripoda, Mayabharti	
21.	Sh. Madhusudan Nanda President	Sevakutir At/PO Karanjia Mayabharti Ph:409	
22.	Sh. Jayakrishna	F 1511, Baripada, Mayurbhanj	
23.	Sh. K.K. Das	Indian Institute of Remote Sensing, Dehradun.	
24.	Sh. Raju S.	Mahatma Gandhi University	
25.	Sh. Mohan Pandey	Kishan Organisation, Almora.	
26.	Sh. Omprakash Bhatt	Dasholi Gram Sudhar Mandal Gopeshwar, Chamoli 2183 Pin-246401	
27.	Sh. C.R.Bijoy	Doctor's Quarters, Sri Rama Krishna Hospital, 395 Avarampalayam Road Coimbatore, Tamilnadu - 641044	
28.	Sh. Feroz Deen	Kumao Compt. No.14 Gauri Range Proposed Raja Ji National Park	
29.	Sh. Sachin Sachdeva	CEE, Sawami Madhopu 25, Jawahar Nagar - 322001	
30.	Sh. Debashish Sen	PSI, Dehradun	
31.	Hari Raj Singh	- do -	
32.	Sh. Painuly Virendra	Sri Bhuvneshwari Mahila Ashram P.O. Anjanisain Tehri Garhwal U.P.	
33.	Sh. Ramveer Singh	WWF - India, 172B Lodi Estate, New Delhi -110003	
34.	Dr. R.S.Chundawat	WII, Dehra Dun.	
35.	Sh. H.S. Panwar	Director, WII, Dehra Dun.	
36.	Dr. V.B. Mathur	Wildlife Instt. of India, Dehradun.	

PARTICIPANTS LIST

Sl.No	NAME AND DESIGNATION (IF ANY)	ORGANISATION NAME, POSTAL ADDRESS WHI TELEPHONE NUMBER (IF ANY)	SIGNATURE
37.	Sh. Mukherjee S.K.	Wildlife Institute of India	
38.	Sh. B.K. Mishra	Wildlife Institute of India	
39.	Mrs. Pritapi C.Sinha	Wildlife Institute of India	
40.	Dr. Y.V. Jhula	Wildlife Institute of India	
41.	Sh. Aman Singh Coordinator	Tarun Bharat Sangh Bhikampura - Kishori Via - Thanagarh Alwar, Rajasthan.	
42.	Pratibha Singh	- do -	
43.	Sh. B.K. Sethi	F.R.I. Dehradun.	
44.	Ch. Chhatrpati Singh	CEL - WWE - I, Delhi	
45.	Sh. Sanjay Upadhayay	CEL, WWF, I	
46.	Ms. Ruchi Pant	PILSARC & cel.	
47.	Ms. Chitra Gupta	CEL, WWF-I	
48.	Ms. Charu Sharma	CEL, WWF-I Campus Law Centre.	
49.	Sh. Anil Agarwal	C&E New Delhi.	
50.	Sh. B.K. Mohapatra	45C Angul (Orissa) P.O. Hakimpada - 759143	
51.	Sh. Jagabandhusahu	- do -	
52.	Mrs. B. Mishra	- do -	
53.	Prof. B.K. Roy Burman	I-1779, Chittaranjan Park New Delhi - 110019	
54.	Sh. V.J. Thomas	The Times of India	
55.	Sh. Vivek Panwar	EKTA PARISHAD Lakhanadon, Seoni (M.P.) 480885	
56.	Sh. Gaurishankar Yadav	Ekta Parishad, Chindwada Block Bichuva, (M.P.)	
57.	Sh" Damandeep Singh	Business Standard, R.No.2 PTI Building Sansad Marg, New Delhi - 110001	

PARTICIPANTS LIST

Sl. No	NAME AND DESIGNATION (IF ANY)	ORGANISATION NAME, POSTAL ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER (IF ANY)	SIGNATURE
58.	Sh. Bittu Sahgal	Indian People's Tribunal on Environment & Human Rights C/o 602, Maker Chamber-V Nariman Point Bombay - 400021 Tel: 283061/81 Fax: 2874380	
59.	Mohd. Hasan	C.F. Rajaji National Park Dehradun	
60.	Sh. H.Rama Chandran	IBSNAA, Mussoorie.	
61.	Sh. P.Rahi	Himachal Times, Dehradun	
62.	Dr. D.N. Tiwary Director General	F.R.I. Dehradun	
63.	Sh. Koshy Cherail	CSE, F-6 Kailash Colony New Delhi - 48	
64.	Smt. Neena Singh Research Associate	LBS Academy, Mussoorie.	
65.	Sh. Rajesh Tandon	Participatory Research in Asia 42, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi. Phone: 6451908, 6439559 Telex: 3171477 , ARPIN-IN, Fax: 91-11-6171183	
66.	Sh. Chandan Dutta	- do -	
67.	Dr. Nalini Ranjan Jena	- do -	
68.	Sh. Avdhash Kaushal	Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra 21, E.C. Road, Dehradun.	
69.	Ms. Ruchi Kukreti	- do -	
70.	Sh. Praveen Kaushal	- do -	
71.	Sh. C.B. Pant	- do -	