

Lessons from Management of Forest Resources in Maharashtra

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Many states in the country have initiated various measures to protect their forest resources. Maharashtra is no exception to this phenomenon. An attempt, therefore, has been made in this paper to examine the extent to which this state is successful in conserving and managing its forest resources. The main foci of attention of this study are on evaluating various forest related indicators of Maharashtra such as distribution of forest area, outturn of major and minor forest produce, income and expenditure pattern on state forestry, extent of social forestry, and afforestation, etc. The study revealed very interesting observations. One of the major observations of this study was the sharp decline in revenue receipts from state forestry, especially after the late eighties period. Very slow growth in total value of forest produce harvested and a sharp increase in total expenditure on state forestry were found to be the major causative factors responsible for this decline in revenue receipts. Although the Government has banned felling of trees in many parts of the state, it has also adversely affected not only the harvesting of forest produce and thereby revenue receipts from state forestry but also the working of Forest Labourer's Co-operative Society (FLCS) in the state. The study provides certain policy suggestions that will not only help the state to increase its revenue receipts from state forestry but also in respect of achieving its goal of maintaining ecological balance in the state.

Introduction

Forests occupy a pre-eminent position in our country's economy since they not only influence the agricultural and industrial development but also help in soil and water conservation. In broader terms, Indian forests as elsewhere provide two major functions, one for protective purposes and other for production of products and services. Infact, it was during the second and third five-year plans when due to frequent natural hazards like floods and draughts, our agricultural surplus fell short of the target that the importance of forests management and land use in the country's economy was realized (Chowdhury and Basu, 1967). Thereafter, in every successive five-year plans a considerable emphasis was placed on their consolidation, improvement of degraded forests, establishment of economic plantation of fast growing trees and improvement of communication. The schemes undertaken by the Government during these plans mainly related to forest conservation and protection, forest research, forest education and preservation of wild life. Modern systems of intensive forest management were also adopted. However, the mounting burden of growing population had not only led to widespread shift of forest land for agricultural cultivation but also over exploitation of forest resources (Das, 1983;

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