

Tribal and Forests

NIWCYD started its journey in the late 80's by initiating the work amongst the tribal communities in Amarapur block of Dindori (erstwhile Mandla) district. In the initial stages of the work, the focus of the organisation was on mobilising the youth and women in the area, creating the awareness among them about the issues they were facing and liquor prohibition. In early 90's, NIWCYD team explored the "Baiga Chak" area in the same district. The Baigas have the unique identity in terms of their way of living. The Baiga men keep the long hairs and would be wearing only the "Langoti" a piece of cloth around their waist. The Baiga Woman would wrap a sari around herself. The entire body of Baiga woman have the tattoos all over.

When NIWCYD started the work in Baiga Chak area during the period 1993-95, there were a



series of natural calamities. Like hailstorm in the year 1994, followed by a severe drought in the year 1995. Coupled with that the entire forests of Baiga Chaka area were affected by the Borer attack. People hardly had anything to eat. The Baiga families used to do the "Begar" with the forest department. Begar is a system where the Baiga families were forced to work for 7-8 days against which they were being paid the wages for 1-2 days.

There was an abject poverty and malnutrition among the children and women. The land they possess were undulating, sloppy and unproductive. The agricultural production was sufficient for only 3-4 months and for remaining 8-9 months, the people were dependant on forest produce collection and on the forest department along with the money lenders from the area for their survival. In such a scenario, NIWCYD started the Food for work program for the Baiga and the other tribal groups in Amarapur and Baiga Chak area. Later on a systematic planned program for the Natural Resource Management was started in 14 villages of Amarapur and Baiga Chak area with support from Oxfam (India) Trust. While implementing the program, study conducted by NIWCYD revealed that nearly 70% of the livelihood needs of the tribals are fulfilled from the forest resources like minor forest produce, the forest vegetables, fruits and nuts etc.

After the initial phase of 3-4 years, when the rapport with the people got established, and the immediate need of food availability started being addressed, the people started thinking of forest as the source of livelihood for them. The incidences of rampant cutting of the trees by forest department under the pre-text of the saal borer attack forced the people of Baiga Chak area to



ponder of the issue of forest conservation and protection. This was the time when NIWCYD started organising the people on the issue of forest protection and conservation. The process of documentation of the temporary land titles started and was linked with the soil and water conservation program of the organisation. Later on when the Forest Rights Act was enacted the records of the soil water conservation work became the evidence for the Individual Forest Rights that have been allotted to the Baigas and other forest dwelling community in the area.



Some external experts in the area of forest conservation also helped the local community in realising the importance of protection and conservation of forest resources. In the year 2004-05, the process of formation of “Jangal Adhyayan Mandals” (Forestry Study Groups) was also initiated in the area. These Mandals included the knowledgeable people from the villages along with the youths interested on the issues of forest.

In the year 2006, Government of India enacted an important act “The Forest Rights Act” In the year 2008, the rules for the implementation of FRA were framed by Madhya Pradesh Govt. In the same year, NIWCYD undertook a barefoot yatra in all the 52 villages of Baiga Chak area to create awareness among the people about the provisions of FRA. The processes of filing of claims for the Individual Forest Rights as well as Community Forests Rights. The Baiga and the other tribal families from the few villages also framed the rules and regulations for the conservation and management of CFR areas. A woman from village Pondi, Ujjiyarobai took the initiative and organised the people from her and adjoining villages to protect the forest. The Group has protected 15000 Ha. of CFR area with the collective involvement of the community. Later on in the year 2015, Ujjiyarobai was invited at the **World Tribal Forum meeting organised at Johannesburg in South Africa** to share her experiences on Forest Protection and Conservation. She was felicitated by Dindori District administration for putting Dindori on world canvas for forest protection, conservation and management. For these efforts, the Forestry Study Group led by Ujjiyarobai has got the Equator prize recognition by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the year 2017, for the protection and conservation of forest resources.



There are some issues in the conservation and management of forest areas. These issues are:

Individual Forest Rights

1. People have been tilting the lands from generations. They have not received the individual land titles for the land area they have been using. Many of the land sizes have been cancelled on the title maps.
2. For the individual land entitlements, the Tribal Development Department was entrusted to do the job of measurement of the land by using PDA machines. But this has not been done.
3. In some cases people have received less than one Hectares of land under Individual Forest Rights.
4. Many families which had submitted the claim for the individual forest rights have not received the land titles.
5. In many cases the area/compartments number mentioned in the IFR title differs from what it is in reality.

Issues in the Community Forest Rights:

1. The CFR titles issued in the Baiga Chak area has mentioned the condition of the Forest Act of 1927 which curtails the rights of the people over the forest.
2. Only usufruct rights are given in the CFR titles whereas FRA clearly talks of the Management rights of the community forest.
3. In many titles the area of the forest allotted to the community is not mentioned, while in some cases it is as small as 1.5 Hectares. How can a community residing in the forest for the generations have the rights on only 1.5 Ha. Of forest.
4. In many villages in Baiga Chak area, the Community Forest Rights titles have been given in the name of "Forest Protection Committee" instead of GRAMSABHA as envisaged in FRA.
5. Only the photocopies of the CFR titles have been given to the village community and that too after 3-4 years. In majority of the cases the CFR titles have been signed by the District level authorities in 2009 but have been given in the year 2013 and 2014.
6. In case of CFR areas being allotted there is a need to develop the systematic Conservation and Management Plans of CFR area, with the participatory approach involving the community, the government departments and the other stakeholders.

NIWCYD has taken forward these issues with the involvement of the local community. As a result of continuous efforts in the areas of participatory forest conservation and management, District Collector Dindori has formally invited NIWCYD for the technical assistance in facilitating the process of proper implementation of Individual Forest Rights and Community Forest Rights in 20 villages of Baiga Chak area of the district. NIWCYD has completed the process of submission of IFR and CFR claims to the district level committee with the coordination of the line departments and the approval of the IFR and CFR is in process. Organisation will take up the same process in the remaining villages of Baiga Chak area.