

Learning From and Carrying Forward CFR Management Planning in Central India

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How does Community Forest Resource (CFR) management work on the ground? What can we learn from the decade-long history of such management by villages in Maharashtra to build capacities elsewhere? Our [CFR-Central India team](#)'s research, observations and interactions with communities and CSOs in Maharashtra has helped us gain an understanding which we are now deploying in training programmes on CFR management planning in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, where CFR titles are just now being given.

Study tour to Pachgaon (Amravati district, Maharashtra), a CFR success story

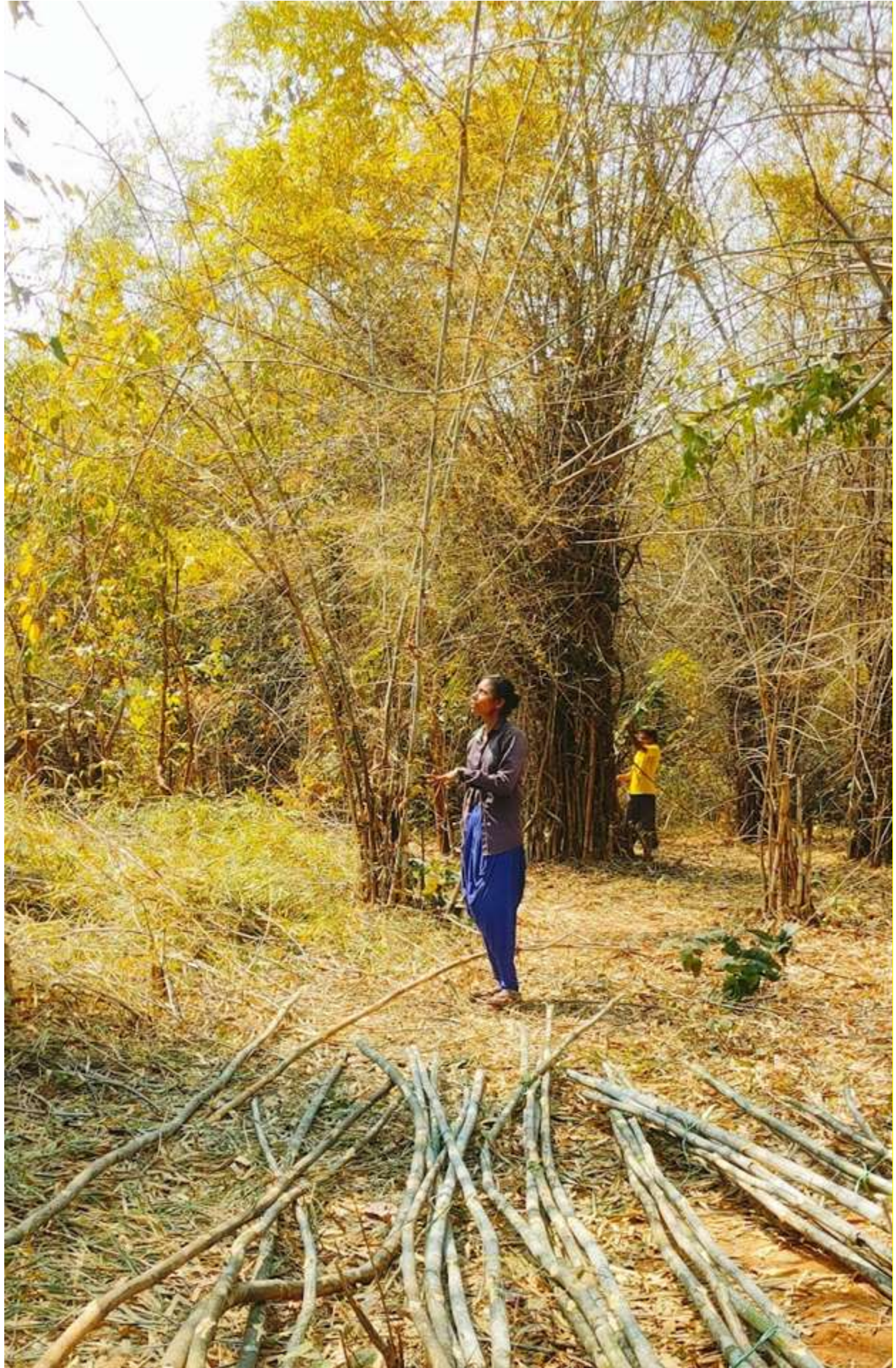
Our team of 18 FRA Coordinators (a team mainly composed of Adivasi youth, including women) has been working over the past 5 months in Bastar district to initiate the CFR rights claim-making process in many villages. The next step was to train them in how to create good CFR management plans. Perhaps the best way to learn is to see a success story yourself. In this spirit, we organised an exposure visit to Pachgaon village, in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra between March 5th-6th, 2022. Sharachchandra Lele (Project Lead) coordinated the visit along with Anubhav Shori (District Coordinator) and Tulsi Thakur (honorary Master Trainer). Post-docs Atul Joshi and Shruti Mokashi joined us there from their field sites in Yavatmal.

Pachgaon Gram Sabha (village general body) received CFR rights for 1,006 hectares of forest land in June 2012. Since then, the village has engaged in a highly democratic process of forest protection and bamboo harvesting and sale for livelihood enhancement. Our study tour included an evening meeting with the [Pachgaon Gram Sabha](#) and a half-day excursion into their forest to observe their practices of bamboo harvesting and conservation (including their sacred grove), followed by a detailed discussion and record perusal with volunteers Sanjeev and Vikas.



ATREE Team at Pachgaon village

Villagers working in the forest explained their method of harvest which is guided by a set of rules that ensure bamboo quality (only 3 year old bamboo) and sustainability (only 1/4th of the area is harvested and a minimum number of mature bamboos are left unharvested in each culm), as well as equitable sharing of the livelihood opportunity (by limiting how much each person may harvest per day). The entire process of harvest, auction, transport, and sale of bamboo and all associated record-keeping and accounting is handled entirely by the villagers, which has resulted in increased incomes and empowerment. Dispersed authority and transparency ensures accountability to the Gram Sabha.



*Woman harvester in Pachgaon sorting bamboo by quality
(Photo Credits: Yugal Joshi)*



ATREE Team discussing management planning experiences with representatives from Pachgaon

CFR Management training in Bastar

The learnings from the Pachgaon visit were leveraged to conduct a workshop on CFR management planning for our team of FRA coordinators in Bastar during 8th and 10th March. The workshop was conducted by Sharachchandra Lele, Shruti Mokashi and Atul Joshi and drew on a management planning template jointly prepared by ATREE and TISS that was notified by the Government of Maharashtra in 2017. The FRA coordinators were taken through the objectives of management planning, the process of structuring a plan, and methods for conducting social and ecological baseline surveys. The template that was used breaks down the task of management planning into six basic stages; outlining the current status of the CFR area, needs from the CFR, threats to the CFR, a plan that addresses the threats, the support that is needed from the state, and a timeline for the plan. These six prompts can be used to help a village develop a simple understandable and practical plan in the form of their main concerns

and challenges, and solutions for tackling them. Trainees were divided into groups to work on villages familiar to them and to use the template to draft very preliminary plans.



FRA Coordinator Annu Thakur presenting a draft CFR management plan along with team members Puran Singh Kashyap, Kamlesh Kashyap, and Yugal Joshi

The classroom training on 8th March was followed by a hands-on experience in village Nagalsar in Jagdalpur block of Bastar district on 10th March. Nagalsar has recently submitted its claim for CFR rights and wanted to move ahead with preparation of a CFR management plan. ATREE's team led by Anubhav Shori, Puran Kashyap and Somaru Baghel handled the logistics of getting more than 60 villagers together and dividing them into focus groups (women, FRC members, younger members, male elders, etc.) to discuss the questions raised in our template. Each group also traversed different parts of the CFR landscape to build some common understanding of the condition of the forest and threats being encountered. The process of helping Nagalsar come up with a full-fledged plan will continue with the ATREE team of Shruti Mokashi, Atul Joshi Yugal Joshi, Naresh Kumar Sahu, Puran Kashyap and Phulsingh Nag working with the core team from Nagalsar over the next few months. [Look out for more news on this front soon.]



Puran Kashyap explaining the purpose of CFR management planning to a group of villagers in Nagalsar village

Initiating CFR Management planning in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh

The success of our ongoing work in Bastar district resulted in a pressing invitation from grassroots activists in neighbouring Dantewada district requesting us for training in CFR management planning. On 12th March 2022, our team (Sharad, Shruti, Atul, Venkat and Anubhav) travelled to Bacheli township in Dantewada, where the local network (Sarva Adivasi Samaj) had gathered more than 60 volunteers from more than 15 villages for this training. Breakout groups again tried to think through the prompts in our template in the context of their own villages. It was interesting to see the youth and the elderly come together and resolve to carry out CFR management planning in order to improve the self-reliance and economic independence of the village. Many anecdotes were exchanged on how village residents used to protect the forests from smugglers and how traditional knowledge can be leveraged to protect the forests. We are happy to hear from SAS friends that implementation of the learnings from this workshop has [already begun in some villages](#).



*[Shruti Mokashi](#) explaining the key to successful CFR management using the Pachgaon story video to trainees in Dantewada district
(Photo Credits: Sharachchandra Lele)*

Revitalising CFR management in the Forest Villages of Baiga Chak, Madhya Pradesh

The Forest Villages of Baiga Chak in Dindori district of eastern Madhya Pradesh present sharp contrast to the forests of Bastar. Created by the colonial Forest Department itself to ensure labour for forestry operations in exchange for some agricultural land leases, the villagers still languish in the same condition even 75 years after independence, lacking secure cultivation rights and completely controlled by the forest administration. Although, thanks to their mobilisation and the support of NWYCID, a local rural development organisation, they received CFR rights (of sorts) back in 2010, they have been unable to exercise any of these rights thus far.

Last year, ATREE's central India team member Venkat Ramanujam (whose doctoral work in Baiga Chak provided the foundation) initiated discussions with villagers on whether and how they want to take up CFR management. In the face of enthusiasm shown by the villagers, we approached the Collector Dindori, who extended his full support for conducting a CFR Management Planning workshop. This was held in Chada Forest Village's community hall on 24th and 25th of March, with the help of Venkat, NYWCID's Balwant Rahangdale and ATREE's FRA coordinators (Sunaram, Sukkalsingh, Pitambar). These 5 villages were specifically chosen for the workshop as they have been making an active effort (for more than two decades!) to conserve their forest areas. After being introduced to the CFR management planning template, the 5 village teams worked to draft management plans for each of their villages. Some groups even worked late into the night and woke early in the morning to finish or improve their plans!



*Shruti Mokashi helping villagers from Serajhar to prepare a draft management plan
(Photo Credits: Venkat Ramanujam)*

The following day, the representatives presented their draft management plans to district officials who attended the workshops, including the SDM Dindori, SDO Gadasarai, and representatives from the health and education departments. The presentations were followed by discussions with the officials on various issues pertaining to CFRR and IFR titles. The success of the workshops resulted in the District Collector of Dindori agreeing to initiate CFRR management planning pilots in the 5 villages that participated in the workshop.



*Village volunteers presenting their draft management plans to government officials in the Chada workshop, Dindori district
(Photo Credits: Venkat Ramanujam)*

While sharing our understanding based on observations and analysis of CFR management planning and progress in Maharashtra, we continue to learn more. First, that the ecological conditions significantly shape what is possible: Pachgaon has a large bamboo rich forest, while villages in Bastar have a limited bamboo resource and those in Baiga Chak have a forest heavily degraded by lantana invasion. Second, that communities will have to learn the ways and means of collective marketing and sale of non-timber forest products in the face of trader power, forest department vested interest and internal heterogeneity and lack of experience. They will sometimes fail and will have to be given the space to do so by a state providing a safety net and support, but not repeating the paternalistic approaches of the past. Third, people across all three states see the forest department's timber-oriented 'coupe felling' is the biggest threat to a more people-friendly, NTFP-oriented and conservation-oriented forestry, both because the objectives of this 'scientific forestry' themselves are different from what people want and also because in practice, coupe felling results in the opening up of the forest canopy and the consequent invasion of lantana and other species that actually disrupt the ecology of the forest. Getting the foresters to change their mindsets and policies on coupe felling is going to be a major challenge.

The silver lining is that many villagers are both aware of these issues and interested in taking active measures to improve forest based livelihoods while conserving forest resources. Villagers are especially motivated to take up CFR management planning as a means to reducing if not stopping distress migration. Pachgaon inspires hope that improved livelihood prospects in the village will provide an incentive to stay for those who are forced to leave the village just to earn

a living. Pachgaon also shows that villagers can sacrifice economic returns in the interest of conservation by setting aside *devrais* or sacred areas. The interest and motivation that exists at the village level encourages us to continue and expand this process of cross-learning.

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