

Social Forestry: Empowering People and Nurturing the Environment

Dhengle A.S.¹, Lade A.H.², Pidurkar P.K.³ and Guha S.⁴

¹Assistant Professor, Agricultural Extension Education, MWCA, Yavatmal (M.S.)

²Assistant Professor, Agricultural Extension Education, G H Rasoni University, Saikheda (M.P.)

³Assistant Professor, Soil Science and Agricultural Chemistry, MWCA, Yavatmal (M.S.)

⁴Ph.D. Research Scholar, Agricultural Extension, BCKV, Mohanpur, (W.B.)

SUMMARY

Social forestry is an integrated approach that combines forest management with rural development, addressing socio-economic and ecological challenges while ensuring the well-being of both communities and the environment. The main objectives include providing essential resources like timber, firewood, and fodder to rural households, preserving biodiversity, and promoting ecological balance. Through diverse initiatives and programs, social forestry encourages tree planting on barren lands, wastelands, and urban areas, fostering environmental conservation and creating green spaces. One of its significant benefits is its role in carbon sequestration, mitigating global warming by absorbing carbon dioxide. Additionally, it contributes to soil conservation, enhancing water-holding capacity, and positively impacting agricultural productivity. Social forestry projects aim to generate employment opportunities, reduce dependence on conventional forest resources, and empower local communities through their involvement in decision-making. Challenges related to gender inclusivity and prioritizing basic needs over income generation require careful planning and collaboration with stakeholders for successful implementation. Embracing social forestry principles collectively will foster a greener and more resilient future, striking a harmonious balance between economic growth and environmental preservation.

INTRODUCTION

Social forestry encompasses various activities related to forest products, rural environments, and subsistence agricultural communities. It often involves external assistance to support these communities and their surroundings. In the last decade, the perception of social forestry as a technology to improve welfare has shifted from optimism to caution and skepticism. However, recent analytical literature provides evidence supporting the positive view, but only in specific conditions. These stimuluses us to examine the evidence, identify successful applications, understand the limits of social forestry, and address important unanswered questions. Our main focus is to assess how social forestry contributes to human welfare rather than just considering forest cover, protection, and afforestation as ends in themselves.



The term "social forestry" was coined by J.C. Westoby, and the National Commission on Agriculture (NCA, 1976) recognized it as a vital part of forestry to meet rural needs. Social forestry involves managing forests

for the benefit of local communities and includes activities like forest management, protection, and afforestation to enhance rural, environmental, and social well-being (Hyde *et al.* 2000). It entails managing and protecting forests, planting trees on barren lands, and practicing forestry outside conventional forest areas to promote environmental, social, and rural development.

FAO (1978) identifies key attributes of social forestry:

- Providing fuel and essential goods to rural households.
- Ensuring food security and environmental stability.
- Creating employment and income opportunities for the community.

Social forestry is now seen as an alternative to traditional forestry management, as it offers communities a means to obtain firewood, fodder, and small timber resources, reducing pressure on natural forests. India's 1988 Forest Policy also emphasized prioritizing the needs of rural people over commercial requirements, particularly for tribal communities.

The main objectives of the social forestry program, as conceived by the Indian government, are:

- Ensuring sufficient availability of timber wood, firewood, and fodder for household use.
- Encouraging farmers, panchayats, and other organizations to utilize marginal and degraded land.
- Planting tree crops to maintain ecological and environmental balance and purity.
- Generating productive employment opportunities and building infrastructure.
- Establishing agro-based industries, particularly for the benefit of rural areas.

To fully understand these objectives, it is crucial to examine the socio-economic aspects of social forestry because this program aims not only at forest and environmental regeneration.

Scheme:

The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change promotes tree planting across the country, including major cities, through various programs and initiatives like Nagar Van Yojana, School Nursery Yojana, Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), National Afforestation Programme (NAP), National Mission for a Green India (GIM), etc. These initiatives encourage urban forestry, tree planting on unused lands, and bunds on agricultural lands with the active involvement of local communities, NGOs, educational institutions, and local bodies.

Benefits of Social Forestry:

- **Increased Biodiversity:** Planting trees in barren lands within the community helps increase forest coverage, supporting a diverse range of animals, plants, birds, insects, and more. Trees become a source of food and shelter for these living beings.
- **Carbon Removal:** Trees act as carbon sinks, helping combat global warming by removing carbon from the environment. They are a powerful way to reduce carbon dioxide levels in urban areas.
- **Conservation of Energy:** Trees provide a cooling effect in the areas they are planted, reducing the need for air conditioners and lowering energy consumption. Less energy demand means fewer fossil fuel-based power plants.
- **Diminution Global Warming:** Areas with tree cover are significantly cooler, which reduces energy consumption.
- **Soil Conservation:** Tree roots prevent soil erosion by holding the soil in place, and their decaying leaves enrich the soil and reduce erosion. Trees also increase the soil's water-holding capacity.
- **Health Benefits:** Trees and nature act as natural remedies for stress and anxiety, offering various health benefits.
- **Noise Pollution:** Social forestry in urban areas helps mitigate noise pollution by reflecting and absorbing sound energy.

Social forestry, agriculture, and rural development are interconnected aspects of rural progress. The intersection of social forestry and agriculture results in practices like agroforestry or arboriculture, which involve both forestry and agricultural components. In tropical Asian countries, about 70 percent of rural communities are farmers. Thus, agricultural development is closely linked to rural development. However, rural development encompasses broader goals such as socio-economic growth, stability, and equity. Agriculture, being the main resource practice, is a means to attain these goals, but not the only focus.

In this part of the world, agriculture is important for the livelihoods of most rural villagers, but many, including marginal and landless farmers, rest on on forests for essential needs like food, fuelwood, and fodder. Therefore, rural development must include social forestry as a necessary component. Social forestry can be seen as a subsystem of rural development, serving to meet the diverse needs of rural communities and contributing to their overall well-being.

Social Benefits:

Social forestry contributes to the creation of recreation parks, providing people with an opportunity to destress from their busy lives.

Current steps and challenges

The Indian Lok Sabha has recently passed the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill-2023. This amendment exempts land near the country's border from conservation laws, allowing for the development of zoos, safaris, and eco-tourism facilities in forest areas. The Act also exempts forest land along rail lines and public roads, as well as land for strategic linear projects and defense-related projects, from conservation provisions. However, some social forestry projects have faced challenges. They did not involve women, who were supposed to be the main beneficiaries. The focus was on market-oriented trees, leading communities and farmers to view it as a cash-generating exercise rather than addressing basic needs. The wood was mostly used for urban and industrial purposes instead of meeting the fuel and fodder needs of rural communities. As a result, land employment decreased, and absentee landlordism increased.

CONCLUSION:

Social forestry has emerged as an integrated approach with proven research-backed benefits for addressing environmental, social, and economic challenges. It indicates its role in sustainable forest management, ensuring the availability of essential resources for rural communities, and preserving biodiversity. As a carbon sink, social forestry contributes to global climate change mitigation efforts, while its positive impact on soil conservation, water management, and agricultural productivity enhances the well-being of both rural and urban populations.

Moreover, the article highlights the significance of community participation, gender inclusivity, and precise planning to achieve successful implementation and desired results. Social forestry projects, with their focus on green spaces, environmental conservation, and income generation, play a key role in nurturing holistic rural development. Social forestry remains a promising tool for sustainable development, improving livelihoods, and creating a greener and robust future for communities worldwide.

REFERENCES: -

- Baynes J, Herbohn J, Smith C, Fisher R, Bray D (2015) Key factors which influence the success of community forestry in developing countries. *Glob Environ Chang* 35:226–238
- Dogra. Bindu (2018) Social forestry in India; its socio-economic dimension and impacts. *Gyankosh: An Interdisciplinary Journal: ISSN: 2581-8252: Volume I, December 2018: (p 60-61)*
- <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/topic/Social-forestry>
- <https://www.clearias.com/social-forestry/>
- <https://www.insightsonindia.com/environment/environment-degradation-and-issues/forest-ecosystem/governmental-institutions-for-forest-conservation/social-forestry/>
- Hyde WF, Kohlin G, Amacher GS (2000) Social forestry reconsidered. *Silva Fenn* 34:285–314