



A Critical Analysis of the Impact of Regional Developmental Activities on Local Forestry

Sakshi Mishra

Under the Supervision of **Prof. Pradeep Kumar Singh**

Department of Geography, M.M. P.G. College, Kaalakaankar, Pratapgarh, Uttar Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

Millions of people worldwide depend on forests for their livelihoods and survival, yet forest degradation remains one of the most pressing environmental challenges in rural regions, particularly in rural regions of underdeveloped countries. The relationship between forest degradation and rural development presents a fundamental paradox: economic development in rural areas often drives deforestation and ecosystem loss, while conservation efforts may perpetuate more rural poverty and concern to food security and environmental impacts. This paper examines the complex interactions between forest degradation and rural development, analyzing the mechanisms driving land-use change, the trade-offs between economic growth and environmental sustainability, and pathways toward integrated sustainable and climate resilient green development.

Introduction

Forests are invaluable to our planet, communities, and economies. Forests, which cover approximately 31% of the world's land surface. Forest is the second highest natural carbon sink on Earth, absorbing 2.4 billion metric tons of carbon annually. It plays a vital role in climatic crises by drawing down greenhouse gasses, water cycle, act as green muffler for sound pollution and support biodiversity as well as have vast reservoir

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of recourses such as fuel, fruits, medicinal herbs, structural building materials but today humans degrading forests for their developmental purposes such as Road construction, Dams, industries and powerplants (Thermal, Hydro, Nuclear and Wind) development. While industrial and infrastructure development is also viewed as necessary component for economic growth, but they all come at the cost of environment such as poor air quality, water logging, soil degradation, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and reduce productivity of recourses and lots of other problems.

Rural Forest definition

Rural forests are characterized by different level of formal and nonformal appropriation by rural communities who generally managed, shaped, or rebuilt these forest formations over many generations with refined local knowledge and practices related to their use and perpetuation. Rural forests are therefore social-ecological systems that contribute to ecosystem and landscapes configuration, definition of rural territories, and sustainability of local livelihoods.

Global Policy Definition:

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines a forest as land spanning more than 0.5 hectares with trees higher than 5 meters and a canopy cover of more than 10 percent. This strictly excludes land predominantly under agricultural or urban use.

Ecological Definition:

Ecologists define a forest as a dynamic, complex ecosystem where trees are the dominant life-form. These ecosystems exhibit deep vertical stratification (canopy, understory, and forest floor) and support diverse plant, animal, and microorganism communities.

Forest degradation; reasons and impacts on rural regions

Global and regional pattern India is ranked 9th globally in terms of total forest area and nationally, forest cover is 21.76% of the geographical area, making up **7,15,343 sq km** as per the India State of Forest Report.

From 2002 to 2025, India lost 370 kha of humid primary forest, making up 15% of its total tree cover loss in the same time period. The total area of humid primary forest in India decreased by 6.0% in this time period. The causes are multifaceted of degrading forests like commercial farming, slash and burn agriculture development purposes as we create Roads, Dams industries as well as urbanization and population explosion . Industrial and infrastructure development is also viewed as necessary component for economic



growth, but they come at the cost of environment such as poor air quality, water crises, soil degradation, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and reduce productivity of resources. resource scarcity increasing production pressure.

Agriculture expansion and forest degradation:

In current world agriculture expansion seen as prominent cause of forest degradation especially in rural regions. The world is facing double challenge producing food and shrinking priceless forest. Increasing population demands more food production and more land to live on. Needs of Housing, roads, and infrastructural development forces to agriculture expansion and taking over valuable forests.

According to National Green Tribunal (NGT) and MOEFCC data 13,056 sq. km. of forest land is currently under illegal encroachment.

Shifting cultivation is also cause forest loss according to available literature review that roughly 900,000 hectares of land is currently tied up in active rotation cycles of shifting agriculture.

Biodiversity Loss and Ecosystem Fragmentation

Forest degradation directly threatens biodiversity at tropical latitudes like India, where species richness, and habitat diversity is good. Habitat loss and fragmentation from agriculture drives much of crisis the species extinction and biodiversity loss, with large-scale conversion to crops. Agricultural expansion modifies land by reducing habitats and ecosystem connectivity, which impairs the provision of critical ecosystem services including pollination, pest control, and soil retention (Jiang et al., 2025).

The demographic impacts of forest degradation on wildlife populations indicate vulnerability beyond simple measures of richness. Research across regions forest vertebrates reveals that land-use change affects survival, reproduction, and movement rates in species-specific ways, with considerable variation in demographic responses that may not be immediately reflected in abundance or richness metrics (Cosset et al., 2018).

Soil and Hydrological Consequences

Forest-to-agriculture conversion triggers soil pollution by soil erosion, salinisation, and changes in nutrient richness and hydrological functioning. When forests were converted to agricultural land, soil microbial biomass decreased approximately in short-term agricultural sites compared to forest soils, accompanied by



reduced productivity of soil. These functional changes indicate that soil ecosystem services—nutrient cycling, water retention, and carbon storage—are substantially diminished forest conversion.

Hydrological processes are similarly disrupted. Tropical regions experiencing forest loss to agriculture show altered water balance components: studies document increased streamflow and surface flow, reduced evapotranspiration and groundwater recharge (Kayitesi et al., 2022). The meta-analysis of tropical case studies reveals that 68% experienced forest loss to agriculture and urban expansion, resulting in modified river hydro-morphology through altered sediment transport and riverbank erosion.

3.3 Carbon Dynamics and Climate Feedback

Climatically and hydrologically, these forests stabilize regional microclimates and drive monsoonal cycle and ensure ground water recharge as well as economically India is rich in forest diversity, that provide various kinds of timber and non-timber forest products including medicinal plants, resins, and bamboo. As we know India's geographic and climatic diversity supports major kind of forests categories classified under the Champion and Seth system: Tropical Deciduous, Tropical evergreen, Montane, Mangrove, and Thorn forests. Carbon emissions from tropical forest degradation are primarily driven by socioeconomic factors rather than biophysical characteristics (Corona-Núñez et al., 2021). Rapid industrialization, infrastructure expansion, and large-scale mining, agriculture expansion are major force of degradation this forest. Additionally Devastating Forest fires and illegal logging of high value timber also worsened the vulnerability.

Government policies and rural development:

Indian government's policies support rural development, but still, it requires lots of efforts for their equitable implementations as well as we need sustainable and balanced development policies which can balance multiple objectives food security, environment sustainability and social equality (Jiang et al., 2025). Land use planning, strong monitoring policies at deferent administrative level, equal benefit sharing, incentivising and joining local people indecision making will be helpful in rural sustainable and balanced development.

Impacts of forest degradation in rural regions:

Forest degradation is rural regions has multiple negative impacts it can be social, economic, environmental. Global warming rising sea level, glacier's melting forest fires and altering climate every day are biggest global problem. At local level we can see lots of problems like air pollution, water pollution, sound pollution, flood, desertification, soil degradation, change in local climatic, and biodiversity loss.



It also has major physical and mental concern and Problem is not for same to everyone, rural people especially poor people suffer more because they don't have enough knowledge and capital to spend. Spreading disease cause mass extinction of Tribble people because they used to depend on nature for their food fodder and medicine, they worship the nature as Vandevi and because of shrinking forests are also aggravating the situation.

While industrial and infrastructure development is also viewed as necessary components for economic growth, they come at the cost of environment, like reducing soil productivity, reducing productivity of resources, impacting earth's biogeochemical cycle and which does not have any alternative at present.

- Pathways to Sustainable Rural Development
- Shift to sustainable with green development
- Enhancing agriculture productivity scientifically

World is looking for sustainable development, but this is the time looking forward and go with green development which is best way at present to cater this problem by optimizing resource uses and minimizing environmental impacts. Farmers should be told how to use fertilizer by the knowledge of soil type, irrigation system with soil monitoring, other modern technologies like seed quality monitoring. Conservation tillage with minimum soil disturbance and crop residue retention increases soil organic matter, while integrated pest management employing biological control, crop rotation, and monitoring reduces pesticide application by 20% while maintaining pest suppression (Jiang et al., 2025). Although Indian government giving the Soil health card to our farmers but lots of people don't know about these policies and those who know don't know the uses and application. India holds the world's largest overall livestock population, still India imports fertilizer, because lack of knowledge and pressure on food security missing while have opportunity to shift from chemical farming to organic farming by using composted fertilizers and can use better land use take maximum production on that piece of land, which is safe for forest as well as human health.

Reconcile the Limitation of current conservation policies:

Climate change and accelerating global demand for food, fuel, fiber, and feed present seemingly contradictory challenges. REDD+ policies targeting reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation could become synergistically integrated with agricultural sustainability initiatives through shared approaches for measuring and favoring high environmental and social performance across entire jurisdictions, coupled with stronger links to domestic policies and finance (Nepstad et al., 2013). Despite



investments in forest conservation, poverty alleviation through forest-dependent livelihoods remains limited. Payment for ecosystem services (PES) and Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) programs, while theoretically sound, have demonstrated limited effectiveness in achieving both forest conservation and poverty alleviation (Nambiar, 2019). The core challenge is that forest conservation is not linked with economic opportunities, and don't uplift the rural income. Local people are not involving benefit sharing and decision making does not motivate people to conservation their forest region from agriculture expansion and urbanisation.

Redevelopment of rural forest:

Global or macro level planning and policies will work unless work is done at the local level. Reviving old local rural forest also can enhance the productivity and income of their region by value added timber and non-timber forest products. Just before today all Indian villages had own forest and a pond within in, which regulate their local climate by cleaning local air, water harvest and recharge ground water table, conserve soil, and supporting local biodiversity and also support local economy by local forest produce like wood, fruits, litter and medicines. Which is nowadays known as small-scale forestry. Today every village cutting forest for agriculture expansion and housing some of that land is bare. Small-scale forestry enterprises and local value addition could catalyse rural development and entrepreneurship while sequestering carbon and substituting for emission-intensive materials (Nambiar, 2019). Investing in reviving rural forest and spread awareness about these forests will support not only rural income but also increase Indian forest cover.

Participatory Land-use Planning and Monitoring:

Engaging stakeholders—farmers, communities, government agencies, and civil society—in participatory land-use planning fosters social learning, trust building, and conflict resolution while enhancing the legitimacy and effectiveness of land-use decisions (Jiang et al., 2025). Continuous monitoring and evaluation system with modern technologies can enhance the land productivity and save local ecosystem.

Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems provides evidence bases for adaptive land management through developing indicators, models, and tools for assessing trade-offs and synergies between production and ecosystem services.

Spatial Differentiation of Land Use Intensity:

Implementation of sustainable rural development requires spatial differentiation reflecting different objectives: core agricultural zones (30% of area) focusing on sustainable intensification; ecological



protection zones (40% of area) prioritizing restoration; and mixed-function zones (30% of area) balancing production and conservation (Jiang et al., 2025). This approach support of land resource utilization, protect local ecosystem and maintain habitat diversity and enhance ecosystem productivity.

Human wildlife conflict is concern to human health and crop productivity:

The nexus between forest degradation, land-use change, and human health extends beyond ecosystem services. Deforestation and forest fragmentation increase direct human-wildlife contact, livestock-wildlife interface, and exposure to disease-carrying vectors, elevating risks of pathogen spillover from animals to humans (Rulli et al., 2025). Changing land use destroys natural habitat and force to migrate that harm the human health. Lots of zoonotic diseases are spreading with contact of livestock-wildlife contact than livestock-human. They also destroy cultivated crops by grazing and crushing the crops underfoot, which reduce the productivity and force to rural people migrate to urban region further increasing the problem of urbanization. Reforestation will give them habitat and give the solution of all the problem linked with this.

Employment to unemployed uneducated rural people:

India is facing high unemployment problem. Most of Indian rural population is uneducated and could not get any job which make them stuck in viscus cycle of poverty and making them more and more poor, but they are rich in traditional knowledge in their area. They respect their nature as it provides them fuel, food, and fodder, but because of development they lost their habitat creates problem to their survival. By using their rich traditional knowledge of their goddess nature and give them job opportunities that suits their role as like plantation according to their local climate, landscape. Giving them job of the revival of their local forest, plantation on side of national and state highways, waterlogged and uninhabitable area, continuous monitoring of plants health and nutrition as well as guarding jobs so that other people and animal don't harm the plant and trees, and lots of job roles will be created like gathering food and other resources. It will not only uplift their life but also will be solution of 3 consecutive problem unemployment, rural poverty and deforestation. It also saves government fund to spending in educating people of that particular area.

Research Gaps and Future Directions:

Despite increasing research on forest degradation and rural development linkages, significant knowledge gaps persist. Most of the Research are focusing more on macro level planning and not giving the much importance to local level forests. Studies are focusing more on economic perspective and sideline the importance of local forests those who gave attention they also could not suggest any sustainable solution which do not harm the ecosystem and in the path of development.



Future research should employ comparative studies across diverse agroecosystems, develop dynamic land-use change models capturing temporal and spatial dynamics, incorporate greater stakeholder participation in ecosystem service valuation, and strengthen empirical bases for ecosystem service assessment (Jiang et al., 2025).

Conclusion:

Today environment degradation and climate change become a global issue. But development is also a fundamental need and, Forest degradation and rural development remain fundamentally interconnected challenges. While agricultural expansion drives forest loss and ecosystem service degradation, conservation alone proves insufficient for addressing rural poverty. Sustainable rural development requires integrated approaches that can balance multiple objectives be it food security, environmental and economic sustainability, rural poverty, social equity and rural development.

Suggested pathways include adoption of sustainable practices that optimize resource use and minimizing environmental impacts. By maximum land utilization, scientific agricultural practices and irrigation system, climate resilience planning, engaging local community in decision making will enhance the rural people living standards and saves their natural ecosystem as well. This will not only save local environment but also helps to strengthen their economy at national economy. These strategies, grounded in holistic purpose of agroecosystem dynamics, represent the direction for achieving both forest conservation and meaningful rural development aligned with nations Sustainable Development Goals and Green India Mission.

The challenge is adopting technical solutions is not sufficient as per the objective of rural green development and need more innovation, planning and policies, government and financial support at local level to fulfil this objective. Need to shift mindset that look environment or forests as an obstacle in the way of development whereas this should be integral part of development.

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