

Nature better off with indigenous people, indicates global report

Author - Ishan Kukreti, Published on - 8.5.2019

The findings of the first-ever Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services are important in the light of the ongoing Supreme Court case against Forest Rights Act

Photo: IPBES

Biodiversity is declining everywhere at an unprecedented rate, but this rate is lower in areas where indigenous people own land, according to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services' (IPBES) [Global Assessment Report](#) on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

"Nature managed by indigenous people and local communities is under increasing pressure. Nature is generally declining less rapidly in indigenous peoples' land than in other lands," reads the report.

The report, released on May 6, 2019 in Paris, assesses the status of biodiversity on the planet and has revealed some worrisome findings about anthropogenic impact on the biodiversity of the planet. According to the report, 1 million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction and thousands of these would become extinct within decades.

While acknowledging the role of indigenous species, the report says the pressures on these lands are high.

"The areas managed (under various types of tenure and access regimes) by indigenous people and local communities are facing growing resource extraction, commodity production, mining and transport and energy infrastructure, with various consequences for local livelihoods and health. Some climate change mitigation programmes have had negative impacts on indigenous peoples and local communities," reads the report.

IPBES is an independent intergovernmental body, established in 2012. It has 132 member governments. The objective of IPBES is to strengthen the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being and sustainable development.

According to the report, many places that are home to large concentrations of indigenous people and many of the world's poorest communities are projected to experience significant negative effects from global changes in climate, biodiversity, ecosystem functions.

The report reads, "Indigenous people and local communities have been proactively confronting such challenges in partnership with each other and with an array of other stakeholders, through co-management systems and local and regional monitoring networks and by revitalizing and adapting local management systems." However, the knowledge and perspective of the indigenous communities is absent in the global approaches to conservation.

"Recognizing the knowledge, innovations and practices, institutions and values of indigenous peoples and local communities and their inclusion and participation in environmental governance often enhances their quality of life, as well as nature conservation, restoration and sustainable use, which is relevant to broader society," the report points out.

These findings are important in the light of the ongoing Supreme Court case against the Forest Rights Act, (FRA) 2006. FRA is a central law that aims to give legal recognition to customary land rights of forest dwelling communities. However, there is much opposition to the law, especially from state forest departments and wildlife conservation organisations who see the forest dwellers as encroachers responsible for forest degradation.

However, the findings of IPBES are not alone in recognising the relation between indigenous communities and conservation. A 2014 report by World Resources Institute found that legal forest rights for communities and government protection of their rights tend to lower carbon dioxide emissions and deforestation.

"In Brazil, deforestation in indigenous community forests from 2000 to 2012 was less than 1 per cent, compared with 7 per cent outside them," reads the report titled *Securing Rights, Combating Climate Change*.

"There is growing evidence from across the world that deforestation is much lower in areas with recognised land rights for indigenous communities. In fact, for the first time we are seeing that the land rights of these communities have become a mainstream issue, be it in the water space, biodiversity or climate change space," says Rohini Chaturvedi of Global EverGreening Alliance, an international non-profit working for land restoration and sustainable agriculture.

First published by [Down to Earth](#) on 7 May 2019