








## Box 3.8 Overview: Dhani Forest

Twenty years ago, Dhani Forest in Orissa State was badly degraded. Commercial harvesters had removed much of the forest canopy; local residents had cleared slopes for crops, gathered fuelwood relentlessly, and allowed cattle to graze the forest floor heavily. Today, this mixed deciduous forest is reborn, thanks to a five-village effort to ensure its survival. These villages have become leaders in a trend toward community forest management that is spreading across India.

Ecosystem Issues	
<b>Forests</b> 	<p>The 2,200 ha Dhani Forest is a primary source of food, fuel, building materials, fibers, and medicines for local people. Their dependence makes Dhani both extremely vulnerable to overuse and critical to protect.</p>
<b>Agriculture</b> 	<p>At various times, villagers have cleared lower slopes of the forest to expand agricultural areas and feed their families. Clearing forest, however, decreased their supplies of leaves that serve as farm fertilizer and food and other resources that cushion the effects of drought and crop failure.</p>
<b>Freshwater</b> 	<p>Local stream flows and water tables are vulnerable to changes in Dhani's forest cover and soils. Diminished water flows, in turn, affect the health of soils and crops in adjacent agroecosystems.</p>
Management Challenges	
<b>Equity and Tenurial Rights</b> 	<p>Today, villagers' rights to manage and use part of Dhani Forest's output is legally recognized—a far cry from the 1950s when the Orissa Forest Department ignored villagers' use rights and granted permits to contractors to harvest timber there. Yet some people argue that the State still does not treat the villages' forest protection committee as an equal, and some believe that the State should completely surrender title to Dhani Forest.</p>
<b>Economics</b> 	<p>Dhani Forest's renewed health is essential to both local subsistence and local market economies. The State also reaps economic benefits; local management has lowered its forest protection expenses and is creating an asset from land that might otherwise be unproductive.</p>
<b>Stakeholders</b> 	<p>Dhani's restoration and protection require collective decision making among the five villages who crafted the forest's protection plan, plus the cooperation of other neighboring villages who might infringe on this open-access forest. Restoration also depends on the State's willingness to respect community management and the value of nontimber ecosystem goods and services.</p>
<b>Information and Monitoring</b> 	<p>Dhani Forest's successful restoration has largely depended on folk knowledge, wisdom, and commitment; the same is true of many similar projects in India. Orissa State has contributed some technical expertise, but more scientific analysis to complement local management is needed—guidance and research that are beyond the resources of the Dhani community.</p>