

Clarification of applicability of safeguard policy on Physical Cultural Resources to AERF proposal “Advancing sustainability of the Satoyama landscapes in the Sahyadri-Konkan Corridor using innovative mechanisms”

25th March 2013

Sacred groves - We wish to highlight a fact that AERF has been working on sacred groves conservation since its inception (1996) and also in the same landscape. In fact, the sacred grove of Washi village where we have implemented conservation agreement recently and will be up scaling the approach there, has been restored by AERF with local peoples’ participation in 2001. After knowing about this success, the National Afforestation and Eco-development Board, Ministry of Environment and Forest, Govt of India invited us to submit a proposal to scale up the eco-restoration of sacred groves from Ratnagiri district in 2003. For implementing the restoration activities in 8 sacred groves, AERF received the permission from District collector of Ratnagiri. Since then AERF has got support from and participation of local communities to carry out restoration activities which included plantation of native plants in about 25 sacred groves in the district. This work was replicated also in Sindhudurg district. In recognition of this work, AERF director- Dr.Archana Godbole received Whitley Associate Award.

In short, AERF has substantial experience of working on sacred groves and in no case, we have entertained the idea of altering any object of cultural /historical significance from sacred groves.

In last few years, we have observed that communities have been cutting big trees from sacred groves to get money for building a temple. Often these trees are nesting sites of hornbills, barbets, eagles. In order that local communities get recurrent income from these trees, we have thought of giving compensations for collecting fallen fruits specifically that *Terminalia bellirica* to the communities so that they start looking at this resource in a different manner. In this case, there is no removal of any culturally or historically important object or feature from sacred grove. On the contrary, this approach will result in saving the trees and some keystone species.

In other words, we are taking utmost care that there will not be any violation of any social or cultural practice.