

IIM Lucknow publishes insights on Forest and Mineral Resource Management in India

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Indian Institute of Management Lucknow researcher Professor Priyanshu Gupta, Assistant Professor, Business Sustainability, in collaboration with Professor Rajesh Bhattacharya, Professor, Public Policy and Management Group, IIM Calcutta, has published a groundbreaking paper in the journal Land Use Policy. Their study delves into the challenges and conflicts in managing India's forests and mineral resources.

The research team analysed India's Go-No-Go policy, aimed at determining which forests should be protected and which could be used for issuing faster mining clearances.

India's mineral wealth lies predominantly beneath its dense, biodiversity-rich forests, home to many tribal communities. This scenario creates a conflict of interest among mining activities, environmental conservation, and the rights and development of tribal populations. The central question remains: which use of the forests should be prioritised?

Introduced in 2009, the Go-No-Go policy, later renamed the Inviolable Areas policy, sought to address these conflicts. Its objective was to identify and conserve ecologically significant forests while expediting grant of clearances in less critical areas. The researchers reviewed the policy's development and the hurdles it has encountered.

The research team utilised data from extensive government documents obtained through India's Right to Information Act 2005 (RTI). This was supplemented by interviews with senior bureaucrats, policymakers, and experts, providing a comprehensive view of the policy process.

Speaking about their research work, Professor Priyanshu Gupta, Assistant Professor, Business Sustainability, IIM Lucknow said, "The rights over different uses of forest resources are fragmented across stakeholders. For instance, the government oversees mineral development, the environment ministry handles conservation objectives at national scale, and local communities have rights to forest produce and managing their local forest resources. This fragmentation often causes conflicts and delays, leading to calls for faster clearances and mechanisms like single window clearances that appear to resolve all resource-related trade-offs at one go. The Go-No-Go policy was one such attempt. However, the design of such mechanisms is itself challenging: the design of Go-No-Go policy has been shaped by inter-ministerial conflict manifesting through the consultative processes and institutional mechanisms visualised in India's democratic framework. Till date, the policy still remains un-notified even though it has significant implications"

The analysis suggests that removing politics from policy decisions is not the solution, as public policy is inherently political and requires input from all stakeholders. The paper argues that focusing solely on efficiency and coordination may result in temporary solutions.

The study challenges the notion that "anti-commons" property, where too many parties have rights to resources, is inherently problematic. Instead, Professor Gupta views it as a necessary process for democratic consultation, ensuring that all stakeholders have a say, leading to more balanced and sustainable outcomes.

Sources: <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/iim-lucknow-publishes-insights-on-forest-and-mineral-resource-management-in-india-2560730-2024-07-01>