

Foreword

The Planning Commission of India (1974-75) focused on the Western Ghats (WG) Conservation through its Western Ghat Development Programme (WGDP), which was in fact a component of the programme for the development of hill areas of the country. Among the other state governments, the Government of Karnataka, Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) has been responsible for implementing this programme and conserving the eco-system of the WG region in Karnataka State. The schemes, outlined under the WGDP have been very crucial for income generation among local people and conservation of biodiversity. Department of RDPR has the responsibility to work with the Watershed Development Department and Panchayat Raj Engineering Department of the state government. Department of Watershed mainly focuses on the conservation and regeneration of degraded properties of the eco-system such as forest, ground water, soil, check dams, etc. Besides this department is also providing training programmes to the local people residing within the WG region for income generation. Similarly, the Panchayat Raj Engineering Department is focusing on the construction of civil engineering works such as foot bridges, hanging bridges across the *nala* and streams in the region. This is a crucial intervention as WG receives high rainfalls, making commuting a challenge for the local people particularly during the monsoons. Hence, the evaluation of this programme is very crucial for restoring the properties of eco-system and ameliorating the rural livelihood as well as commuting challenges in the WG region.

This study is undertaken by the researchers of ISEC – Dr Sunil Nautiyal, Dr S Manasi and Dr M S Umesh Babu – to evaluate the WGDP and its schemes. The study is anchored on the perceptions of all the stakeholders, such as officers and administrators at all levels of the government, farmers, landless labourers and other beneficiaries, to formulate a holistic view, to articulate ground-level situations, to identify problems, if any, and to develop alternative but improved solutions. As a comprehensive evaluation study of WGDP, it touches upon all the key aspects of the programme, such as agriculture, horticulture, spice cultivation, forestry, agro-forestry, soil conservation, rural infrastructure, livelihood, etc. The recommendations of this study are more policy-oriented and are in line with the views of the High-Level Committees (Madhav Gadgil, August 2011 and Kasturirangan, April 2013) formed by the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India. Not only that the study articulates the ecological

concerns of WG but also provides specific recommendations for more effective implementation of the programme.

I am optimistic that this monograph will be very useful to the Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj of GoK and also MoEF, GoI, for its valuable recommendations pertaining to the schemes (under WGDP) and for their effective implementation. The study is also to benefit ecological researchers on Western Ghats for providing deeper insights into ecological questions and management perspectives for its conservation.

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