

ILLEGAL LOGGING AND CHALLENGES IN SANDALWOOD AGROFORESTRY

THEME: AGROFORESTRY & FOREST CONSERVATION



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STAKEHOLDER

MR. GOVARDHAN
FARMER - THIMMANAHALLI,
CHIKKANAYAKANAHALLI, TUMKUR

Core Issue

High value trees such as sandalwood and red sanders provide a opportunity for farmers practicing agroforestry, but they face multiple challenges. Illegal logging of these trees threatens the livelihoods of farmers, making cultivation risky and unsustainable. The inability to track the origin of timber and sandalwood makes it difficult for authorities to stop illegal logging or prosecute offenders, allowing smuggling and fake products to continue. Additionally,

wood trees delays financial returns, and farmers must bear the costs to protect the trees until they reach harvestable age. Together, these factors creates a limited growth and security of sandalwood farming.

Constraints

- High value of these trees encourages repeated theft and smuggling.
- Difficult to monitor large farm areas, especially during night hours.
- Increased illegal activity and law enforcement challenges in rural areas.
- The current ways of marking or tracking trees and wood are not strong enough, so it's hard to tell if the wood was taken illegally.
- Lack of affordable and scalable tracking technologies for tree protection.

Context

Sandalwood and red sanders are highly valued globally for their fragrant wood, essential oils, and cultural significance. India has historically been a major producer, but illegal logging and smuggling have escalated due to the high market. Indian sandalwood is currently priced at around 12,000–13,000 INR per kg, while red sanders commands around 10 crore INR per ton internationally. Farmers investing in agroforestry face long maturation cycles for sandalwood trees, requiring careful maintenance and protection over several years before they can generate returns. At the same time, it is difficult to trace where these trees and products come from, which makes it hard for authorities to stop illegal activities. This creates financial risks for farmers and threatens the survival of these species, harming local communities, the environment, and law enforcement efforts.



Groundwork to be considered

- Map the regions and farms most affected by illegal felling and smuggling activities.
- Analyze how long it takes for trees to grow, how much investment is needed over time, and what methods farmers use to protect them.
- Study how farms and authorities currently track and protect high-value trees, identifying gaps and vulnerabilities.
- Consult farmers, local communities, and forest officials to understand challenges in enforcement and protection.
- Work with forest officials and police to learn about the gaps in current enforcement methods and coordination.

Existing Systems

- Farmers or hired watchmen look after farms, especially at night, to prevent illegal felling.
- Some farms use fences, gates, or barriers to restrict unauthorized access.
- Certain government programs require marking or tagging high-value trees to track ownership and legality.
- Read about the Karnataka State Sandalwood Policy, 2022
- Earlier, only state agencies like KSDL (Karnataka Soaps & Detergents Ltd) or the Forest Department could buy from private growers under restrictive norms. Under the new policy, others (private entities etc.) may also participate in purchase.
- To guard against theft and illegal felling, the policy includes the use of technology: microchipping/ bar coding / GPS tracking for trees. Forest Department and KSDL are collaborating to increase protection and monitoring. (Ideal Stakeholders for interviews)