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## Gadgil takes his Western Ghats crusade to Wikipedia

- [Shoumojit Banerjee](#)



Prof Gadgil and his team are looking at a bilingual approach for wider reach, writing in the Marathi Wikipedia to begin with —file photos: K Murali Kumar and Paul Noronha

*Wants others to contribute too*

With the Centre and successive State governments in Maharashtra dumping his crucial report on the conservation of Western Ghats, ecologist Madhav Gadgil has now turned to Wikipedia to record his findings and present his solutions.

Prof Gadgil was feted with the prestigious 2015 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement in March for penning the landmark report on the preservation of the unique ecosystem of the Western Ghats and the inclusion of local committees. The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) had announced that it was 'not processing' the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) report for any further action.

Some of the content of Prof Gadgil's comprehensive Wikipedia 'exposition' on the Western Ghats will be crowd-sourced, where people are free to contribute and add to articles already uploaded.

The ecologist has chosen Wikipedia owing to the lack of advertisements on the site and most importantly, out of government control, which will allow him considerable latitude in revealing his researches on the actual state of affairs.

“This is real democratisation of data wherein we shall be dealing with issues like illegal sand and stone mining, deforestation, while putting up photos. Moreover, we will be uploading extensive information about several villages, their social parameters, and the problems the villagers face,” said Prof Gadgil, adding that credible references from a variety of sources, including newspapers and research articles, would constitute the ‘base’ article to which citizens could contribute their own observations.

“People can add a variety of problems threatening the ecosystem, unpalatable facts that the government conveniently ignores. This would help create a permanent record,” he said.

On the use of Wikipedia to deal with civic issues, he points to analogous examples in western countries where promises made by political candidates have been juxtaposed with the actuals delivered in the public domain.

At present, Prof Gadgil has uploaded information on villages affected by the pollution of the Panchaganga and its tributaries.

“We have already written about two villages: Parite and Haldi. The base article on Haldi has information about its sewage being flown into the river, which leads to gastric diseases. Now, people can add to that environmental, social, or other issues that they feel are a priority, along with evidence and references,” said Subodh Kulkarni, an environment activist, who is part of the project.

Prof Gadgil and his team are looking at a bilingual approach for wider reach, writing in the Marathi Wikipedia to begin with. The articles will then be translated into English. For crowd-sourcing, they are training local communities to write in the Wikipedia format.

Parineeta Dandekar, associate coordinator of the South Asia Network for Dams, Rivers and People, said data from government agencies is dubious, just like that of the pollution control board for river pollution.

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