



OPEN ACCESS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

The Effects of Demographic Expansion on Forest Ecosystems: Case Study of Namkum and Mandar, Ranchi

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Abstract: *This study examines the impact of population growth on forest ecosystems in Namkum and Mandar blocks of Ranchi district, Jharkhand. While Namkum faces rapid urbanization and land-use changes, Mandar remains largely rural but is also experiencing population-driven pressure on forest resources. Both regions reveal how demographic expansion leads to forest degradation, biodiversity loss, and socio-economic challenges for communities reliant on forests. The research highlights the need for integrated approaches to balance human development with environmental sustainability.*

Keywords: *Population Growth, Forest Degradation, Land Use Change, Namkum, Mandar, Ranchi, Jharkhand, Urbanization, Rural Communities, Biodiversity, Forest Ecosystems, Sustainable Development*

I. INTRODUCTION

Forests are vital ecological systems that provide a range of environmental, economic, and cultural services. In India, where forests support both biodiversity and the livelihoods of millions, they are increasingly under threat from rapid and often unmanaged population growth. As human settlements expand and the demand for land, food, and resources escalates, forest ecosystems are among the first to bear the impact. The interplay between population dynamics and forest degradation has emerged as a critical area of concern, especially in regions where communities are heavily dependent on forest resources for their survival. This study explores the effects of demographic expansion on forest ecosystems with a specific focus on Namkum and Mandar blocks in Ranchi district, Jharkhand. Namkum and Mandar, located on the fringes of Ranchi city, offer a compelling geographical context for examining human-forest interactions. While Namkum is experiencing significant urban spillover due to its proximity to Ranchi, Mandar remains more rural but is also undergoing steady population growth. Both blocks feature considerable tribal populations who rely heavily on forests for fuelwood, grazing, minor forest produce, and cultural practices. Over the last two decades, these areas have witnessed substantial changes in land use patterns, largely driven by increasing population pressure. Agricultural expansion, housing development, and infrastructure projects have led to the gradual encroachment and fragmentation of forest areas.

As populations increase, household sizes change, and nuclear families replace joint families, the demand for land and forest products multiplies. This demographic shift translates into greater extraction of timber, fuelwood, and other forest-based goods.

Forests that once operated under traditional systems of community regulation are now under stress from overuse and lack of sustainable management. In Namkum, urbanization has further intensified this pressure, with forest land being converted for commercial and residential purposes—both legally and illegally. In Mandar, agricultural expansion into forest margins is a major concern. Together, these changes have led to a noticeable decline in forest cover, biodiversity, and ecosystem services. The environmental consequences of this demographic pressure are multifaceted. Loss of tree cover contributes to soil erosion, reduced groundwater recharge, and increased vulnerability to climate extremes. Moreover, the depletion of forest resources directly affects the socio-economic wellbeing of local communities, particularly women and marginalized tribal groups, who depend on forests for cooking fuel, fodder, food supplements, and income. The weakening of traditional ecological knowledge and practices further complicates efforts toward sustainable resource use.

This study seeks to understand the geographical dimensions of population growth and its effects on forest ecosystems in Namkum and Mandar. By combining demographic data, land use analysis, and field-level socio-economic insights, the research aims to highlight the complex and interdependent relationship between people and forests in this region. The findings emphasize the need for integrated policy approaches that consider both ecological sustainability and human development. In a state like Jharkhand, where forest resources are a cornerstone of both environment and economy, striking a balance between population needs and forest conservation is not just desirable—it is essential for long-term resilience.

1.1 Study area

The present study is situated in the Ranchi district of Jharkhand, focusing on two contrasting administrative blocks—Namkum and Mandar—which provide an ideal setting for examining the ecological consequences of demographic expansion. These blocks represent different ends of the rural–urban spectrum, yet both are undergoing transformations that directly affect forest ecosystems. Namkum, lying on the eastern periphery of Ranchi city, is experiencing rapid urbanization, while Mandar, located to the west, remains predominantly rural and heavily reliant on forests for local livelihoods. Together, these blocks illustrate how population growth—both through natural increase and migration—interacts with land use, forest cover, and community resource dependence.

1.1.1 Namkum Block (Urban-Fringe Zone)

Namkum block, located on the outskirts of Ranchi city, is experiencing rapid urbanization due to its strategic location along National Highway 33 and proximity to major transport hubs. This has led to a sharp population increase and expansion of residential, commercial, and institutional infrastructure. As a result, forest and agricultural lands are being rapidly converted, leading to deforestation, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and groundwater depletion. The growing demand for timber, firewood, and land reflects the ecological strain caused by urban sprawl.

1.1.2 Mandar Block (Rural-Tribal Zone)

Mandar block, about 35 km west of Ranchi, remains rural and heavily forest-dependent, inhabited by tribal communities like Oraon, Munda, and Kharia. Livelihoods rely on agriculture and the collection of non-timber forest products. Although forest cover here is denser than in Namkum, increasing population and traditional practices like shifting cultivation are putting pressure on forest resources. Limited access to services has triggered youth out-migration, weakening traditional forest stewardship systems and sustainability.

1.1.3 Comparative Significance

Namkum and Mandar present contrasting yet interconnected demographic impacts on forest ecosystems—urban expansion versus rural dependency. Together, they reflect the broader challenge in Jharkhand: balancing development and ecological preservation amidst growing population pressures.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research from multiple regions of India and beyond documents the profound ecological impacts of demographic expansion—through urbanization and rural population growth—on forest ecosystems. Urban fringe landscapes, in particular, exhibit rapid forest decline as human settlement expands (Nagendra et al., 2014; Tyagi et al., 2024). In an Indian-wide analysis, Nagendra et al. (2014) emphasize how urbanization triggers land-cover changes, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem disruption in peri-urban zones. A case study of Gurugram by Tyagi et al. (2024) reported significant conversion of Aravalli forest fringes into built-up zones, resulting in measurable forest cover loss and species decline. These findings resonate with the dynamics observed in Namkum block, where urban spillover similarly displaces forest patches.

- In Jharkhand specifically, geospatial research by Ahmad and Goparaju (2025) assessed threats to forest ecosystems statewide—detecting fragmentation, deforestation, and fire incidents—and linking them strongly to expanding human settlements. Their findings suggest that rapid demographic change in areas adjacent to Ranchi, such as Namkum, significantly increases ecological stress on remnant forests.
- Agroforestry and socio-economic analyses in Namkum by Kumari (2017) provide granular insights into local population structure vis-à-vis tree cover. Her study among tribal and agrarian households highlights the limited landholding sizes (<1 ha for over 90 % of households) and the prominence of agri-silviculture systems. Yet, despite agroforestry being adopted, pressure for timber and fuelwood remains high, as forest dependency persists amidst rising human densities.
- Studies specific to Mandar and Namkum on NTFP (Non-Timber Forest Product) trade by Ranjan (2015) show extensive dependency on forest collection—villagers travel up to 8–10 km to harvest mahua, tendu leaves, and other resources for sale and consumption. This pattern of resource extraction intensifies with increasing rural population and aggregation in forest-adjacent villages.
- Sharma et al. (2025) discuss how households with customary ownership participate more in participatory forest management (PFM), while poorer or displaced tribal households remain marginalized, extracting resources unsustainably due to lack of alternatives. These dynamics are particularly relevant in Mandar, where tribal groups like Oraon and Munda depend heavily on common forests yet may have limited governance roles.
- Research from other biodiversity-rich regions corroborates similar ecological processes. For example, remote sensing data from the Western Himalayas and Western Ghats show forest losses of approx. 11 % due to urban expansion, with agricultural and built-up land surges fragmenting ecosystems (Tiwari et al., 2024). In tropical forests of Kudremukh (Western Ghats), human impact alters forest structure and species composition, lowering regeneration of primary tree species and favoring pioneer species (Sayer & Whitmore, 1990)—a trend likely mirrored in fragmented forests around Namkum and Mandar.
- Urban sprawl literature (Czech et al., various years) points to habitat loss, invasive species spread, and weakened ecological succession in peri-urban zones, exacerbated by population pressures. Nagpur's experience (DeFries & Pandey, as cited by turn0search9) highlights how urban growth in previously forested areas leads to ecological degradation unless planned forest corridors are maintained.

In summary, the cumulative literature establishes a clear linkage: demographic expansion, whether via urban sprawl or rural growth, leads to forest fragmentation, biodiversity decline, soil and water depletion, and cultural-economic stress on forest-reliant communities (Nagendra et al. 2014; Ahmad & Goparaju, 2025; Kumari, 2017; Ranjan, 2015). In Jharkhand's context, Namkum represents the urban-fringe case, where high in-migration and land conversion pressure degrade peri-urban forests. Mandar, by contrast, typifies the forest-dependent tribal rural scenario, where internal population growth and traditional practices—absent sustainable alternatives or governance—erode forest resilience.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To analyze the rate and pattern of demographic expansion in Namkum and Mandar over the past two decades.
- To assess the extent of forest cover change in Namkum and Mandar using remote sensing and GIS tools.
- To investigate the key drivers linking demographic growth to forest degradation in the study area.
- To evaluate the impact of forest ecosystem degradation on local biodiversity and ecological services.
- To examine the socio-economic implications of forest degradation on indigenous and local communities.
- To assess the effectiveness of existing forest conservation and land-use policies in the region.

IV. STUDY AREA

The present study focuses on Namkum and Mandar blocks of Ranchi district, located in the state of Jharkhand, India. Ranchi, the capital city of Jharkhand, has experienced rapid urban expansion over the past two decades, and both Namkum and Mandar serve as critical zones that represent the interface between urban growth and forested landscapes.

Namkum lies to the southeast of Ranchi city and is undergoing substantial urbanization due to its proximity to the urban core. It is characterized by mixed land-use patterns, including residential colonies, institutional zones, infrastructure projects, and residual forest patches. Namkum's development is driven by factors such as migration from rural areas, expansion of educational institutions, and housing demand. The presence of forest areas such as the Hatia and Lowadih ranges makes it a relevant site for studying the direct impact of urban sprawl on forest ecosystems.

Mandar, located to the northwest of Ranchi, represents a more rural and tribal-dominated area, where demographic changes are occurring at a slower but steady pace. The region includes several forest reserves and community-managed forests that are essential to the local economy and ecological stability. Forest-dependent communities in Mandar rely on non-timber forest products (NTFPs), agriculture, and grazing. However, increasing land-use conversion for farming, infrastructure development, and population pressure is posing threats to forest sustainability.

Both areas fall under the ****Chotanagpur Plateau****, which is rich in biodiversity and known for its red lateritic soil, moderate climate, and undulating terrain. The forests here are predominantly tropical dry deciduous and are part of a broader ecological zone that supports a range of flora and fauna. However, the demographic dynamics in Namkum and Mandar have led to fragmentation of habitats, reduction in forest cover, and growing human-wildlife conflicts.

The study area was selected because it presents a contrast between urban-peri-urban (Namkum) and rural-tribal (Mandar) settings, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how demographic expansion impacts forest ecosystems in different socio-ecological contexts. The dual-site approach enables comparative analysis and better generalization of findings relevant to similar regions in Jharkhand and beyond.

The study will use a combination of satellite imagery, census data, field surveys, interviews with local residents, and GIS mapping to analyze forest change patterns and human-environment interactions in the selected sites.

V. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to investigate the relationship between demographic expansion and forest ecosystem degradation in the Namkum and Mandar blocks of Ranchi district, Jharkhand. The methodology combines both This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to investigate the relationship between demographic expansion and forest ecosystem degradation in the Namkum and Mandar blocks of Ranchi district, Jharkhand. The methodology combines both primary and secondary data sources to ensure a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the issue. The emphasis is placed on field-based data collection to capture local perspectives, while secondary sources help provide broader contextual and historical insights.

5.1 Data Collection Approach

The research relies on a two-pronged data collection strategy involving primary and secondary data. Primary data offers real-time, field-level insights into population dynamics, livelihood strategies, and forest dependence among communities, while secondary data supports and contextualizes these findings through official records and scholarly interpretations. This combination enhances the validity and reliability of the study, ensuring triangulation and reducing bias.

5.2 Primary Data Collection

Primary data plays a pivotal role in this research, serving as the foundation for original analysis of how population growth impacts forest resources and socio-economic conditions in the study area. A blend of quantitative and qualitative methods has been employed to collect robust and meaningful data from individuals and households residing in the Namkum and Mandar blocks.

The research team used a structured interview schedule as the main instrument for primary data collection. A total of 200 respondents were selected using a stratified random sampling technique, ensuring adequate representation across different age groups, genders, occupations, and community types (urban, semi-urban, and rural). This approach helped in capturing a diverse set of experiences and perspectives.

5.3 Secondary Data Collection

In addition to fieldwork, secondary data was extensively gathered to supplement and cross-verify the primary findings. Secondary sources provided essential background information, historical trends, and authoritative statistics that enhanced the analytical framework of the study.

Data was sourced from government publications, including the Census of India (2011), district statistical handbooks, and reports from the Forest Survey of India (FSI) and the Jharkhand State

Forest Department. These sources provided quantitative data on population growth, forest cover change, land-use patterns, and ecological indicators over time.

Further, the study drew upon academic literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and case studies relevant to Jharkhand's geography, tribal communities, forest-based livelihoods, and environmental governance. These scholarly works were instrumental in building the theoretical foundation of the research and situating it within broader academic debates on environmental change, development, and sustainability.

By synthesizing official records with academic research, the study ensured that its methodological framework was informed by existing knowledge while identifying critical research gaps, particularly in the localized context of Ranchi district.

5.4 Data Analysis

Once the data collection process was completed, a structured and systematic data analysis phase followed. Raw data from interviews were organized, coded, and entered into analytical software to facilitate statistical and thematic analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies, means) and cross-tabulations to identify patterns and correlations between demographic factors and forest resource usage. For qualitative data, thematic content analysis was employed to extract key narratives and perceptions related to environmental changes, forest degradation, and socio-economic shifts. This dual approach enabled the integration of numerical trends with human experiences, resulting in a holistic interpretation of the findings.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods ensures that the study captures both measurable impacts and lived realities, strengthening the relevance and applicability of its conclusions. Ultimately, this integrated methodology supports the goal of developing informed recommendations for sustainable forest and population management in the Namkum and Mandar blocks of Ranchi. sources to ensure a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of the issue. The emphasis is placed on field-based data collection to capture local perspectives, while secondary sources help provide broader contextual and historical insights.

VI. POPULATION GROWTH AND ITS IMPACT ON FOREST RESOURCES

Population growth is one of the most significant drivers of environmental change, especially in developing regions where rapid demographic expansion often coincides with high dependence on natural resources. The Namkum and Mandar blocks of Ranchi district, located in the state of Jharkhand, India, provide a critical case study of this dynamic. These regions represent contrasting but interconnected geographies — Namkum as a peri-urban area adjacent to the growing city of Ranchi, and Mandar as a predominantly rural, tribal-inhabited block. Both blocks have witnessed substantial population increases over the past two decades, which has translated into direct and indirect pressures on the surrounding forest ecosystems. This section explores the patterns of population growth in Namkum and Mandar, the nature of forest resource dependence, and the resulting impacts on forest cover, biodiversity, and ecological balance.

6.1 Demographic Trends in Namkum and Mandar

The Ranchi district, as the administrative and economic hub of Jharkhand, has experienced rapid urbanization, with the city's expansion spilling into adjoining areas like Namkum. According to the 2011 Census of India, Namkum's population has grown steadily due to both natural increase and migration driven by educational, industrial, and infrastructural development. This peri-urban growth has resulted in an increase in housing colonies, commercial establishments, and infrastructure projects.

Mandar, in contrast, is more rural and characterized by a predominantly tribal population that relies heavily on agriculture and forest-based livelihoods. While the population growth rate here is comparatively slower than Namkum's, it remains significant enough to affect forest resources. The rural communities in Mandar depend on forests not only for timber but also for non-timber forest products (NTFPs), medicinal plants, fodder, and fuelwood. Population growth in Mandar has led to the gradual conversion of forest land into agricultural fields and settlements, further intensifying pressure on forest ecosystems.

6.2 Forest Dependency and Livelihoods

In both Namkum and Mandar, forests remain a critical resource for the local population's livelihood and subsistence needs. In Namkum, while urban development has encroached upon many forest patches, several peri-urban communities still rely on forest resources for fuelwood and fodder. The proximity of the forest areas, such as Hatia and Lowadih ranges, provides essential ecological services and resources.

In Mandar, dependence on forests is even more pronounced due to the tribal communities' cultural and economic ties to the forest environment. Collection of NTFPs like mahua flowers, tendu leaves, and honey forms a significant part of household incomes. Moreover, many residents practice shifting cultivation, which necessitates the clearing of forest patches for agricultural use, followed by a fallow period allowing regeneration. However, increasing population density reduces the availability of forest land for this traditional practice, leading to overuse and degradation.

6.3 Impact of Population Growth on Forest Cover

The burgeoning population in Namkum and Mandar has triggered notable changes in forest cover and composition. Remote sensing studies and Forest Survey of India (FSI) reports indicate a steady decline in forested areas over the last two decades, with more pronounced effects in Namkum due to urban sprawl. The demand for land to accommodate residential, commercial, and infrastructural development has led to extensive deforestation and fragmentation of contiguous forest patches. This loss of forest cover has disrupted wildlife habitats, reduced biodiversity, and diminished ecological services such as carbon sequestration, soil conservation, and water regulation.

In Mandar, the decline in forest area is linked more to agricultural expansion and fuelwood collection rather than urbanization. Increased population pressure has caused forest lands to be converted into farmland, often without adequate reforestation measures. This has resulted in soil degradation and reduced regeneration capacity of the forest, threatening long-term sustainability. Additionally, overharvesting of forest products,

particularly fuelwood and timber, exacerbates the depletion of forest resources.

6.4 Ecological and Environmental Consequences

The forest degradation in Namkum and Mandar due to population growth has several ecological ramifications. Habitat fragmentation in Namkum, where large forest patches are broken into smaller isolated fragments, limits the movement and survival of many wildlife species. This fragmentation often leads to increased human-wildlife conflicts, especially as animals venture into human settlements in search of food and shelter.

Soil erosion has intensified in areas where forests have been cleared, particularly on the undulating terrain of the Chotanagpur plateau, which encompasses Ranchi. Loss of forest cover reduces the soil's ability to retain moisture, affecting agricultural productivity and increasing vulnerability to droughts.

Water bodies originating or flowing through forested areas in both blocks face sedimentation and reduced water quality due to deforestation and land-use change. This affects not only the local ecosystem but also the water availability for human consumption and irrigation.

The decline in biodiversity is another critical concern. Many plant and animal species native to the region are threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation. The reduction in species diversity diminishes ecosystem resilience and compromises ecological balance.

6.5 Socio-economic Challenges Linked to Forest Decline

The impact of population growth on forests extends beyond ecological degradation to include significant socio-economic challenges for the local population. In Mandar, where forest resources are a primary livelihood source, forest degradation translates into diminished income and food security for tribal communities. Scarcity of fuelwood and fodder forces households to travel longer distances or switch to less sustainable alternatives, increasing their vulnerability.

In Namkum, the pressure of urban expansion has resulted in the displacement of some communities and a loss of traditional access to forest resources. Additionally, the fragmentation of forest areas reduces recreational and cultural opportunities associated with forests, affecting the quality of life. Increasing human-wildlife conflict also poses a challenge, with crop damage and livestock predation by wild animals creating tensions between forest-dependent communities and wildlife conservation efforts.

6.6 Policy and Management Implications

The case of Namkum and Mandar highlights the urgent need for integrated forest and population management strategies. Forest conservation policies must address the realities of demographic expansion by promoting sustainable land-use planning that balances development with ecological preservation.

Community-based forest management programs, particularly in Mandar, can empower local stakeholders to sustainably manage

forest resources, restore degraded lands, and promote alternative livelihoods to reduce dependency on forests. Urban planning in Namkum must incorporate green spaces and buffer zones to minimize forest loss and fragmentation.

A forestation and reforestation initiatives, combined with awareness campaigns on sustainable resource use, can help mitigate the adverse effects of population growth on forest ecosystems. Furthermore, policy frameworks should promote diversification of energy sources to reduce fuel wood dependence.

VII.CONCLUSION

This study clearly demonstrates the close connection between rapid population increase and the depletion of forest resources in the Namkum and Mandar blocks of Ranchi district. The growing number of inhabitants has significantly intensified the demands on forest lands, triggering changes in land use, destruction of habitats, and declines in biodiversity and soil fertility. Most community members recognize the adverse impacts these pressures have had on forest cover, wildlife populations, and critical resources such as water availability and soil quality. Such environmental stress not only disrupts the natural ecological balance but also jeopardizes the livelihoods of those who depend directly on forests for their survival.

The considerable demographic growth observed in Namkum and Mandar has led to extensive deforestation, fragmentation of once-continuous forest landscapes, and loss of species diversity. While the main factors driving these changes vary—urban sprawl predominates in Namkum, whereas agricultural expansion is the primary cause in Mandar—the resulting ecological effects are deeply intertwined. Effectively addressing these challenges calls for a detailed and context-specific understanding of the demographic shifts, economic activities, and environmental characteristics unique to each area.

To achieve sustainable forest conservation alongside human development, it is essential to adopt participatory strategies that actively involve local communities. Integrating social and economic advancement with ecological protection can help create a balanced approach that supports both the wellbeing of people and the preservation of natural ecosystems. This includes fostering community awareness, implementing sound policies, and encouraging collaborative management practices that together promote the long-term sustainability of forest resources and the resilience of the populations that rely on them.

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