



**Prasad Nichenametla, Hindustan Times**  
Email Author  
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## Thumbs down to Saxena report from members

The NC Saxena Committee report on review of Forest Rights Act turned out to be a mix of divergent views and dissenting notes.

While 10 out of 20 members of the Joint MoEF and MoTA Committee on the Forest Rights Act chose to differ and recommend stronger action in separate section, two of the members from the forest services gave separate dissenting notes.

“Though we agreed with majority of the report, we felt our views on future of forest governance, minor forest produce and joint forest management are not reflected. As these changes are essential to plug the lacunae in FRA implementation, we went with separate recommendations,” Dr Ravi Chellam, member and country director, Wildlife Conservation Society India, said.

The main suggestion made by 10 members are dissolved JFMCs, which should be replaced by community forest governance/management committees, constituted under a new statute or amendment of existing statute.

“They had some strong suggestions, which other members did not agree to, like wanting a radical law on forest management. When FRA itself is in infancy of implementation, how can we suggest a unrealistic approach,” committee chairman NC Saxena said.

The report, to suggest better implementation of the act providing forest dwellers legal rights over resources, is also given thumbs down by the civil society groups.

“While admitting all the flaws, illegalities defeating purpose of FRA, the committee does not suggest anything substantive, nothing in particular against forest officials,” Shankar Gopalakrishnan, secretary, Campaign for Survival and Dignity says.

“This is when a committee under same ministry and headed by same chairman, a few months back categorically pointed violations of the law in Niyamgiri in Orissa,” Gopalakrishnan adds.

Two members, Dr Arvind Jha and Dr Sreedharan, associated with Indian Forest Service, sent dissenting notes questioning ‘stepping out of terms of reference and distorted interpretation of law’.

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