

## **Odisha: Convention on Forest Rights Act organised by Bana Adhikar Sangram Parishad, Bolangir**

Wednesday, February 20, 2013

**Report by OdishaDiary bureau, Bolangir:** To make tribals and forest dwellers aware on their community forest rights recognized under Forest Rights Act, 2006, a convention was organized by Bana Adhikar Sangram Parishad, Bolangir affiliated to Campaign For Survival and Dignity(CSD), Odisha at Khaprakhaol on 15th Feb 2013.

Bana Adhikar Sangram Parishad is a joint endeavor of the community based sangathanas working in different parts of the Bolangir district. The objective of the convention was also to aware the community people on the importance of the community forest rights recognized, on the empowered Gram Sabha and towards organizing people of the region to collectively fight against the upcoming threat from the private companies who have eyeing on rich natural resources including the Scared Gandhamandhan Hill.

A long procession of tribals and forest dwellers of the area was convened to welcome Dr. B.D Sharma and Somjit Bhai Damor, the chief guests of the Convention.

Around four hundred tribals and forest dwellers from different regions of Kantabanji, Titlagarh and Patnagarh etc participated in FRA Convention. The participants were members of three community based organizations i.e Zindabad Sabgathana, Adivasi Kalyan Sangathan and Gandhamardhan Surakhya Juba Parishad, local intellectuals and media persons. The convention was started with the introduction and welcome by Guptewar Kuar to the guests of the Convention followed by sharing the objectives of the Convention by Gulap Niayal.

Bolangir district is divided into three sub-divisions(Bolangir,Patnagarh and titlagarh), 14 Blocks/Tahasil, 285 G.Ps and 1794 villages. In the district forest land constitutes 27.57 per cent of the total geographical area and are mostly (68.47 %) of reserved forest coming under Tikhari, Bender, Thutha, Gandhamardhan, Chandali, Raju, Rameigarh, Chhatardandi and Patpani etc Reserved Forest areas leaving just 27.12 % and 4.39 % as revenue forest land and DLC forest land respectively.

The organizer of the Convention severely attacked the Bolangir District Administration for poor implementation of the historic Act in the district. “While the tribals and forest dwellers cultivating forest land and depending upon forest for their livelihood and have submitted around 5000 individual forest rights claims in the three SDLCs, the recognition and settlement of individual forest rights is very poor in the district. Even many villages have filed community forest rights claims over their forest but the district administration is sitting on them and even do not bother to reflect them in its status report. Besides, there is hundreds of un-surveyed/forest villages located in the reserved forests in the district which needs to be recognized as independent revenue village under FRA, 2006.”

Dr. B.D.Sharma, president of Bharat Jan Andolan and former STSC Commissioner, GoI, Somjit Bhai Damor, former Gujrat Environment Minister and President of Akhil Bharatiya Adivasi

Vikash Parishad, Jatish Mohanty Former Commissioner, Fishery and Animal Husbandary, Govt. of A.P, Pravin Patel, Director, Tribal Welfare Society, Trilochan Punji, President of Zindabad Sangathan, Manohar Chuahan, Member, CSD, Odisha and Dillip Dash, Director, Antyodaya Kalahandi Joined as guest speaker.

In his key address, Dr. B.D Sharma spoke on the importance of “Gram Sabha” in the decentralized democracy “Panchayatiraj System” and called upon the community people to revive the traditional and empowered Grama Sabha. Somjit Bhai Damor called upon the tribals and community people of the area to organize themselves and fight against the injustice being done to them.

Mr. Pravin Patel talk on the importance of the Community Forest Rights and ownership rights over MFP recognized under FRA and called upon the people of the area to take over the business run by Govt. of Odisha on KL at their hand and get benefitted out of it. Mr. Trilochan Punji shared the important issues in the FRA implementation in the Bolangir district, Mr. Manohar Chauhan, member, CSD, odisha appreciated the joint endeavor of the local community based sangathans towards the implementation of FRA in the district and shared the important changes brought in Forest Rights (Amendment) Rules, 2012 again centralizing and empowering the Gram Sabha.

Besides, many sangathans from different district i.e Nuapada, Kalahandi and Bolangir joined in the Convention and gave their solidarity to the organizer of the FRA Convention. Dillip Dash shared the FRA implementation scenario in his Kalahandi district, Meghnath Kharsel of Jami Jungle Mukti Andolan, Nuapada shared on their ongoing protest rally and dharana started from last 8th Feb 2013 at Rajkahariar in Nuapada district and Udaysingh Thakur of Lower Suktel Movement, Bolangir shared on their struggle against displacement.

At the end of the convention, all the participants of the convention took vow to widespread campaign of filing community forest rights claims and to bring all the forest areas under community control duly recognized under FRA. Bipra Bisi from Adivasi Kalyan Sangathan gave a vote of thanks to all the guest and participants of the Convention.