

Date:09/08/2010 URL:

<http://www.thehindu.com/2010/08/09/stories/2010080960300500.htm>

[Back](#)

[Andhra Pradesh](#) - [Eluru](#)

Polavaram: study contests State claims over forest rights

Staff Reporter

'State says there are no rights to be settled'

Of five panchayats, only 35 claims pertaining to three villages of two panchayats approved: study

Forest department officials charged with negating the very objective of the act

ELURU: The State Government's claim over settlement of forest rights, which was set as a pre-condition by the Union Ministry of Forests and Environment (MoEF) for according forest clearance to the Indira Sagar Project, was misleading, according to a study conducted by a team of tribal activists on the implementation of the Forest Rights Act in the State.

The team, comprising Oliver Springate-Baginski of University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK, M. Gopinadh Reddy and Anil Kumar from the Hyderabad-based Centre of Economics and Social Studies (CESS), and P. Trinadha Rao, an advocate from Rajahmundry, made the study in the project-affected habitations of the district.

Mr. P. Trinadha Rao demanded that the MoEF consider nullification of forest clearance accorded by it to the project recently by taking cognisance of the 'false' claim of the State Government that stated, "There are no rights to be settled under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights Act), 2006 (in the project area)". But the fact remains that nowhere were individual and community claims submitted by tribals seeking rights over forest lands settled in the project area in letter and spirit, he contended.

'Spoilsport'

Out of 23 villages in five gram panchayats in Polavaram mandal which are notified as vulnerable to submergence in view of the dam, only 35 claims covering an extent of 87 acres pertaining to the three villages of Devaragondi, Mamidigondi and Sarugudu under Thutigunta and Mamidigondi panchayats were approved by the Government, he said. He sought to know why the claims in the remaining three panchayats were disallowed by the officials.

Accusing the Forest department officials of 'playing spoilsport' in settlement of forest rights in the Indira Sagar project area, Mr. Trinadha Rao said the claims of tribals in

Kondrukota and Chengondapalli were disallowed only at their behest. He said the Forest department, unwilling to accord forest rights to local communities, was allegedly negating the very objective of the act, which was aimed at devolution of ownership to local tribal communities over the forests.

© Copyright 2000 - 2009 The Hindu