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## State stands second in FRA implementation

Satyasundar Barik

*Bid to win over forest dwellers*

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*It so far distributes 1,72,935 titles*

*Chhattisgarh tops in effective implementation of the Act*

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BHUBANESWAR: At a time when Maoists are gaining new ground in tribal pockets of Orissa, the State government is trying its best to win over the forest dwellers by effectively implementing the Forest Rights Act. Orissa has now very rapidly climbed to the second position after Chhattisgarh in terms of land titles distribution under the historic Act.

The State has so far distributed 1,72,935 titles among forest dwellers, while it is 2,14,918 titles doled out by the neighbouring Chhattisgarh by May 31 end this year.

Five naxal-affected districts of the State such as Deogarh, Sambalpur, Gajapati, Malkanagiri and Rayagada have been given priority in the implementation of FRA. In Malkanagiri, 5,536.29 acres of land has been settled in favour of forest dwellers.

Orissa has decided to give land ownership to forest dwellers on 111088.41 acres of land. So far it has distributed 57,376 certificates of titles, while about 1,26,996 claims have been received by the Forest Rights Committees.

Rejection rate

What is unique about the implementation of FRA in the State? Ashok Tripathy, Secretary of SC and ST Development, said, "we have taken maximum precautions not to reject claims coming from tribal communities. We understand they are still not conversant with the law and administrative procedures. They need to be dealt carefully. Orissa probably stands first among other naxal-affected States where the rate of rejection of applications from tribals has been low. The statistics say while only 32.48 per cent of applications have been rejected in Orissa, it is 55.81 per cent in Chhattisgarh and 73.22 per cent in Madhya Pradesh."

Most of the applications were rejected either in gram sabha or sub-divisional level committee so that they could avail another chance to rectify their mistakes and get their rights at district level. In case of other States, reports say sizeable rejections were made at

district level, which means the forest dwellers could not go on appeal against rejection, Mr. Tripathy said.

Y. Giri Rao, who has been working on FRA implementation for quite sometime now, says certificate of title distribution marks a new beginning in lives of tribals residing in forest region as they can now boast that they are part of mainstream.

Land alienation continues to be stirring issue for tribals. Extremists take advantage of lack of response from government on the issue.

Now there could be perceptible change in the lives of forest dwellers, Mr. Rao said.

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