

Subject Corrected: AIFFM Statement on the CAMPA Bill Passed in Rajya Sabha Today

Statement from the All India Forum of Forest Movements

As the CAMPA Bill is passed

The Forest Communities in India today Stands Betrayed by the Political Class

The passage of the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Bill, better known as CAMPA Bill in Indian Parliament decisively suggests that the political class in this country remains biased against the poor and the marginal. The Bill is a betrayal of the country's tribals and other forest-dwelling poor; it seeks to hand over, literally, wads of money to an incorrigibly corrupt forest bureaucracy in the name of compensatory afforestation, thus giving it more unconstitutional powers to undermine the rights and sovereignty of the people at the grassroots whose survival is linked to forests.

Despite being true legal owners of the India's forests, the forest communities of the country would be thus forced to battle a more powerful forest department everyday; the hundreds of billions of Rupees of CAMPA money will saturate the later with funds to continue with its illegal programme of relocation of villages from the protected areas and help impose Joint Forest Management even in forests under effective community control.

Civil society organisations of the country and abroad, including various movement groups and grassroots level organisations, had in vain pointed out the myriad problems with the CAMPA Bill, in particular its probable adverse effects on the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA). It was emphasised time and again that neither typical forestry operations such as plantations nor ecological interventions such as habitat regeneration and forest restoration can be successfully done without community consent, participation and control, in other words, implementing the Forest Rights Act in letter and spirit. In the post-FRA forest governance scenario of the country, forest department had only nominal control over many forest areas. Yet the CAMPA Bill does not even mention FRA, and unequivocally provides for the entire CAMPA funds to be spent through the forest bureaucracy.

It was perhaps but natural that the pro-corporate and anti-poor government at the Center would come up with the CAMPA Bill and try to undermine the democratic essence of the FRA. Ever since it has come to power the attack on forest communities has increased manifold; efforts are underway to subvert, dilute and amend the FRA. However, there was an expectation that the parties in opposition, particularly the Congress and the Left, would see things differently and fight the CAMPA Bill in the Parliament. Given the ultimate damp surrender by the opposition and the relative ease of the passage of the Bill, it is clear that the expectation was misplaced. Once again, the country is forced to witness a total betrayal of the people and its democratic aspirations, the constitutional integrity of the nation.

Apparently, the state won and the people lost as the CAMPA Bill was passed. Yet the struggle for Indian forests has not been fought on the floors of the Parliament. Despite the FRA and its empowering provisions, the forest-dependant poor has remained locked in a seemingly perpetual struggle against the Indian state for the better part of the last decade. The struggle can only intensify in the days to come.

AIFFM calls upon all civil society groups and movement consolidations to come together and start a nationwide campaign for democracy and dignity. At the same time AIFFM demands that the Rules for the CAMPA Bill is framed through a more inclusive, participatory and democratic process. The present government must not be allowed to go free in its clear agenda of subverting democracy in Indian forests.

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For the Secretariat

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