

Community rights of forest dwellers stressed

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The State Government on Thursday directed the Forest Department to lay more stress on community rights over forest land for their sustainable livelihood and development.

Though Odisha is far ahead of other states in settling forest land in favour of tribals and other traditional forest-dwellers, a large number of applications for community rights on forest land are pending for disposal.

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik reviewed the progress achieved in the settlement of land under the Scheduled Tribe and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, at a high-level meeting here on Thursday. After the amendment of FRA Act, the State Government is more than keen to expedite things and has already drawn up plans for a comprehensive programme to implement the legislation.

The new rules have mandated that forest rights related to protection, regeneration and management of community forest resources by forest-dwellers for sustainable use should be recognised in all the villages with forest-dwellers, said Forest and Environment Secretary Santosh Sarangi.

The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs notified the amended rules for the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 on September 6 bringing more clarity to provisions relating to recognition of forest dwellers' rights, he said.

According to the new rule, the committee constituted under the gram sabha will prepare conservation and management plan for community forest resources after forest-dwellers' rights on such resources are recognised. The gram sabha will approve all decisions of the committee pertaining to issue of transit permits, use of income from sale of forest produce or modification of management plans.

The Government has so far received 5,384 applications demanding community rights over forest land of which 2,900 applications have been disposed of. Naveen directed the Forest and Revenue departments to ensure that the remaining applications are disposed of without delay.

It was also decided to organise training programme for field-level officers including the welfare extension officers this month to sensitise them on the changed rules under the FRA.

The State Government has received over 5.37 lakh individual applications claiming rights on forest land. The Government while disposing of more than 3.25 lakh applications have settled over 4.98 lakh acres of forest land in favour of the beneficiaries, including 17,229 primitive tribals.