

FRA Amendment a welcome move: Experts

The recent amendment to the Forest Right Act (FRA), 2006, which empowers forest dwellers to collect, process, transport and take up value addition of Non Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), would go a long way in ensuring the livelihood of millions of poor people living in forest areas.

Prior to this amendment, forest dwellers were finding it difficult to get the permission for transporting and selling of their produce. Now it is the Gram Sabha which will give transit permit, observed experts of the Regional Manager of Regional Centre for Development and Cooperation (RCDC) at a district level workshop.

It was organised by the District Forestry Forum, Balangir, (DFF) in collaboration with RCDC at Saintala, 40km from here.

The Forest Rights Act, 2006 which came into operation since 2008, gives individual forest rights and community rights over forest.

Attended by members of village forest protection committees and members of Sub divisional level forest rights committee (SLDC), the workshop expressed concern over delay in granting community claims over forest in Balangir.

So far, in Balangir district out of the 4,796 individual claims over forest, a total of 1,190 claims have been approved and a total of 2,828.28 acres of land has been given. However, in the patta distributed to the people, the sketch map of the area has not been attached. As a result, when a person wants to be covered under different development scheme like MO Pokhari and Farm Pond scheme, one has to face a lot of hurdles and at times resulting in denial of the intended benefit. Besides this, title has been distributed in the community forest or village forest area not in reserve forest area.

As per a Government notification, the SDLC should provide all the historical records of that area to the Gram Sabha. According to reports, the forest dwellers, other than tribals, are being asked by the department people to furnish evidence of residing there for three generations. As there is no historical record with them, they are facing a lot of difficulties, the experts said.

The SDLC should facilitate the process and provide them with the record and other evidence of that area, opined Amar Gouda. However, in community claim over forest, although 1,143 claims have been made by the District Forestry Forum (DFF), not a single claim has been approved by the Forest Department, he rued.

Divisional Forest Officer Abhiram Nayak spoke about the recent amendment to the Forest Right Act and stressed on proper implementation of the Act. So far, in Balangir district, a total of 1,190 beneficiaries got entitlements for 2,828.77 acres of forest land, 74 people got house under IAY, six were included in Mo Kudia Yojana, 47 under Mo Pokhari and lands of 317 persons were taken up for development, informed District Welfare Officer Amiya Kumar Mahanty.

The SDLC has sent 27 community forest rights claim for joint verification. To facilitate the process further, a legal aid cell has been started at Block level, Mahanty informed. Among others, Kulamani Sahu, Thakur Sahu, Milan Kumar Pati members of SDLC, besides other officials spoke.