

FRA VIOLATIONS: RALLY IN STATE CAPITAL ON JUNE 5

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Protesting against the non-recognition of community forest rights and demanding all the forest rights duly recognised under the historic Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, the Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD) threatened to take out a protest rally on June 5 in Bhubneswar.

The State Government has failed to make the people aware of the community forest rights, rights over community forest resources (CFR) and community rights to protect and manage the forest, ownership rights over minor forest produces like kendu leaf and bamboo, provisions duly amended in the December, 2012 amendment in the Forest Rights Rules, it said.

The Government has failed to recognize forest villages or un-surveyed habitations residing in forest areas as an independent village/Gram Sabha and forming Forest Rights Committees (FRC) therein. There is no information whether all the FRCs have been reformed as per amended Forest Rights Rules, 2012. The Government is continuously disrespecting the Gram Sabha, the quorum of the Gram Sabha duly empowered and authorized under the FRA whose importance has been underlined by the Supreme Court in the Niyamgiri case, the CSD pointed out.

There are huge gaps in the tall claims of the Government on recognition of individual forest rights of tribals in the State and the actual position enjoyed by them.

The authorized and empowered Gram Sabha/FRC have been bypassed in the field verification process and arbitrarily dominated by the Government officials limiting the forest land recognized (the average has been only 1.59 acres) in the State and rejecting around 1,37,877 individual claims including the claims of Other Traditional Forest Dwellers(OTFDs) despite Gram Sabha's recommendations. Even in many districts, OTFDs were even not allowed to file their individual forest rights claim, the CSD said.

Even after the passing of five years, there is no progress in the recognition of community forest rights and rights over the forest (CFR) in the State.

Most of the community forest rights said to have been recognized are not as per Section 3(1) but as per 3(2) meant for developmental purposes. In most of the cases, community forest rights titles have been issued over VSS areas bypassing the real traditional and customary areas, while CFR titles have been issued without following the given process under FRA. There is no uniformity among the CFR titles distributed in different districts in the State, it said further. The Government is sitting over thousands of individual and community forest rights claims where mining and diversion has been proposed. Not a single PTG habitat rights have been recognized in the State despite claims filed. Till date no steps have been taken towards conversion of forest village into revenue villages. The State Government is apathetic in the FRA implementation process in the State which is quite evident from the fact that in its status report it is claiming to have completed the recognition of individual forest rights in 14,831 villages, including in one district (Gajapati) while the ground reality is totally different.

The Forest Department is disrespecting the FRA and Gram Sabha and is still continued its control over MFP like kendu leaf and bamboo; misusing CAMPA fund and lurching Red Plus projects etc, CSD said.