

Odisha: Tribals, Forest Dwellers of Nuapada District continue their protest demanding Recognition of Community Forest Rights

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Report by OdishaDiary bureau, Nuapada: Hundreds of tribals and forest dwellers under the banner of Jami Jungle Mukti Andolan and Jungle Bachao Abhijan affiliated to CSD, Odisha gheraoed the DFO Office on 8th Feb 2013 after the daylong protest Rally at Rajkhariar demanding implementation of Forest Rights Act, 2006 in the district. They submitted a memorandum to the District Collector through the BDO.

The protest dharana witnessed a unique mode of protest in which tribals and forest dwellers have brought rice, leaves, fuel wood and vegetables at the dharana place and are determined to continue their protest dharana till the District Administration including the district Collector, DFO, DWO and all the Tahasildars do not come to the dharana place and assure them to fulfill their genuine demands. Accordingly, their "Protest Dharana" is continued from last 8th Feb in front of the Block Office and has already completed 11 days. Tribals and forest dwellers, PRI members from different parts of the district have extended support to them and joining the protest dharana. However, till date the district administration is silent and have not come and discuss with them on their genuine demands.

Nuapada District was under Kalahadi district until 1st April 1993. Thereafter, it has been divided into 5 Blocks and Tahasil(Nuapada, Komna, Khariar, Boden and Sinapali). There are 658 villages under 109 G.Ps. Besides, there are 2 N.A.C(Khariar and Khariar Road) and 6 Police Stations and 20 RI Circles. As per the 2001, the population of the district is 5,30,690 mostly living in rural areas leaving only 5.66% living in the urban areas. Scheduled Caste constitutes 13.62% while ST constitutes 34.71% of the total population. Besides different tribal communities, one PVTG/PTG called "Chikutia-Bhunja" is also live in the district.

In the district, there is 470455.96 acres of forest land which is 49 percent of the total geographical area of the district. Out of this, 456764.75 acres constituting 97.08 per cent is Revenue Forest Land while only 108.68 acres are under the State Forest Department and rest 13582.53 acres are DLC land. Besides, there is a Sanctuary (Sunabeda Sanctuary) in Nuapada district.

As per the latest FRA implementation report produced by the State Level Monitoring Committee(SLMC), by 30th Nov 2012, 5290 individual forest rights titles have been distributed only to STs out of the 10835 claims filed at the Gram Sabha level. Besides, SLMC reports that only 35 community forest rights claims have been filed at the Gram Sabha level out of which 5 CFR titles have been distributed in the district. However, as per leader of JJMA, Khuturam Sunani, "they have already submitted more than 100 community forest rights claims to which the SDLC and DLC is not reflecting in its status report. Even the 5 CFR titles shown to have distributed are not distributed at all". He further raised that "even after the passing of four years of FRA implementation, the district administration is totally confused over Section 3(1) and Section 3(2) of FRA and yet to know what needs to be recognized under community forest

rights which hopefully form “C” added by Forest Rights (Amendment) Rules, 2012 would clarified them.

According to Dr. Manohar Chauhan, member CSD, Odisha who have recently carried out study on the implementation of FRA in Nuapada district shared that “ In Nuapada district up to 24th Feb 2012, the process of FRA implementation have been done in only 112 villages coming under 76 G.Ps out of 665 villages and 109 GPs”. He also further stated that the individual forest rights recognition process has been seriously halted due to non-consideration of claims over “Gramya Jungle Jogya” kissam land available mostly in “rakhit khata” which has been in fact treated as “forest land” by the Govt. itself over the period.

The main demands of the tribals and Forest dwellers includes, recognition of community forest rights to all villages, conversion of forest villages/forest hamlets into revenue villages, recognition of individual forest rights of the OTFDs duly approved by the Gram Sabha, immediate step to be taken on the missing claims in the Forest and DWO office, Recognition of forest rights over "Dongari" and "Gram Jungle Jogya" kissam of land, re-verification and correction of faulty titles issued and appointment of block wise special RI/Amen for FRA etc.

Representative of the Jami Jubgle Mukti Sangathan and jungle Bachao Sangathan also met and submitted a copy of their memorandum even to Jayram Rahesh, Minister, Rural Development, GoI on his visit on 16th Feb to Nuapada District. They have also call upon all the sangathans across the State to extend their moral support to their continuous struggle.