

AIFFRS Perspective on Forest Dependent Communities

Case study of Communities/issues strictly not coming under FRA

Background:

The need for differentiation of forest dependent communities into tribals and other forest dwellers emerged due to historical reasons where Non tribals had usurped tribal land. There was a fear that the act would now be used to regularize these illegal claimants to the forest. The distinction however could not give due recognition of rights to those whose traditional occupations were based on the forest but for various reasons had to shift their habitation. Among these are those who are recognised as tribals in one State but have not been granted the same recognition in the current State of residence.

Lessons from the work of AIFFRS

The case study of Pardhis is covered in the report on Chhatisgarh and the case study of Internally Displaced persons not covered in the ISB report but in the report of APT (Andhra Pradesh Telangana) Consortium for local self governance a member of AIFFRS.

The case study of Kashtkari Sanghatana in Palghar District reported in the Chapter on Maharashtra covers a different dimension. The concern of the Forest Rights Act was in sustainable forest livelihoods and hence distinguished between livelihood needs and commercial exploitation of the forest. The necessity of tribals to harvest and market forest produce is an intrinsic part of livelihoods. Recognition has been granted to forest dependent communities to sustainably harvest tendu patta and bamboo but the same recognition has not been given for timber. It is Kashtkari Sanghatana's contention that this right is required if sustainable forest based livelihoods are to be achieved.

Way forward

In line with the suggestions for promotion of CFR and landscape based federations be they of gram sabhas of specific communities the fundamental concern will be sustainable forest based livelihoods. While the federation will negotiate the rights of such communities at the district level and higher levels, the groups of individuals will have to ensure that these find a place in the discourse at the gram sabha level. The Federation and support Civil Society organisations can help in showing how their livelihoods fit into the framework of forest based livelihoods.