

# Institute for Ecology and Livelihood Action

## – A journey over the last five years

### **Background:**

Institute for Ecology and livelihood action was registered on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2015 with the objective of developing an Action research based approach to Ecology, livelihood and governance. As such the initial action research agenda where those which could not find a space in the conventional way organisations are run and governed. It also takes into account that concerns related to ecology require an integrated approach to both natural and social sciences not normally the case in the current way work division takes place within organisations. The second fundamental proposition was that donor driven agenda has limitations and hence the comprehensive agenda would require the investment of both time and money of the founders, to give shape to the organisation. It was only this approach which helped the founders collaborate meaningfully with others contributing their own time and resources in a similar manner and hence in the process build up a National edifice from the grass roots upwards. In practical terms this means that the organisation is not working for profit, rather its action research is directed at social agenda of relevance to local communities and the Nation as a whole. The organisation has chosen to work with four types of grass roots communities due to its understanding that it is these communities who primarily have a stake in ecological sustainability as their livelihood and life support systems depend on it. The four communities are as follows:

**a. Small Farmers:** who apart from the agriculture which they practise, also depend on the commons for sustenance.

**b. Tribals:** who might be small famers too but are mainly forest dwellers or forest dependent communities. This distinction is being made to separate out those who have distanced themselves from the tribal way of life.

**c. Pastoralists:** For whom the landscape is the source of their sustenance. Their lifestyle is distinguished by the fact that they do not depend on a particular piece of land for long, rather move from one plot to another. While they play in role in recycling agricultural stubble into the fields by way of dung, they are also able to use common lands not fit for anything but grass. The relevance of this community is only now being properly recognised as also how they have been able to colonise traditionally hostile regions like the desert.

**d. Fishers:** For the purposes of IELA, this refers to the small, marginal and traditional fishing communities whose livelihoods are based on capture not culture fisheries. Studies have shown that the sustainable livelihoods of these communities are interwoven with the practises of the three communities mentioned above and hence all four are natural allies in a process that involves integrated development for sustainable livelihoods.

Along with this two other aspects need mention:

**a)** The relevance of renewable energy in the control of local communities. How this can be made possible is a subject that requires a lot of action research.

**b)** The relevance of government programmes in general and the relevance of MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Act 2005) in particular. This needs to be harnessed by the local communities to bring about the transition to their economies destroyed by the current way the resources have been exploited and damaged by the use of fertilizer and pesticides.

While the specific thematic areas above require specific focus, how they come together at the gram sabha and how these gram sabhas can be federated at the landscape level is the primary area of engagement.

## Annual Report 2015-16

This report will also cover the brief period from 19<sup>th</sup> March 2015- 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 when the organisation took formal shape and the management structure was put in place.

### **Study of Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 in Rajasthan – case study of Sariska and Phulwari ki Naal**

IELA contributed both time and financial resources to a study being done by the Managing Trustee. The study helped to develop a perspective of Rajasthan forests which as mentioned in the report showed that 84% of the forests were east of the Aravalis while another 9% were in two districts adjoining the Aravalis on the Western side. The study also showed the relevance of the tribal and pastoral economies to sustainable development. IELA in collaboration with KRPAVIS did a study of how FRA was being violated in Sariska Tiger Reserve and also highlighted how the forest department was misusing the provisions of FRA to displace people from the region. The study was taken up by Global Human Rights Communications which filed two petitions in the National Human Rights Commission for violated of the rights of tribals, scheduled castes and other forest dwellers.

On a part of this effort IELA organised two meetings, one in Udaipur, Rajasthan and the other at Ahmedabad to highlight issues related to non implementation of FRA in the Western region States of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

### **Development of the concept note on Commons and initiation of a process of National engagement**

Following up on the understanding leading to formation of IELA, the Managing Trustee IELA toured the country developing relations with civil society organisations engaged with the four communities mentioned above. This led to the need to develop a concept note on commons which could engage all of these communities on one platform. Accordingly the note was developed and widely circulated across the country. The note kept in the centre, the perspective gained with the help of Timbuktu Collective based in Anantpur District of Andhra Pradesh. The idea was to see its wider applicability for fishers' pastoral, tribals and small farmers across the country through discussions with some of the leading practitioners in the field. The process also explored the relevance of renewable energy for decentralised governance and in this connection examined some of the advancements that had taken place till then.

### **Meeting of Adivasi Jan Sangathan Morcha, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2015**

As a follow up to the rally on 9th August (International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples), a meeting of Adivasi Jan Sanghatana Morcha was called on 24th October. Mr. Meghraj Tawad (labour union and tribal leader) was chief speaker. The meeting was attended by 20 persons from five districts resolved to do the following – **A.** Follow up with the Commissioner of the Tribal Area Development and the collectors of the different districts on their charter of demands placed on 9th August. **B.** Demand for management of eco-tourism programme in the protected areas and sanctuaries by the local communities and the revenue

so generated should accrue directly to them. Steps to curb the destruction of forests on account of eco-tourism and resultant damage to the related livelihoods of the forest dwelling communities. **C.** Demand that non-tribal controlled mining in the TSP area should be banned forthwith and anonymous mining in the name of tribal be investigated as well. **D.** Follow up on PESA.

The meeting discussed the implementation of FRA at length and noted with concern that leave alone Alwar, Rajsamand is now being excluded from implementation of FRA due to Todgarh Rawli being declared an eco-sensitive Zone. It also noted that IFR titles have been given in 'reserve forests' and none in sanctuaries and National Parks.

RMKU has mentioned that its members from Ganganagar, Hanumangarh, Bikaner and Churu have expressed solidarity with the demands of Adivasi Jan Sanghatana Morcha.

**State Convention of Tribal and Peasant Members of Rajasthan Majdoor Kisan Union at Molela (Rajsamand, Rajasthan) 21-22 March, 2016.**

The convention was annual event of RMKU was organised for restructuring internal leadership and discussion on the issues encountered by tribal and peasants regarding their rights provided under the constitution, implementation of various government acts (e.g. The Forest Right Act 2006) and sharing of ideas by invited experts. Mr. Viren lobo (Managing Trustee of IELA is also one of the patrons of RMKU) facilitated the event. He presented the national and international perspective in which the work of RMKU is placed, which covers the relevance and significance of community control of natural resources in the life support systems, reasons for the rise of the unorganised sector labour and necessity for development of a social security system for this sector (including those involved in and dependant on natural resources).

## Annual Report 2016-17

### Capacity development of Civil Society Organisations in FRA in the Western Region

Based on the ecological perspective given to the work of FRA in Rajasthan in 2015, the action research study expanded to cover the Western region of India. It was decided to focus on collaboration with Adivasi Jan Uthan Trust who was in a position to understand and absorb the ecological thrust being given to the action research study. The first part consisted in consolidating the work being done with them over the last seven years in order to develop the framework for the future course of action. Simultaneous to this was the follow up in Rajasthan. The report was translated into Hindi and on the basis of the findings of the report a five page letter was drafted on behalf of Rajasthan Mazdoor Kisan Union working with tribals, famers and unorganised labour in Rajasthan. This letter highlighting the issues in FRA was sent to the Minister of tribal Affairs. The letter was the basis for participation of Rajasthan Mazdoor Kisan Union at the Public hearing in Delhi on the occasion of 10 years of implementation of FRA. IELA also contributed to the development of the Promise and performance report on 10 years of FRA in Rajasthan and facilitated the participation of a number of organisations at the National event held at Delhi. In collaboration with All India Forum for Forest Rights Struggles, a workshop on FRA was held in the Western Region, IELA also participated in similar workshops held in other regions of the country. This was conducive to IELA developing a national perspective on forestry.

Separately IELA did a study of the performance of FRA in Goa. The study highlighted that though the Goa government had filed more than 10,000 cases the Government of India had not reported the same on their web site. The study also highlighted that due to non cooperation of the Forest department, there was very poor implementation of FRA in the State.

### Rajasthan Promises and Performance of Forest Right Act: The Tenth Anniversary Report

The state report was produced as part of the Community Forest Rights: Learning and Advocacy Process for assessment of the implementation of the ‘Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006’ (in short – FRA) in the duration of ten years after the promulgation of the act in 2006. The report highlights current situation of the implementation of FRA in Rajasthan along with inquiring into the key issues of non-implementation and provides certain recommendations towards its effective implementation. The report also includes a preliminary assessment of the potential forest area over which rights can be recognized in Rajasthan under the FRA. The estimate offers a baseline for informing implementation and planning, for rights recognition under the FRA, and allows policy makers and forest-dependent communities to assess the extent to which the law has been implemented.

### Deliberate Deprivation of Forest Resource Rights and Forced Eviction of Indigenous Communities: Violation of FRA, 2006 in Sariska Tiger Reserve, Alwar, Rajasthan (Report)

This document investigates into the arbitrary attitude of the authorities in demarcating the Critical Tiger Habitat (CTH / Core Zone) and Buffer Zone in the Sariska Tiger Reserve,

Alwar, Rajasthan. The report describes evidence based facts about forest department bypassing the provision of the ‘Gram Sabha Consent’ for voluntary village relocation (as prescribed by the National tiger Conservation Authority, NTCA) in the process of relocating villages from the tiger reserve. It also pointed out how the provisions of Gram Sabha Consent were ignored and instead of that individual consent being validated in total violation of the prescribed guidelines of the NTCA. The report also describes violation of the provisions of FRA, 2006 as well as FRA Amendment Rules, 2012 by ignoring settlement of rights (including forest resource rights) of villagers before their relocation and rather forced eviction of villagers without settlement of their rights through arbitrarily planned compensation packages and forced relocation of individual families without any Gram Sabha Consent.

### **Workshop on the Relevance of Commons for Sustainable Development, Udaipur, 20-22 January 2017**

Following up on the perspective note on commons and engagement with likeminded organisations across the country, a workshop on the relevance of commons was organised in Udaipur in January 2017. People from 14 States representing tribals, fishers, pastoralists and small farmers participated in the workshop along with those who were exploring the relevance of renewable energy for decentralised governance. Based on the model developed by Timbuktu collective in Anantpur, a plan was developed to try and operationalise pilots in other parts of the country. IELA took the responsibility for developing the pilot that had been initiated by Habitat and Adivasi Jan Uthan Trust in Chhota Udepur while exploring how community based organisations could do the same in another five states of the country.

### **Regional Forestry Meeting, Ahmedabad, 14-15 May 2016**

The idea of this meeting was to discuss upon how strategically the four stakeholder forest dwelling communities namely Tribals, Fisher Communities, Pastoralists and Other Forest Dependant Small Agricultural Communities can work together for assertion of their forest rights under the Forest Right Act 2006 and collective approach to Community Forest Resource Rights (including right to manage, conserve & protect their forest resources). The meeting was attended by 40 participants representing four States. Mr. Viren Lobo (Managing Trustee of IELA) explained the purpose of calling the and pointed out that in the ten years since implementation of FRA, only 9% of the total area in which entitlements exist have been recognised. He also put example of Rajasthan where the figure is a mere 0.8 % and said that the focus so far has primarily been on Individual Forest Rights (IFR) instead of Community Forest Resource Rights (CFR) and this approach has been actively promoted by the State machinery, the result of this is there to see.

State-wise presentations were given by invited representatives that included Advocate Ramesh Nandwana (Rajasthan), Mrs. Trupti Parekh Mehta (Gujarat), Mr. Ashok Shrimali (Madhya Pradesh), Ravindra Velip (Goa). Thematic and other presentations were given by Mr. Aman Singh (KRAPAVIS, Alwar, Rajasthan), Ms. Hiral (Cohesion trust, Gujarat), Sejal along with Jivika, Vibha & Abbas Bhai (Anandi, Gujarat), Mr. Mujahid (AIFPPFW), Mr. Chetan (FES, Gujarat), Dr. Sunil Dubey (IELA, Rajasthan), Ms. Soma K.P. (Independent),

Lalji Desai (Marg, Gujarat), Mr. Prabhat Sinha (RMKU, Rajasthan) and Mr. Sagar Rabari (ICAN, Gujarat).

The meeting concluded with charting out a follow-up plan for documentation of the emerging issues and consultations with national forums of organisations working on FRA, field visits and sub-group consultations at regional level.

**Meeting with Traditional Forest Dwellers and Forest Dependent Communities at Panarwa, (Tehsil Jhadol, Udaipur), 26<sup>th</sup> November 2016**

The meeting was called in collaboration with Rajasthan Majdoor Kisan Union. More than 300 people from 11 panchayats attended the meeting. The meeting aimed at public discussion on the significance of the Forest Rights Act in the context of the Historical injustice done to the tribals and the significance of the clause providing joint title to the women under the act, as well. While discussing the poor implementation of the Act and the continued harassment by the forest department, the need to protect the remaining forests and apply for CFR in this respect was also highlighted. The need to re-examine traditional life support systems and the related knowledge systems was pointed out in the context of self empowerment. Invited speakers also highlighted the necessity for conservation for livelihood and pointed out the prevailing psyche of ‘ignoring forest dwellers & dependent communities and focus on the commercial outlook (of which the forest department is also a part) that is destroying the forests.’

As a major outcome, an eleven member committee comprising of persons from each of panchayats who attended was formed and a plan for panchayat level meetings was also decided.

## Annual Report 2017-18

### Status of FRA implementation in 10 Sanctuaries and National Parks spread over five States and development of model micro plan

While dealing with the issues emerging in the previous studies under FRA in the States of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Goa, Association with All India Front for Forest Rights Struggles (AIFF-RS) created the base working on a cross section of Sanctuaries and National Parks in Five States of the country (including the States of West Bengal and Odisha to the other three) and having tribals, pastoralists, fishers and small farmers as dependent communities. In the meantime Adivasi Jan Uthan Trust had also agreed to help facilitate the development of a model micro plan for the facilitation of Community forest rights for sustainable development in the tribal region of Chhota Udepur.

The Study of violations in Sariska Tiger reserve led to a workshop among the pastoralists of the region and the development of a letter to the Minister of Tribal affairs similar to the one written for the State by Rajasthan Mazdoor Kisan Union but dealing specifically with the issues facing the pastoralists in Sariska. As a result of the study the fact that Alwar was not included in the list of States filing claims under the FRA was also highlighted. A perspective on how to deal with the issues of fishers in Mangrove forests was also developed.

As part of AIFF-RS an exercise highlighting the impact of the Comprehensive Afforestation Act (CFA) passed in 2016 was also conducted in which IELA took part. The contradictions between FRA and CFA were sought to be understood. In collaboration with Habitat, IELA presented the issues and questions related to the implementation of Compensatory Afforestation. Separately a case related to how this was being implemented in Rajasthan was also done to show the issues involved in taking up this matter systematically.

The questions related to CAF 16 and the draft Forest policy, were taken up in the regional workshops organised by AIFF-RS across the country. In the Northern region workshop held at Dehra Dun, the need to be engaged with FRA as means to address the issue of pastoralists also came up.

A draft perspective on women and FRA building on the CFR-LA group perspective on gender and FRA was also developed for larger circulation. The note highlighted the following

- a. Reproduction instead of production focus. This focussed on the quality of life and the wider applicability of this perspective to the natural world as well.
- b. The fact that access rights rather than titles were of more significance to women who directly engaged with the land.
- c. Issues related to violence including mental violence and the facilitation of the creation of conducive structures for full and meaningful articulation of women. This perspective was initiated with women and children in Chhota Udepur district through the Environment Education programme. The exercise culminated in a Forest Festival at Uncheda where a

declaration to protect the landscape was taken by Fenai Mata Revakhand Jaiv Shristi Mandal a federation of 42 villages in the region.

As part of the study, follow up arising out of the response of the Government of Rajasthan to the petition of Global Human Rights Communications in the National Human Rights Commission was also taken up. A series of affidavits were prepared with the help of representatives of Rajasthan Mazdoor Kisan Union and IELA.

#### **Follow up on the Commons workshop at Udaipur**

Apart from the action research work being done in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Goa, as part of the follow up of the workshop visits to Kashmir, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra and Telangana were also organised. In West Bengal apart from the study of modules to be developed in the Elephant and Tiger sanctuaries a study of the drainage system of Kolkatta were also studied with the idea of seeing the relevance of the fishing cooperatives in the East Kolkatta wetlands provided an inexpensive method of waste management provided toxic wastes and other industrial wastes could be segregated from the system. In Andhra and Telangana, the creation of APT consortium for Local self governance was facilitated with the help of six organisations working within the region. Apart from working on the ecological issues related to decentralised local governance, the Consortium also took up the issues of persons due to be displaced by Polavaram Dam and the questions related to the livelihood security of Internally displaced persons from Chhatisgarh who were living in the forests of Andhra and Telangana.

#### **National Workshop on Conservation of the Community Conserved Areas (ICCAs) - Orans/Charnots at Jodhpur, 15-16 July 2017**

Orans are one of the major types of CCAs that are prevailing in India and livelihood of many communities like forest dwellers, pastoralists, villagers etc is directly as well indirectly connected with various ecosystem services delivered by them. In order to respond to the short and long term scenario to sustain livelihoods of the local communities consisting of poor farmers, agro-pastorals, nomadic communities and so on as to have resilient system consisting of productive ecosystems and strengthened local institutions and policy frameworks, deliberations were done on community-level observations through scientific led mix on communities' livelihoods and on local environments, in order to build on the local efforts to cope with as well as adapt to these changes by the local communities. The workshop was organised Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) Jodhpur Chapter and Mehrangarh Museum Trust, Jodhpur.

Dr. Sunil Dubey, Joint Managing Trustee, IELA gave the presentation on 'Baseline of Potential Oran Sites through Geospatial Tools & Techniques' that described the scientific documentation and mapping of Orans of Jawai Bandh Conservation Reserve (earlier done under consultancy to the Forest Dept.).

#### **Zonal Workshop on Post CFR, Udaipur, 29-30 July 2017**

The workshop was organised under the banner of National Adivasi Andolan (NAA) and All India Front of Forest Rights Struggles (AIFFRS) and hosted by IELA. The workshop was

focused on strengthening post CFR (i.e. after the recognition of Community Forest Resource Rights to the Gram Sabha, under the Forest Right Act 2006) activities, such as, involvement of villagers in protection, management and regeneration of forest biodiversity/resources by forming a committee by Gram Sabha under FRA and making convergence with various state departments for promotion of livelihood and income generation programs as per the Rule no. 16 of FRA Amended Rule 2012. IELA apart from active participation also facilitated the design of agenda and local logistics.

**Consultancy to Wildlife Division, Udaipur (Dept. of Forest, Rajasthan)**

The Wildlife Division, Udaipur assigned consultancies to IELA for scientific study and documentation of a wetland Udaisagar and Mapping & documentation of Orans (Sacred Groves) of Jawai Bandh Conservation Reserve. Overall 03 consultancy reports were prepared as per the assignments –

1. Baseline Survey of Orans (Survey and Assessment of Biodiversity), Jawai Bandh Conservation Reserve (Sumerpur)
2. Mapping and (Geographical Information System based) Digitization of the Identified Orans in Jawai Bandh Conservation Reserve (Sumerpur)
3. Baseline Data (Aquatic and Terrestrial Ecology), Wetland Conservation, Udaisagar.

## Annual Report 2018-19

### Consolidation of the work related CFR in Rajasthan

Learning from the legal requirements to be fulfilled in relation to responding to a reply of the Government of Rajasthan it was felt that conscious approach to document the violations at the grass roots was required. This meant that the local community needed to be trained in the filing of RTIs (under the Right to Information Act). Accordingly it was decided to facilitate the same in Alwar and Chittaurgarh with the help of KRAPAVIS and Badod Mazdoor Kisan Union respectively. The idea was to get a comprehensive picture of the nature of violations taking place at various levels. This exercise helped to put in place the requisite grass root documentation to file a reply in the NHRC. When later this exercise was threatened to be overturned by the Supreme Court ruling on evictions, a comprehensive report on the basis of the RTIs filed was also placed before the Minister of Tribal affairs with the help of All India Forum for Forest Rights Struggles.

As a result of the efforts of IELA and other organisations in Rajasthan, for the first time, Individual Forest Rights claims were recognised in sanctuaries and by the end of the year community forest rights claims were also being processed. The violations as well as the achievements were summarised in three pamphlets prepared for Sariska, Chittaurgarh and Rajasthan as a whole. These had been prepared in Hindi and English. While the English Pamphlet was distributed through Internet, the Hindi pamphlet was printed and circulated through a systematic campaign in the districts of Udaipur, Banswara, Dungarpur, Chittaurgarh and Alwar. On the basis of work done in those regions, calls to protect Eastern Ghats, Sundarbans and the Aravalis were prepared and circulated as well. The call for Eastern Region was translated into Telugu and was the basis for organising a workshop on FRA in the region.

The process of regional meetings being held by AIFF-RS was facilitated by IELA and the opportunity was used in Western region to consolidate the work being done by Adivasi Jan Uthan Trust by calling tribal organisations from neighbouring districts and the neighbouring States bordering Gujarat as well. Representatives from seven districts of Gujarat participated as well as representatives from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. The process was then later used to develop a perspective for the Confluence zone (Aravalis, Satpudas and Sahyadris) with Adivasi Jan Uthan at the epicentre. The regional meeting in Dehra Dun helped to develop a perspective for the pastoral communities in the States of Himachal, Utrakhand and the neighbouring district of Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh.

### **‘Deliberate Delay in Execution of Forest Right Act: A Report Based on Evidences Collected Through ‘Right To Information’ Campaign by Bhil and Garasiya Tibe People in Rawatbhata Tehsil in Chittaurgarh District Rajasthan’ (Report)**

The Chittorgarh district administration and the forest department were found flouting the provisions, guidelines and rules of the Forest Right Act and arbitrarily implementation of the said act. The claims of traditional forest dwellers being either denied or kept pending without

giving any reason. Claim files being rejected arbitrarily on the basis of false objections raised by the forest department and ignoring the verification done by the Forest Right Committees (FRCs). The claimants were not being informed of rejections; they are neither given written reasons for rejection in writing (as per guidelines) nor a chance to appeal as per rules.

Taking stock of the situation BMKS started handholding support to FRA claimants in filing the RTIs to get the documentary evidences of the status of filed claims and other information regarding implementation of FRA. RTIs were filed at three levels – Village Panchayat, Sub-Division Level and District level respectively. The RTI campaign started in June 2018 and within one year 120 RTIs were filed from 10 villages belonging to 04 Panchayats of Bhensrodgarh Panchayat Samiti, Chittaurgarh. The findings were documented along with data analysis and a report was produced for wider circulation.

### **Collaboration with Searching and Service in Unity to help women farmers in Ahmednagar**

Searching and service in Unity is a youth organisation that stages a play every year to raise funds for useful causes. As the cause related to helping women farmers in Ahmednagar, IELA decided to collaborate with them to raise funds for the cause. The calls related to Sundarban, Eastern Ghats and Aravalis were published in their annual brochure by the respective organisations making the call. The play was followed up by a visit to Social Centre by IELA and SSU to understand the issues being faced. SSU and IELA also teamed up to show the movie Ho Gaya Pir Parvat Si a film on the nature of destruction caused by unsystematic development in the Himalayas.

### **Preparation of a proposal on permaculture for Big Medicine Charitable Trust, Udaipur**

Given the nature of IELA's experience, Big Medicine Charitable Trust (BMCT) requested the trustees help them prepare a proposal for NABARD on the question of translating permaculture principles on the ground. BMCT had previously worked to help Ghati village in Jaisamand as the first completely organic village in the State. The idea was now to use this expertise to develop Ghati into a permaculture experimental station. IELA used its expertise to convince BMCT to develop a three stage approach to the development of Jaisamand catchment area as a way to mainstream permaculture lessons learnt at a larger landscape level. The exercise exposed IELA to the state of the art in permaculture and other disciplines related to sustainable development.

### **Preparation of a proposal for SOPPECOM on sustainable development keeping women at the Centre**

As the Managing trustee of IELA was a member of Society for Promotion of Participatory Ecosystems Management (SOPPECOM), the expertise with IELA was used to develop a proposal for sustainable development keeping focus on women in four States of the country namely Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and West Bengal. The experience helped IELA consolidate its approach to natural resource development keeping women and children in the

centre which was being developed in collaboration with Habitat, Visnagar in Mehsana District Gujarat and Adivasi Jan Uthan Trust, Bhekadiya Chhota Udepur, Gujarat.

**Seminar on ‘Forest Rights Act: Status and Direction’, at Redma (Daltonganj, Jharkhand), 26<sup>th</sup> October 2018**

A one day community seminar was organised to discuss upon the status of implementation of the ‘Forest Rights Act 2006’ at Redma (Daltonganj, Jharkhand). The seminar was organised by Jharkhand Majdoor Kisan Union and co-sponsored by IELA, Jharkhand Forest Right Forum and Vanvasi Utthan Samiti. There was overwhelming response from the tribal stakeholders who in more than 800 numbers attended the seminar. Tribal stakeholders (including those who have filed the individual and community claims under the FRA) presented their experiences with government functionaries, atrocities being faces and arbitrary processing of claims by government functionaries etc. Invited guests from national forums also delivered their thoughts. The seminar resolved further action points that included approach to the elected representatives (MLAs & MPs) for intervention in the atrocious attitude of the government functionaries; legal means to counteract against arbitrarily acts of non-implementation of FRA; signature campaign to send memorandums to the Chief Minister and Union Minister, etc.

**Production and Distribution of Pamphlets on Status & Implementation of Forest Right Act 2006**

Three pamphlets (One state level and two regional level) were produced before the Rajasthan State Assembly Election 2018, for wider awareness among FRA stakeholders about facts related to deliberate delay in the implementation of the Forest Right Act and non-execution of the CFR process in the state. The state level pamphlet included factual summary and data about status of FRA implementation in the state after more than 10 years of execution of the said act. It also contained factual points about deprivation of forest rights and forced eviction of people from reserved forests, wildlife sanctuaries and tiger reserves. The pamphlet also hinted on official atrocities and political negligence towards the FRA claimants. Whereas, two separate pamphlets produced for Alwar and Chittorgarh district regions respectively contained a bit detailed region specific facts about enactment of the FRA in the region and the highlighted figures. The pamphlets also incorporated appeal on behalf of communities eligible for FRA (CFR in particular) to existing MLAs and MPs of the state/region as well as prospecting candidates of the State Assembly and Parliament elections, for their supportive role in the interest of (FRA stakeholder) electoral.

## Annual Report 2019-20

### Giving thrust to CFR and development of Federation

Over the period of one year, the credibility of Badod Mazdoor Kisan Union developed sufficiently for it to undertake the process of trying to convince the local community to develop an approach to Community Forest Rights as the way to effectively deal with the systematic undermining of the Forest Rights Act. This thrust was provided in the States of Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana as well.

As a result of the work being done the previous two years, two proposals were prepared for AIFF-RS. One was for Global Green Fund to continue to facilitate the process of regional and national level meetings. The other was for Indian School of Business as a follow up of the meeting with the Minister of tribal affairs the previous year. This study was to cover ten States and would extend into the next year as well. At the end of the year, with the funds available with CORD from Global Green Fund, a National meeting was called to highlight the findings of the study. At that time six States had been covered. To facilitate the process a policy brief was prepared by IELA which incorporated IELA's work in the States of Rajasthan, Gujarat Andhra and Telangana s well. IELA also helped to prepare the points to be taken up with the Minister following the meeting. The meeting outlined the strategy for the next year as well. A Core team for AIFF-RS was formed in which a member of IELA was given representation.

### Maha Utsav – Maha Yatra in Fenai Rewakhand Region, Chhota Udepur, Gujarat, 9-16 January 2020

The work being done in Chhota Udepur culminated in a Maha Utsav - Maha Yatra celebrating the specific Bio Universe and Tribal Culture of Chhota Udepur Tribal region. The event was organised by villagers of Fenai Rewakhand region of Chhota Udepur (which is rich of tribal population that is mostly dependent on forest resources and marginal agriculture for livelihood) with logistic facilitation by Adivasi Jan Uttha Trust (AAJ). The Maha Yatra events covered travel of more than 220 Km through 80 villages having the population of more than 8,000 people. IELA co-sponsored the event as well as contributed in its planning and organisation.

The Maha Yatra showcased the efforts related to the conservation and protection of the biodiversity of the region and its related issues. It also included special events highlighting the Biodiversity of the region and the strongly inbuilt tribal culture as series of "Nature-Culture Festivals" like, Nature festival, Forest festival, Traditional Food festival, Nutrition festival, Jal Yagy & Jal Sanskriti (Water festival), Display of local natural wealth (medicinal plants, indigenous seed diversity, minor forest produce, etc.), Local traditional herbal healers sammelan, Natural healing festival based on local traditional knowledge wisdom & resources, local cultural festival. In addition to this, details related to local resources and provisions were also shared i.e. Collection of Minor Forest Produce, its processing and

marketing; Community Forests Rights (CFR) and Biological Diversity Act awareness among the local community and their ecologically sound implementation.

**Work related to formation of Children’s parliaments in Udaipur, Chhota Udepur, Odsiha and Delhi**

Taking advantage of the fact that the Managing Trustee of IELA was doing an Impact assessment for PRATYeK, IELA used the opportunity to engage NGOs from Udaipur, Chhota Udepur, Odisha and Delhi in the process. In the process of training these organisations on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, a perspective on the SDGs for the tribal regions of the country was developed. This perspective was widely shared by IELA and used to initiate the process of Children’s parliament in Bhekadiya village of Chhota Udepur.

**Preparation of a proposal for River Basin Management for SOPPECOM**

The experience in Chhota Udaipur was consolidated through the process of developing a proposal for Narmada River Basin for SOPPECOM. The proposal envisaged the extension of the process of Federation development to other regions within the confluence area and in other parts of the Narmada so as to develop a cross section of engagement of local communities representing different typologies (upstream, midstream and downstream) on the Narmada river basin.

**Preparation of a proposal for Sustainable development for Gayatri Seva Sansthan**

The process initiated with Big Medicine Charitable Trust was used to develop another proposal for Gayatri Seva Sansthan which helped to consolidate the work being done on a individual basis by the Joint Managing Trustee IELA with that organisation. The work in effect also tried to translate the approach being developed for Narmada River basin to work being done by IELA and Gayatri Seva Sansthan in the Mahi River Basin.

**COVID-19 Relief Measures for Tribal Communities and Poor Families**

IELA extended relief measures in tribal areas (mostly forest dependent communities) as well as other rural and urban areas. The relief measures included supply of ration kits to needy families {more than 50 families in Rawatbhata (Chittaurgarh) area; 40 families in poor slum areas of Udaipur city}; technical and handholding support in filing applications for central and state government support & relief schemes including MGNREGA, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana, PM Kisan Yojana, PM Jan Dhan Yojana, Subsidised Ration at Public Distribution Shops etc (more than 200 families). Apart from technical and handholding support during COVID-19 lockdown, IELA and BMKS are continuing their relief measures during the unlockdown phase through handholding support, technical assistance, advocacy and pursuing of related issues with the government departments.

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