

Joint Communication signed to provide more powers to tribals

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In news

Joint Communication for more effective implementation of the Forest Rights Act(FRA) 2006 signed by Environment and Tribal Affairs Ministries recently.

Background

A meeting was held between both ministers on 10th August, 2020 which was intended to resolve issues in ensuring community participation in forest management and recent joint communication, is a culmination of the series of consultations done after that.

Key updates on joint communication

- The joint communication is oriented towards the rights and duties of the forest dwellers and to improve participation of such communities in the process of forest management.
- The Joint Communication, addressed to all Chief Secretaries of States/UTs, pertains to more effective implementation of the FRA 2006 and for **harnessing the potential for livelihood improvement of the Forest Dwelling Scheduled Tribes (FDSTs)** and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs).
- It notes that despite a considerable lapse of time since the Act came into force, the process of recognition of rights is yet to be completed.
- Further, the exercise of these rights as well as operationalization of Section 5 of the Act are other

areas of concern.

- As per the joint communication, the frontline staff of State Forest department should extend assistance to the institutions/committees under Rule 4(1)(e) and (f) of the Act for:
 - Preparing conservation and management plan for community forest resources in order to sustainably and equitably manage such community forest resources for the benefit of FDSTs and OTFDs and
 - Integration of such conservation and management plans with the micro plans or working plans or management plans.
- State Governments were urged to **ensure close cooperation and coordination between State Forest Department and State Tribal Welfare Department**, which will provide a win-win situation for both the forests and tribal communities at grassroots level.
- Forest Departments of state governments have been directed to carry out verification of claims for forest rights, mapping of forest lands involved and provision of necessary evidence as required, authentication of records, joint field inspections, awareness generation etc.
- State forest departments have also been asked to undertake projects for value chain addition including capacity building of primary collectors, new harvesting methods, storage, processing and marketing of NTFP under schemes implemented by MoTA as well as designate a nodal agency for specific non-timber forest products as supply chain platforms in collaboration with TRIFED, NSTFDC, Ministry of Ayush, MFP Federations, TDCCs, Van Dhan Kendras etc.
- State tribal welfare departments along with forest departments are also to work out strategies to extend MGNREGS and NRLM to forest dwellers as well as initiate skill development programs and give impetus to agro-forestry and horticulture projects.

Significance

The joint communication indicates a paradigm shift from one of working in silos to achieving convergence between Ministries and Departments, and is a very positive development.

The Forest Rights Act(FRA) 2006

The FRA is an Act to recognize and vest the forest rights and occupation in forest land in FDSTs and OTFDs who have been residing in such forests for generations but whose rights could not be recorded; to provide for a framework for recording the forest rights so vested and the nature of evidence required for such recognition and vesting in respect of forest land.

The Act came into operation with the notification of Rules on 01.01.2008 for carrying out the provisions of the Act.

There are 13 types of rights that have been elucidated in the Act. But despite nearly 13 years of the Act coming into place, only one of these rights – distribution of pattas to forest dwellers – has actually been implemented.

Other initiatives related to forest dwellers

- Ekalavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS).
- Van Dhan Yojana.
- Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Minor Forest Products (MFP).

Extra

Reading:

<https://journalsofindia.com/forest-rights-act-fra/>