WORKSHOP ON FOREST RIGHTS ACT

Building bridges among stakeholders for holistic implementation

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EVEN after many 'progressive' steps by the State Government relating to Forest Rights Act (FRA) implementation, it is short of expectations and apart from the individual right, community forest resources (CFR), non-tribals, habitat concept and primitive tribal groups (PTGs) are yet to get desired attention.

While only 12 per cent claims on individual right have been approved by the district-level coordination committees, at community level the reference is as low as 4 per cent. So to sensitise the Stakeholders, especially the government officials and authorities concerned a three-day State level workshop on FRA with a 'focus' on CFR began here today.

Organised by NGO Vasundhara, the meet is being represented by many PTGs like 'Paudi Bhuyan' from Sundargarh and Angul, 'Juang' (Keonjhar); 'Dongria Kondh' (Rayagada), 'Gond' (Deogarh , Sambalpur), 'Diday' and 'Paraja' (Malkangiri) and 'Saora' from Gajapati district.

The representatives are also narrating their difficulties regarding FRA and its implementation.

"As right over habitat is covered under the FRA now the PTGs have a say in the areas like Khandadhar and Niyamagiri hills, so a meet like this holds enough importance as it brings the PTGs to a common forum to discuss their issues with social workers, policy planners and decision - makers," said social worker Bibhuti Pradhan from Vasundhara.

Technically, though the PTGs and other communities guarding forests have more say over the green cover there is always an "attitudinal problem among the Forest officials on the ownership issues and there is always a need to democratize the governance of natural resources," said Ghasiram Panda, adding the three-day event will thus help in building bridges among stakeholders to resolve issues so that the FRA implementation would come through a 'holistic understanding'.

Executive Director of Vasundhara Prasant Mohanty said more emphasis would be given to implementation of all other aspects of FRA apart from the much talked about individual right and with a large number of community forest management groups working in the State, these would certainly bring in more 'involvement and transparency' to the whole process.