

Clarification on FRA deadline urged

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A NATIONAL Consultation on protected areas and Forest Rights Act (FRA) has urged the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) to clarify on the deadline clause over the Act's implementation. With a large number of forest communities in different states yet to claim rights due to lack of awareness, it observed that the proposed December 31 deadline would deprive the communities of their land and forest rights. The memorandum forwarded to Prime Minister's office, MoTA and SC /ST Welfare Department of the Orissa Government also observed that the opinions of the gram Sabhas concerned must be taken into consideration in the process of determination of community forest rights (CFR) and the implementing agencies must ensure raising awareness on the subject. Implementing authorities and agencies should be asked to support and facilitate the process of claim on habitat rights by the primitive tribal groups (PTGs), it observed adding strict instructions be given by the Government to stop any kind of violations of the law such as plantation in the land claimed under FRA and relocation from tiger reserves during the process of recognition of rights and non-recognition of rights of the other traditional forest dwellers. There are many flaws in the framework and administration of joint forest management and CFR, the participants pointed out and thus the consultation urged a reformulation of the JFM policy to align with various provisions under Sections III and V of the FRA, which are more empowering and equitable.

On habitat rights to PTGs, it said there are a number of groups like Khadia, Mankadia, Kutia Kondh, Chuktia – Bhunjia living in Similipal, Suabeda, Kotgarh and Karlapat wildlife sanctuaries. These PTGs have distinct habitats which are spatial and cultural domains that sustain the integrity of the communities and provide them with livelihood sustenance. However, though the FRA provides a specific right for the PTGs over their habitat, these rights are not recognized in the protected areas. The two-day consultation which ended here yesterday comprised activists, forest rights experts and researchers from Orissa, Chhatisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. It was organized by Odisha Protected Area Network and Vasundhara.