

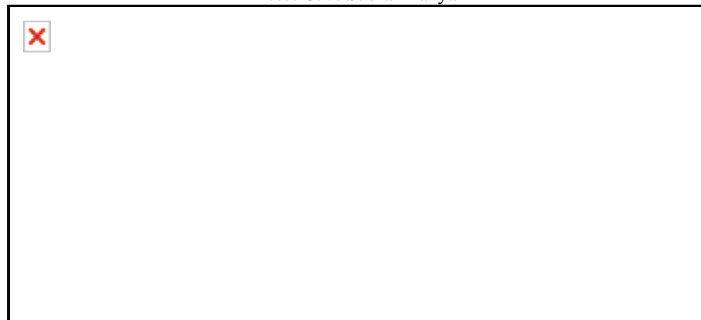
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FRA panel interacts with public

Special Correspondent

Committee members complete the three-day tour of Visakha Agency

Photo: C.V. Subrahmanyam



ELICITING VIEWS:Co-Chairman of Joint Committee on Forest Rights Act Devender Pandey (left) and others during the public consultation exercise in Visakhapatnam on Friday.—

VISAKHAPATNAM: Pattas under the Forest Rights Act are given for a small extent of land while they are cultivating much bigger areas. This was the major complaint made by the participants at a public consultation held by the Joint Committee on Forest Rights Act at the Collectorate here on Friday. Representatives of several organisations from Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, East Godavari, West Godavari, Khammam and some Telangana districts express their views before the committee. Committee Co-Chairman Devender Pandey, members Ravi Rebbapragada and Ravi Chellam were present along with district officials.

The committee toured the Visakha Agency area during the last three days and met many people. It held a public consultation here before leaving for Hyderabad where it would discuss the issues with the State government officials on Saturday.

Apart from getting pattas for a minuscule extent of land they were cultivating, sidelining the role of gram sabhas, refusal to give community forest rights, rejection of applications without a valid reason, insufficient survey of land, etc. were raised by the participants. A Girijan woman from Srikakulam said the FR Act did not give any right to the people and another went to the extent of saying that the people felt that they were happy without this Act since they could cultivate as much land as they could in the past.

They also raised the problem of land taken by the Forest Department for running Vana Samrakshana Samitis in the past. Now the Girijans who had given these lands were in a fix as to whether they could apply for the pattas for these lands or not.

Fishermen's plea

Overall it was felt that the officials concerned were not totally aware of the contents of the Act and the people were not given a full picture.

A fishermen community representative explained that the fishermen needed the land on the seashore which was being claimed by the Forest Department as its own and wanted the FR Act to be amended to provide land to the fishermen.

Later, Dr. Pandey and other members explained to Collector J. Syamala Rao the observations they made and the official assured that the same would be taken up with the government.

Paderu Integrated Tribal Development Agency Project Officer K. Nirmala, District Revenue Officer D.V. Reddy, Chief Conservator of Forests of Visakhapatnam Pradeep Kumar, CCF of Guntur Anup Singh, who gave a power-point presentation of how the areas were recorded in a special method, DFO of Paderu Lohitasyudu and other officials were present.

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