

Forest Act becomes challenge for Tripura JICA

Agartala, Nov 25 : The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act has been proving to be a hurdle in implementation of Tripura JICA project, an externally aided project for poverty alleviation of forest-dependent people of the state.

According to report, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) funded Rs 366 crore in 2007-08 fiscal to Tripura for restoration of degraded forest and improvement of livelihood aspects of tribal families engaged in traditional shifting cultivation, promoting sustainable forest management through Joint Forest Management (JFM).

It was implemented with the objective of improving environment and poverty alleviation within 2014-15 but distribution of land deeds to individual dwellers under forest rights act was hampering the community forest management approaches, sources said.

Interestingly, forest officials kept quiet though they were dead against the act because of their "career prospects", since Left parties had played the main role in passing the act and Tripura had now become pioneer in land deed distribution.

The Tripura government was committed to establish at least 400 JFMCs in 16 jhum-practising regrouped villages but as soon as they got JICA fund, the state started land deed distribution under forest act and about one lakh families were already given patta.

The JICA had clear cut regulations that under the project, the state would ensure forest rehabilitation through JFM and development of JFM community by adopting integrated forest management and in few cases it yielded a good result.

Sources, however, indicated that implementation of JICA project in Tripura was accepted through JFM and cluster approaches - 456 JFMCs, 1950 self-help groups and 49 clusters - but the officials faced serious problem when the state government had been distributing individual land holdings to some of the JFM members who lost their interest in community livelihood management through forest development.

Besides, Tripura JICA has sanctioned Rs 162 crore in 2006-07 for Swan River Integrated Watershed Management Project in Himachal Pradesh, Rs 660 crore for Orissa Forestry Sector Development project, Rs 830 crore for Gujarat Forestry Development Project Phase II and Rs 575 crore for Uttar Pradesh Participatory Forest Management and Poverty Alleviation Project in last three years.

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