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NFRAC to hold public hearing on Forest Rights Act in Himachal

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Shimla: In order to dispose of issues related to affected dependent stakeholders and communities of Himachal Pradesh, the National Forest Rights Act Committee (NFRAC) will organise a public hearing for three days to sort out grievances during its ensuing visit to the state beginning from July 29 to 31.

According to Roma Malik, specialist member of NFRAC, the committee would visit the state to assess implementation of Forest Rights Act 2006, and listen to grievances of the communities affected by non-implementation of the legislation. She informed that NFRAC has been constituted jointly by the ministry of environment and forests and ministry of tribal affairs.

In Himachal, 67 per cent of the land is under jurisdiction of the forest department and only 9 per cent of the land is under agriculture. 90 per cent farmers fall among the marginal and small farmers category as they claim less than one hectare land holding with them. This indicates that there is a large extent of dependence of local communities on these forests for their day-to-day survival and livelihood needs and it further promotes encroachment on forest fringes.

The Forest Rights Act 2006, aims at recognising the individual and community rights of forests under the jurisdiction of the forest department. This legislation is meant to correct the grave historical injustice done as India emerged as a nation state, which has alienated people from the forest resources which they have protected and used since centuries.

"Restricting rights of communities in reserved forests and protected areas or diverting forests to 'development projects' without recognizing and settling the rights of the forest dependent people under the FRA 2006 is a gross injustice. "The non implementation of the Act in the entire state of Himachal Pradesh is a cause of concern for us and we would like to review the status and impacts of such a situation. We, therefore appeal to all those communities and people, who have been residing in or dependent on forest lands for their livelihoods and would like to register their issues with the committee to be present for the public hearing in Bilaspur at the Municipal Committee Hall on July 28," she said. Public Hearings will also be held at Tattapani guest house, Mandi district at 8 am and PWD rest house at Tapri at 4 pm on July 29.

It is worthwhile to mention here that many stakeholders under the banner of Himachal Pradesh Kisan Sabha, affiliated to CPI-M, have been protesting for a long time for implementation the this Act passed by UPA-1 in 2006. It would benefits the people of state especially tribal communities of Lahaul Spiti, Kinnaur and Chamba districts who depend on forest produces for their livelihood.

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