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Special steps to extend forest rights urged

Staff Reporter

'It seems to be difficult to reach out to all migratory primitive tribes'

State-level consultation organised by Vasundhara

Implementation of FRA in PRG area has been a non-starter till now, says a study

BHUBANESWAR: Experts have emphasised evolving special strategies to help Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) take advantage of Forest Rights Act (FRA), which is currently being implemented in Orissa.

Addressing a State-level consultation on FRA organised by Vasundhara, city-based organisation, director of ST and SC Research and Training Institute A. B. Ota said since the Act was being implemented in very short time there was scope of PTGs being overlooked in the processes.

'Shy in nature'

"Members of PTGs have been very shy in nature. They tremble before government officials. Moreover, they keep on migrating from one place to another. Under these circumstances it seems to be very difficult to reach out to all PTGs. There should be special strategy to bring them within the fold of FRA," Mr. Ota said.

Orissa is home to 62 tribes including 13 PTGs which is highest in the country. With strong socio-cultural and religious tradition they have been critically and symbiotically depending on forests and forests resources to derive their livelihood needs.

"When forest was under occupation of PTGs, the quantity and quality of forests was in much better shape. Primitive tribals conserve forests with utmost care. Their traditional practices to earn livelihood and religious belief also contribute to forest conservation immensely," said Trilochan Sahoo, a senior researcher on tribes.

Activists and experts said if PTGs were settled in forests through FRA, they might be lost and whole objectives of the revolutionary law will get defeated.

According to study of Vasundhara, the implementation of FRA in PRG area has been a non-starter till now. "No awareness has been created among gram sabhas for effective

implementation of FRAs,” the organisation said.

It said, “evidence support for the claim is a challenging task. The records from different sources show that PTGs have been residing within their specific customary boundaries with distinct settlement patterns. It is very difficult to identify large number of PTG villages lying outside the micro-projects areas and support the evidence with clear physical boundaries.”

“PTGs have been identified as the most vulnerable and impoverished through different processes of exclusion, which reduced their access to the customarily enjoyed rights and entitlements over resources and livelihood base,” said Sricharan Behera of Vasundhara.

He said it was very important to bring these groups to mainstream development processes using the revolutionary law like FRA.

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