

State to synergise functioning of forest committees

Gaurav Sharma Posted: Sep 24, 2009 at 0124 hrs

Ahmedabad The state Tribal Development Department (TDD) has initiated a proposal to synergise the functioning of the Forest Rights Committees constituted by it and the Forest Protection Committees constituted by the Forest and Environment Department, in rural Gujarat. The move has come a day after The Indian Express had reported on September 23 on the Forest Rights Act causing "bureaucratic confusions" in state.

T L Patel, Joint Director, TDD, said: "We have decided that both government departments must work in tandem to resolve this issue. According to the proposal, the TDD will constitute Forest Conservation Committees in villages, in line with Section 5 of the Forest Rights Act that will perform three main functions of protection, conservation and development of forest areas. And these Conservation Committees would be assisted by Protection Committees of the Forest department to carry out such tasks."

The modalities of such an arrangement will be worked out later after discussions with the Forest Department officials, Patel added.

The Indian Express report had highlighted the issue of both these locally constituted committees perceiving their interests as conflicting in nature.

It had mentioned about 200 such incidents reported in the Devgadhi Baria taluka of Dahod district, where the members of the Protection Committees had vehemently opposed the land claims submitted by the Rights Committees to the gram panchayat.

As already reported, the Rights Committees are the first stage of verification of land claims by the tribals or traditional forest dwellers. They are then screened and approved at the taluka and district levels.

Meanwhile, the Protection Committees are granted access to non-timber forest products and share in timber revenue by the Forest Department in return for protecting forests from fire, grazing and illegal harvesting as well as carrying out plantation works.

<http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/state-to-synergise-functioning-of-forest-committees/520781/>

Implementation of Forest Rights Act causes 'bureaucratic confusion'

Gaurav Sharma

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Ahmedabad The implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, popularly known as the Forest Rights Act, is now causing 'bureaucratic confusion' between the Department of Tribal Development and the Forest and Environment Department.

THE issue pertains to the conflict of interests between the Forest Rights Committees and the Forest Protection Committees.

The Rights Committee is constituted in every village by the Tribal Development Department (TDD) under Section 6(1) of the Forest Rights

Act, for the verification of land claims by the tribals before they are screened and approved at the taluka and district levels.

The Committee is granted access to non-timber forest products and share in timber revenue in return for protecting the forests from fire, grazing and illegal harvesting as well as carrying out plantation works.

The Protection Committee is constituted by the Forest and Environment Department under its Centrally-sponsored Joint Forest Management scheme, and though both committees involve the local village communities, they perceive their interests as conflicting in nature.

This is evident from such incidents reported in the Devgad Baria taluka of Dahod district, where the Protection Committee members vehemently opposed the land claims submitted to the gram panchayat by the Rights Committee.

Roop Singh Chauhan, Secretary, Eklavya Sangathan, an organisation based in Limkheda village in Dahod that has been fighting for tribal forest rights said: "Nearly 200 such cases have come to our notice where the land claims have been contended in the gram sabhas. The Protection Committees do it, as larger forest cover means larger incentives by the Forest Department."

In order to avoid such conflicts between the two committees, various panchayats have even approached the district and state level authorities to prevent the Protection Committees from plantation works until the Rights Committees in every village settles all land claims.

Chauhan said: "We have submitted a memorandum to this effect to T L Patel, Joint Director, TDD, in-charge FRA in the state."

Meanwhile, Patel acknowledged that there have been cases of misunderstanding between the two committees leading to such conflicts.

He said: "One basic difference between the two is that while Protection Committees are constituted as a co-operative, the Rights Committees are constituted by the democratically elected gram panchayats. According to the Section V of the Forest Rights Act, all issues pertaining to community rights have to be dealt by the democratically formed Rights Committees. These include the rights of minor forest produce, fuel and fodder (grass collection and feeding to the cattle), natural water resources as well as joint forest management."

He added: "If FRA itself provides for joint forest management, where is the need for Protection Committees to be constituted by the Forest Department. Once the Forest Rights Act is in full enactment, either the Protection Committees will be abolished or even if these remain, they will be superceded by the Rights Committees. Till that time, the TDD is trying to spread awareness regarding this in every village to avoid further conflicts."

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