



State level consultation on Forest Rights Act held in Orissa

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Report by Orissadiary correspondent; Bhubaneswar: Odisha has the unique distinction among all other states in the country for having community-managed forests in more than 12,000 villages. With one third population of Odisha dependent on forest resource as a source of livelihoods and biodiversity conservation being a part of their socio cultural life, this state level workshop here in Bhubaneswar on Forest Rights Act keeps its importance in the context of scheduled Tribes and other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, otherwise called as Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006. The concern for community forest resources has accumulated people from different cultures, region, and representatives from Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTG). The three-day's workshop organized by Vasundhara, an NGO in Orissa, has focused on areas like scope and prospects of FRA, problems with implementation of FRA in the context of Common Forest Resources, rights of PTGs under the act, Rights over Minor Forest Produces etc.

Mr. Bijay Ranjan Singh Berhia, the Minister, Tribal Affairs, Govt. of Odisha, Mr. Pyarimohan Mohapatra, MP, Rajya Sabha, Prof. Radhamohan, Mr. Jagadananda, Information Commissioner, Govt. of Odisha, Mr. A.B. Swami, Mr. Sanjay Pattnaik, Prof. K.C. Samal, Mr. Ashok Tripathy, IAS, Principal Secretary, Tribal Affairs, , Mr. Biswajit Mishra, IAS, Additional Secretary, Mr. S.K. Sinha, Conservator of Forest (KL), Dr. A.B. Ota, IAS, Director SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar, Mr. T. Sahoo, Senior Research Officer, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar, and Mr. Raghunath Sahoo, Former Deputy Director, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar were the panelists for different sessions of the workshop . Among others present were community representatives, tribal leaders, persons from PTGs, representatives of NGOs across the state and many other elites.

After the three-day-discussion and sharing at the workshop the recommendations were put before Mr. Berhia, Hon'ble Minister, Tribal Affairs and Mr. Pyarimohan Mohapatra, Hon'ble MP, Rajya Sabha. The minister assured of proper implementation of the act for the benefit of lakhs of tribals in the state, who are being deprived of all their rights since hundreds of years. Mr. Mahapatra promised to facilitate in the removal of hurdles for implementation of the act that have come out as recommendations from the deliberations of the workshop. The Principal Secretary, Tribal Affairs pledged to remove all the bottlenecks that delays the process of implementation of the act. He also pointed out that this act will override all other state laws that are in conflict with FRA, hence, can be very much beneficial to the community. All provisions are being made to benefit the tribal people under the purview of this act.

This workshop provided more insights and clarity on the issues related to Community Forest Resources under FRA and rights of PTGs. Vasundhara offers itself to provide training and orientation to the community, Government officials and NGOs as and when required for the benefit the historically-deprived communities.

The workshop was ended with a vote of thanks from Mr. Ghasiram Panda of Vasundhara.

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