

Better coordination sought for Forest Rights Act implementation

NAGPUR: Top officials of revenue, forest, [tribal welfare](#) department and civil society representatives from Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Goa met in the city to discuss how the [Forest Rights Act](#) (2006) could be implemented more effectively. The two-day workshop concluded on Wednesday.

Organized by the Union ministry of tribal affairs, the workshop was supported by tribal development department of the state. State tribal development minister Babanrao Pachpute presided over the inaugural function on Tuesday before rushing back in hurry to Mumbai following sudden political developments caused by deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar's resignation.

In her opening remarks, joint secretary of Union ministry of tribal affairs Sadhana Rout said though the Act was operative from last four years, not much had been achieved as far a community forest rights of people traditionally living in and near the forests are concerned. Stressing on implementation of the Act in letter and spirit, she said guidelines issued by the ministry are exhaustive and should be followed. On September 6, some rules were amended so as to address issues raised some state governments and the civil society.

Pachpute stressed that officials of revenue, forest, tribal and rural development should work in tandem to implement the Act. Maharashtra has been at the forefront and was the first to grant community rights for bamboo harvesting to residents of Mendha Lekha village in Gadchiroli district. Today, 3.39 lakh individual forest rights claims have been allowed and of the 5,088 claims for community rights, 1676 have been allowed by the district level committees. The minister announced that the state government was considering allocation of Rs 50 crore for the development of land given to tribal beneficiaries under the FRA.

Vibha Puri Das, secretary Union ministry of tribal affairs, said in her inaugural address that FRA is not an extension of other schemes and is a stand-alone Act. She said that the state-level monitoring committee should play a proactive role in FRA implementation.

NC Saxena, member National Advisory Council, noted that the tribal community suffers from isolation and continues to suffer silently. Pravin Pardesi, principal secretary of state forest department said that through community rights, villages are earning an income of Rs 50 lakh to Rs 1.5 crore from sale of bamboo. Under joint forest management, 350 villages spread over 15 districts are gaining from income through non-timber forest produce.

Civil activist Subodh Kukarni presented the success story of Mendha Lekha and said a village of 500 people succeeded in getting forest rights and were now adopting innovative methods for its sustenance. Dilip Gode of Vidarbha Nature Conservation Society said alternative models were successfully demonstrated in several villages of Gondia district by his organization. He said FRA was effective where NGOs were active and doing advocacy.