

‘Implement FRA in true spirit’

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The tribals and traditional forest dwellers of Nuapada district have been holding a dharana in front of the Khariar block office since February 8 last demanding proper implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA).

They claimed that the district administration was not taking proper interest to implement the provisions of Section 4(1) of Chapter 3 of the FRA in true spirit which speaks about the recognition and vesting of forests to the community. The agitators also raised the issues of conversion of forest habitations to revenue villages and recognition of individual rights of the traditional forest dwellers.

“We had staged a dharana and gheraoed the office of the Boden Panchayat Samiti eight months back. The administration had given in writing that they would address the issues but nothing was done,” the demonstrators said, adding, “We will continue to stage the dharana this time till our demands are fulfilled.”

The FRA was implemented in 2008. In last five years, the District Level Committee (DLC) on FRA in Nuapada has settled only 4,083 claims out of more than 10,000 claims. However, none of the community claims under Section 4(1) of the FRA for recognition of forest rights have been approved by the DLC, they lamented.

“The Government is knowingly delaying the process in order to deny the forest rights to the community, because it knows that once the forest right is given, it will be difficult for the Government to make that available for the companies in future without the consent of the people,” alleged social activist and district convener of the Jami Jangal Mukti Andolan Khuturam Sunani.

The local DFO said, “The community claims for forests and individual claims of the traditional forest dwellers had not been approved by two-third majority in the Gram Sabhas. So they have been returned to the DWO. It is quite astonishing that the administration had allotted documents to 4,083 tribals on the basis of the same approval.”

He added that the department had sent the proposals back to the Welfare department.

When DWO was contacted, he said that all the proposals had been returned to the WEO working in the blocks. When the BDO and the WEO were contacted, they replied that they had sent the proposals to the district office.