

CFR-LA

(Community Forest Rights-Learning
and Advocacy Process)



Public Hearing on Community Forest Rights

New Delhi, 14 December 2013: To highlight the issues of Community Forest Rights (CFR) under the Forest Rights Act and to build political momentum in order to give priority to the recognition of these rights—members of the Community Forest Rights-Learning and Advocacy process (CFR-LA) and Adivasi Janjati Adhikari Manch (AJAM) along with other networks and people's forums organized a public hearing on the subject today.

Over 250 participants attended this hearing. Eminent jury members heard testimonies presented by the community groups from 12 states. The jury included **Madhu Sarin**, member, Campaign for Survival and dignity, **Shomona Khanna**, leading advocate active on FRA issues, **Pradip Prabhu**, social activist and member of the group involved with the drafting of the Forest Rights Act, **Dr Velaram Ghogra**, member, ICITP and Praful Bidwai, journalist. The public hearing was also attended by Dr **Usha Ramanathan**, member of the High Level Committee on tribal issues formed under the Prime Minister's office and Swami Agnivesh, renowned social activist.

Members of Parliament Bhakta Charan Das and AV Swami who were present in the hearing spoke about their state level and national level experiences in relation to the Act and expressed their support towards the struggle of local communities to get their rights recognized.

The public hearing was aimed at highlighting the overall status of community forest rights, which continues to be a cause of concern in various states where forest right act (FRA) is being implemented, The public hearing engaged national and regional level civil society organizations, political representatives, networks and forums, activists and people's representatives from different states in a dialogue on the status of recognition of community forest rights and the challenges faced by the local communities in exercising their rights over forests. The dialogue primarily focused on the recognition of community forest rights and assertion of the rights for establishing community forest governance and diversion of forest lands and resource.

Some of the issues that emerged from the public hearing needing immediate attention and action were:

- Strengthening institutional mechanisms for implementing the law with dedicated staffs, awareness campaign, tighter monitoring and better redressal systems
- Improving records of recognizing community forest rights with a special focus on neglected groups such as Particularly Vulnerable Tribes, nomadic pastoralists, Other Traditional Forest Dwellers and neglected areas such as Protected Areas, Forest Villages and Municipal Areas.
- Addressing conflicts between the Forest Rights Act and other laws, policies and programmes.
- Taking action against the violation of FRA in forest clearances for developmental projects

In their remarks Ms. Madhu Sarin and Mr Pradip Prabhu pointed out that the rationale behind the concept of community forest rights while FRA was being drafted was to give the forest dwellers and the forests freedom from repressive state laws. Mr Prabhu remarked that along with recognition to CFRs, protection and conservation of the forests is equally important which will be true freedom for forest dwellers. Mr Velaram Ghogra, also reiterated the importance of CFR rights for tribal culture.

For more information about the Public Hearing, please contact Tushar Dash (Vasundhara), tushardash01@gmail.com or Meenal Tatpati (Kalpaviksh) meenaltatpati@gmail.com.