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Chhattisgarh steps forward to recognize community forest resource rights in an urban area



Chhattisgarh, carved out of Madhya Pradesh on November 1, 2000, became the first State on Monday, August 9 to recognize the Community Forest Resource Rights in urban areas. The State Government recognized the rights of residents of Dhamtari district spread over 4,127 hectares of forest.

Recognized Community Resource Rights

In addition to Dhamtari district, the State Government also recognized the community resource rights over 5,544 hectares of forest within the core area of the Sitanadi Udanti tiger reserve area. Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, Bhupesh Baghel said that with the recognition of community resource rights, the tribal community or the village dependent on forest would not need to struggle for their rights for water, forest or livelihood.

What are Community Forest Resource?

Any forest resource that the tribal and other forest dwelling communities use and depend on for a livelihood, is known as Community Forest Resource. This can be a common forest area that the community has been conserving and protecting to make use of its resources.

According to Section 2(a) of the Forest Rights Act, Community Forest Resource is the customary common forest land within the traditional or customary boundaries of the village or seasonal use of landscape in the case of pastoral communities, including reserved forests, protected forests and protected areas such as sanctuaries and national parks to which the community had traditional access.

The community forest resource area may include forest of any category i.e. revenue forest, classified and unclassified forest, deemed forest, reserve forest, protected forest, sanctuary and national parks etc.

What are Community Forest Resource Rights?

The Forest Rights Act, 2006, gives Gram Sabhas the right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any forest resources used by the entire community, or village which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use.

Section 5 of the Act empowers the holders of forest rights, the Gram Sabha, and village level institutions to protect forests, water catchment areas, biodiversity and ensure that the habitat of forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers is preserved from any form of destructive practices affecting their cultural and natural heritage.

Forest Rights Act

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 is also known as the Forest Rights Act. The Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 recognizes the rights of the forest-dwelling tribal communities and other traditional forest dwellers to forest resources, on which these communities were dependent for a variety of needs, including livelihood, habitation, and other socio-cultural needs. The Act provides certain individual rights such as Rights of Self-cultivation and Habitation and community rights such as grazing, fishing, and access to water bodies in forests, community right to intellectual property and traditional knowledge etc.

The Act empowers the forest dwellers to access and use the forest resources in the manner that they were traditionally accustomed to, to protect, conserve and manage forests, protect forest dwellers from unlawful evictions, and also provides for basic development facilities for the community of forest dwellers to access facilities of education, health, nutrition, infrastructure, etc.

Significance of the decision

With the recognition of the rights, the Gram Sabha can have a say on access allowed in the forest that falls within their traditional boundaries. This empowers the Gram Sabha to protect the wild life, forest and biodiversity and ensure that adjoining catchments areas, water sources and other ecological sensitive areas are adequately protected.

Forest dwellers and communities dependent on the forest for livelihood and survival are the natural caretakers of the forest. Moreover, their main source of livelihood is dependent on forest produce. The direction is a step towards leaving no one behind and exploring the economic and social rights of the indigenous or tribal people. They

need to be protected to save the biodiversity. The recognition by government also recognizes the struggle of the community.

This would also sensitize people towards the existence and process of community forests resource rights in urban areas while also ensuring the protection of their culture and traditions with the nature, forest, land and water.

This also preserves the symbiotic relationship between tribal and forests and hands over the community grazing and harvesting rights in the nearby forest.

Also celebrated first Tribal Day

The State Government also celebrated World Tribal Day for the first time. On the occasion, it also released the State's atlas featuring the tribal population in the State. The CM also said that the Government will speed up the process of recognizing more community forest resource rights in future.

The State is home to a large number of tribal communities.