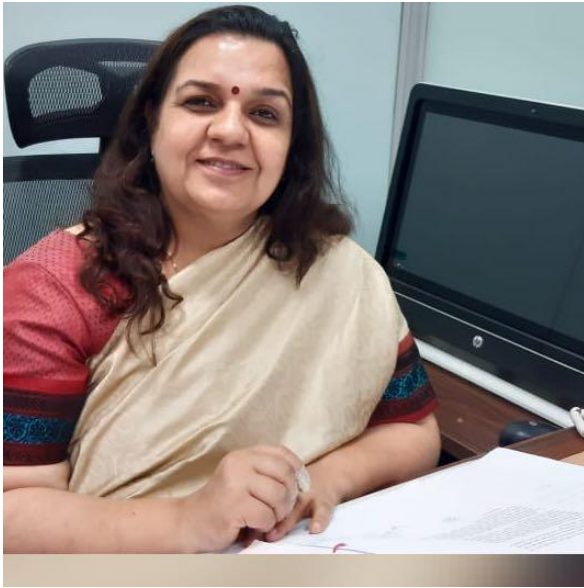


Carbon footprints of tribal households are negligible

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What's the precise positioning of the tribal welfare departments at the Centre and states on FRA?

This is a seminal legislation. The preamble to the Act itself states that it aims to 'undo the historical injustice' to forest dwelling communities who were cultivating their land for generations but were deemed encroachers as their rights were not recorded.

This legislation recognises, vests and provides for recording of rights of forest dwellers for self-cultivation up to four hectares, enabling security of tenure and livelihood to vulnerable communities. In addition, it confers on the communities the right to protect, regenerate and manage forest resources and provides for safeguards against arbitrary displacement. Union tribal affairs ministry being the nodal department under the law, has been guiding states to implement this legislation.

Maharashtra government has taken many steps for its effective implementation. Last year, Vanmitra Mohim (campaign) was launched under the guidance of the chief minister to expedite pending cases. The state level monitoring committee chaired by the chief secretary does regular monitoring to track progress. A portal has been created to leverage technology for maintaining records. Efforts are on to enhance the incomes of FRA beneficiaries by improving agriculture productivity and providing support for value addition and marketing linkages for minor forest produce through convergence with Van Dhan Yojna, water conservation and agro-related schemes.

Today what really ails the forest dwellers or tribals of India?

I think the biggest challenge before tribal communities and youth in particular is to negotiate between tradition and modernity. The exponential growth in communication

facilities, urbanisation, education and exposure has led to a rise in aspirations among tribal communities which may not be in consonance with their traditional way of life. The real challenge for policy makers and the communities is to ensure improved access to health, education and development opportunities while preserving their unique heritage. 'One size fits all' approach in policy making will not work as some areas do require contextualised programmes and policies.

Will education and opportunities to progress, similar to those available in nearby villages, solve their problems?

Education is the key instrument for socioeconomic progress. Nearly 50% of the budget allocated to the tribal development department in Maharashtra is spent on providing education to tribal students. In addition to schools run by local self-governments, there are 502 residential ashram schools, 546 aided schools and 491 hostels run by the department across the state. We have undertaken innovative projects in partnership with expert organisations for improving teaching in math, science and English. We have also created a Code/manual for the good governance of these institutions.

Centre has already enacted the Right to Education Act. The Union tribal affairs ministry provides funds to set up Eklavya residential English medium schools and pre- and post-matric scholarships for tribal students. Hence, access to education is no longer an issue even in remote areas. But improvement of quality of education requires sustained efforts.

Conservation of flora and fauna is a global concern in the light of adverse climate change. At the same time the right to livelihood of forest dwellers is a genuine humanitarian issue. What steps are being initiated to strike a balance?

The two are not antithetical. In fact numerous studies show that forests have been preserved best where tribal communities reside. FRA has been enacted on this premise and recognises that forest dwelling communities are integral to the sustainability of the forest ecosystem. In Maharashtra there have been numerous heart-warming examples such as Mendha Lekha, Pachgaon, Payvihar where village communities have demonstrated their innate wisdom in conservation.

Community participation in forest resource management has a salutary impact not only on enhancing household incomes but also as a step towards participatory and transparent management of minor forest produce. The tribal development department, Maharashtra, is facilitating on pilot basis the preparation of scientific forest resource management plans by gram sabhas in nearly 356 villages where Community Forest Rights have been granted. A diploma course on sustainable community forest resource management that demystifies the technical knowledge for tribal youth to work along with gram sabhas has been rolled out with the help of experts.

Climate change and its mitigation is an issue that requires serious reflection at global level. To pitch tribal communities and their modest human rights to livelihood and habitat against this global challenge is unfair. The carbon footprints of an average tribal household are negligible in relation to rich urban households.

Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/the-interviews-blog/carbon-footprints-of-tribal-households-are-negligible-forests-have-been-preserved-best-where-tribal-communities-reside/>