

In a first, Chhattisgarh recognises forest resource rights in an urban area

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Chhattisgarh on Monday became the first state to recognise Community Forest Resource Rights in an urban area, with the state government recognising rights of residents of Dhamtari district over 4,127 hectares of forests. Community resource rights over 5,544 hectares of forest within the core area of the tiger reserve area were also recognised.

Under Forest Rights Act, 2006, Community Forest Resource Right gives gram sabhas the right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any forest resources used by the entire community, or village.

Distributing certificates at a programme in state capital [Raipur](#) on the occasion of International Day of the World's Indigenous People, Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel said the government will expedite the process of recognising more such community forests resource rights in future. Baghel also unveiled an "atlas" of tribal communities living in Chhattisgarh, and a special five-part teaching module on the all-round development of tribal areas to be used to train public representatives and members of the Panchayati Raj system. Tribals account for more than 31 per cent of Chhattisgarh's population.

For the first time, forest rights of three wards in Nagari nagar panchayat of Dhamtari district were recognised. The rights recognised in municipal areas are spread over 707.41 hectares for Nagari ward, 678.18 hectares for Churiyara, and 2,746.74 hectares for Tumbahara ward.

The rights recognised in core areas of Sitanadi Udanti Tiger Reserve area spread over 975.58 hectare for Masulkhoi, 984.92 hectares for Karhi, 551.42 hectares for Joratarai, 1651.725 hectares for Bahigaon, and 1389.615 hectares for Baroli. The recognition of community forest resource rights in the tiger reserve — spread across Dhamtari and Gariyaband districts — was a long-time demand of villagers living inside the core zone, who had accused government officials of thwarting the process

On January 19, people from tribal communities of several villages in the area protested outside the office of Sitanadi Udanti Tiger Reserve deputy director Ayush Jain. The same day, Jain informed villagers through a letter that the reserve is to be brought under the category of Critical Wildlife Habitat.

Residents of Bahigaon subsequently submitted a letter to the Sub Divisional Magistrate on February 16, asking for a special gram sabha to facilitate the recognition of community forest resource rights provided under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

Manoj Shakshi, a zila panchayat member who led the movement, said, "Forest officials were opposing recognition of our rights. They contended that the villages are in the core zone, and only tigers can exist there. For generations, we have known how to live along with tigers without harming them. As a member of district-level committee formed under the Forest Rights Act, I repeatedly tried to persuade government officials about the provisions for tiger reserve areas under the law. Thankfully, our efforts have paid off; now we have an official document recognising the rights of our people."

Birbal Padmakar, president of the forest rights committee from Joratarai village, located in the core area of Sitanadi Tiger Reserve, said: "We were even lathi-charged while demanding our rights, in the past. It is a relief that finally the government took note of it."

At the event, Chief Minister Baghel enumerated the tribal specific policies of his government and reiterated that tribals and their rights were the government's priority. "It is the responsibility of our forest dwelling brethren to make sure that our forests stay enriched and the number of tigers draw people from around the world," he said.

Saraswati Dhruw, member of forest rights committee of ward sabha Nagari said that in all, 47 meetings were held to sensitise people and officials about the existence and process of community forests resource rights in urban areas. Describing it as a tedious process, she said, "But we were

determined to get it done as we want our future generations to enjoy their livelihood from forest the way we have done, following the same traditions and customs of living with nature and wildlife.”

Raipur: Maoist activists from Udanti area committee allegedly cut the grille to enter the Wild Buffalo Conservation Breeding Center in Sitanadi Udanti Tiger Reserve on Sunday and put up their banners and dumped posters at the centre after setting one of the huts on fire, officials found on Monday morning. “We are investigating the incident. The damage done at the centre is being assessed,” a police officer said. ENS

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